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Arthurian Literature and Christianity

Notes from the Twentieth Century

edited by
Peter Meister

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ARTHURIAN LITERATURE
AND CHRISTIANITY

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ARTHURIAN LITERATURE AND CHRISTIANITY

NOTES FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

EDITED BY
PETER MEISTER

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for
Gail Roth Meister, J.W. Gregg Meister,
Miriam Lucia Meister

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Sarah Loach Meister renews my interest in courtly verse through her own devotion to early music.

PM
New Hope, Alabama
October 1997

Preface

Throughout this century, Arthurians have repeatedly raised but never settled the question of their literature's relationship to Christianity. A few scholars have, but most have not, regarded the Christian milieu in which Arthurian literature was composed as a factor of the first importance. Although the debate has been of recurrent interest, the field of Arthurian studies lacks a systematic survey of approaches to this question. The present volume attempts to meet that need. Without reprinting work readily available elsewhere and no longer subject to revision through dialogue with fellow contributors, we here attempt to fairly represent all sides and phases in this century's discussion of the position of Christianity in medieval Arthurian romance.¹

Chronologically, our first long essay (following two short overviews)² discusses a masterpiece of the ninth century, and our last looks at the mysticism of the late Middle Ages. Essays in between focus on works of high courtly literature. Four contributors grant Christianity a place of honor at the Round Table, one is irritated by such an approach, three take courtly Christianity with a grain of salt and one is even more neutral than that.

Some scholars will wonder why we have to go through this again. Didn't the century open with Jessie Weston offering a christianist explanation of the Grail which was investigated by R.S. Loomis in his volumes of 1927 and 1949, and pronounced dead in 1963?³ Didn't D.W. Robertson try in vain to breathe life into the matter during the 1950s and 1960s? Surely it cannot be necessary in the 1990s to sift once more through things Arthurian in the alchemical hope of finding all things Christian.

Yet the caverns into which Weston's and Robertson's footsteps lead are worth peering into. For one thing, they have never been sealed.

To be sure, those thinkers had their chance, and can now barely be heard; but later readers continue to see in the Arthurian cycle a reenactment of certain Old and New Testament narratives, and these sightings continue to grate on the nerves of other highly alert readers. So the issue remains unresolved.

Nor could resolution mean deciding who's right. If anything, it might mean nearly the opposite: finding some common ground between readers who see things differently, and coming to clarity as to why certain other ground cannot be held in common. Above all, it would mean appreciation of the depth of the soil upon which most of our gainsayers walk. Toward this end, many of the contributors to this volume have read at least one other contributor's work in manuscript; and all manuscripts, whether previously published or not, have gone through some revision—if only in the notes—in response to questions raised by another contributor.

Secondly, Weston and Robertson did not receive a full or a fair hearing.⁴ Weston saw Christianity in the French and German romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and speculated on the historical causes of that phenomenon. When her speculation on the underlying historical process was dismissed, the phenomenon she was trying to account for was likewise discredited.

For different reasons, Robertson met a similar fate. He wrote at a time when Christianity had fallen out of favor in academia, and just before the traditional approach to literary criticism which he practiced was displaced by an array of more theoretical approaches (“postmodern literary theory”). By postmodern theorist, I mean a humanist in the Age of Science—a reader especially mindful of the tension between objectivity (sometimes made a method or goal of science, or even equated with science) and subjectivity (the point of the humanities).⁵ The ramifications of that tension for an “objective” flow of speech are many. To imagine Narcissus squinting into ripples: the literary text is a clouded surface in which the captive may have glimpsed something besides himself. A rainbow trout? A hawk?

The traditional critic also thinks about such things, but does not tend to include them in the commentary, perhaps regarding that as the province of primary literature⁶ or feeling that to write about the critical quandary is to find in the end that one has managed only a preface to one's topic. To judge from Robertson's best-known title, *A Preface to Chaucer*, this can happen anyway. In a style—genre, even—that was

falling out of academic favor, he traced most medieval literature to a religion that had already done so.

The Weston-Robertson discussion goes to the heart of twentieth-century Western literature. It provides the context for T.S. Eliot, whose poetry changed our notion of what verse entails and whose criticism gave rise to a “modern” approach which strove for scientific objectivity (“New Criticism”), to which “postmodern” literary theory would soon regard itself as subsequent (or “post”).⁷ Eliot thus provides the point of departure for as much literary experimentation in our experimental century as can be traced to any other single figure, and Jessie Weston was one of his fundamental catalysts. Issues of comparative religion, which shape Weston’s research and Eliot’s *Waste Land*—what about a Christianity that lifts up other wisdoms, rather than putting them down? is that what courtly storytellers were doing with Welsh lore?—shape some of the essays in this volume. And even contributors with no interest in Eliot’s poetic content write in a climate influenced by his poetic form (highly associative)⁸ and critical content (in praise of objectivity), which have somehow combined to blur the line between primary and secondary literature.⁹

Twentieth-century Arthurian commentary, especially as it touches on myth and religion, thus provides a bridge between two literary land masses—the traditional (Weston/Robertson), the experimental (postmodern descendents of Eliot)—which have not always managed to complement each other, at least not with sufficiently generous appreciation of the other side’s depth. If *The Waste Land* is the quintessential twentieth-century poem, then Arthur’s relationship to Jesus has some claim to being taken very seriously indeed as a literary question. The poem closes with an allusion to the Fisher King (“I sat upon the shore / Fishing”) against the background of an allusion to the Risen Christ (“Who is the third who walks always beside you?”) and pursuit of the scientifically verifiable.¹⁰ To be sure, postmodern critics impatient with traditional criticism may find that methodology’s failings present in all but undiluted form among readers here designated as “christianists” (those who, whatever their own religion, regard medieval Christianity as relevant or central to medieval Arthurian literature). Postmodernism stresses the radical subjectivity (“indeterminacy,” “self-reflexivity,” “ambiguity,” “self-consciousness”) of each literary experience. For some, Christianity (despite deep differences between Jesus and Paul, and again between Paul and James, which

have multiplied geometrically over time), or even christianism, may seem the epitome of absolutism.

Interestingly, however, postmodern literary theory and high courtly literature dominate corresponding decades in their respective centuries. Christianity colored the twelfth century in something of the way that scientific method colored the humanities in the twentieth—occasionally explicitly, but much more often without overt regard for the reference point of the age. To disassociate Arthurian romance from the Church—so goes the christianist claim—is to posit a literature that wished to make no comment on the political reality or intellectual climate of its day. According to christianists, postmodernism vis-à-vis Arthur is a case of one world view trying to come to terms with another, with all the questions of perspective that that entails. So the stage is set for a dialogue exactly suited to the postmodern temperament, and in need of that methodology's most important insights.

As a world view concerned with all aspects of life, postmodernism has enough traits in common with Christianity¹¹ to be for some a successor to it, and so has little interest in that cluster of metaphor and narrative,¹² save as some Christians might occasionally exemplify certain errors of perception with helpful clarity. The christianist approach to Arthurian literature is thus too far from postmodern concerns even to attract many opponents from that school, let alone adherents. In our volume, only Kathryn M. Talarico can be termed a literary theorist. Henry Kratz, the most explicit nonchristianist in our volume, is a philologist, as is Deborah Rose-Lefmann, who takes no sides in the debate. G. Ronald Murphy, S.J., Jacques Ribard, Tom Artin and Anne Huntley-Speare are ad hoc readers—traditionalists—¹³ who find Christian themes in Arthurian literature.

Their claim can sharpen our understanding of Christianity itself. At first blush unfamiliar enough, the Germanic Jesus about whom Murphy writes is nevertheless relevant to our own impression of Christianity, whatever that impression happens to be. The transmission process which brought any of us our view of the Mediterranean Gospel narrative is always similar in kind to the Northernization of which Murphy writes. Often, our image of Jesus rests on that very refraction. Most Protestants trace some portion of their theology to Martin Luther, whose own inheritance included the so-called *Saxon Savior (Heliand)*, a ninth century translation of the Gospel narrative into Saxon (essentially a dialect of German).

The relationship between creative writing and critical commentary will be illumined by asking why the religious matter of central concern to certain major poets in the English language has escaped most students of the medieval Celtic, French and German literatures upon which Yeats and Eliot drew. And since we have a great deal of biographical information for Arthur-influenced poets of the twentieth century, but little or none for most medieval writers, we draw back an outermost veil of medieval anonymity by comparing high courtly poets to modern Arthurians whose biographies are well known. In the work of a poet whose very name and dates were unknown, the possible relationship to Christianity of a line like

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? (*The Waste Land*)

would be still more debatable than it is for Eliot. Nor would such linkage imply an orthodox or even favorable disposition toward Christianity on the part of the poet.¹⁴ Yeats is known to have been hostile to Christianity, influenced in this by his atheist father. If we knew about Yeats only his name, or not even that, such a line as

What rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born? ("The Second Coming")

would be still harder to unpack than it already is.

Postmodern questions of canon (in this case, canonical *criticism*), and attention to matters of perspective and marginalization, provide a helpful apparatus for hoisting into the daylight a discussion that usually lies half buried at the bottom of Arthurian regard (in secondary though not in primary literature). Not that the postmodern postmortem is monolithic. But neither is traditional criticism. Tom Artin (theory) and Jacques Ribard (exegesis) differ in subtle ways, and their synchronic¹⁵ articles on French literature differ obviously from G. Ronald Murphy's diachronic commentary on two German works. Anne Huntley-Speare zooms in on a single "detail," which, she argues, lies at the heart of her story. The term christianism captures some of what these readers have in common, but none of their differences. And it is hard to imagine how anyone could have greater respect for the radical subjectivity of each

literary experience than a textual critic such as Deborah Rose-Lefmann, whose specialty is that unique thing, the medieval manuscript.

Few readers of English are wholly comfortable with all three modern languages (German, Welsh, French) from which translations have been made for this volume. So some researchers will be grateful for an introduction to Joachim Bumke, Ifor Williams or Jacques Ribard. The German offers a neutral overview of *Parzival* scholarship, the Welshman a nonchristianist diachronical note on the *Four Branches*, and the Frenchman a mostly synchronic christianist reading of two tales by Chrétien.

The time will come when thoughtful readers remind themselves that our day was bigger than its starred terms. One goal of this volume is to help them follow up on that insight, laced though it is with luminous overlap. Thus Talarico cautions: "Twentieth-century scholarship has shown a remarkable predilection for offering up 'monolithic' meanings of the Grail stories, which, when taken together, display enormous variety—if not contradiction." Ribard observes mildly that his reading is merely coherent—not the only one possible. It is not that Talarico and Ribard are both seeing, or even saying, the same thing about romance generally. On this one point, however, there does seem to be some common ground as each ponders alternate approaches to the Round Table. To join christianist and nonchristianist in a discussion which celebrates the inadequacy of such labels is to enhance one's appreciation of still more elusive aspects of Arthurian criticism and romance.

WHY WESTON AND ROBERTSON DESERVE A NEW HEARING

In the early nineteenth century, a desire to rediscover indigenous roots was abroad in many parts of Europe, industrialization having brought with it a longing for what had not been mass produced. Writing in this period of Romantic nationalism,¹⁶ Lady Charlotte Guest translated a medieval Welsh story cycle (the *Mabinogi*) into contemporary English. She underlined the work's indigenous aspects and—while stressing the debt continental Arthurian literature owed to these Welsh stories—presented the cycle as a counterweight to Christianity.

Working on individual Arthurian characters and romances in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Jessie Weston (1850–1928)

frequently noted a close connection with Christianity, particularly in the cycle's later development. In *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), she attempted to account for this 'ecclesiasticizing development.'¹⁷ With Weston we reach back to the modern revival which lifted Arthur out of postmedieval oblivion: she was a younger contemporary of Richard Wagner (to whom she dedicates her verse translation of Wolfram's *Parzival*) and Alfred Lord Tennyson (whom she appears to value no less than Wagner).¹⁸ But she also points unexpectedly toward the future. One of her younger readers would build a sprawling poem around the images in her masterpiece. *The Waste Land* (1922) by T.S. Eliot borrows Weston's framework for the myth ("Waste Land," "Hollow Man") the young century would borrow from him. Like the essential optimism of *The Waste Land* itself (rain is expected at poem's end),¹⁹ Eliot's evolving Christianity ("Ash Wednesday" [1930], and, in "Four Quartets" [1943], the mysticism of Julian of Norwich)²⁰ often went unremarked.

From Ritual to Romance zeroes in on the legend of the Grail, ignoring much else in the sprawling genre of Arthurian literature. According to Weston, the talisman began as part of a "heathen" mystery rite and had become a Christian symbol by the high Middle Ages. In other words—and she does not, in fact, phrase it this way—the legend is diachronically nonchristian and synchronically Christian (relative to twelfth-century France and Germany).

Two currents of thought in which the humanities and natural sciences mingled with special force in Weston's day were psychology (Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung) and linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure), both young at the start of the twentieth century. The former discipline would devote much attention to the notion of "projection" (attributing to another traits which actually belong to oneself), while the latter would build on a scaffolding of polarities introduced by Saussure shortly before the turn of the century. One such polarity was "synchronic" versus "diachronic"—in language study, the difference between a form in use at a particular time and the historical parade of forms which preceded and followed it throughout the lifetime of a given tongue. In Saussure's memorable metaphor, this was the distinction between the set-up on a chessboard at some particular moment versus the moves which had yielded that arrangement.²¹ The same distinction can be helpful in assessing the relationship of Christianity to Arthurian literature.

Jessie Weston (literature) and Ferdinand de Saussure (linguistics) were writing at about the same time, and so the literary scholar did not use the linguist's terminology. If she had, she might have expressed her observations in this way: Arthurian literature is diachronically non-Christian,²² but synchronically (i.e., for Chrétien, Wolfram and their contemporary countrymen) Christian.²³ Unfortunately, lacking the specific terminology that Saussure was fashioning and the intellectual climate his writings would eventually foster, Weston's perception was open to misinterpretation. Since she was trying in her studies to account for the transformation of the Grail (a researchably small portion of the larger Arthurian legend) into a Christian symbol, Weston was associated with the sort of reading which is here termed christianist. But since the linguistic distinction between diachronic and synchronic was not yet operative in Arthurian studies, her christianist reputation was not limited to the synchronic plane. Not regarded in her time as a *synchronic* christianist (and diachronic nonchristianist), she was instead known with somewhat less precision as both a christianist and a diachronist. Eventually, and perhaps correctly, Loomis dismissed her diachronic account of a link between the two traditions: he became satisfied that her 'pagan' source for the Grail was neither the historical Welsh, nor the Celts of whom they are one branch, but a hypothesized people of whom we have yet to find a trace.²⁴ This verdict spelled the end of diachronic christianism, whose blurred tombstone held the name of synchronic christianism as well.

In the 1950s an English professor began publishing work on Geoffrey Chaucer which explored the medieval milieu so thoroughly as to attract attention among students of the French courtly romance.²⁵ In his culminating title, *A Preface to Chaucer* (1962), D.W. Robertson, a careful student of the visual arts, foregrounds Chaucer against the backdrop of nearly two thousand years of Western literature.²⁶ He argues that since the Romantic period—when originality, which as a manifestation of arrogance would have diminished a medieval poet, now came to be revered as a necessary plus—we tend to view the medievals through a post-Romantic lens (*Preface* 31–32).

Because of this Romantic revolution (which deserves credit for having discovered the Middle Ages in the first place), we assume that a lyric, personal voice speaks in works where the artist's purpose is in fact didactic (*Preface* 45–46), and where authoritative precedent is expected. For Robertson, the authority of Augustine in the Middle Ages

stands “second only to the Bible” (*Preface* 52). Since didacticism, and resemblance to a model (or ‘type’), are regarded as flaws in post-Romantic literature, modern readers wishing to be generous to pre-Romantic verse and fiction are likely to close one eye to embarrassing “mistakes” like trying to improve oneself or one’s reader (*Preface* 33, 65) or rephrasing a predecessor in such a way as to bring his work to fruition (‘typology’) (Frye, *Code*, 78). Robertson, peering down Romanticism’s early slope, observes that Christian allegory and typology²⁷ were the flesh and bones of medieval European inquiry :

The artist is, in effect, a teacher whose efforts are directed toward the revelation of a truth which is not only beautiful in itself, but which is also the source of all other beauty. (67)

The Chaucerian does not use the psychological term “projection,” but that human inclination is the rugged terrain round which he tries to detour.²⁸ In the process he revamps standard periodization, all but finding Romanticism through Renaissance a single mountain range.²⁹

Critics of Robertson observe in contrast that the Middle Ages cannot be pictured as having a monolithic mentality,³⁰ certainly not one dictated in the twelfth or fourteenth century by a church father some seven hundred years earlier. They argue that “when a medieval author intended to convey a hidden significance he took it out of hiding and expounded on it at length,”³¹ and point out that even within theological circles, allegory was waning in importance in the twelfth century. Dante—who does indeed speak of allegorical intentions—serves no better than Augustine, in their view, as a “typical representative” of the “Middle Ages.”³² Robertson is thus guilty of oversimplification, never more glaringly than when he collapses European literary history into a medieval period and a modern one.

Periodization is a worthy topic in its own right, and perhaps *A Preface to Chaucer* could have been improved by a three-page explanation of the author’s private grid. On the other hand, to dislodge a presupposition and leave it for us to roll back into place might just as easily be viewed as a mark of his richness. Stylistically, one can understand his reluctance to interrupt what was already a “preface” for still prior rumination; while, conceptually, the traditional habit of

breaking three or four centuries (approximately 1400–1850) into as many periods does not make self-evidently better sense than regarding our emergence from feudalism as a single event. In view of the thousand-year “Middle Ages” (lasting from about 400–1400), Robertson may have felt it largely a foreshortening effect that causes terrain closer to us to appear in greater detail.

But in order to profit from an author, it cannot be necessary to think him perfect.³³ Robertson’s writings contain, in fact, a rarely noted weakness which may have impeded full reception of his work: the habit of studding his prose with untranslated quotations from a number of languages. The Chaucerian’s thinking, satisfyingly difficult in its own right, can become unsatisfyingly so when the crucial passage slams shut at a border crossing. To put serious writing in the vernacular was an innovation in Chaucer’s day, and the Renaissance not far behind.

Some of the charges against Robertson may cancel each other out. Was allegory waning in the twelfth century? But the “Middle Ages” are not monolithic, so Chaucer could have been allegorical anyway. Does Robertson regard the Middle Ages monolithically? But he isn’t bound by customary periodization, and would respect a schema in which the *Romance of the Rose* and Chaucer fall at least provisionally into separate “periods” (in order to create medieval periods as short as those in our postmedieval era). Nevertheless, who’s to say Robertson in constructing a coherent scenario doesn’t exaggerate the extent of Augustine’s influence on the later Middle Ages? Rather than exonerate Robertson of every weakness with which he has been charged (though he may be innocent on the occasional count),³⁴ the more pertinent point is that he came to some of the best insights of our theory years before we did.³⁵ Students of reception theory, intertextuality and New Historicism would have reason to respect Robertson as a pioneer in their field. If any one word could sum up the thrust of our century’s literary maturation, it might well be self-consciousness—the reminder that you have to take your own perspective into account (and then try to subtract it from the whole). Robertson exemplifies that cautionary note.³⁶

He was an investigator of presuppositions: What are these literary “periods” that we tuck poets into? How does our grid affect us? What would Chaucer look like if seen from a different point on the grid? Is it possible to just lean back a few hundred years and listen in on the

Canterbury Tales, or does all our eavesdropping amount in the end to a preface?

He tackles the problem of projection,³⁷ and how to turn this problem in perception into an investigative tool.³⁸ Yet a variety of this same human tendency may sometimes have caused Robertson's readers to tar the messenger with a stick intended for some part of his message. In the twentieth century, critical interest in Christian aspects of Arthurian literature has varied inversely with the declining role of Christianity in the larger culture. Not everyone who finds Christianity in the Arthurian cycle is a Christian, nor does everyone who resists such a reading stand outside that faith. Nevertheless, the tenor of the discussion is not unlike that in the general culture: there exists intense appreciation of Christianity as a potentially or actually vital presence, alongside widespread rejection of many of the faith's basic premises. Indeed, our verdict on the role of medieval Christianity in medieval Arthurian literature might be largely a reflection of our own relationship to twentieth-century Christianity—a fact that could hardly have worked to Robertson's advantage.³⁹

For all the technique and concentration we hope to bring to our studies, successful reading might turn in the end on "sympathetic" versus "combative" reading styles.⁴⁰ A little theory goes a long way here. But it is worth observing that sympathetic does not mean acknowledging no weaknesses. It means overlooking no strengths.

Pre-Arthurian works considered in this volume include the Hebrew and Christian Bibles (in Jerome's fourth-century translation of both), the *Heliand* (ninth century) and the *Mabinogi* (eleventh century or earlier). Our Arthurian emphasis is on the twelfth- and thirteenth-century romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, as well as the Vulgate Cycle. Our only post-Arthurian titles come from Christian mysticism of the fourteenth century.

The sense in which Jewish and Christian scriptures are "considered" differs for christianists and nonchristianists. Believing that Arthurian tales recast the Christian Bible much as the New Testament does the Old, christianists of course discuss religious texts. But nonchristianists, too, survey Old Testament and New—at least implicitly—in order to show that medieval entertainers were not seriously engaging these texts.

MECHANICAL MATTERS

Single quotes and double quotes appear here in a new way. Single quotes ('ecclesiasticizing development') function like square brackets to indicate that an author's exact word choice ("the most developed and ecclesiasticised form of the Grail legend") has been revised in good faith to fit into new syntax. Why not just use square brackets? On short quotes, I do; but on some longer quotes, ellipses and square brackets create more clutter on the page than do single quotes.

In order to make it possible for scholars to compare the original version of a published work with the present reprint, the first note in each republished essay lists all pages in the original from which any portion of the present version was taken. In order to make the present version as inviting as possible in its own right, however, no further indication of excerpting is given. The initial note makes possible an entire reconstruction of authorial revision (by Ribard, Artin and Huntley-Speare) or my editorial decisions (for Kratz). Editorial modifications save the one mentioned in the next paragraph are strictly mechanical in nature.

This book is meant to be valuable—in different ways, to be sure—to those for whom medieval Arthurian literature is of primary interest, but also to those for whom this realm merely provides arresting background for some other adventure. The decision to settle on one common language does cause a change in tone from the original of some articles, and hence may be viewed as going beyond the strictly mechanical. Whether warranted or not, and whether mechanical or not, this change, too, is an attempt to free our conversation from all nonessential difficulties. When not otherwise indicated, English translations were provided by the author (or translator) of the essay.

Languages involved in this study are Hebrew (the Hebrew Bible), koine Greek (the New Testament), Latin (Jerome's Vulgate Bible), Old Saxon (the *Heliand*), Welsh (the *Mabinogi*), French (Chrétien de Troyes), High German (Wolfram and Rhine mysticism) and Dutch (Rhine mysticism). Command of all these languages—counting modern, earlier and regional forms of each language separately, as we will if we want to read them—is not reasonably expected of any general reader nor of every researcher. For the sake of consistency, quotes in this volume appear first in English. The original is usually available but placed in a less prominent position.

One exception to our policy of letting the eye encounter English first, then the original, concerns titles of books and articles which have not been published in translation. Except in biographical sketches of contributors, such titles have been left untranslated in order to avoid giving the impression that the work is available in English. And occasionally a contributor felt strongly that the original should precede the English for some other stylistic reason. Of greater importance than consistency is the right of an author or translator to determine what goes out under his or her name. The various instances of a title will usually be as follows:

first occurrence: English (followed by original): *The Story of the Grail*
(*Le Conte du Graal*)

second occurrence: Original (followed by English): *Le Conte du Graal*
(*The Story of the Grail*)

subsequent occurrences (within a given essay): Just the original:
Le Conte du Graal.

With respect to considerations of literary genre, the traditional distinction between “courtly romance” and “Arthurian romance” is occasionally helpful, and hence occasionally in force in this volume. However, it is sometimes equally illuminating to blur this distinction, as the medievals must have done. The Tristan saga is the prime example of a courtly romance which is not Arthurian. However, in both sorts of texts many of the relationships (king and nephew), adventures (rescuing the queen), issues (adultery) and traits (passive king) are similar. Consequently, there is some overlap between even these two cycles.⁴¹

NOTES

1. Not all nonchristianists who were invited to take part in this project chose to do so. This makes sense, actually, since nonchristianists—who would rarely think of themselves in those terms—do not regard these questions as germane to the genre. This stance has been the dominant one throughout the twentieth century.

2. These passages by Ifor Williams and Joachim Bumke became normative upon publication and continue to represent standard opinion.

3. Loomis (*Grail*) ix, 63. In *Arthurian Tradition* (1949), he does not directly repudiate Weston. Rather, he omits her from his survey of problems and approaches. One is led to wonder whether Loomis's explicit repudiation in 1963 is not in response to Robertson.

4. John Darrah—though he views Christianity in the romances as a distraction—pays Weston the attention she deserves, and in many ways brings her work to completion.

5. This definition is not traditional. In her more standard sketch, Linda Hutcheon speaks of “cultural forms since the 1960s that display certain characteristics such as reflexivity, irony and a mixing of popular and high art forms” (612). My focus here is not on postmodernism per se, but on Weston's and Robertson's low profile in the late twentieth century.

6. The horseman in “O where are you going” and the blackbird in “Thanksgiving for a Habitat” (both by Auden), like Goethe's watery reflections in “The Lake” (“Auf dem See”), seem explorations of reader-writer relations. Postmodern commentary often takes on some of the characteristics of such poems.

7. Makaryk 120 and 310.

8. The rambling structure of “The Waste Land” may be a trademark of the Grail legend. Cf. Nutt (34): “Of all the Quest romances [a certain thirteenth-century *Perlesvaus*] is the most confused and aimless.”

9. This is actually what Eliot was trying to avoid (*Sacred Wood* 7).

10. Eliot (*Collected Poems*) 54, note 360; Makaryk 308.

11. Should a postmodernist, a Christian and a textual critic find themselves in a taxi cab discussing who will pay what, the postmodernist might well link the matter explicitly to her postmodernity, as the Christian might to her Christianity. The textual critic would be unlikely to link this nonliterary question to his literary methodology.

12. Frye (*The Great Code*) 76 and 224: “metaphor cluster” (describing the Bible, rather than Christianity).

13. “Traditional” is here an expanded synonym of Brownlee and Brownlee's “close” reading (vii). (In narrower usage, “close” implies a rejection of Robertson's “patristics.”) For my purposes, I am content to contrast traditional commentary with iconic or postmodern commentary, where “iconic” means: “mirroring; stressing rather downplaying any necessary similarities that might happen to exist between a work of criticism and the work of art under discussion.”

14. For Goebel (61–62), Kafka’s reception of the Bible is an apostate critique of Judaism. For Frye (*Code* 195), on the other hand, the same poet’s *Trial* “reads like a kind of ‘midrash’ on the Book of Job.” Cf. Psalm 84:10.

15. For an explanation of “synchronic” and “diachronic,” see our discussion of Ferdinand de Saussure later in the preface.

16. Daniel Schenker turned my thoughts toward the possible influence of Romanticism on Guest. The period in which she grew up is often associated with both nationalism and the Middle Ages.

17. Weston (1897) 9. For our use of single quotes, see “Mechanical Matters” at the end of the preface.

18. Weston (1894) ix.

19. In terms of European politics between two wars, thunder was properly ominous (cf. Frye, *Code*, 167), as Eliot suggests in the poem’s notes. His final such note, however, renders the poem’s last line as “the Peace which passeth understanding.” In terms of the medieval legend around which Eliot’s twentieth-century verse is woven, the sour countryside can blossom now that the healing question has been asked.

20. Cf. McCaslin, “Vision and Revision in *Four Quartets*: T.S. Eliot and Julian of Norwich.”

21. *Course in General Linguistics* 88–89.

22. Weston (*Quest*) 64–65.

23. Weston (*Quest*) 75–97. This chapter (“The Ritual Theory”) provides a clear introduction to her work.

24. Loomis (*Grail*) 63. But cf. Talarico (our pages 36–37, citing Littleton and Malcor): “ ‘save for some unique historical events, the core of what later became the Arthurian and Grail literature was born on the steppes of ancient Scythia,’ [283] specifically in the cultures and rites of two tribes which flourished between the second and fifth centuries B.C.E., the Samartians and the Alans.”

25. For a list of Robertson’s early essays and a clear summary of his approach, see DeNeef. Though favorable to Robertson, that outline emphasizes different points than the present overview.

26. With *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976) and *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature* (1981), Northrop Frye covers much of the same ground for English literature while making the Bible itself more accessible.

27. For the sense of an underlying mold whose varying products have the potential to play off each other, thus heightening our impression of someone or

something familiar, or preparing us for someone not yet met (“typological fulfillment”), cf. “archetype,” “typesetting,” “typecasting.”

28. Robertson (*Preface*) 3: “Our judgments of value are characteristically dependent on attitudes peculiar to our own place and time. If we universalize these attitudes, as though they were Platonic realities, and assume that they have a validity for all time, we turn history into a mirror which is of significance to us only insofar as we may perceive in it what appear to be foreshadowings of ourselves, but which are, actually, merely reflections of ourselves arising from reconstructions of the evidence based on our own values.”

29. Robertson does not explicitly form a single era from three traditionally separate periods (Renaissance-Baroque-Romanticism). But he may do so implicitly (*Preface* 31–33), making Romanticism the fulcrum upon which modern literature seems to arise while nowhere displacing the Renaissance from that position for science.

30. Theiner (199).

31. Loomis (1963 [1964]) xi.

32. Calin 35–37.

33. For Robertson himself (*Preface* ix), his own ‘deductive approach is in many ways unsatisfactory.’

34. DeNeef (209, note 12): “Even if all four levels [of allegory] were not sought after in the Fourteenth Century (and it is not conclusive that they were not), this would in no way negate the concept which sees Scripture as allegorical. In fact, as Father Dunning himself goes on to suggest, the growing concern with the ‘literal’ meanings of the Sacred text was for the purpose of establishing a firmer foundation upon which the allegorical meanings had to be based.”

35. But cf. note 28.

36. Some theorists do indeed seem prepared to number Robertson among the early theorists (Jeffrey 124–25).

37. Robertson (*Preface*) 45: “The concept of vicarious experience . . . , or, rather, the spontaneous inclination to indulge in it now ingrained by the massive techniques of the cinema, affects our ideas of narrative structure as well as those of characterization.” Robertson (1968) 7: ‘Courtly love’ is a construct ‘clearly belonging to the realm of romantic and Victorian fiction, and has nothing to do with the Middle Ages.’ (On single versus double quotes, see “Mechanical Matters” at close of preface.)

38. Robertson (*Preface*) 45–46: Medieval commentary emphasized intellectual, rather than emotional, aspects of classical Greek drama. From this

we can infer that medieval literature was itself more intellectual than emotional. Cf. also Makaryk 458.

39. Cf. Schenker: Wyndham Lewis's "progression from aesthetic to social to religious concerns" (x) left him something of a "one-man *memento mori*" (or reminder of death) (2), who for this reason enjoys little standing in the modernist canon (9).

40. Theiner (199): "As has frequently been observed by reviewers, both sympathetic and combative . . ." Coleridge (430): 'Without that acquaintance with the heart of man, or that docility and childlike gladness to be made acquainted with it, which those only can have, who dare look at their own hearts—without this, and the modesty produced by it, I am deeply convinced that no man, however wide his erudition, however patient his antiquarian researches, can possibly understand the writings of Shakespeare.'

41. McDonald, *Arthur and Tristan. On the Intersection of Legends in German Medieval Literature* (1991).

ARTHURIAN LITERATURE
AND CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER 1

The Time of the *Four Branches*¹

Ifor Williams (tr. Wayne Harbert)

In 1839 Lady Charlotte Guest began publishing English translations of a medieval Welsh cycle to which she gave the name the Mabinogion ('tales for children'), but which is now called the Mabinogi ('tales of a hero's coming of age').² These annotated translations, which she refined and reissued throughout her life, contributed on the one hand to reviving pride in the indigenous Welsh tradition, and, on the other, to understanding the roots of Arthurian literature on the European continent. Whether inherently because of the material itself, or secondarily because of the nationalist emphasis in Guest's commentary, a dichotomy between "Celtic" and "Christian" came to be standard in Arthurian commentary on the Mabinogi. In this selection, most of the explicit instances of a Christian presence in the Four Branches are enumerated within the context of an attempt to date the narrative, both with regard to its actual composition and to the age in which the story purports to be taking place.

Whenever the story was shaped, the narrator situated its events in the past. He did not mention imaginary contemporaries, no matter how much of the coloring of his age is on them, but the old inhabitants of the country in times gone by. There are no Saxons or Normans to be seen anywhere, only Brân, the king of the whole island, with the crown of London on his head. The Romans haven't arrived either, but they are close by. When Brân was in Ireland, the island [Britain] was conquered by Caswallawn the son of Beli, which harks back to Casivellaunos, king of the Britons, who opposed Julius Caesar in 54 B.C. The era of the Mabinogi, therefore, in the mind of the narrator, was the era immediately before the first arrival of the Romans on the island.

The author of the *Dream of Maxen*³ conflated matters a bit in making Beli and his sons contemporaries of the emperor Maxen (Maximus), who was killed at the end of the fourth century A.D. (388): and yet, he kept something of the tradition, since Beli and his sons reigned here when the first Romans came to the island. Therefore, the narrator of the *Mabinogi* knew that it was about the pagan era before Christ that mention was to be made, and, to be fair to him, he succeeded rather well at keeping Christianity out of his material. He failed sometimes, nonetheless. His characters swear on their “confession to God,” the spear for killing Lleu is made when people are at Sunday Mass,⁴ a scholar, a priest and a bishop come to Manawydan, and he asks for their blessing: a name is given at the occasion of baptism, too, only here he remembered to add that it was the baptism that was done at that time.⁵

And yet, if he failed in these points, he succeeded in keeping Roman, Saxon and Norman out of his story. Some authors are surprised that he makes no mention of Arthur at all. But there would be more occasion for surprise and wonder and blame if he had brought Arthur in. Every storyteller knew that King Arthur was the hero who fought against the Saxons, and how could space be found for him in a story about the natives of Wales in the time before even the Romans had landed? The absence of Arthur from the picture doesn't prove that the story was completed before the story about Arthur became famous, any more than does the silence concerning the Saxons prove its composition before A.D. 400. All that is proved is that the storyteller, in this at least, was consistent in his idea about the era in which his characters lived. But who is responsible for the citations from the *Triads* in the *Four Branches*?⁶ It can be shown that that person knew a certain amount about Arthur too.

NOTES

1. This selection originally appeared in modern Welsh in the introduction to the medieval Welsh edition of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* (*Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogi*). Section 5, pages xxii-xxiv. For commentary on this passage (or on this matter), see Sioned Davies 61 (and 34–5).

2. Loomis (*Development*) 23. He gives 1849 as the first publication date, and phrases the definition of the genre somewhat differently.

3. *The Text of the Mabinogi from the Red Book of Hergest*, 88.

4. Williams 86.

5. Williams 150–51. [Translator’s note: In a note discussing the sentence “They had the boy baptized, according to the baptism which was done then” (“*Peri a wnaethont bedydyaw y mab, o’r bedyd a wneit yna*” p. 23), Williams observes: “. . . a suggestive sentence. The narrator feels that a mention of Christian baptism was not appropriate somehow in connection with persons like these; that it continued a certain vague remembrance of their antiquity, is doubtless, and a consciousness that such beings were rather pagan, although the name of God was in their oaths. And yet he could not think that there was not something of the sort in their history, or when did they get their names! To him the chief meaning of baptism was the giving of a name. Cf. English christening. Every time that baptism is mentioned the emphasis is on the naming, page 75, line 21; page 76, lines 7 and 19; page 83, line 26; and so here.”]

6. [Translator’s note: The Triads (*Trioedd*) to which Williams refers here were widely circulated lists of legendary persons and events, arranged thematically by threes under such headings as “Three Stubborn Men,” “Three Lovers of the Island of Britain,” “Three Concealments and Three Disclosures of the Island of Britain,” etc. These were apparently intended to serve as catalogues or indices of bardic lore for the use of poets and story tellers. Arthur figures prominently in these legendary triads. Similar lists existed for other areas of learning, e.g., law and medicine. The largest and best known collection of legendary triads, *The Triads of the Island of Britain (Trioedd Ynys Prydein)*, has been edited by Rachel Bromwich.]

CHAPTER 2

Parzival and the Grail¹

Joachim Bumke (tr. Peter Meister)

The origin of the Grail saga may be counted among the most difficult problems in Arthurian research. Theories fall into the following groups: a Celtic origin, a Christian origin, an Oriental origin. The dominant view today (1997) combines Celtic origin with Christian influence.

The story of Parzival and the Grail belongs to the cycle of Celtic sagas about King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table (“the Matter of Britain”).² The history of this cycle is the object of international research. Today that research is based in French studies in America and France as well as in Celtic studies in Great Britain. German Arthurians, who at one time took the initiative in important ways, now play a quiet role. The main transmission question is whether French poets of the twelfth century owed their Arthurian tales in the main to Celtic tradition or whether these poets made them up for the most part, perhaps by freely combining inherited motifs.

The reason this question is so difficult is that Celtic tales of Arthur were for centuries passed on only orally and nothing is known of them except for scant traces recorded in Latin chronicles and hagiographies of the ninth through the twelfth centuries. Almost without exception the Celtic (Welsh) manuscripts are younger than the courtly epics. Since the French epic exerted a demonstrable return influence on Celtic tradition, we can never be sure which nationality is responsible for those motifs which they have in common. This problem is nowhere more intractable than for the most important group of Welsh texts, the so-called Mabinogi (“story or stories about a hero in his youth”).³ The *Mabinogi* are a collection of prose narratives, several about King

Arthur. The dominant view today is that some of these narratives—“Kulhwch and Olwen” in particular, by coincidence the collection’s most famous piece—preserve old Celtic sagas, while others borrow fairly faithfully from the French. An example of this second kind would be the *Mabinogi* about “Peredur,” which seems in the main to have been modeled on Chrétien’s *Story of the Grail* (*Conte du Graal*).⁴

Whether or not there was an earlier Celtic saga of Parzival is not a matter on which scholars can agree. The hero’s name is French. In Chrétien he is called Perceval, and medieval poets take that to mean “press on through the valley” (*perce val*). In Wolfram, similarly, Sigune translates: “the name means right through the middle”⁵ (140,17). In the *Mabinogi* the hero’s name is Peredur. Our first attestation of this name is in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *History of the Kings of England* (*Historia regum Britanniae*), where a guest named Peredur appears at King Arthur’s courtly festival.

Our oldest narrative about this hero is Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal* (*Story of the Grail*), a work thought to date from about 1180–1190. Various figures and motifs in this work display typical traits of the Celtic world of legends and marvels, for example, the ugly Grail messenger, three drops of blood on a snowy field, the Bleeding Lance, the Fisher King, the Wondrous Bed (*Lit de la Mervoille*) among others. Romance scholars such as Jean Marx and Roger S. Loomis have tried to deduce the original plot of a Celtic saga of Parzival (or Peredur).⁶ At the heart of such a plot would have been the visit of a mortal to a Celtic Otherworld that had become barren because of a spell. A magical question, according to Marx and Loomis, would have dispelled this curse. Again, we have no way of knowing whether Chrétien de Troyes was familiar with a Celtic story whose plot elements combined in this particular way.

The major role which religious motifs play is the most important difference between the Parzival story and other Arthurian matter. Sin and repentance stand—in Chrétien’s treatment as in Wolfram’s—in the closest possible relation to the Grail. The origin of the Grail saga may be counted among the most difficult problems in Arthurian research. Three theories are still discussed:

- a Celtic origin. In most versions the Grail is pictured as a magic provider of food. This cornucopia function is not far from the magic pots and horns described in Celtic lore. The Grail is also

associated with clearly Celtic motifs (the Bleeding Lance, the Fisher King).

- Christian origin. The Grail is by all accounts a sacred container.⁷ Eucharistic motifs arise in several versions. And the celebratory Grail procession is reminiscent of liturgical practice.
- an Oriental origin. This claim rests mainly on Wolfram, who describes the Grail as a stone. This stone has reminded some scholars of various Eastern stones.⁸ Given Wolfram's dependence on the French, however, his depiction of the Grail is clearly secondary.

The dominant view today is that the Grail as object originated in magic containers of Celtic saga, but that this object didn't take on its distinctive character as "the Grail" until it became associated with the Christian Eucharist.⁹ This reinterpretation was probably the work of the French poets of the twelfth century, who were also the first to call this object the "Grail."

NOTES

1. [Translator's note: 154–56 *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, 7. Auflage. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1997 [1964]. Though the present translation is based on the 1997 seventh edition, a stylistic nicety is occasionally retained from the 1991 edition. Unless content is involved, no footnote compares the various editions.]

2. [Translator's note: In 1966 this sentence read as follows: "The story of Parzival and the Grail is part of the Matter of Britain, but differs from other Arthurian tales by virtue of a number of explicitly Christian themes which cannot have arisen within the Celtic tradition."]

3. [Translator's note: Throughout much of the twentieth century, scholars followed Lady Guest in regarding the plural of *Mabinogi* as *Mabinogion*, which was then used as the title of the whole collection. Bumke's German edition reflects this usage, which has been superseded by "Mabinogi" in both the singular and plural.]

4. [Translator's note: This question of direction of influence as between French and Welsh is referred to—reflecting earlier usage, see note 3— as "the Mabinogion question" (*die Mabinogionfrage*). For Bumke in 1997, "Peredur" is a product of both Welsh and French transmission.]

5. *der nam ist rehte enmitten durch* 140,17.

6. Jean Marx. *La légende arthurienne et le Graal*. 1952. Roger S. Loomis. *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*. 1949.

7. [Cf. Bumke 144.]

8. [Cf. Bumke 144.]

9. [Translator's note: This sentence appears for the first time in the 1997 edition.]

CHAPTER 3

From Germanic Warrior
to Christian Knight
The *Heliand* Transformation

G. Ronald Murphy, S.J.

In his commentary on the Heliand (The Saxon Saviour), and the apparatus to his English translation of the same work, Father Murphy describes the reinterpretation of Mediterranean Christianity by a ninth-century poet in a monastery in what is now northern Germany. Murphy's emphasis in those places is on the Germanic underside of an Old Saxon masterpiece. In the present essay, he discusses the early courtly side of this vernacular Gospel narrative.

Prior to Murphy, the Heliand was valued primarily as a document recording a certain stage in the history of a particular language family (and English-tasters will indeed savor 'This is a mighty thing' in Old Saxon 'thit is mahtig thing'). Admiration of the gospel translator's artistic achievement awaited Murphy's depiction of the challenge facing a Saxon audience trying to come to terms with Charlemagne's military Christianization of their homeland. Merging Christian charity with the Germanic military ethos anticipates courtly literature by several centuries (Saxon Saviour viii and The Heliand, The Saxon Gospel 101, note 142).

Some four hundred years before Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote his *Parzival*, in about the year A.D. 830, during the reign of Charlemagne's troubled son, Louis the Pious, an unknown Saxon poet struggled to transform the story of Jesus into a Germanic epic. His task, no less than a synthesis of Tatian's harmony of the four gospels and northern

Europe's epic tradition of warrior virtue, resulted in the most effective and possibly well-spread vernacular literary work of the Dark Ages, the *Heliand*. The *Heliand*'s synthesis of the story of Christ and the Germanic warrior-epic helped bring into being the integrative cultural literary atmosphere that made possible the later enthusiastic reception of the Arthurian tales, and thus may be a hidden player in Wolfram's retelling of the story of Perceval. In his *Bildungsroman* Wolfram is primarily concerned with the personal development his hero must undergo in order to become a Christian knight, but many of the characteristics of Wolfram's concept of Christian knighthood, including Wolfram's emphasis on Parzival's active emotional involvement, first saw light in the ninth-century *Heliand*. Did Wolfram know the *Heliand* and was he influenced by the literary and cultural synthesis it helped crystallize?¹ I am one of the skeptics who believe Wolfram was kidding when he wrote that he couldn't read a single letter.² He read and listened well, and most surely loved the Celtic Arthurian-Christian world and its French interpreters. I would venture that his reading background as a German knight who so admired the spirit of a religious order, the Knights Templar,³ might have included the *Heliand* just as surely as his chevalier background included the warrior-spirituality of the *Heliand*'s world. It is, in any case, remarkable that so many of the characteristics of Christian knighthood found in full blossom in the courtly romance of the High Middle Ages were already sprouting from knighthood's Germanic-Christian double root in the great heroic epic of the Dark Ages.

In the following essay we will examine the treatment given to the apostles, the Magi and Christ in the *Heliand*. In order to transfer the gospel into Germanic terms, certain critical relationships had to be changed by poetic analogy into a northern European equivalent. The basic, but foreign and unfamiliar, relationship of rabbi to disciples used so often in the Bible to express the mutual relationship of Jesus to Peter, James, Thomas and the others of his twelve apostles, had to be transformed from its base in a Jewish pedagogic analogue to a Germanic warrior analogue, and thus became the mutual relationship of chieftain to warrior-companions. This critical poetic change alters the relationship of Christ to the Christian from one of teaching and learning to one of mutual protection and defense (*mund* in Germanic). This is underscored in the scenes of Jesus's rescue of Peter from drowning and of Peter's drawing his sword to defend Christ during his arrest in the

Garden of Olives. Throughout the *Heliand*, Jesus will be given the impressive feudal title of “powerful Protector” (*mahtig mundboro*), and Peter will be called “the good” and “the mighty swordsman.”

A striking consequence follows from this new analogy. If the word *faith* expresses the disciple’s acceptance of the teachings of Jesus as rabbi in the educational analogue of the relationship, then *fidelity* or *faithfulness* is the proper way to express the same acceptance of Jesus as the warrior’s Chieftain in the soldierly model. This is a significant change; it embodies a fundamental difference between Roman and Germanic relational law, and is illustrated by Roman emperors’ preference in times of imperial assassinations for a bodyguard of Germans who would be loyal to their person rather than one of Romans loyal to the office of emperor. “Faithfulness” here is loyalty to a person, “faith” is belief in, acceptance of, teachings. The *Heliand* poet thus, alongside the traditional *gilobo* [*Glaube*], poignantly translates “faith” for his warrior audience as *treuua* [*Treue*]*—*faith is loyalty, belief is fidelity. The author of the *Heliand* will thus have some explaining to do when it comes to Peter’s denials and the “desertion” behavior of the disciples when the “enemy army” comes to take Jesus off to crucifixion as “prisoner of war.”

A third element to consider is the early presence of a concept of quest in the *Heliand*. The journey of the knightly Magi, and the journey with Jesus and his three warrior-disciples up the mountain of the Transfiguration, to see with their own eyes the object of a warrior-companion’s search for happiness, are made into highly elaborate and important scenes in the *Heliand*. They are clearly written to focus the reader/hearer’s attention on them.

To begin with an early scene in the *Heliand*, when the angel Gabriel announces the future birth of John the Baptist to the priest Zachary in the temple he says words that are at first quite similar to the standard biblical version—until he comes to the end:

Never in his lifetime will he drink hard cider or wine in this world: this is the way the workings of fate made him, time formed him, and the power of God as well. God said that I should say to you that your child will be a warrior-companion of the King of Heaven. He said that you and your wife should care for him well and bring him up on loyalty [*treuua*].⁴

Not only are the old pagan Germanic forces being given a role in shaping John's personality (along with the power of God), but John will be a warrior-companion [*gisið*] of God as his king. Only a few lines later the angel details this remarkable concept by saying that John will be *Kristes gisip*, a thought which neither Wolfram nor any crusader would have thought foreign, but one that surely would have startled St. Luke, author of the original version of this passage. More important for us here is the *Heliand* author's added instruction that John is to be raised on *treuua* rather than the perhaps more to be expected "*gilobol*/faith." This follows, of course, if John is to be a "warrior-companion" of Christ rather than one of Christ's "students."

The author is completely consistent in his Germanic analogy when he deals with the birth of Jesus, John's "Chieftain." At the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem ("hill-fort Bethlehem"), the author describes the coming of the shepherds and Mary's reaction:

The angel of God had shown the horse-guards [the shepherds in the *Heliand* become Joseph's *ehu-scalcos*] with a shining sign that they themselves could go to God's baby Son. They soon found him, the Chieftain of clans, the Lord of peoples. They praised God the Ruler with words and made known widely all over the shining hill-fort what a brilliant holy vision from the meadows of heaven they had been shown out there in the fields. . . . The mother, the loveliest of ladies, then fittingly brought up the Chieftain of many men, the holy heavenly Child, on love [*minnea*]. (18)

All but the last line is a paraphrase of Luke's account. The addition of *minnea* is obviously very important to the poet's attempt to describe the Baby's future relationship to his followers. The term is known to medieval scholars more for its much later meaning in *Minnesang* as romantic love, or as exposed for glorifying actual or intended adultery by Gottfried von Straßburg in his *Tristan*, but the root meaning of *minnea* in the *Heliand* is a loving loyalty—the protective attitude of a Chieftain in his unwavering love of and concern for his faithful vassals. This older meaning of *minnea*, emphasizing mutuality and fidelity, is the one found both in the *Heliand*—and four hundred years later in Wolfram.⁵

One of the more touching and effective lines in the *Heliand* comes when the author tries to express the wonder of the Incarnation in

Germanic-warrior terms. Here again he resorts to the world he knows and comes up with a remarkable concept. Luke's gospel uses a perfunctory phrase to provide a clear marker for the ending of the infancy narratives before the beginning of the public life of Christ. He writes (after the incident of finding Jesus in the temple as a child when he said to his parents, "Why did you look for me? Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?"): "But they did not understand what he meant. Then he went back with them to Nazareth, and was obedient to them." (Luke 2:49–52) This last line becomes in the *Heliand*: "The holy family, Joseph and Mary, set off for home and then left Jerusalem. They always had the King of Heaven, the Son of the Chieftain, the Protector of Multitudes, as their warrior-companion . . . " The mutuality of heaven and earth in Christ is expressed in terms that are designed to express the wonder of the Incarnation in feudal style. In Christianity the King of Creation has become a mere warrior-companion in Joseph's household. The Chieftain of Heaven spent his childhood on earth not as a protective Chieftain with a large retinue of warriors, as one might have expected, but just as one of Mary and Joseph's *gisiðos*.

The apostle Thomas in the *Heliand* combines warrior fidelity with loyalty to Christ. When Christ in Bethany makes the final decision to return to Jerusalem, his disciple/warriors object:

"Why are you so keen, my Lord," they said, "to go back there? It was not so long ago that they intended to punish you for your words—they wanted to throw heavy stones at you. Now you are determined to travel back to those people where you have plenty of determined enemies—arrogant earls looking for a fight!" (130)

Thomas's reply carries curious echoes of Wiglaf's speech on loyalty to Beowulf's followers (date uncertain), and eerie similarity to Bryhtwold's harangue of the younger warriors in the later *Battle of Maldon* (c. A.D. 991). One should be faithful to one's chieftain, even to death beside him. Bryhtwold: "Our minds must be harder, our courage must be keener / our emotions must be higher, as our strength grows weaker. / . . . I am old in years; but I will not yield / instead, here beside my lord / whom I love so much, / I intend to lie."⁶ The *Heliand* christianizes the sentiment by making Christ the chieftain:

Then one of the twelve (Thomas was his name, he was an excellent man, the Chieftain's devoted thane) said, "We should not criticize his action or obstruct his will in this matter, we should continue on, stay with him, and suffer with our Commander. That is what a thane chooses: to stand fast together with his lord, to die with him at the moment of doom. Let us all do it therefore, follow his road and not let our life-spirits be of any worth to us compared to his—alongside his people, let us die for him, our Chieftain. (130)

This is quite a change from the original, which, in John 11, consists of a single, perhaps even unhappy, line about "doubting Thomas": "Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us go, that we may die with him.'" "What a warrior chooses" (*thegenes cust*) has been blended with Christianity.

It is interesting to examine the opposite side of the coin. If faith becomes fidelity in the *Heliand*, then doubt should become infidelity, unfaithfulness to one's own Chieftain—and indeed it does. Though "doubt" can mean fearful hesitation in the *Heliand*, just as often, and more strikingly, it means disloyalty to the Chieftain. Judas, rather than Thomas, thus becomes the archetype of "doubt."⁷ At the Last Supper Christ's single line to Judas, "What thou dost, do quickly," is very greatly expanded by the author:

"Do what you are thinking," he said, "do what you are going to do—you cannot keep your intentions concealed any longer. Fate is at hand, the time has now come close." As soon as the disloyal traitor⁸ took the food and put it in his mouth to eat it, the power [protection] of God left him. Cruel things started going into his body, horrible little creatures, Satan wrapped himself tightly around his heart, since God's help had abandoned Judas in this world. This is the woeful situation of people who, under heaven, change lords. (152)

Judas does not know how to behave according to *thegenes cust* ("a warrior chooses") and changes from one lord to another with the feudal consequence of loss of the Chieftain's *mund*, protective power for his knights.

Once looked at from this perspective, even the concept of original sin in the Garden of Eden can be seen as an act of infidelity, *untreuua*:

Satan approaches Christ to subject him to the three temptations in the desert:

The Chieftain of earls (Christ) was there in the desert for a long time. He did not have any people with him, no men as companions, this was as he chose it to be. He wanted to let powerful creatures test him, even Satan, who is always spurring men on to sin and malicious deeds. He understood Satan's feelings and angry ill will, how Satan first deceived the earth people in the beginning through sin, how he misled the couple, Adam and Eve, with lies, into *untreuua* (disloyalty). (36–37)

St. Peter is the *Heliand's* favorite warrior-companion, the first Christian knight in Germanic literature. In the course of the epic he becomes the only knight whom Christ rescues by taking him by the hand. On the Sea of Galilee “a great storm arose, the waves of the sea roared against the bow stempost!” (95) When the disciple/warriors see what appears to be Jesus walking on the waves of the storm, despite initial fear Peter calls out from the boat, “If you are the Ruler, as I think you are, good Lord, then tell me to walk to you across this seaway, dry across deep water, if you are my Chieftain, Protector of many people.” Peter starts off well enough “until in his emotions he began to feel the fear of deep water. . . . Just at that moment he began to doubt in his mind. The water underneath him became soft and he sank inside a wave. . . . Very soon after that he called out quickly, asking earnestly that Christ rescue him, since he, his thane, was in distress and danger.” (95–96) It is interesting to see that the author has embellished the account with great physical and emotional detail, but does not let “doubt” (*tuueho*) in the case of Peter have any weakening effect on his relationship to his Chieftain. Quite the opposite, because he is a thane, he calls out to his Chieftain for the protection which a chief owes a thane.

The rescue is swift in coming. “Then the holy, all-mighty One *took him by the hand* [italics mine], and all at once clear water became solid under his feet, and they went together on foot, both of them, walking, until they climbed on board the boat from the sea.” (96)

Not only does the author emphasize the protective and personal relationship of Jesus to his vassal Peter, Peter's one occasion in the gospel story where he draws his sword in defense of his sovereign, at

the time of Jesus's arrest, becomes a climactic moment in the *Heliand* as it is in the *Battle of Malden* and in *Beowulf*. The simple, original gospel account describes Peter as drawing his sword and striking at the servant of the high priest, missing, cutting off the servant's ear. The whole incident occupies only a few lines in John 18. In the *Heliand* the *gisiðos Cristes* prepare for the defense of their Chieftain:

Christ's followers, wise men deeply distressed by this hostile action, held their position in front. They spoke to their Chieftain. "My Lord Chieftain," they said, "if it should now be your will that we be impaled here on their spear-points, wounded by their weapons, then nothing would be as good to us as to die here, pale from mortal wounds, for our Chieftain." Then Simon Peter, the mighty, the noble swordsman flew into a rage; his mind was in such turmoil that he could not speak a single word. His heart became intensely bitter that they wanted to tie up his Lord there. So he strode over angrily, that very daring thane, to stand in front of his Commander, right in front of his Lord. No doubting in his mind, no fearful hesitation in his chest, he drew his blade and struck straight ahead at the first man of the enemy with all the strength in his hands, so that Malchus was cut and so badly wounded in the head that his cheek and ear burst open with a mortal wound! Blood gushed out, pouring from the wound! The cheek of the enemy's first man had been cut open. The men stood back—they were afraid of the slash of the sword. (160)

The passage shows the vassal Peter fighting for his Lord, but is no *carte blanche* for unrestricted Christian warfare. Jesus's statement, "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword" is not left out of the *Heliand* but is made more physical and more fatalistic:

" . . . whoever is eager and willing to practice the weapon's hatred, cruel spear-fighting, is often killed himself by the edge of the sword and dies dripping with his own blood. We cannot by our own deeds avert anything." (161)

The warrior virtues of northern Europe have not been negated by the gospel, rather they have been integrated into it with a corresponding effect on the text of the gospels. Before his final departure, Christ gives his faithful thane Peter charge of his household:

“Whoever of the nobly born you wish bound here on earth will have two things done to him: heaven will be locked to him, and Hel will be open, the burning fire. Whomever you wish to unbind once again, taking the manacles off his hands, for him heaven stands unlocked—eternal life in the greatest of worlds on God’s green meadow.” (101–2)

The surprising change is not that the passage has been rendered so physically with locks and manacles, but that the charge has been changed from one of authority over things of law to authority over persons. The original statement, “*whatsoever* you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and *whatsoever* you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19) has been subtly changed by the simple substitution of *who(m)* for *what*. The text has gone from the Mediterranean world of written law codes to the northern European one of feudal interrelationships.

The Eight Beatitudes become a new ideal by combining biblical and northern values. In connection with the author’s depiction of Peter, it is interesting to look at what becomes of “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

[Jesus] said that those too were fortunate “who live peacefully among the people and do not want to start any fights or court cases by their own actions, they will be called the Chieftain’s sons for he will be gracious to them, they will long enjoy his kingdom.” (46)

Surely this is a brilliant finding of common ground between the two traditions. The thought has successfully come down to our present day, since it is still true that no one cares for people who start fights or enjoy litigation! In the Fifth Beatitude, however, the author has performed a work of genius. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will have mercy shown to them.” (Matthew 5:7) At first this saying of Jesus seems somewhat plainfaced and needing little change to be acceptable to the epic. The author rewrites it, however, as “Fortunate as well are those who have kind and generous feelings within a hero’s chest, the powerful holy Chieftain will himself be kind and generous to them.” (46) This is the emergence of a new cultural ideal, an ideal of a warrior male which surely influenced Wolfram and beyond. That the ideal Christian man should be described as having both a big chest and

gracious feelings seems disconcertingly physical and at the same time charmingly familiar. It is this ideal handed on from the Dark Ages which may indeed be one of the hidden players in Wolfram's reception of Parzival and creation of the hero's kind and generous pagan brother Feirefiz.⁹

Jesus himself is transformed in the *Heliand* into a very human Son of God. His own fear of dying is portrayed more vividly than in the four gospels, and his enduring and rising above this fear is portrayed as the act of a strong soldier with a generous heart. The Agony in the Garden is Saxonized in the following scene:

The powerful One then stood up in the shrine [the temple], Christ the Rescuer, and went out by night with his thanes. Troubled and deeply saddened, Christ's followers walked with grief in their hearts. He brought them to the high Olivet mountain, the one he usually went up with his followers. . . . Then he told his followers to wait there, up on the mountain. He said that he wanted to climb up higher on the slope to pray, and told three thanes to go with him, James and John and good Peter—daring warriors. They went gladly together with their Commander. . . . The powerful Son of the Chieftain bowed, the most powerful of kings, and knelt down on the earth. He spoke to the good Father of all peoples, he said words of lamentation and grief. His mind was clouded and afraid; in his humanness his feelings were upset, his flesh was frightened. His tears fell, his precious sweat dripped down just as blood comes welling out of wounds. (156)

The poet has not only intensified the agony, he has added tears and a touching military comparison: the bloody sweat of Jesus indicates that his "battle" to save mankind has already begun, and the Chieftain of mankind is already "wounded" and bleeding. He narrates further, adding to the gospel story, explaining the nature of the "fight":

The spirit and the body were at war in God's Child. One was ready to be on its way—the spirit—to God's kingdom; the other stood there in distress—Christ's body—it did not want to give up this light, it was afraid of death. After he had addressed the mighty One, he continuously kept calling out more and more with his words to the Chieftain, to the high Heaven-Father, to the holy God, the Ruler. "If mankind cannot be rescued," he said, "unless I give up my body,

which I love, to terrible torture for the sake of the sons of people—if you want it this way—then I want to drink it. I take this chalice in my hand and drink it to your honor [*thi te diurðu*], my Lord Chieftain, powerful Protector! (157)

In one majestic stroke the poet has transformed the biblical image of “drinking the cup” (acceptance of what is coming) into a Germanic military salute simply by adding a toast, *thi te diurpu*, “to your honor!” A salute from a dying thane is made to his Chief in an act of final loyalty.

A final consideration in looking at the *Heliand's* Germanic transformation of the story of Jesus is the emphasis on the journey one must make in order to come to him. This is surely not identical to the quest for the Holy Grail, but it bears a fascinating ancestral similarity through the metamorphosis of Jesus almost into a thing, an object of light to be beheld and to be held, the magic source of happiness. The Last Supper and the establishment of the Eucharist are the starting point.

When Jesus says the words over the bread and wine, “this is my body, this is my blood,” the author adds a significant phrase, he has Jesus say: *thit is mahtig thing*. The word *mahtig* is the word most often used for “magic” as well as “power.” In other words, to make the eucharistic transformation intelligible to his Saxon audience, the poet says that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are magic things which possess power. *Thit is mahtig thing* means “this is a magic thing,” “this is an object which possesses power.”¹⁰ In the *Heliand* these powers are listed and they are quite orthodox, the main one being the power to remember Jesus and the deed he performed out of love. The author, however, adds a second phrase to describe the eucharistic bread and wine, he has Jesus continue: “this is a holy image” [*thit is*] . . . *helag bilipi*. The word “holy” obviously has no connotation here of moral or saintly life; *helag* refers to the inviolability of a sacred person or thing, its radiant, sometimes dangerous power—in other words, *helag* and *mahtig* are parallel, and Jesus’s sacramental body and blood, the bread and wine, are seen as magic objects, things possessing great power. The emphasis is made all the more clear by describing the eucharistic bread and wine as something to be looked at (rather than merely eaten and drunk) and held, in order to experience its magic power. This attitude toward the sacrament is clearly a result of a northern attempt to

understand the foreign ritual of “eating and drinking” the Seder, in its transformation by Jesus, as being something holy and possessing the awesome power of causing remembrance as well as salvation.

If this is the Germanic mode of comprehending the spiritual nature of the bread and wine, then one can see the logic of treating any object with which they come in contact as *mahtig* and *helag*: the chalice which held the transformed wine, the plate of the bread, the lance which shed the blood, the cloth, and, in Wolfram’s case, the stone¹¹ on which the body of the Savior was placed. The story of the Holy Grail would, then, come to anyone raised on the *Heliand*, or on its very long-lived spirituality, as perfectly normal and charmingly familiar. Even the ritual of the Church would come to require, in order to reinforce the power of remembrance of Good Friday contained in the “magic images” of the bread and wine, that during the celebration of the eucharistic body of Christ, not only must a cloth (the corporal) be placed under the chalice and paten to remind of the shroud, but under the cloth on which the body and blood are placed there must be a small stone¹² slab (the altar stone) to remind of the sepulcher from which he rose, and upon which the *mahtig thing* is placed during every celebration of the Mass. Wolfram realizes, if his hero does not, the power of loyal *minnea* (“love”) to maintain the magical connection between Jesus on Good Friday and distant *gisiðos* (“warrior-companions”):

“Such power does the stone give a man that flesh and bones are at once made young again. The stone is also called the Grail. “This very day there comes to it a message wherein lies its greatest power. Today is Good Friday and they await there a dove, winging down from Heaven. It brings a small white wafer, and leaves it on the stone. Then, shining white, the dove soars up to heaven again. Always on Good Friday it brings down to the stone what I have just told you, and from that stone derives whatever good fragrances of drink and food there are on earth, like to the perfection of Paradise. . . . Thus to the knightly brotherhood, does the power of the Grail give sustenance.”¹³

Finally, let us consider the concept of undertaking a knightly journey to find this “perfection of Paradise.” The journey of the Wise Men from the East is described as a knight’s journey from the wisdom of an alternate religion, led by light, to find the light-filled Son of God and to

see him. The main emphasis again in the *Heliand* is that the Magi want to see and hold him:

. . . Men of the East, very wise men, three strong thanes, came to this [Jewish] people walking the long road over the land to get there. They were following a bright-shining beacon, and with clear mind they were looking for God's Child. They wanted to kneel to him, to go and become his followers—God's fate-workings were leading them on. . . [The three thanes explain to King Herod:] "A long time ago . . . there was a wise man, a man of great experience and wisdom, our ancestor there in the East. There has never been since then a single man who spoke so wisely. He was able to interpret God's speech. . . . When the time came for him to depart, to leave the earth and the throng of his relatives, to give up the comings and goings of men and to travel to the other light, he told his followers, his heirs and his earls, to come closer and told them truthfully in soothsaying everything that came afterwards, everything that has happened since in this world. Then he said that a wise king, great and mighty, was to come here to the middle world. . . . He said that it would be God's Son. . . . He said that on the same day on which his mother gave birth to him blessedly in this middle world, in the East there would shine a bright light in the sky such as we had never before seen between the earth and the heavens . . . never such a baby nor such a beacon! (21–23)

It is clear that the journey which the earls make is a quest for such a baby and such a beacon. By making the Magi into Germanic warriors the nature of the warrior's quest is changed from seeking treasure to seeking Christ in Bethlehem. Even more interesting may be the author's creation of a nonbiblical, pagan saint and prophet living far from Christendom. While this may have been intended originally as a gracious accommodation to the wavering Saxons and their previous religion, after the conversion of the Saxons this passage can be understood as acceptance of good and holy persons "able to interpret God's speech" living anywhere in heathendom. When one thinks of the deep ecumenical message of Wolfram's *Parzival* in which a heathen knight ends up not only sitting in the grass with our Christian hero, but also the two discovering that they are brothers, then one is not surprised that Wolfram touchingly describes Feirefiz's tears of love as a baptism:

“[Feirefiz to Parzival] You have fought here against yourself, against myself I rode into combat here and would gladly have killed my very self. . . . Jupiter, write this miracle down! Your strength helped us so that it prevented our deaths!”—He laughed and wept, though he tried to conceal it, and *his heathen eyes shed tears as if in honor of baptism*. Baptism must teach fidelity since our new covenant was named for Christ: in Christ may fidelity be seen [*italics mine*].¹⁴

Wolfram the crusader ends up opposing warfare on the grounds that it is wrong to fight brothers and relatives, and, since all are descended from Adam and Eve and have God as their common Father, Saracen and Christian may not fight one another. This generous spirituality is the same as that found in the Magi scene of the *Heliand*, which uses the pre-Judeo-Christian religious awareness of the Wise Men to make the same point. Here,

the Magi explain their desire to Herod to go and find the Child:

“Every morning we saw the bright star shining and went toward it, following the beacon all the time over roads and forests. The greatest of our desires was to be able to see him himself. . . . Tell us to which clan he has been born.” [The thanes receive their instructions and go on.] The bright star shone brilliantly over the house where the holy Child willed to live. . . . The thanes’ hearts became merry within them, they understood from the beacon light that they had found God’s peaceful Son, the holy King of heaven. [The Magi present their gifts and then:] The men stood there attentively, respectful in the presence of their Lord, and soon received It [the child] in a fitting manner in their hands. (24–26)

The Magi come to behold and hold. The last line is not a paraphrase of this incident from Matthew’s gospel, nor of any portion of Scripture, but entirely a creation of the author. The Magi wait in line respectfully to receive “It” in their hands. In the original text the poet has slipped from using “baby” to using “child” so that the proper pronoun of reference will not be the clear “him” that is received in the hands, but the much more richly allusive “It.” As in the case of *Parzival*, the listener/reader is present at an unusual ritual with thanes standing respectfully in attendance. As in *Parzival* the reader (as well as the hero) does not at first recognize the scene fully nor realize that he is in a

familiar presence. The added line “and soon received It in a fitting manner in their hands” makes the whole scene allude quietly to one of Communion. This theme and technique of treating the treasure of Mount Salvation as being a journey away, seeable with the eye, holdable with the hand, but only reachable by the good-hearted and then in an instant, being only as far away as where magical bread and wine (with spear, cloth and stone) can be found, is a golden thread uniting the spirituality of the Dark Ages to that of Wolfram.

It should not be imagined, therefore, that the Arthurian tales were received in Germany by an unembodied “raw” Christianity. Just as the French Arthurian tales were a mixture of Celtic-pagan and Christian story, so the literature of Germany was a mixture of Germanic-pagan and Christian story. What they have in common then is three things: Christianity, northern pagan tradition, and the blend in the story. And it is the mutual presence of blend, I believe, which made the ground fertile for the Arthurian tale’s reception by Wolfram and all of Germania.

The last incident I would like to consider is the journey up Mount Tabor by Christ and his warrior-companions in the *Heliand*. In some senses this is the most unusual scene in the work. The author chose to make it, rather than some battle scene, the center of his epic.¹⁵ It is the *Heliand*’s equivalent to the finding of the Holy Grail:

Then soon after that he picked from among his followers Simon Peter, James and John . . . and with these warrior-companions set out to go up on a mountain on their own—the happy Child of God and the three thanes. . . . They climbed along the mountain face over rock and slope until the warriors came to the place near the clouds which Christ the Ruler, King most powerful, had chosen, the place where he wanted, by his own power, to show his followers his divinity—bright-shining vision!

As he bowed down to pray up there, his appearance and clothes became different. His cheeks became shining light, radiating like the bright sun. The Son of God was shining! His body gave off light, brilliant rays came shining out of the Ruler’s Son. . . . (102)

For the poet of the *Heliand*, this is the goal of Christian knighthood, to be a warrior-companion in Jesus’s company, to see the light of the next world shining through the person of Jesus Christ. In later (or earlier)

tradition, the Grail is always associated with brilliant light and with radiant magic power, and with Christ and the objects associated with his sacramental body and blood. In both the *Heliand* and in *Parzival*, there are more called to the vision of the light, pagan and Christian, than just the hero himself. Parzival is able to bring Feirefiz with the help of a lady's love to see the vision. In the *Heliand*, the three pagan Magi are as much called through their saintly pagan ancestor as are the three thanes, Peter, James and John, to 'come and see.'

The *Heliand* poet breaks into Germanic and biblical imagery to express the happiness of the warrior/disciples at seeing the light of heaven up on the mountain:

It became so blissful up on the mountain—the bright light was shining, there was a magnificent garden there and the green meadow, it was like paradise! (103)

Germanic warriors have found happiness up there on the mountain with Jesus, and by being there with him as their Chieftain have been transformed into Christian knights. Their happiness is a doubly blissful, pagan-Christian delight: biblical paradise and Germanic warriors' heaven—the bright Garden of Eden and the green meadows of Valhalla. Saint Peter is beside himself, and to that mighty swordsman, *Kristes gesið*, up on the mountain, shall be given the last word. On arriving at the holy grail of knightly transformation from Germanic warrior to warrior companion of Christ, he speaks:

Peter the steady-minded hero then . . . addressed his Lord and said to God's Son, "This is a good place to live, Christ All-Ruler, if you should decide that a house be built for you up here on the mountain, a magnificent one, and another for Moses, and a third for Elijah—this is the home of happiness, the most appealing thing anyone could have! *thit is odas hem, uuelono uunsamost!* (103)

NOTES

1. Wolfram's first description of the Grail (235,23): "It was really something" ("*daz was ein dinc*"). The *Heliand* poet's first description of the Eucharist (song LVI, line 4645): "This is a mighty thing" ("*thit is mahtig*")

thing”). Not striking in translation perhaps, this shared reliance on “*thing*” is nonetheless startling in the two originals.

2. 115,27: “*ine kan decheinen buochstap.*” Cf. Kratz (*Total Evaluation*) 33: “There is evidence that Wolfram was familiar with the German clerical literature of the 12th century.” 34: “Wolfram must have been familiar with other French works as well.” 35: “There is also evidence that Wolfram derived some material from Latin sources.”

3. Wolfram “wants to be valued as a knight, not as a poet” (*als Ritter, nicht als Dichter will er gewertet sein*). *Verfasserlexikon* 1059.

4. *The Heliand, the Saxon Gospel* 7–8. All subsequent references to this translation will be given in parentheses at the end of each citation.

5. Book XV, 388 Mustard and Passage (abridged): “The baptized man was gaining in strength. He was thinking — and none too soon! — of his wife the queen and of her noble love. Parzival began to shout ‘Pelrapeire!’ And just in time Condwiramurs came across four kingdoms with the sustaining power of her love.”

6. See my *Saxon Savior*, 95–117.

7. Like Wolfram’s MHG *zwivel* (doubt), the Old Saxon word for doubt, *tuueho*, further reinforces the idea of wavering between two choices. *Tuueho* means ‘twoness,’ and thus to be caught between two choices, as the author’s Saxons were in the early ninth century between the old religion and the new. Modern usage seems more to indicate a general state of unsureness, even though the Latin root of ‘doubt’ *dubium*, also indicates twomindedness.

8. The word used for “traitor” is very strong in the *Heliand*, it is not a cognate of “to hand over” (*tradere*) but rather, literally, “loyalty-liar” (*treulogo*), thus making Judas’s crime even more heinous than accepting money in general to arrange an assassination. Judas’s sin is compounded by selling his own Chieftain with whom he stands in a loyal relationship of mutual defense and protection.

9. I now think that Feirefiz is *Frere-et-fils* (“brother and son”). He is both Parzival’s brother and, by baptism, his spiritual son.

10. For an excellent discussion of the role of magic, see Stephen E. Flowers, *Runes and Magic, Magical Formulaic Elements in the Older Runic Tradition*. [Editor’s note: Cf. also Murphy (*Heliand*) 207 ff.]

11. “. . . a precious stone so clear that in the day the sun shone through. It was a garnet hyacinth, long and wide, and he who measured it for a table top cut it long and thin that it might be light to carry.” Mustard and Passage 128.

12. “The altar on which the most holy sacrifice of the Mass is to be celebrated should be completely stone, properly consecrated; or at least it

should have a table top of stone; or a sacred stone [the altar stone], properly consecrated, which should be large enough to support the consecrated bread and the larger part of the chalice" (*Altare, in quo sacrosanctum Missae Sacrificium celebrandum est, debet esse totum lapideum, rite consecratum; vel saltem habere debet tabulam lapideam, seu petram sacram, item rite consecratam, quae tam amplia sit ut hostiam et maiorem partem calicis capiat*). *Missale Romanum* xxxv.

13. Trevrizent is speaking. Mustard and Passage 252.

14. Mustard and Passage 392.

15. [Editor's note: Murphy's "Light Worlds of the *Heliand*" is devoted entirely to this point.]

CHAPTER 4

Romancing the Grail
Fiction and Theology in the
Queste del Saint Graal

Kathryn Marie Talarico

The Christian elements in the Vulgate's Queste del Saint Graal have too often been analyzed so as to turn the Queste into a doctrinal, didactic treatise. Rather than view these elements as a (failed) attempt at nonfiction, we view them here as fictional elements in the story of the fall of Arthur's Camelot. By appropriating the popular elements of the Christian liturgy, iconography, biblical exegesis, and the like, and incorporating them into the fictional milieu of King Arthur's court, the Vulgate author(s) give new weight and seriousness to this corpus of tales. They also demonstrate that Old French prose is an adequate vehicle for such gravitas and thereby confer on this newly emerging language a status heretofore reserved for the Latinized clergy.

“Truly, Sir,” said the newcomer, “I wish you welcome too. Upon God’s name I have desired to see and be with you beyond all men alive. And it is only natural that I should, for in you is my beginning” [“*car vos estes commencement de moi*”]. Matarasso, *Quest*, 257–58; Pauphilet, *Queste*, 250¹

These are the words Galahad uses when he is reunited with his father, Lancelot, in the *Queste del Saint Graal*. Galahad is referring here to his bloodline and lineage in relation to Lancelot, but this statement suggests something else as well: it serves to tie his *story* in the *Queste* to Lancelot’s and to bring together the spiritual and fictional worlds.

And Lancelot's story is inextricably linked to yet another story: that of King Arthur and the fall of the kingdom of Logres. In the vast, complex tapestry of prose romances we know as the Vulgate Cycle,² the *Queste del Saint Graal* is but one "chapter"—the fourth and penultimate, announcing the last of the great adventures before the final cataclysm in the *Mort Artu* in which Arthur, Mordred, Lancelot and all the "best knights" die and the kingdom of Camelot is finally dissolved. The five enormous prose romances³ that make up the Vulgate are the *Estoire del Saint Graal* (*The History of the Holy Grail*), the *Estoire de Merlin* (*The Story of Merlin*), the *Lancelot Proper*, *La Queste del Saint Graal* (*The Quest of the Holy Grail*) and *La Mort Artu* (*The Death of Arthur*)⁴ and were written between 1215 and 1235 by an anonymous author or group of authors.

For the most part, the history of *Queste* scholarship is the history of explaining the origins and sources of the Grail legend, the ultimate, religious, doctrinal meaning of the Grail itself⁵—leaving aside all that is "Arthurian" in the story and separating it completely from the other tales in the cycle. Medieval authors did not hesitate to offer a variety of objects and rewritings of Grail material, yet twentieth-century scholarship has shown a remarkable predilection for offering up "monolithic" meanings of the Grail stories, which, when taken together, display enormous variety—if not contradiction.

What I propose, in a volume dealing with the varying approaches to the issue of Arthurian literature and Christianity, is to reassess the more important problems in Grail/Vulgate scholarship as they have evolved over the years and suggest that rather than read this text as a doctrinal treatise, we follow in the path of studies done within the past fifteen or so years that place this text squarely within the tradition of *romance*—of fiction. Many of these studies raise (but do not answer) questions about the emergence of Old French prose in the early years of the thirteenth century. The fictionalized Christian elements, as they appear in the *Queste*, open up the realm of literature and confer on Old French prose a new status in its ability to proclaim literary "truthfulness," to stake out fictional literature's ability to treat lofty, serious questions not only in a delightfully entertaining way, but, and perhaps more importantly, to create a usable *cultural* past in the vernacular,⁶ grounded, as one critic has suggested, in "the 'delicious sweetness' of fiction."⁷ "Romancing the Grail" is to be understood as both a linguistic and generic *mise en roman*.⁸ It is part of the process of

rewriting the Arthurian legend in the early years of the thirteenth century, with all that this transformation implies for the French language and for a particular literary genre.

The Vulgate Cycle—as one of the very first examples of Old French prose fiction—stands at the crossroads of both the “writerly” and oral traditions. As a work in prose, it draws on the traditional past models of written *Latin* prose: historical chronicles, juridical texts, the Bible, sermons, exempla—in short, prose Latin’s recourse to textual *auctoritas* with all its seriousness and claim to Truth. As the story of Arthur’s kingdom, the Vulgate also draws on the twelfth-century (oral) models of verse romance and the Celtic, Breton Otherworld depicted in Chrétien de Troyes’s Arthurian romances and the (Latin and vernacular) chronicle-stories of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, for instance. These are the two worlds that are brought together (at times uncomfortably, some would argue) in the scene cited above where Lancelot and Galahad meet on the Miraculous Ship in the *Queste*. Just as Galahad recognizes Lancelot as his father, so too, should we, as readers, allow the Grail material to “recognize” its Arthurian “paternity” and remain within the orbit of the Vulgate Cycle—tethered to it rather than separated from it. The Arthurian material appropriates into its sphere the lessons of Christian spirituality, piety, redemption, etc., not in order to promulgate that doctrine—to make Cistercian doctrine, for instance, “clearer” to the public. Rather, those lessons are used to broaden the purely secular, *merveilleux* world of the earlier verse romances. The *Queste* author, by transforming and fictionalizing those lessons, gives an importance, weight and seriousness to Arthur’s story while at the same time opening up the Arthurian time frame to larger concerns. There *are* lessons in the Arthurian legend, but they are not the lessons of the Cistercian cloister or biblical exegesis. They are mythological, universal and movingly, eternally human. For within the Vulgate Cycle as a whole, it is the human—the secular—that takes precedence in the final collapse of the kingdom of Logres as recounted in the *Mort Artu*—despite the best intentions and efforts of all the hermit-exegetes and the “celestial” knight, Galahad.

RECENT GRAIL SCHOLARSHIP

One of the most prominent characteristics of *Queste* scholarship up until about fifteen years ago was its isolation from the rest of the

Vulgate Cycle. Early commentators tended to focus on the Vulgate texts of the *Lancelot* and/or the *Mort* as they debated questions of authorship, the unity/disunity, *entrelacement* of the tales.⁹ The *Queste* was, for the most part, ignored in many of these studies, since it appeared to be so different and many scholars were reluctant to attribute the *Queste* to the same author(s) as other parts of the cycle.

Vulgate scholarship and studies of the *Queste* in particular, have undergone major changes in the past fifteen years. E. Jane Burns has succinctly summarized the more recent trends:

Redirecting the illusory search for absent authors, origins, and textual unity, [scholars in the past fifteen years] have begun interrogating instead the complex relations between author and text as they appear on the pages of the lengthy prose cycle. . . . Scholars have formulated new questions that set the prose romance squarely within the context of medieval manuscript transmission while underscoring simultaneously its theoretical modernity. Scholars have recently rethought the persistent tendency to seek in the medieval French prose romance a relatively stable and coherent text whose literary worth could—for the Romantic imagination at least—be vouchsafed by the signature of a verifiable historical author.¹⁰

Despite the hard questions we may ultimately have to ask about authorship, medieval textuality, or the *sens* of this corpus of works, the manuscript tradition of the *Queste* does not allow us the luxury of separating this text from the rest of the cycle (despite the critic's desire to do so).¹¹ Nor does isolation of the tales accurately reflect medieval practice. In only four of the forty-three manuscripts in which the *Queste del Saint Graal* is preserved does it appear alone. In all the others (whether they contain the whole of the cycle or only some parts), the *Queste* is found either with the Prose *Lancelot*, the *Mort Artu*, or the *Estoire*.¹² As Burns points out, "these groupings suggest that a variety of possible readings were built into the highly flexible narrative structure of the long and rambling Vulgate tales and that textual boundaries as we know them actually varied from one reading/performance to the next."¹³

Extant tales do not even allow us to pin down concretely what kind of *object* we are dealing with, illustrating on a material level the idea of *mouvance*: in Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval ou le Conte del Graal* the

graal (with a small “g”) is a plate; in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* it is a stone; in Robert de Boron’s *Joseph d’Arimathie* (which exists in manuscript fragments only) it becomes the *Saint Graal* (Holy Grail; capital “G”) and it is transformed into a type of chalice.¹⁴ In the Vulgate *Queste* it is also a chalice/cup, but the Grail winner has changed: it is no longer Perceval, but Galahad, the illegitimate son of Lancelot.

In 1960, Frederick Locke undertook a study of the *Queste* in which he argued for the “poetic” status of the tale and for the importance of the “suggestiveness” of the image/meaning of the Grail itself.¹⁵ He challenged the notion that to identify the origin and sources of these stories in some way *explains* them and that by doing so, the Grail romances have been robbed of their poetic function: to imply, to suggest (6). He provided a succinct overview of the more important theories concerning the origin and meaning of the Grail legend. I shall follow his general outline, and bring it up to date:

- The chalice of the Eucharist: This is the theory offered by W.E.M.C. Hamilton,¹⁶ who, in response to Gilson’s theory about the Grail being synonymous with “grace” (Cistercian doctrines of grace), sees the *Queste* as “a eucharistic novel” (*un roman éminemment eucharistique*) (110). His “quarrel” with Gilson’s argument is that one cannot consistently substitute *graal* for *grâce* in all instances in the text.
- A misinterpretation of the horn of plenty of Celtic mythology: This is Roger Sherman Loomis’s theory¹⁷ (shared by Helaine Newstead¹⁸) concerning a “blunder” of literary history whereby the French did not understand (or know) the tradition of the Welsh horn of Bran “which provided whatever food or drink one desired” (50).¹⁹ In his 1963 study of Arthurian romance, Loomis also dealt with the *Estoire del Saint Graal*. His “doubts” about the Christian orthodoxy of the text (and the whole of the Vulgate enterprise, I might add) are best summed up in his own words:

[The *Estoire*] opens with the claim that it is a transcript of a book which Christ Himself had written and delivered to a hermit 717 years after the Passion. If the claim were true, it would reflect severely not only on the Lord’s veracity but also on His talents as a writer of fiction. As we read on, we learn that the hermit was

afflicted with doubts about the Trinity, but, after being rapt up to heaven and having a vision of the Three-in-One, he was restored to orthodoxy. It is hard to decide whether this was the author's private joke, or whether he was touched in the head.²⁰

- A phallic symbol (when taken in conjunction with the Bleeding Lance): This is Jessie Weston's theory in her study *From Ritual to Romance*:

In the process of transmutation from Ritual to Romance, the kernel, the Grail legend proper, may be said to have formed for itself a shell composed of accretions of widely differing *provenance*. It is the legitimate task of criticism to analyse such accretions, and to resolve them into their original elements, but they are accretions, and should be treated as such, not confounded with the original and essential material. After upwards of thirty years spent in careful study of the Grail legend and romances I am firmly and entirely convinced that the root origin of the whole bewildering complex is to be found in the Vegetation Ritual, treated from the esoteric point of view as a Life-Cult, *and in that alone* (emphasis Weston's).²¹

- For Albert Pauphilet, the Grail is a manifestation of God, while the *Queste* itself is an inversion of the fictional world (*un renversement du monde romanesque*) (171). It was Pauphilet who also offered the theory of the Cistercian *provenance* of this text, since he believed that it would have taken a "specialist" to decipher the "real" meaning of the story: *des clerics seuls pouvaient démêler d'eux-mêmes le sens de tant d'allégories et de symboles accumulés; et encore leur eût-il fallu autant d'érudition et de subtilité qu'à l'auteur lui-même.*²²
- Etienne Gilson proposed that in the *Queste* the Grail represents the grace of the Holy Spirit²³ and theories of grace emanating from the influence of St. Bernard and the monks of Cîteaux (91).
- René Guénon sees in the *Queste* and in the Grail the forgotten remains of Druid rites of initiation.²⁴
- Whether chalice or plate (or stone?), was what was contained in the Grail the Trinity, the Eucharist or the *manna* of the Hebrews, as Urban Tigner Holmes has suggested?²⁵ Indeed, can a case be made for the Jewish origins and meaning of the Grail? Was

Chrétien de Troyes “a Christian” of Troyes, perhaps a converted Jew and the Grail ceremony depicted in the *Perceval* really a reenactment of the Passover seder, as Eugene Weinraub suggests?²⁶

- Or is the liturgical “atmosphere” of the *Queste* Byzantine or Roman in origin, as Myrrha Lot-Borodine has suggested?²⁷
- In 1979 Pauline Matarasso published an important study of the *Queste*, *The Redemption of Chivalry*, in which she meticulously examined the sources of the *Queste* that the author may have had in mind when setting quill to parchment:

It is hoped that from an examination of the sources an interpretation will emerge that can be shown to be solidly based on the rock of Scripture and doctrine. By sources I do not mean the legendary substratum of which one could happily say that there were more things in Celtic myth than were dreamt of by writers of romances. It is the sources consciously used by the author of the *Queste*, the Bible to which he constantly refers his readers and the other works most likely to have nourished his intellect and formed his spirituality. (17)

Although she dismantles many of the earlier theories—and especially those of the parabolic/allegorical interpretations of Pauphilet—she, too, is reluctant to allow the author of the *Queste* to completely remove his monk’s cowl and robes. Even though she reminds us of Jean Frappier’s statement that the monks of Cîteaux did not write *romans*.²⁸

Locke is correct in stating at the end of *his* list of Grail/*Queste* interpretations that “liturgy, ethnology, philosophy, and theology have all profited from such investigations, but literary studies have benefited little because these questions do not concern the literary works dealing with the Grail but rather concern the prehistory of the Grail” (6). He also contributes one of his own questions: “Is the theological content of the Grail stories orthodox or heretical from the Christian point of view?” (6) Unfortunately, he does not suggest any answers. In fact, he eschews such inquiries altogether since he does not find them to be germane to the problem. His main concern is to make a case for the “poetic” nature of the *Queste*, for its poetic/symbolic/mythological meaning as a “journey.” In one sense, Locke’s study heralds the

beginning of the transformation of *Queste* scholarship that has taken place in the last fifteen years in that he accepts a plurality of meanings as an inherent characteristic of poetic fiction.²⁹

Locke's argument for the "poetic" nature of the Grail sets his study apart from others, but he, too, remains silent about the *Queste's* relation to the other texts and tales in the Vulgate.

Among the more important of the recent Grail/Vulgate studies that argue for its status as *romance* are those by:

- E. Jane Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*. In the chapter entitled "Fictions of Meaning and Interpretation," Burns studies the *Queste* in particular and argues that "the allegorical composition of the *Queste* does not then produce a text that says one thing and means another, but a text that says the same thing over and over in slightly different form, recasting itself constantly in a series of analogical molds" (77).
- Emmanuèle Baumgartner, in *L'Arbre et le pain*, who argues against monolithic readings of the *Queste* and who suggests a more sociological function and meaning: the *Queste* as a "class Gospel" ("*évangile de classe*" 146) and more specifically, for the knightly class ("*. . . à l'usage exclusif de la chevalerie*," 45).
- Nancy F. Regalado, who argues in her study "*La Chevalerie celestiel*" that the Arthurian elements of the *Queste* have been little studied and "dismissed as an ill-fitting romance garb or seen as an allegorical husk to be discarded after interpretation" (91). She argues further that "as focus on the *Queste* has begun to shift to this work's place in the great thirteenth-century romance cycles and to the chivalric ethos it is now judged to glorify, full understanding of the *Queste* requires that we reclaim it as romance, that we establish its Arthurian paternity" (91).

There also continue to be studies arguing for a return to more primitive and pagan readings of the Arthurian legend in general and of the Grail in particular. Two very recent studies are John Darrah's *Paganism in Arthurian Romance*, which (re)traces the residue of pagan/Celtic culture in Arthurian romance, and C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. Malcor's *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* in which the authors claim that "save for some unique historical

events, the core of what later became the Arthurian and Grail literature was born on the steppes of ancient Scythia (283), specifically in the cultures and rites of two tribes which flourished between the second and fifth centuries B.C.E., the Samartians and the Alans.³⁰

What are we, then, to make of all these varied and sometimes contradictory theories? Are we supposed to sweep away all the work of the past in order to arrive at a “correct” reading? One of the most troublesome aspects of this, for me at least, is that many of the theories outlined above are *very* convincing. We can, I think, nod in agreement with many of these studies. But it is when they are taken all together that something seems wrong with the whole picture. One of the things “wrong” in the earlier doctrinal (and other) readings is that those studies set out their theories from *a priori* assumptions of what is *supposed* to be in the *Queste* (Cistercian doctrine, Celtic mythology, pagan ritual, etc.) and the glosslike interpretations which follow from those assumptions take off like a hot-air balloon into the stratosphere.³¹ Logic tells us that the Grail cannot (or should not) be at once Jewish, Christian, Celtic, Byzantine, Roman, Scythian. It cannot (or should not) at once be the Eucharist, grace, the cauldron of plenty, a vegetation ritual, and a phallic symbol. Or can it? Is there perhaps something else (something more) going on here? I would suggest that the very porousness and polysemous nature of the Grail as object (plate, stone, cup) and as symbol demonstrates not *only* or merely its poetic function (as Locke would have it), but is indicative of how the Arthurian material—the Arthurian legend—was being transformed, rewritten (and rewritten in *prose*) in the early years of the thirteenth century. The ability of the Grail to be all the things outlined above—and more—makes it a catalyst for *all* the inherited *symbolique* of the Arthurian world. All these symbols and meanings—from very different sources—seem to coalesce in the image of the life-giving chalice cup.

THE INTERPLAY OF FICTION AND THEOLOGY

While most scholars today agree that we should allow the *Queste* to remain within the fictionalized orbit of romance, within the larger context of the Vulgate Cycle, we cannot ignore the very clear presence of a Christianized, moral, spiritual atmosphere in this text.³² But it should not be surprising to find such a dimension in these stories, since, on the one hand, this was one area that had not been explored in earlier

stories and, on the other, the Christian elements had been present in the Arthurian story from its earliest beginnings. Arthur's association with Christianity was not a "new" idea invented by the Vulgate writers. The earliest stories of Arthur as they were told in the Latin chronicles of Gildas and Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*,³³ and Wace's French (verse) *Roman de Brut*³⁴ in the twelfth century all depict him as "defender of the faith," struggling to keep the Saxon hordes at bay and, when victorious, rebuilding churches, establishing bishoprics, etc. Nennius's *Historia Britonum* (c. 800 C.E.) contains a description of the twelve battles in which Arthur fought. In the eighth battle, fought at Castle Guinnion, "Arthur carried the image of St. Mary the Perpetual Virgin on his shoulders, and the pagans were put to flight on that day, and there was a great massacre of them through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His mother Mary."³⁵

In these early chronicles, Arthur's role (real or imagined) is limited to his involvement in the battles of fifth-century British history, which is one chapter in the tale of the loss of Britain. In the verse romances of the twelfth century, specifically those of Chrétien de Troyes, there was a significant transformation of the Arthurian story. These romances do not depict British history, rather they are the stories of individual knights who are associated with Arthur's court and the Round Table. Arthur himself has receded into the background in Chrétien's romances, his court the starting and ending point of an individual knight's tales of adventure, love and chivalry: *Erec et Enide*, *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la charrete*, *Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion*, *Perceval ou le Conte del graal*. The stories of these knights were essentially secular, imbued with elements from the Celtic world of the Breton folktales. This was the world of courtly love, idealized material and physical beauty, feats of prowess, knightly virtue, mysterious fountains and magic rings. Or so it was at least until Chrétien began his *Perceval* (which remained unfinished) and introduced the Grail material into the Arthurian stories.

By the end of the twelfth century a veritable "industry" had grown up around the obscure hero of the Battle of Mount Badon,³⁶ with many varied and sometimes contradictory tales being told. What began as Arthur's individual biography, carefully circumscribed within the dark history of Saxon Britain, had shifted dramatically: the elements of his

story were expanded, and had taken on larger, more cosmic, universal and multifaceted dimensions.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, then, the fifth-century world of the tale of the loss of Britain was too small—too limited—to contain all the resonances, textures and diverse stories that had accreted to Arthur and his court and that carried these stories not only into the world of the Celtic *merveilleux*, but linked them as well to the stories of classical antiquity. Arthur and his company joined the ranks—and continued in the line—of the great fictional and legendary heroes of the past.

On one level, the Vulgate Cycle can be characterized as an attempt to put the Arthurian “house” in order—to incorporate many of the individual tales that had accreted to the legend and to somehow fit it all into the context of Arthur’s whole career: to tell the story of *tout Artur* and to examine reasons for the ultimate failure and fall of Camelot due to internal treachery, not just on the part of Mordred, but of Lancelot and Guinevere as well.³⁷ The teleological orientation colors the interpretation of all the disparate events in the story and frames them in a context unknown in Geoffrey’s or Wace’s earlier versions. To accomplish this difficult task will require both the omniscience of Merlin and the miraculous presence of the Grail. In other words, by the time the author or authors decided to retell Arthur’s story in the Vulgate, the stakes had changed and the game had become more serious.

Within this context, the problem, then, is how far to push the importance of the doctrinal slant of the *Queste*—to the extent that we read it as a Cistercian treatise with a doctrinal “mission” where the presence of the familiar Arthurian *topoi* makes for an uncomfortable mix? One question we need to ask is what sort of theology is found in the *Queste* and then to examine its relation to the Vulgate enterprise as a whole—in other words, to examine more closely the interplay of fiction and theology.

The *Quest of the Holy Grail* is the last of the great adventures in the Arthurian kingdom, whose first adumbrations appeared on the opening pages of the Vulgate Cycle in the *Estoire du saint Graal* (some two thousand pages earlier!) and marks the beginning of the end of Arthur’s world.³⁸ When Galahad finally arrives on the scene to fulfill the angel’s prophecy in the *Estoire*, the monk who explains Galahad’s

mission to him sets out the context in which the audience should read Galahad's story:

Today the similitude is renewed whereby the Father sent His Son to earth for the deliverance of His people. For just as folly and error fled at His advent and truth stood revealed, even so has Our Lord chosen you from among all other knights to ride abroad through many lands to put an end to the hazards that afflict them and make their meaning and their causes plain. This is why your coming must be compared to the coming of Jesus Christ, *in semblance only, not in sublimity* (Matarasso, *Quest*, 64; Pauphilet, *Queste*, 38: "*de semblance ne mie de hautece.*" Emphasis mine)

By seeking a resemblance between Galahad's coming and the coming of Christ, the *Queste* author sets out from the very beginning the series of figural similarities that will be found throughout the story. Galahad here is Christ-like; he does not *stand for* Christ though his coming is analogous to Christ's coming. It is the repetition of figural and analogical antecedents throughout the *Queste* that, while always promising some higher (or clearer) significance, never really goes beyond the telling of yet another tale, another story—be it from the Bible or from earlier Arthurian "history." This sort of narrative circularity, moving from the telling of one tale to another, is what has led critics, notably Burns and Regalado, to see in the *Queste* a fictional transformation of Christian theology. In the example above, the author is not following the traditional methodology of biblical exegesis. There is no transcendent meaning in all this, but, as Burns points out, "What we are asked to understand (*entendre*), to accept as the *senefiance* of Galahad's adventures, is actually another story: the tale of Christ liberating the sinners. . . . Rather than guiding us to a transcendent meaning, the narrative of the *Queste* immerses us in a series of interrelated texts. . . . The function of the . . . tale is to shift the focus from the Arthurian hero to his biblical analogue, creating a second, ahistorical and circular construct on the moral level" (64).³⁹

The analogous stories which fill the pages of the *Queste* stand on their own—are wholly circumscribed within the whole of the Vulgate, even when reaching beyond Arthurian history and prehistory and back to the Old Testament. And the lessons that are drawn from these analogues are for the characters themselves. Unlike the techniques used

in *exempla* and sermons, neither the author nor the hermit-exegetes draw the audience into those lessons. It is the knights who are exhorted to mend their ways, to see the vast, sweeping parallels, continuities and lessons. Arthur's knights, in a sense, are being asked to "reread" their own stories, to interpret them in a different way. In the "old stories" (i.e., the individual romances that predate the Vulgate or in the earlier episodes of the Vulgate itself), knights knew how to react to adventures, to challenges. They were, after all, *Arthur's* knights—the very best. Now, however, they are being asked to reassess their past behavior, to see more in their individual histories than examples of secular virtues. They must begin to learn that more is (and was) at stake in all this. For many, this was a lesson too quickly forgotten. The knights' failures and successes as they seek to penetrate the mysteries of the Grail will remind them of how far they have gone astray and will also offer them the promise of redemption if they mend their ways. This intertextual circularity—of one story (be it biblical or Arthurian) resonating in another—is demonstrated in the *Queste's* "Legend of the Tree of Life," where Solomon is trying to figure out a way to get a message down to Galahad in the future—a scene in which both New Testament and Arthurian events are explained to Solomon by the Holy Ghost⁴⁰ and where the Old Testament figures are presented, quite astonishingly, as not only prefiguring Arthurian events, but knowing about them as well.

In addition to reaching back to the biblical antecedents of the Arthurian story, the *Queste* reaches back to the past history of verse romance as well as to episodes presented in earlier parts of the Vulgate. In the story of Lancelot's repentance, for instance, it is Lancelot who is asked to reinterpret and reevaluate his past actions (in past Arthurian fictions), based on stories and parallels drawn from the Bible by his monk-confessor. His past actions are "rewritten" in another register. The image of Lancelot in this section of the *Queste* is very unlike what the audience had come to expect when he is described. Many episodes of the *Lancelot Proper* retraced the adventures Chrétien de Troyes had recounted in his romance, and many more adventures were added. Lancelot is known as the best of Arthur's knights, responsible for negotiating the peace between Arthur and Galehaut, with whom he was at war. Lancelot is the knight who prevailed at all tournaments, surmounted all obstacles and challenges, and whose passionate love for Guinevere spurred him on to greater and greater glory. Even as a young

man, not yet a knight in Arthur's court, Lancelot's potential for greatness was shown in his conversation with the Lady of the Lake about the qualities and virtues of knighthood: a knight must have "two hearts, one as hard and solid as a diamond, and the other as soft and yielding as hot wax."⁴¹ But in the *Queste*, those images are turned upside-down. When some knights come across Lancelot sleeping outside the Grail chapel (having missed the Grail ceremony because he was asleep), they describe him as "the worthless knight who lies there sleeping" (*Quest* 84; *Queste* 60). When Lancelot awakens and approaches the Grail chapel, a voice tells him: "Lancelot, harder than stone, more bitter than wood, more barren and bare than the fig tree, how durst thou presume to venture there where the Holy Grail abides? Get thee hence, for the stench of thy presence fouls this place" (*Quest* 85; *Queste* 61).

The lesson that Lancelot learns is that, as the best of all the knights, he is therefore the most guilty, since God was particularly generous in endowing him with all the necessary virtues to be a good knight and a good Christian. But Lancelot misused those gifts and is now rebuked. The hermit who explains the meaning of stone, wood, and barren fig tree to Lancelot, draws upon the Bible (particularly Matthew 21:19) to make his point clearer, but he does not quote it verbatim: Lancelot is "like that tree, save only more barren and bare" (emphasis mine. *Quest* 93; *Queste* 69–70). This scene of Lancelot's confession and repentance, then, brings together the worlds of fiction and theology by drawing not only on the lessons of Christian orthodoxy, but on other romances and earlier episodes in the Vulgate in order to clarify and explain the sudden shift in Lancelot's position.

There is very little in the examples just cited to justify, as Pauphilet would have us do, the search for either a "specialized" or monolithic explanation for these scenes above and beyond what is already provided in the text itself. In the section of the Lancelot scene which mentions the fig tree, it is Matarasso who supplies the footnoted quotation from the Gospel of Matthew—not the *Queste* author. The semblance and atmosphere of religious doctrine is here pressed into the service of elucidating the *fictional* story of Lancelot (and *not* vice versa) whose story remains circumscribed within the story of the eventual fall of Camelot.

We rarely, if ever, find Arthurian *matière* used to explain or clarify religious doctrine. If anything, theologians frowned upon such uses,

since these stories seemed a dangerous distraction from the contemplation of God. Although the clerics in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries may have accepted interest in romance as part of what Dom Jean Leclercq terms the “psychological baggage” carried by monks, Leclercq cites an example, related by Caesarius of Heisterbach toward the end of the twelfth century, of one Cistercian abbot who was not pleased by this “baggage”:

On a certain solemnity, Gevardus, predecessor of the present abbot, was giving us a talk in the Chapter. He noticed that some, especially among the conversi, had gone to sleep; a few were even snoring. So he raised his voice: “Listen, my brothers,” he said, “I have something new and important to tell you. There was a King called Arthur.” There his story ended, but he went on to say: “My brothers, this is no light matter; you went to sleep when I spoke of God—but *as soon as I introduced a diverting theme you pricked up your ears, woke up, and began to listen.*” I was present at that sermon. The devil tempts by sleep spiritual and worldly people alike (emphasis mine).⁴²

The same process is at work in another often-studied scene in the *Queste*: the Temptation of Perceval. The scene is certainly very suggestive and critics have been able to gloss it in a way that goes well beyond the explanations found in the text itself:⁴³ At one point, Perceval is alone (and lonely) on an island. A beautiful damsel arrives who tells Perceval that she can get him off the island if he, in return, will help her win back her inheritance. Perceval’s reaction is in an Arthurian register: as a worthy, compassionate knight of Camelot, he will help a “damsel in distress.” In earthly, secular terms, this is the “right” reaction. But when played out on a spiritual plane, Perceval’s “right” reaction leads to almost disastrous results: A sumptuous feast is prepared for Perceval and, after making him tipsy with wine, the damsel attempts to seduce him. Just as he is about to succumb, “he caught sight of his sword . . . [and] his glance fell on a red cross which was inlaid in the hilt. Directly he saw it he came to his senses. He made the sign of the cross on his forehead and immediately the tent collapsed about him and he was shrouded in a cloud of blinding smoke, while so foul a stench pervaded everything that he thought he must be in hell” (*Quest* 129; *Queste* 110). While Perceval bemoans his almost-lost virginity,⁴⁴ another ship arrives and a holy man on board provides a

lengthy (three-page) explanation of what has just happened to Perceval. The short form of the holy man's explanation is the following:

“Ah, Perceval,” sighed the other, “you will ever be simple.” . . . “The maiden you spoke with is the enemy, the master of hell” . . . “He laid a ‘snare’ for Eve, to ‘play on her criminal desire until she culled the deadly fruit’ ” . . . “By sitting and resting she meant that you should give your body its fill of earthly cheer and gluttony However you fared this once, . . . be on your guard henceforward.” (*Quest* 131–33; *Queste* 112–14).

Perceval answers the holy man, saying, “You have told me enough about the lady for me to recognize in her the champion I was to fight against” (*Quest* 132–33; *Queste* 114). Perceval is satisfied with the explanation and the reader should be satisfied as well. While it may be interesting (and tempting!) to seek parallels in this episode with St. Bernard's Sermon 33 on the *Song of Songs* concerning the earthly perils which tempt Christian monks, or William of St. Thierry's *Golden Epistle*⁴⁵ where he discusses Evil masquerading as Good, knowledge of these specific texts does not really make the holy man's explanations any clearer—for either Perceval or the audience. Rather than seek out, once again, a very specialized meaning in all this (as both Matarasso and Pauphilet have done), we could also seek a more commonplace echo: the *Pater Noster* (“and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”). Or, we could follow the example of the text and let the explanation stand on its own. In order for Perceval to successfully complete his quest, he, like Lancelot, must learn to “reread” his own story and reinterpret his past actions which, though essentially good and noble, need to fit into the new “celestial” context that the Grail quest represents for the Arthurian world.

Although the *Queste* remains essentially self-referential and many events are explained, there are, nonetheless, times when no explanations at all are provided and the knights and audience remained baffled. Such is the example of the episode of the Miraculous Ship which underscores, I believe, the many and varied sources (Christian, Celtic, Arthurian) and voices in this text. When the three companions—Galahad, Perceval, and Bors—are finally reunited with Perceval's sister on the miraculous ship, they discover the sword which is meant to hang at Galahad's side. Now if there is anything at all in which the Arthurian

hero is expert, it is swords: Arthur's sword in the stone; the sword Lancelot refuses to take out of another stone in the *Queste* (because it is destined for Galahad). Heroes are invariably identified by their ability to wrest the sword from a stone or hidden place. It is one of the hallmarks of Arthurian verse romances and is an image repeated over and over again in the Vulgate. The audience, too, knows how to "react" when there is in the same scene a sword and an Arthurian knight.

But as is so typical in this romance, something more is going on in this scene. What is usually so self-evident in matters Arthurian, here on this marvelous ship (whose wood comes from the Tree of Life, no less) is a sword whose meaning utterly and completely eludes the three companions. A rich red cloth embroidered with writing covers the sword. And the sword itself is inscribed on both sides with close to two and a half pages of writing (in letters red as blood): "Let none presume to draw me from the scabbard, unless he can outdo and outdare every other. He who in any other circumstance unsheathes me should know he is foredoomed to injury or death. The truth of this requires no further proving" (*Quest* 215; *Queste* 203). The companions continue to read about the powers of the sword which will protect him who wears it and which will be girded on by a maiden who is "throughout her life a virgin in both deed and in desire (*en volenté et en oevre*)" (*Quest* 217; *Queste* 206). After reading the inscription on one side of the sword, the knights "broke into laughter, exclaiming that what they saw and heard was marvelous indeed"; and when they read the rest of the inscription on the other side of the sword, they were "more baffled than before" (*plus esbahi que devant*) (*Quest* 217–218; *Queste* 206). Such a sword (with its ominous warning and its history of having belonged to Nascien and King Mordrain) leads the companions and the readers into a labyrinth of complex images and associations. Here, on a ship that symbolizes the Church, is found a sword destined to be Galahad's, and that is tied to Arthurian prehistory. We learn of the sword's history as an *object*, but no higher, transcendent meaning is imparted. In the face of all the possible associations with swords (the Church Militant; Galahad as a knight of Christ; this sword's former owners Mordrain and Nascien; all the other swords of Arthurian literature), it is no wonder that the knights laugh. It would appear that in this scene, all the *symbolique* of the secular and spiritual worlds is revealed to the knights—their world is opened up to new meanings and allusions heretofore unexplored—and they are baffled; they laugh. They can

appreciate what they have seen, but they cannot understand it. And neither can the reader, despite scholars' best attempts to do precisely that.⁴⁶ There is no *one* story that Perceval's sister (or any passing hermit) can recount to fully convey the richness of meanings found in this scene. And from this point on in the *Queste*, there are fewer and fewer overt lessons—it is the experience of the mystery, the visualization of the mystery, that takes precedence. It is as if the companions (along with the audience) have crossed a boundary, into a realm that is more purely spiritual, suggestive and abstract—encompassing everything—and, as such, it defies concrete, single-minded explanation. The companions are approaching the dramatic focus of the story—the reason for their quest: participation in the Grail ceremony itself.

If the three companions laughed a contented laugh (in the spirit, perhaps, of the smiling angels on the façade of Reims cathedral) at the sight of the sword on the Miraculous Ship, that laughter will turn to tears of joy as they participate in the mysteries of the Grail ceremony. The meaning of the Grail (as object and as ceremony) has been the subject of detailed, often contradictory, studies over the years (see the descriptions of Pauphilet, Gilson, Hamilton, and Matarasso above). It is, however, the literary scholars who have sought in the Grail ceremony⁴⁷ expositions of Trinitarian doctrine or the mystical experience as it figures in Cistercian writings, to name but two examples. Pauline Matarasso has made one attempt to reconcile all these various theories, but even she, in the final analysis, must admit to the “literariness,” the poetic nature of the Grail, and states that “. . . we may assume that our author drew from whatever Cistercian writings came his way, along with such Fathers as he was familiar with, elements which, reinforcing and completing one another, could be woven into a harmonious whole In fine there can be no definition of a symbol, for the function of symbols is to transcend definitions.”⁴⁸ It is noteworthy that Matarasso provides a more literary interpretation to the Grail ceremony, which, according to her own study, should be a kind of culmination—a crescendo—uniting all the theories and sources she so painstakingly detailed in the rest of her study.

In fact, when we look at the descriptions of the three Grail ceremonies we find that they are consistent with the depiction of the fictional *semblance* of theological doctrine that we have seen in other places in the text. Just as Perceval's lessons about the temptations that

the Christian soul is prey to *could* point to certain Cistercian writers, they could just as easily point to more popular religious beliefs. So, too, can the meaning of the Grail ceremony point to less specialized, abstract theories about the Eucharistic ritual and the mystical vision.

The three ceremonies—the three manifestations of the Grail—follow a very careful pattern of exposition. The first ceremony is the one Lancelot witnesses from outside a room in a palace. Lancelot is “steeped in sin,” though repentant, and his vision, therefore, will be the most imperfect. He is rewarded for his repentance by being allowed to see something of the ceremony, but may not participate in it in the same way that the three companions and, finally, Galahad, will. The language chosen to describe what Lancelot sees is indicative of the semblance of religious atmosphere that permeates this text:

Before the Holy Vessel was an aged man in priestly vestments, engaged to *all appearance* in the consecration of the mass. When he came to elevate the host, Lancelot *thought* he saw, above his outstretched hands, three men, two of whom were placing the youngest in the hands of the priest who raised him aloft *as though* he were showing him to the people (emphasis mine. *Quest* 262).⁴⁹

What Lancelot appears to see here are the three persons of the Trinity participating, literally and physically, in the Son’s sacrifice. It appears to be a visual representation of the moment of transubstantiation, but, as we are reminded, in semblance only.

In the second ceremony, in which the three companions participate, we see again the *semblance* of the Mass, but this time it is Josephus himself who appears to the group and who serves at the ceremony:

This visitor, who had come among them in the *guise* of a bishop, had an inscription on his brow which read: ‘This is Josephus, the first Christian bishop, the same who was consecrated by our Lord in Sarras, in the spiritual palace . . . Next Josephus acted *as though* he were entering on the consecration of the mass. After pausing a moment quietly, he took from the Vessel a host made in the likeness of bread. As he raised it aloft there descended from above a figure *like to a child*, whose countenance glowed and blazed as bright as fire; and he entered into the bread, which quite distinctly took on human form before the eyes of those assembled there . . . Having

discharged the functions of a priest as *it might be* at the office of the mass, Josephus went up to Galahad and kissed him. . . . (Matarasso, *Quest* 274–75; emphasis mine).⁵⁰

A figure of a man, bleeding from his hands and feet and side, appears to the companions and speaks to them, explaining that, though many have been served by the Holy Vessel and filled with its grace, no one until now has ever seen it “face to face” as the companions now do. Here, there is a more perfect vision, since the three companions (and the nine other knights who joined them) actually appear to be seeing and speaking to Christ. But yet the author does not present these first two manifestations of the Grail as a *real* mass.

The third Grail ceremony is the one reserved for Galahad alone: he is permitted to have a vision of the Godhead. That is what he sees when he is asked to look into the Holy Vessel. In this last scene (after which he dies and a mysterious hand removes the Grail from its earthly setting), the greatest mystery of all is revealed to Galahad and there are no words like “semblance” or “appearance,” since this vision goes beyond human words and experience. Galahad sees revealed “what tongue could not relate nor heart conceive” (“*ce que langue ne porroit descrire ne cuer penser*” *Quest* 282; *Queste* 278). It is the fulfillment of his greatest desires. After this most perfect of all experiences, Galahad dies. His was a vision granted to very, very few. It is the earthly knights who remain behind to continue their earthly story.⁵¹

The Grail ceremonies are—as they should be—the moments of highest drama in the story. But should they, as Matarasso claims, be used only as an example of the *Queste* author’s use of Arthurian material to serve the ends of monastic doctrine?⁵² Is it not the other way around? Is it not that religious doctrine is pressed into the service of expanding the Arthurian material; of adding an additional dimension—moral lessons for the knights—to the story of Logres? Furthermore, as historians of the liturgy and Eucharistic theology have pointed out, the Grail legend exemplifies the more popular beliefs regarding the Eucharist circulating in the early thirteenth century.⁵³ None of them reads the *Queste* (or any of the Grail stories, for that matter) as a “treatise,” either on the Eucharist or any other theological subject.

What is described in the Grail ceremonies is far more fundamental and basic than what we find in the many literary studies of the Grail material—which tend to ignore “populist” notions altogether. To help

keep the *Queste* within the orbit of the fictional Arthurian world, rather than in the orbit of more purely abstract theological discourse, an understanding of the evolution and changes in the Eucharistic ritual in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries is essential. In its most generalized terms, Gary Macy, for instance, sees the devotional practices surrounding the Eucharist “as part of that whole move toward a new understanding of humanity that is generally held to characterize the twelfth century.”⁵⁴ Devotion to the Eucharist is synonymous with devotion to the Human Christ—Christ present on earth and in His human form. Macy, like Édouard Dumoutet before him, emphasizes the “climate of the age,” which expressed, in its “theology, devotional literature, and even in the Grail Legends, a growing desire to see Christ as he exists in the Eucharist” (*Theologies* 92).

Father Joseph A. Jungmann discusses the first accounts of Eucharistic miracles which appear in the twelfth century: “In place of the species of bread, our Lord was seen in His own human appearance. Even if these accounts cannot withstand critical examination, still they are professions of faith all the more emphatic because couched in the realistic language of the people” (*Mass of the Roman Rite*, Vol. 1, 119). These miraculous appearances of Christ resemble more closely the Grail ceremonies than all that is dreamt of in the theories proposed by the literary critics. Father Jungmann’s further comments concerning the exaggerated lengths to which the people went in order to view the Eucharist are significant, since what we see here is a *popular* movement, from the people, rather than the more theoretical concerns of theologians such as Hugh of St. Victor, Anselm of Laon, William of St. Thierry:

Thus the Mass acquired a new center, a new focal point, and the devotion of the people acquired an object which corresponded to their understanding and to which they thenceforth clung tenaciously. To see the celestial mystery—that is the climax of the Grail-legend in which, at the same period, the religious longing of the Middle Ages found its poetic expression. As in the Grail-legend many grace-filled results were expected from seeing the mystery, so too at Mass. Esteem for this opportunity to look upon the Host went to such lengths that it was placed side by side with Holy Communion, and the question was asked, would sinners commit a new mortal sin by looking at the sacred Host?

To look at the sacred Host at the elevation became for many in the later Middle Ages the be-all and end-all of Mass devotion. See the Body of Christ at the consecration and be satisfied! In the cities people ran from church to church, to see the elevated Host as often as possible. . . . People even started lawsuits to ensure getting a favorable view of the altar. There are examples of congregations where the majority of the faithful waited for the sance-bell signalling the approach of the consecration before they entered the church and then after the elevation they rushed out as quickly as they had come in (*Mass of the Roman Rite*, Vol. I, 121).⁵⁵

Father Jungmann's description of popular enthusiasm (rowdiness?) for the Eucharistic ritual comes closer, I believe, to what we find in the *Queste*: a thrilling and dramatic scene where Christ incarnate appears in the Host and speaks to Arthur's knights. Arthur's knights are thus honored by the arrival of the Grail and its presence in Arthur's realm. By experiencing the revelation of the celestial mysteries, Arthur's knights are redeemable—if they do not stray from the right path. They were granted a boon—less perfect perhaps than Galahad's vision of the Godhead—but a boon nonetheless. That is all that the vast majority of *misérables mortels* can hope for.

As the story of the *Queste* draws to a close, it is, finally, a very human lesson that prevails. Arthur and his knights have come very far since their first appearances in the early chronicles.

The Grail adventures offered the knights of the Round Table the possibility of redemption, all the while pointing to their ultimate failure and the destruction of the realm that marks the last section of the Vulgate, the *Mort Artu*.

The final “meaning” of the Grail eluded all but Galahad and was couched in terms of the ineffable. Yet this does not in any way diminish the force of the Arthurian fictions. The force of their fictional “truth” flows from many sources and no voice should be allowed to go unheard. Gabrielle Spiegel was correct in seeing the emergence of Old French prose as a vehicle for creating a usable past for the declining aristocracy in the opening years of the thirteenth century, for “grounding historical truth in a new system of authentication based on prose as a language of ‘truth,’ hence uniquely appropriate for the articulation and dissemination of historical knowledge.”⁵⁶ An argument could be made that such a definition obtains for the Vulgate Cycle as

well as for prose historiography. The pre-thirteenth-century “truth” of prose was Latinate—the domain not only of jurists and philosophers, but of the Truth of God’s *Verbum* as well. The Vulgate Cycle, and the *Queste* in particular, arrive at vernacular truth, using man’s imperfect *verbum*. And that does not in any way diminish the lessons to be found in the Arthurian tales. Humankind’s imperfect and limited *verbum* can communicate moral value and intellectual seriousness and it can also entertain, delight and move. It can provide a kind of cultural validity for the Arthurian stories and it can do all that in Old French prose and without the benefit of the *clergie*.

The *Queste* author has added one more chapter to the story of Camelot and has brought the knights closer to their humanity by having them learn a lesson in humility. In meeting one misadventure after another, they come to learn that, in Christian terms, there is always something greater than the individual experience and that, even if they cannot comprehend it, that should not lessen their desire to strive for it. Although the *Queste* always looks toward the end of the Cycle, the dissolution of the kingdom and the downward movement of the Wheel of Fortune, the knights’ lives are not repudiated.

With the *Queste del Saint Graal* we have not really left behind the familiar *topoi* of the Arthurian *matière*. Mystery, endless desire, ecstasy, love—these terms are as easily applicable to Arthurian romance as to the Christian experience. The delight, the sadness, the struggles on earth are inherent characteristics of the Christian pilgrimage as much as they are of the lives of the knights of the Round Table. Just as Galahad rejoiced in his reunion with his father Lancelot, let us accept the melding of two not so very different worlds in the creation of a timeless, universal fiction. It is not only the joyful fellowship of the other knights and of their romantic antecedents, but the shadows and voices of the Church Fathers, Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, Solomon, David, the Virgin Mary who loom in the background giving weight, importance and seriousness to the presence of Galahad who joins with all who preceded him, to greet Arthur’s knights. The voices of religious doctrine as well as the presence of romance motifs and Celtic characters join together to extend a comforting hand to the celestial knights, entreating them to join in a feast—a Grail feast—larger than King Arthur could have ever imagined for Camelot.⁵⁷

NOTES

1. *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, 257–58. *La Queste del Saint Graal* (1949), 250. All subsequent references to the English translation will be to Matarasso's edition (abbreviated *Quest*) and references to the old French edition will be to Pauphilet's edition (abbreviated *Queste* [1949]).

2. The Arthurian Vulgate Cycle is also known as the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, the Prose *Lancelot*, and the Pseudo-Map Cycle (a reference to the spurious attribution of several of the texts to Walter Map). The Vulgate gets its name (in English) from the only complete edition of the French texts edited by H. Oskar Sommer (*The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, Vols. 1–7, Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institute, 1908–1912).

3. The complete Vulgate runs to several thousand pages.

4. The order given represents the narrative chronology of these texts found in the most complete of the French manuscripts. The *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Merlin* were, in fact, composed after the last three romances in the cycle. The *Lancelot Proper* is by far the longest part of the cycle: it constitutes almost half of the 2,600 or so pages of the cycle. All five romances (along with the Post-Vulgate, consisting of a *Merlin* continuation, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, and *The Death of Arthur*) have recently been translated into English: *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, Norris Lacy, gen. ed., Vols. 1–5 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993–96).

5. In his entry for the Grail in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Norris Lacy points out an important, and often overlooked fact: “What is most astonishing is that, in the midst of this wealth of story and Christian legend, the official Church kept complete silence, never approving or condemning its many and shifting fictions” (213).

6. I have borrowed a “methodological page” from Gabrielle Spiegel's important study of Old French prose historiography (and have also “altered” her title to fit this present study): *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France*. Spiegel's study focuses on the emergence of Old French prose as a vehicle for creating a “usable past” (1) for the declining aristocracy in the opening years of the thirteenth century, for “grounding historical truth in a new system of authentication based on prose as a language of ‘truth,’ hence uniquely appropriate for the articulation and dissemination of historical knowledge” (2). For the most part, Spiegel completely glosses over the concurrent emergence of prose romance writing

during this same period, mentioning, *en passant*, the “*mise en prose . . . in the so-called Vulgate Cycle or prose Lancelot*” (185).

7. E. Jane Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*, 34.

8. The notion of “romancing” Grail material is also found in: Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science and Quest in Wolfram’s ‘Parzival.’* For Groos, Wolfram’s treatment of the Grail legend exemplifies the secularization of German culture: “Not the least of its achievements is [to intimate] the vigor of an emerging secular culture, and [to confirm] the medievalness of our own modernity” (241).

9. Ferdinand Lot, in his *Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose* (1918/1954) was the first scholar to talk about the *entrelacement* of the tales in which he saw a tragedy in five acts (74). Other proponents of the idea of the unity of the cycle are: Jean Frappier, *Etude sur La Mort le roi Artu* (1961), 144–46; Myrrha Lot Borodine, *Trois Essais sur “Le Roman du Lancelot du Lac” et de “La Queste del Saint Graal”* (1919) 3; and more recently, Alexandre Micha, *Essais sur le cycle du Lancelot-Graal* (1987) 297–313. In her Introduction to the English translations of the Vulgate, E. Jane Burns provides a very useful survey of the question (*Lancelot-Grail*, Vol. I, xi-xxxiii).

10. *Lancelot-Grail*, Vol. I, xviii-xix. Burns is referring here to studies by R. Howard Bloch, “The Text as Inquest: Form and Function in the Pseudo-Map Cycle” 107–19; Alexandre Leupin, *Le Graal et la littérature*; and E. Jane Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*. I would add to this list Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *L’Arbre et le pain: Essai sur la Queste del Saint Graal*.

11. Cf. Matarasso (1979), who declared rather sadly that “there are times when a student of the *Queste* could wish it independent of the *Prose Lancelot*” (205).

12. In the Introduction to his edition of the *Queste*, Albert Pauphilet gives the list of manuscripts which contain the *Queste*, to which Emmanuèle Baumgartner has added two others (which have the *Queste* by itself): Ms. Ravenna, Bibl. Classense 454 and Ms. Florence, Laur., Ashburnham 48. Baumgartner stresses further that while the text seems so “different” for us in the twentieth century, it was not perceived or read as an isolated tale in the Middle Ages (*L’Arbre et le pain*, 11–12).

13. *Lancelot-Grail*, Introduction, Vol. I, xx.

14. For a complete discussion of the etymology of the word/object, see *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, 212–13.

15. *The Quest for the Holy Grail*. Even Locke, in 1960, dealt only with the *Queste* and was silent about its relation to the rest of the Vulgate.

16. Hamilton, "L'Interprétation mystique de la *Queste del Saint Graal*" (1942). See the discussion of Gilson's article later in this essay.
17. R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*.
18. H. Newstead, *Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance*.
19. The *cors* (meaning "horn") was misunderstood by the French as *cors* (meaning "body"), hence the (wrong) association with the Eucharist.
20. Loomis (1963) 119.
21. Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1920; rpt. New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1957), 163.
22. Pauphilet (1921). Both Pauline Matarasso (in *The Redemption of Chivalry*) and E. Jane Burns (in *Arthurian Fictions*) dismantle some of Pauphilet's theories. Matarasso will attempt to disentangle the question of the Cistercian influences and Burns will demonstrate some of the problems with Pauphilet's allegorical reading of the *Queste*.
23. Etienne Gilson, "La Mystique de la Grâce dans *La Queste del Saint Graal*," *Les Idées et les lettres*, 59–91.
24. René Guénon, "L'Esotérisme du Graal," in René Nelli, ed., *Lumière du Graal*, 37–49.
25. Urban T. Holmes (1948) and Chapter 10 ("The Judeo-Christian Theory of the Grail") (1970), 153–67.
26. Eugene Weinraub, *Chrétien's Jewish Grail*.
27. Myrrha Lot-Borodine, "Le Symbolisme du Graal dans *l'Estoire del Saint Graal*," 65–77.
28. Matarasso mentions (225) that the thesis of the author of the *Queste* being a monk of Cîteaux has the following weakness, as Frappier himself pointed out: "*il ne saurait être question de voir en lui un moine de Cîteaux, ne fût ce que pour cette raison péremptoire que les Cisterciens n'écrivaient pas de romans*" (Frappier [1954] 195). Nonetheless, Matarasso will suggest a busy itinerary for the anonymous author: in and out of the cloister; an "almost" monk who would have been pleased (and permitted?) to associate himself with the edifying enterprise of writing the *Queste*, in sum, someone who "had at least one foot in the cloister" (246).
29. But the *Queste*, whatever else it may be, is not a discursive treatment of "problems." It is, in the broadest sense of the term, a poem, a fiction, something constructed for the delight of a reader. . . . As soon as it is realized that the *Queste* is a poetic fiction and is not to be judged as a tractate of theology, or in any logically discursive manner, it will become equally clear that the very ambiguity of the Grail is precisely its strong point. (7)

30. Both Darrah's and Littleton-Malcor's studies have been reviewed in *Arthuriana*. Norris J. Lacy reviewed Darrah's book in *Speculum* and in that review presented a very reasoned plea to avoid "scholarly overkill" in Darrah's "tendency to assume and therefore find pagan origins for virtually everything in Arthurian romance." (711)

31. Burns, for example, very carefully and systematically dismantles Pauphilet's allegorical interpretation and her study of the *Queste* (54 ff.) deserves attentive reading and more than a brief summary here.

32. While both Burns and Regalado, in the studies mentioned above, present very compelling and cogent arguments for the status of the *Queste* as fiction, there remains the problem of how to deal with—how to interpret—the religious elements of the text.

33. Geoffrey's *Historia* was written c. 1135–1136. It is the first detailed "biography" of Arthur.

34. Wace's *Brut* (c. 1155) is a verse French reworking of the Arthurian "sections" of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

35. E.K. Chambers (238–39). This anthology remains the standard source for the translations of historical Arthurian documents and is used by most anthologizers of the "Latin chronicle tradition" and the Arthurian legend. See also Barber (1–47) and Wilhelm (3–9).

36. An "industry" encouraged as well by the "discovery" of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury in 1191.

37. In the thirteenth century, it was fairly common practice to take disparate tales and put them together into cycles. This was especially true of epic poetry: the cycles of Guillaume d'Orange and Charlemagne are but two noteworthy examples. The process was the same as we see in the Vulgate: childhoods were filled in, stories of other relatives were added, in an attempt to flesh out in more coherent chronological detail the whole story of a particular family or dynasty. For the Arthurian tales (whose bases are less firmly grounded in "true" history), the Vulgate Cycle is, in fact, just one example of various retellings (cyclic and noncyclic) of this material. The Vulgate Cycle contains the Grail material, but there was also the *Lancelot du Lac* (c. 1215–1220), a sort of "Lancelot without the Grail;" the *Perlesvaus* (c. 1200), considered by some to be the first prose Arthurian romance, and heavily weighted with moral and religious lessons; the *Post-Vulgate Cycle* (c. 1230–1240); the *Prose Tristan* (c. 1250) which fully integrated the Tristan material into the Arthurian cycle. Since the Arthurian material is only "loosely" connected to real historical chronicle, there was more room for very different types of stories to be told, so that putting the Arthurian

house in order was a far messier job than, say, doing the same thing for the Charlemagne stories.

38. Just before Josephus leaves for Britain with his Christian followers, an angel speaks to him and explains the meaning of the bleeding lance and its foreshadowing of all the adventures of the Arthurian kingdom:

This is the beginning of the marvelous adventures that will take place in the land where God intends to lead you. There the great marvels will occur, and the great deeds will be demonstrated. And then the true earthly feats of chivalry will be shown and revealed. . . . You may be sure that the marvels inside the Grail will be seen by only one mortal man, and he will be full of all the qualities that can or should be in man's body and heart, for he will be good to God as well as to the world. (*Lancelot-Grail*, Vol. I, 51)

39. Burns (55–77) analyzes and rebuts Pauphilet's highly esoteric and allegorical interpretation of the *Queste*—something that the text itself refuses to do:

What we find instead is that interpretation here lies with the critic alone; for it is Pauphilet who decodes the textual adventures of the *Queste* for us. His analysis parallels that of a philosophical allegorist seeking to extract a meaning that has been made purposefully esoteric to protect it from misuse by the uninitiated. . . . Although asserting on the one hand that the role of the hermits' interpretations is to make the *Queste* accessible to the lay reader, Pauphilet himself supplies the necessary glosses which are in fact absent from the text (65–66).

40. Solomon was told:

. . . in part what was to be. When Solomon learned of this, he asked whether this maid was to mark the end of his lineage. "No," said the voice, "a man, himself a virgin, shall be the last: one who shall pass in valour Josiah, thy step-brother, by as much as that Virgin shall surpass thy wife. . . . Hearing these words, Solomon declared himself most happy that the last scion of his lineage should be rooted in such virtue and high valour. He bethought himself how he could make known to the last of his line how Solomon, who had lived so long

before him, had had foreknowledge of his coming. (Matarasso, *Quest* 230–231; Pauphilet, *Queste* 220–21)

This is a most untraditional method of “exegesis,” to say the very least!

41. *Lancelot-Grail*, Vol. II, 60. The French text is found in *Lancelot*, Tome VII, ch. XXXIa.

42. Leclercq, 90.

43. P. Matarasso, in *The Redemption of Chivalry*, devotes an entire chapter to Perceval’s temptation (96–114) in which she studies sermons of St. Bernard, passages from the Bible, and the writings of William of St. Thierry.

44. Perceval has recently learned that virginity “in fact and in intent” is the highest virtue.

45. “But it is easy to overcome and meet with reason temptations which give grounds for suspicion or at first sight are obviously evil. It is those which insinuate themselves under the appearance of good that are more difficult to recognize and more dangerous to entertain” (*The Golden Epistle*, 38).

46. For those who would seek a monolithic interpretation of this scene, as for the whole of the *Queste*, Matarasso’s notes for this passage in her translation are telling: She reluctantly admits that, “undoubtedly the spiritual symbolism has . . . been somewhat overlaid by surviving elements of Celtic myth which render interpretations at best tentative” (*Quest*, 296–97).

47. Actually, there are three ceremonies: The first, to which Lancelot is only a witness—too steeped in sin to enter the chapel and participate fully; the second, where the companions see Christ, who serves them at Mass; the third, where Galahad alone sees the Godhead face to face. Of note here is the fact that historians of the liturgy and eucharistic theology do not include the Grail legends among serious “doctrinal” works. As we will see below, the Grail legends are relegated to the domain of popular religion.

48. P. Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry*, 203.

49. “. . . vestuz come prestres, et sembloit que il fust ou sacrement de la messe. Et quant il dut lever *corpus domini*, il fu avis a Lancelot que desus les mains au preudome en haut avoit trois homes, dont li dui metoient le plus jueue entre les mains au provoire; et il le levoit en haut, si fesoit semblant qu’il le mostrast au pueple” (Pauphilet, *Queste*, 255; emphasis mine).

50. “Cil qui en *semblance* d’evesque fu aportez avoit letres en son front qui disoient: ‘Veez ci Josephes, li premiers evesques des crestiens, celui meismes que Nostre Sires sacra en la cité de Sarraz ou palés esperitel.’ . . . Lors fist Josephes *semblant* que il entrast ou sacrement de la messe. Et quant il i ot demoré un poi, si prist dedenz le saint Vessel une oublee qui ert fete *en*

semblance de pain. Et au lever que il fist descendi de vers le ciel une figure en *semblance* d'enfant, et avoit le viaire ausi rouge et ausi embrasé come feu; et se feri ou pain, si que cil qui ou palés estoient virent apertment que li pains avoit forme d'ome charnel. . . . Quant Josephes ot ce fet qui a provoivre apartenoit *come* del servise de la messe, si vint a Galaad et le besa . . . (Pauphilet, *Queste*, 268–269; emphasis mine).

51. Perceval dies shortly after Galahad and it is only Bors who returns to Arthur's court to recount the adventures of the Grail and to participate in the last chapter of the story: *La Mort Artu*.

52. In the last paragraph of Matarasso's *The Redemption of Chivalry* he read: "His [the *Queste* author's] materials were handed down by the Arthurian tradition on the one hand, by monastic tradition on the other. But he ordered them with consummate skill, making the first serve the ends of the second . . ." (244).

53. Among the standard reference works are: Édouard Dumoutet, *Le Christ selon la chair et la vie liturgique au moyen-âge* (Paris: Bauchesne, 1932) as well as his *Le Désir de voir l'hostie et les origines de la dévotion au saint-sacrement* (Paris: Bauchesne, 1926); Adrian Fortescue, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (London, 1912; rpt. London and New York: Longmans, 1937); Joseph A. Jungmann, S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2 vols., trans. Rev. Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R. (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1986; reprint of the original translation of 1955; original title: *Missarum Sollemnia*, Vienna, Austria: Herder Verlag, 1949); Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

54. Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist*, 93.

55. Father Jungmann, citing an incident in England in the fifteenth century as recounted in A. Fortescue's *The Mass* (341), reports that "if the celebrant did not elevate the Host high enough, the people would cry out: "Hold up, Sir John, hold up. Heave it a little higher" (*Mass of the Roman Rite*, 121, note 101).

56. Spiegel 2.

57. There are many friends, colleagues and students who, over the years, have helped me to frame the thoughts expressed in this study. I single out here Nancy F. Regalado, of New York University, whose own study of the *Queste* prompted many discussions of the theology of the Grail and whose erudition helped me on so many occasions; Evelyn B. (Timmie) Vitz (NYU), whose careful readings, critical acumen, sense of humor and friendship were, as on so many other occasions, a personal boon; and Paul J. Gans who, though a Professor of Chemistry, is *really* an avid student and teacher of history as well as an Arthurian enthusiast. His suggestions and insights kept me honest at all

times. Finally, I wish to thank the College of Staten Island, CUNY, for awarding me its Summer Stipend for Junior Faculty which allowed me to finish this project.

CHAPTER 5

Grace and Salvation in Chrétien de Troyes

Jacques Ribard (tr. Helen L. Harrison)

*Among French medievalists, Jacques Ribard is well known for highlighting symbolic and mystical aspects of the jewels of French Arthurian literature. Our first selection is a condensed reprise of his still controversial *Le Chevalier de la Charrette, essai d'interprétation symbolique* (1972/1991). Part two is a more recent article on Chrétien's unfinished last romance. As a final manuscript, *The Story of the Grail (Le Conte du Graal)* may be taken as a kind of spiritual testament of the *trouvère* from Champagne.*

THE KNIGHT OF THE CART: AN ALLEGORY OF SALVATION?¹

The starting point of our proposed interpretation of *The Knight of the Cart* (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*) was suggested to us, many years ago, by the “messianic quality” which the most traditional university criticism² tended to recognize in the character of Lancelot as regards the truly recurrent theme of the liberation of the captives of the kingdom of Gorre.

Thus alerted, we wondered if in fact it wasn't necessary to commit further to this path by proceeding, in medieval fashion, with a systematic allegorical exegesis, and to see in the hero of Chrétien de Troyes's romance a true Christ figure, with all the consequences that that would unfailingly entail for the different episodes of this fascinating work.

We base our justification for this somewhat daring procedure on a double observation. First, the authors of that time were clerics, deeply

rooted in a Christendom in full bloom and trained, intellectually as well as spiritually, to practice easily a narrative writing with double meaning, on the very model of the gospel parables.³ On the other hand, in what more specifically concerns Chrétien de Troyes himself, we have the retrospective illumination that his last romance, the famous *Conte du Graal* (*Story of the Grail*), offers us. The religious orientation of that work is obvious, as is demonstrated, at opposite ends of the text, by the Prologue and the episode of the Hermitage. Armed with this double insurance, historical and literary, we have dared to run the “adventure”—in the medieval sense of the word—of this symbolic and mystical decoding of the romance as a whole.

In addition, we find ourselves confirmed in this enterprise by the enigmatic and almost provocative character of the paradoxical title given by the author: *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (*The Knight of the Cart*) (v. 24).⁴ What in fact is this cart doing, this cart which comes from the rural milieu belonging to *vilains*, that is, to peasants, here in the aristocratic and courtly world implied by the very term “knight”? The “brother romance,” written at the same time by the same author, bears a title which completely conforms to the ethics of the “caste”: *The Knight with the Lion* (*Le Chevalier au Lion*) (one need only think of Richard the Lion-Hearted). We have here something like the announcement and affirmation of a kind of “reversal of values” which cannot fail to surprise and to raise questions.

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That said, we need first to concentrate on rapidly shining this light on the principal, fundamental themes, which best seem to illustrate this rereading of the romance.

And we must immediately return to that famous cart, which is like a key to the whole exegesis of the work.

From our perspective, the cart is not, as has too often been said on the basis of supposedly “Celtic” sources, who knows what “chariot of death,”⁵ but quite simply the very figure of the Cross. Just reread the way in which the cart is presented from the beginning of the romance (vv. 321-44), with the author’s insistence on calling it a “pillory” reserved for “thieves,”⁶ and with the injunction that one needs to cross oneself when meeting it, as is done in front of all those images of Calvary that are found at our crossroads as a silent reminder of the meaning to be given to human life. And Chrétien uses a cart, an

itinerant pillory, in order to show that Salvation is a painful road. We are inclined to speak of the Way of the Cross, for there is nothing static about it. It involves us in a vital dynamic: Salvation is not given, it is a process, an itinerary. That explains Lancelot's hesitation to get on, so similar to Christ's hesitation in Gethsemane: "If it is possible, let this cup pass me by..." (Matthew 26:39).⁷ For it is, when all is said and done, an emblem of humiliation and infamy which is the very symbol of the redemptive mission awaiting Lancelot, who is in truth "the Knight of the Cross."

Moreover, this spiritual crucifixion to which he feels called can be illustrated in the rest of the work with examples which reinforce this interpretation.

There is first of all the episode of the Burning Lance, with that third bed, higher than the two others which surround it—just as, in traditional iconography, the cross of Christ is higher than the other two crosses—a bed resembling a catafalque,⁸ its "brocaded quilt of gold stars"⁹ invoking the cosmic imagery of the night of Calvary. And Lancelot, like his divine model, will there receive a lance blow in "his side."¹⁰

Then there is the famous Sword Bridge, that sword which, by its very shape, is already an image of the Cross. And, once again, the author insists on the wounds which Lancelot receives there, on the model of Jesus on Golgotha, in "his hands and feet,"¹¹ with moreover a "coded" allusion to the "ointment of the three Marys"¹² in reference to the entombment of Christ. It is interesting to pause for a moment here over the effect of counterpoint brought about by Gawain's attitude as he refuses to get in the Cart and taxes Lancelot's acceptance as "a very great folly"¹³ in echo of the famous "folly of the Cross" which St. Paul speaks of (1 Corinthians 1: 18-25). It is this same perfectly rational attitude which makes Gawain choose the Water-Bridge—a simple baptism with water—rather than the baptism of blood which is reserved for the Elect (vv. 683-99).

It is in this same spirit that one may risk an interpretation of the night of love which later reunites Guinevere and Lancelot: is not the queen's bed presented as a veritable *altar*¹⁴ where the wounds of the knight will reopen, thus evoking the renewal of the sacrifice of the Savior as it is staged in the Catholic ritual of the mass (v. 4716-25)?¹⁵

Still looking at this Christic imitation which we attribute to Lancelot, one must above all give full weight to the mysterious Future

Cemetery where we see the hero raise the stone of his own tomb—an obvious evocation in our eyes of the resurrection of Christ. The raising of the stone is the sign of the liberation of all the captives who up to that time have been “caught by the trapdoor / of that kingdom whence no one escapes.”¹⁶ By anticipation—for this type of romance has no need of banal linear progression—this passage prophesies the victory of the Elect over death, and announces that the Crucifixion which we shall soon attend—the episode of the Sword Bridge—is absolutely ordained by the Resurrection for which it is such a bitter prerequisite.

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Another important theme deserves our attention: the theme which puts two kingdoms on stage, that of Logres and that of Gorre—two realms whose geographical limits would be extremely difficult to trace, for, as we shall see, the difference between the two is of a purely spiritual order.

The kingdom of Gorre is not in fact, as has often been said in a reductionist way, the kingdom of the dead, but quite simply the Other World, that of spirits, and as such it is opposed to the realm of Logres, that of the court of Arthur, which corresponds to our Here Below, the world of men.¹⁷

In the kind of signifying game of anagrams appreciated and practiced in the Middle Ages,¹⁸ the kingdom of Logres must be read as the kingdom of “*l’ogre*” (“the ogre”), that is, as the kingdom of devouring time. Let’s translate: Logres expresses the immersion in time of the creation and is only a system of reference to denote “belonging to the human condition.” That is the meaning of being “born in the kingdom of Logres”¹⁹ and that is without a doubt why Lancelot introduces himself in these terms, all the better to underline his character as “Son of Man” in the sense of the famous gospel formula (Luke 12.10). The kingdom of Gorre, on the other hand, is the very inversion of the realm of men. Just look at the play on letters: *L’ogre / Gorre*. Gorre refers to the world of spirits and, as such, completely escapes limitations of space and time.

Once we have made this fundamental antithesis explicit, it becomes easier, in our opinion, to “situate” the main characters of the romance.

To the kingdom of Gorre belongs first of all, and with good reason, King Bademagu, in whom we see a figure of God the Father in all his

omnipotent serenity. Let us not forget that he introduces himself as sovereign—"I am king of this land"²⁰—and that one may only enter there with his "permission."²¹ As to Méléagant, whom critics have wrongly wished to make his hateful counterpart, he is only his son, that is, his creature—but a completely spiritual creature, a figure of the fallen angel, all of whose traditional characteristics he shares: Luciferian beauty, pride beyond measure—he is "very full of pride"²²—and a spirit of revolt, of rebellion, against his own father. And, in the end, by refusing the ultimate attempt at reconciliation offered to him, he will deliberately choose death—let us understand: eternal damnation. Symmetrical to him arises the character of the "sister of Méléagant,"²³ figure of the archangel faithful to the designs of her father, to whose most secret thoughts she is privy. It is she who will be the saving messenger—should one say the "guardian angel"?—assuring the liberation of an imprisoned and apparently despairing Lancelot—for the "sister of Méléagant" is also and above all "the daughter of Bademagu."²⁴

Now, to the kingdom of Logres belongs another series of characters. First of all the royal couple Arthur-Guinevere, truly emblematic of humanity as a whole, since it represents, we believe, the famous "human composite" dear to Saint Thomas.²⁵ Arthur, a bit bogged down in his contradictions and, when all is said and done, disappointing, represents in fact, in our opinion, the body of Man, and this is why he will not have immediate access to the kingdom of Gorre, to the world of spirits. It is a totally different situation with Guinevere, a figure for the human soul, a spiritual principal called to live out an exalting and frightening adventure in that same spirit world. Next to them, in his role of counterpoint, we find Gawain, an accomplished man but as it were shut up in his "earthly" perfection, which makes him unable, despite his good intentions, to live out the truly spiritual, "celestial" adventures—to say nothing of the seneschal Kay, who is only the trailing shadow and the grotesque caricature of Gawain.

Between these two worlds, at their juncture in some way, comes the Man-God, Lancelot of the Lake. He is the son of King Ban—of the carpenter Joseph, I will venture to say—and that is his share of humanity, but he is also son of the mysterious Lady of the Lake, who gives him his name, his divine mark—and in whom we are inclined to see a medieval romance avatar of the Virgin Mother. As such, if he is in the world, he is not "of the world," as St. John would say (John 17.16).

Hence the readily contemplative character which is attributed to him in this romance where he is often portrayed as plunged in thought. Hence also the silences in which he encloses himself—"thinking pleased him; speaking pained him"²⁶—and above all the true ecstasies to which he abandons himself. As obvious evidence of this, near the beginning of the romance, there is the episode of the Tower Window from which the hero nearly falls, completely absorbed as he is in contemplating the retinue of the queen, to whom he feels himself irresistibly attracted. Gawain, who has understood nothing because he lacks the "eyes of the soul," will interpret Lancelot's behavior at the window as a banal attempt at suicide (v. 574). Another and more striking example is Lancelot's fall into the water of the ford, where his unguided mount carries him (vv. 753-71): far from having a comic character, as has been claimed, this episode manifests, rather, complete self-forgetfulness in the interest of a higher cause—"the business of his Father," I am inclined to say, repeating a well-known gospel formula (Luke 2:49).²⁷

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There is one last theme which occupies an essential place in the romance: the famous "custom of Gorre." We mean that "cursed custom"²⁸ which keeps Arthur's subjects in "prison," in "servitude"—words which endlessly come to the author's pen as he defines the custom (vv. 643, 2090-2115, 2413-20). To be brief, we shall say that, in our opinion, we have here the romance expression of what St. Paul calls the "Law," that law which is intimately linked to man's enslavement to sin and, in the final analysis, to death (Romans 7:6; 8:2). And it falls exactly to a unique Messiah, given as ransom for all, to liberate men from it:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law by being cursed for our sake, since scripture says: *Cursed be everyone who is hanged on a tree* (Galatians 3:13).

Isn't this precisely the role played by Lancelot and the reason for which he had to get into the cart of infamy, to live out his crucifixion (vv. 2112-15)?

In sum, it is the Cross which liberates from the Law, as it is the Cart which allows the abolition of "cursed custom." There is a double

equivalence to posit here: Cart = Cross / “Cursed Custom” = Law. And what we have here is literally the adventure of Salvation brought to men—that adventure which is, when all is said and done, only the romance name for Grace (Romans 6:14).

Moreover this liberation, this salvation, had been announced, prophesied for a long time, in the romance as in Scripture. The hospitable vavasor already echoed the awaited coming of a liberator (vv. 2116-21), but above all, in the episode of the Future Cemetery, the prophetic role devolves on the “written letters”²⁹ whose faithful guardian is a “very old monk”³⁰—a figure for the Synagogue (vv. 1899-1906): prediction, in short, by the Old Testament of the New Testament, of the “new law.” And it is in this spirit that one must pay attention to the very term “new(s)” (*novele*) which, in certain contexts, seems to be an obvious reference to the “Good News” (*la Bonne Nouvelle*), the Gospel (*l’Evangile*) (vv. 2423, 4107).

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After having set out, no doubt too rapidly, these indispensable reference points, we can now look at the general economy of the romance as a whole.

Its subject is clear and simple: it is about the rape of Guinevere/the Human Soul by Méléagant/Satan and her liberation by Lancelot/figure of Christ. It is thus the very story of the redemption of fallen humanity which is staged here—and in both its forms: the individual adventure lived by each one of us (the role which Guinevere plays here) and the collective adventure of humanity as a whole (the recurrent theme of the prisoners of Gorre).

For—and this is good theology—there are two categories of men who await their spiritual liberation. Those who are already in the Other World, the prisoners of Gorre subjugated to the Old Law but living in the hope of the “descent into Hell” of Christ the liberator, and those who are still of this World Below, those knights of Arthur immersed in time for whom nothing is definitively played out—whence, by the way, those variations of feeling, those at first disconcerting rejections that come into Guinevere’s behavior toward Lancelot, whence also those combats, always interrupted and always resumed, between Evil/Méléagant and the Savior/Lancelot. Only at the end of time will all men find themselves reunited in the eternal bliss evoked at the end of the romance.

In sum, to take a rapid look at the work as a whole, one can distinguish three stages in it.

The first corresponds, if one may say so, to Genesis—with the intrusion of Evil/Méléagant into a harmonious world, that of original innocence, a kind of earthly paradise—that court of King Arthur where each is in his place and faithfully accomplishes the “service” expected of him.

This intrusion comes to vitiate, to pervert, the established order by inspiring the spirit of revolt, that refusal to “serve” which Kay the seneschal’s attitude especially illustrates, and by introducing, even more basically, pain and death, the separation of the soul/Guinevere and the body/Arthur which is in effect the very definition of death.

Then will come the successive stages of Redemption, centered on Lancelot, and for good reason. By this I mean the series of revelations of the messianic role to which the elect knight is called—first the episode of the Damsel of the Crossroads (v. 606-675), then the Future Cemetery — also the series of trials which we cannot detail here but which all manifest that one must pass through suffering and death if one wants to reach a rebirth: the Passage of the Stones in reference to the way up to Calvary, the crossing of the Sword Bridge, that figure for the Crucifixion—a crossing which occurs under the gaze of the two sons of the vavasor, those “disciples” who, powerless and terrified, will only be able to watch the Passion of their master —, also the false news of the return of Lancelot (vv. 5264-66) which irresistibly makes one think of the passage of Scripture evoking the end of time: “If anyone says to you then, ‘Look, here is the Christ’ or, ‘He is there,’ do not believe it.” (Matthew 24:23). We have finally the actual appearance, at the tournament of Noauz, of a lost and almost forgotten Lancelot, so comparable to the postmortem appearances of Christ to his disciples or to the pilgrims of Emmaus.

Finally we have the Second Coming, the return in glory of Christ/Lancelot “fallen from the clouds,”³¹ a perfect copy of the “coming in the clouds of Heaven” of the Gospel (Matthew 24:30). This final episode, as if by chance, unfolds in a place marked by timelessness, by eternity—in this place where the grass “was always new”³²—under that “sycamore” which strongly recalls the Tree of Life, with that allusion to “Abel” as well, yet another way of saying that Lancelot, like Christ, figures here as a “new Abel” (vv. 6983-92).³³ Basically, a sort of resurgence of Paradise lost and finally found again.

So Guinevere, the human soul, will be able to be definitively returned to Arthur, and man will thus be reestablished in his original integrity. But there we have an eschatological vision which Chrétien de Troyes himself seems to have refused to stage, leaving instead to his continuator the care of evoking it as the “vanishing point” of the whole romance, while he himself deliberately stops on the threshold and leaves us, like Lancelot, prisoners in the tower of this World Below where Evil/Méléagant has undivided reign. As St. John writes at the end of his first epistle (5:19): “We know that we belong to God but the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One.”

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We must conclude in a few words. In this mystical and symbolic interpretation of the *Knight of the Cart*, each element of the “proof,” if there is a proof, is completely contestable in itself—and we are well aware of this. That does not prevent the rather remarkable convergence of all these elements, taken in this perspective, from conferring an undeniable coherence to the whole of the romance.

Of course, this is only one possible reading of this fascinating work. This reading has to its credit an ability to account for a certain number of passages which are, to say the least, very troublesome for traditional interpretation: we are thinking of the haunting theme of the captives (which doesn’t exist, by the way, in the so-called Celtic source³⁴—and that’s a rather striking sign), of the Cart itself, so enigmatic, so paradoxical, also of the Future Cemetery, no less incomprehensible if deprived of its implicit reference to the Scriptures.

So why refuse to try the adventure, to posit or to assume a cleric/author who would not have contented himself with awakening religious chords, as is ordinarily said, but who would have deliberately wanted to veil fundamental truths under a romance and courtly apparel—fundamental truths to which he, like his public, was so profoundly attached? And he does this by using, at the risk of misleading moderns like us, the phraseology and themes of courtly love (*fine amor*), to which one must here give its full etymological meaning: a “refined,” elaborated love, which in this period is the least inappropriate means of conveying the absolute love which is love divine.

THE GRAIL: A CHRISTIAN SYMBOL FROM THE VERY BEGINNING?¹

The Grail “smacks of heresy.”² To convince ourselves of this, we need only glance at the long article, solidly documented, that Father Maur Cochérel devotes to it in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*:³ one feels he is really at ease only when dealing with the “holy” Grail, that of the *Quest* (*Quête*) of the same name, and for good reason, for he is then on familiar ground, marked with religious signposts, while the Grail through the centuries has repeatedly drifted, awakening legitimate worries for a mind attached to an orthodox, Christian view of the world. Drifts (*dérives*) perhaps, drifts without a doubt, but departing exactly from what shores (*de quelles rives*)—to repeat here the felicitous expression of Antoine Faivre—from what origin?⁴

Much has been said about “myth” in connection with the Grail—as evidence I only need the remarkable little summation on that subject which my teacher Jean Frappier once gave under the title *Chrétien de Troyes et le mythe du Graal*.⁵ But, if there is a myth, it is certainly very young when compared to its great ancestors of Greek antiquity.⁶ The Grail became a myth, it is true, and this tree, modest in the beginning, has not ceased to extend its branches in all directions for better and for worse.

Would it not be good to come back to the sources, or rather to the source, the founding romance that launched both the name and the thing in the twelfth century? We mean, of course, the famous *Story of the Grail* (*Conte du Graal*), often misnamed the *Perceval*, of Chrétien de Troyes. It might then be astonishing to see the extent to which this seminal work, at least in our opinion, is above all and from the beginning a religious work that I would venture to call perfectly orthodox—if one is at all willing to read it with constant reference to the type of deliberately symbolic writing which is characteristic of the time and which originates, when all is said and done, in the very manner in which exegesis of Holy Scripture was then practiced (the famous four meanings of Scripture).⁷ For one must never forget that the supposedly secular authors of our literary Middle Ages were all clerics, trained in a certain discipline of mind and heart which has, if I may say so, unfortunately become singularly foreign to us.

For all that, it is out of the question to get carried away with who knows what pursuit of narrow and “picky” identifications which would

empty out all the poetry and all the mystery which our medieval authors cared about preserving. This has been the danger, for example, in attempts to trace the retinue of the Grail back to a procession inspired by the rites of the Byzantine Grand Entrance or to the communion of the sick or in seeing the "lance which bleeds" as the pure and simple copy of the episode of Longinus.⁸ Such a procedure would make us fall once again into our bad habits as somewhat myopic academics, always fond of "sharp" connections and of erudite crutches.

The design of a *Chrétien de Troyes* is, in our opinion, much broader. It invites us to a deeper reflection, more "open" as well, inciting us to go out to meet great spiritual truths as we pass through what Baudelaire, in his famous sonnet "Correspondences" (*Correspondances*), so aptly calls "forests of symbols" (*forêts de symboles*). Everything is in fact suggested, evoked, nothing is clearly, systematically, posted—and this is without a doubt still the best way to approach the essential. For, precisely as Father M.D. Chenu writes, *the symbol is the appropriate means for the expression of mystery*.⁹ Has Christian theology not moreover, in order to account for the mystery of man and life, always posited the existence of great fundamental mysteries, kinds of "black suns," invisible and incomprehensible in themselves but which are nonetheless extraordinarily enlightening for everything which surrounds us?¹⁰

It is in this way that the Grail calls to us today. This explains and justifies, in our opinion, the passionate interest which one still has in it. Yes, the Grail still has something to tell us. But, however enigmatic it may be—as the medieval author deliberately wanted it to be, exactly to force us to interrogate ourselves, to ask ourselves precisely those questions which the *Perceval* of the romance either did not know how, or did not want, to ask—nonetheless one cannot make the Grail say just anything: its orientation, its meaning, are, we are persuaded, truly Christian. It is not after all by chance that in the following century, the thirteenth, authors of the caliber of a Robert de Boron or of a Wolfram von Eschenbach—not to mention the famous *Quête du saint Graal* (*Quest of the Holy Grail*)—all gave an explicitly Christian interpretation of the supposed myth which was not one yet. This medieval guarantee cannot leave us indifferent, insensitive: it brings all its considerable weight to bear on these matters.

It is often repeated, in connection with the *Conte du Graal*, that we have here a myth with Celtic origins. But many of the best informed

Celtic specialists were the first to recognize that the Celtic elements claimed for our Arthurian romances had for a time been far *overestimated*.¹¹ There is no doubt that Chrétien de Troyes himself refers, in the prologue of his romance, to a certain “book,”¹² to a certain “*Story of the Grail*”¹³ which he says “Count Philip of Flanders” gave him;¹⁴ and Wolfram von Eschenbach for his part evokes a mysterious “Kyot the Provençal” by whom he says he was inspired (but whose existence is seriously questioned). Be that as it may, nothing has been saved for us from these supposed sources. And then, whether or not the original “matter” (*matière*) is Celtic does not change much in this affair. What counts is the “meaning” (*sens*) which Chrétien de Troyes wanted to give his story as he played, skillfully by the way, with the “pattern” (*conjointure*), that is, with the meaningful arrangement of his romance (*la composition signifiante de son roman*).¹⁵

We must separate ourselves once and for all from the spirit of causality, which inhabits our modern minds and drives us always to seek to go back in time in search of models, of erudite sources. Rather, we must think in terms of finality—as we must rid ourselves, to read the works of this period, of the hold of a rationality, a deductive reasoning, which is totally opposed to the analogical and symbolic mode of writing used by the authors of the time. It is necessary then to go and discover the meaning, deliberately encrypted, that they wanted to give their romance narratives, possessed as they were, as good medieval clerics, by the intellectual and moral models of a Christianity in full flower.

#

After this long preamble—no doubt necessary to help us, moderns that we are, to make a kind of cerebral conversion, lest we sin by anachronism—it is thus to a deliberately Christian interpretation of Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal* that we invite you . . . at our own risk!¹⁶

This procedure is, in our opinion, all the more legitimate since, above and beyond the social and intellectual environment of the time, it finds its full justification in the work itself.

First of all in the Prologue, a true mosaic of biblical quotations, explicit or implicit. Beginning with an obvious reminder of the parable of the sower and referring as much to the “Gospel”¹⁷ as to “Saint Paul,”¹⁸ the prologue asserts the superiority of Christianity over

paganism by comparing “Philip of Flanders” to “Alexander”¹⁹ and emphasizes the preeminence of charity over all other virtues:

God is Charity, and according to the Spirit—
Saint Paul says it and I with him—the man
who dwelleth in Charity dwelleth in God, and
God in him.²⁰

The highly spiritual tone of this prologue, so very unusual in this author, is already a call to attention, a key to reading in short, that Chrétien de Troyes offers us at the outset. Even the critics who are the most cautious about religious interpretations (such as, once again, Jean Frappier) agree on this.

And, at the other end of the Perceval part of the work—the only part which interests us here, precisely because it treats the Grail²¹—we find the long sequence of the visit of the hero to the hermit, that “holy man”²² who will reveal to him what is contained by that mysterious Grail which he characterizes as “a very holy thing”:²³ a “host,” which “comes there,” that is to say renews itself there,²⁴ and which is destined for a “spiritual” king,²⁵ to whom we shall shortly return. And the hermit will follow this revelation with very spiritual advice on life, addressed to Perceval, before finally giving him Holy Communion.

The prologue and the Hermitage episode, which functions as an epilogue for the Perceval section, thus constitute the alpha and omega of our romance and invite us to a “spiritual” reading of the work, in fact an explicitly Christian reading. That appears indisputable, unless one wants at all costs to consider the final sequence as interpolated, as some have suggested, not without ulterior motives.²⁶ But this purely gratuitous hypothesis cannot reasonably be retained, for nothing authorizes us to scratch out parts of our manuscripts in this way—not even the somewhat surprising placement, for our overly rational minds, of an episode which inserts itself in a curious fashion in the midst of the adventures of Gawain, brusquely interrupting them. But we must see that there is nothing extraordinary about that when we observe that the sequence in question is preceded by a passage which depicts for us the aimless wandering of Perceval during five years—five, the number of man reduced to his simple humanity²⁷—five years in which he abandons himself to meaningless knightly adventures. The author specifies that at that time “he never remembered God.”²⁸ This is a kind

of “bad spell” out of which the truly providential meeting with the penitents will wrench him. These five years of forgetting God—that is, of forgetting man’s true spiritual vocation—are in some way made more perceptible by the temporary erasure of the hero from the narrative line of the story.

So let us take the text as it is—that’s wise—without seeking to impose our modern rules of composition on it, rules to which, by the way, the contemporary novel has fortunately disaccustomed us. And, armed with the warning of the prologue and of this final episode, which gives the key to interpretation, let us not hesitate to reread the work by using retrospective light, for this retrograde reading is the very image of any meditation which endlessly comes back on itself to understand better and to deepen.

#

For lack of space we will confine ourselves to some essential elements and will leave it to readers interested in this type of critical approach to refer to the little work in which we formerly attempted the twinned theological interpretation of the Potion of Tristan and the Grail of Perceval.²⁹

Let us come, without further delay, to the fundamental scene—fundamental in all senses of the word—of the Grail Castle. It is immediately distinguished from all preceding episodes by its dreamlike character. This castle “appears” suddenly before the astonished eyes of Perceval, while an instant before he saw only “sky and earth”:³⁰

Then the top of a tower appeared in the valley ahead of him.³¹

This is a castle which will soon become, when he abandons it after his fall, a kind of castle of Sleeping Beauty where all voices have fallen silent, all movement has stopped, and which will throw him back into the outer darkness after making him attend, paralyzed, the silent procession of marvelous and enigmatic objects. We have here something of a rupture in the narrative line of the story, a kind of moment of eternity. It is as if, before the return to knightly wandering, we are asked to go up a theological vertical line: oneirism³² appears here as the privileged vector of metaphysics. So it is, by the way, in the *Romance of the Rose* (*Roman de la Rose*) of Guillaume de Lorris, with

that “dream” which will launch the hero on a journey whose religious and initiatory coloring is certain.³³

The Grail, we should note, does not “function” by itself here. It is always associated in the text with the famous “lance which bleeds”—and this is so beginning with the Grail’s appearance in the procession. We should note that the procession takes the form of a cross, its center taken up by the Grail: first comes the lance, then, framed by two golden candelabra, the Grail, dazzling with its precious stones, and, to close the procession, the carving platter, another object with sacrificial value. We have here an obvious christological symbol where the royal gold of the Grail and of the accompanying candelabra—a sign of solar sovereignty—is preceded and followed by the lunar coldness of the “white lance” and the “silver carving platter.”³⁴ But the rest of the text will return above all to the Lance-Grail pair.

To this fundamental pair one must closely associate the double question which will remain unanswered since it has not been asked: “Why this lance which never stops bleeding?” “Who is served from the Grail?”—a truly recurrent theme in this passage and beyond. Such questions are, without a doubt, particularly illuminating as we try to account for these intentionally enigmatic objects.

The “lance which bleeds” is, like the carving platter which duplicates it, obviously a symbol of wounding, of suffering, of death, and finally a symbol of Evil. We are told, moreover, in the Gawain part of the *Conte* that the lance will cause the destruction of the realm of Logres: let us translate, ‘of the world Here Below.’ In short, the lance will cause a kind of end of the world:

“And it is written that the time will yet be
when all the kingdom of Logres, once the land
of ogres, will be destroyed by that lance.”³⁵

Thus we are inclined to gloss the question about the lance as follows: “Why this suffering, this death, this Evil which is endlessly reborn?” Is not the problem of the existence of suffering, death and Evil in all its forms Here Below one of those unanswerable questions with which we have ever to deal?

As to the Grail itself, Chrétien refrains from uselessly busying our minds with its material configuration—which will however cause a lot of ink to be spilled by erudites with a misguided need for realism. What

counts for him is the dynamic which the Grail represents: where does it go, to whom does it silently call us, when it passes and repasses in front of the guests at table in the castle? There is really no need to linger long over its miraculous nourishing aspect, even if this is soberly evoked in a few lines by Chrétien:

As each course was served, he saw the Grail
pass before them completely uncovered.³⁶

There is still less need to account for this nourishing aspect by evoking who knows what pseudo-Celtic cauldron, some ancient horn of plenty. The miraculous fishing expedition of the gospels or the multiplication of the loaves—which the *Quête du saint Graal* explicitly evokes in this connection³⁷—will do the job just as well and in a more Christian way. But we think that is not the essential point. Besides, the hermit will soon teach us that this mysterious vessel would be suitable to hold “lamprey” or “salmon”³⁸—and voilà, we have the Grail significantly placed under the christic sign of the fish, as is the case for the Fisher King, to whom we will soon return. But we will learn at the same time that the Grail carries a very spiritual food, which has a direct relationship with the Eucharistic rite.

More important, once again, is the question associated with the Grail: “Who is served from the Grail?” And it is here that we have to ask ourselves, with the hermit’s help, about the famous “spiritual”³⁹ king who functions, if I may say so, in tandem with the Fisher King. We are here at the very heart of the signifying problematic of the work, that which gives its true meaning to the mysterious Grail.

One essential fact that we know concerning the Fisher King is that he is also and first of all a “Crippled” King,⁴⁰ suffering from the same wound, the same infirmity as the very father of Perceval, that Perceval who is himself the emblematic figure of man, as the protagonist always is in Chrétien’s romances. Let it suffice to compare the two passages—the one which treats the Fisher King:

“He is a king, I dare tell you, but he was indeed wounded
in a battle and crippled so that he does not have use
of his body. He was struck by a javelin between the haunches.”⁴¹

and the one which concerns Perceval’s late father:

Your father—you do not know this—was wounded
between the legs and his body crippled.⁴²

The Fisher King, the Crippled King (they are one and the same) has in some way assumed, taken on himself through his incarnation—for, in traditional civilizations, any king is a figure of God—the suffering and infirmity of man. He is here, obviously, a christic figure, placed in this oneiric castle which is at the juncture between two worlds, that of men (represented by Perceval, with his heavy paternal heritage) and the Other World to which one still lacks access, that mysterious “chamber”⁴³ where awaits the “spiritual” King who is, as we know, none other than the “crippled” King’s own father. The mission of this Crippled King, this suffering Christ, is to put man/Perceval in relationship with God, who is hidden, transcendent, temporarily inaccessible since, as it is written in the Gospels, no one goes to the Father without passing through the Son (Matthew 9.27). And it is to this irreversible movement of spiritualization that the Grail invites us—this Grail whose etymology subsequent medieval authors will not fail to signal, an etymology which we tend to call “unscientific” but one that is all the more profoundly significant for a medieval ear since it is based on the analogy of the very sounds which compose the word: this “Grail” is nothing other than a figure of “Grace.”⁴⁴ This Grail which passes and repasses, this “completely uncovered”⁴⁵ Grail as Chrétien de Troyes writes, is the Grace constantly offered but not always received which draws us toward the Christian Beyond, which has no reason to envy the Celtic Avalon. And the question (still ours today) “Who is served from the Grail?” could be glossed in fact in these terms: “Is there a spiritual principle, a God, who invites us to join Him?” For the hidden King is in our view the figure of the transcendent God, inaccessible and esoteric, just as the Fisher King, his son, is the figure of the immanent, incarnate and exoteric God.

The one, the Crippled King—“crippled” by our shortcomings, for Chrétien likes to rhyme “Fisher” (*Pescheor*) and “sinner” (*pecheor*) (vv. 6159-60)—is at the same time a Fisher King, which we may render “a fisher of men,” as in the gospels (Matthew 4.19). As to the other, “spiritual” King, he can only be, at least Here Below, a “vanishing point.” One could even risk seeing in him, as we suggested at a colloquium on Pentecost recently held at Angers, a figure of the Holy Spirit, almost a kind of Joachimist anticipation:⁴⁶ the reign of the Spirit,

that of the “spiritual” King, called to replace the reign of the Son, the “Crippled,” Crucified King. Everything is in fact placed here under the double sign of the color vermilion and of fire: think of the “vermilion armor”⁴⁷ (the traditional color of the Catholic liturgy of Pentecost) deliberately chosen by Perceval and of that “great blazing fire”⁴⁸ which burns in the center of the castle hall—a baptism of “the Holy Ghost and fire” (Matthew 3.11).

#

Be that as it may, nothing more or less than the spiritualization of man is at issue here. It is not for nothing that Chrétien makes “grail” (*graus*) and “spiritual” (*esperitaus*) (vv. 6209-10) rhyme here, just as we have already seen that he rhymes “Fisher” (*Pescheor*) and “sinner” (*pecheor*) (vv. 6159-60). Is it then necessary to wonder, as we ourselves did a little while ago, at seeing the Grail, so paradoxically, occupy, at least apparently, so little place in the romance? It is in fact the whole journey of man, that of all of humanity—macrocosm and microcosm—that the author wants to make us live out in the person of Perceval.

Having departed from the instinctual and paradisiac forest of his childhood, which is also the childhood of humanity, Perceval first lives, as theologians say,⁴⁹ “according to nature” (*sub natura*), and that is what is expressed by that famous simplicity, that *niceté* or *naïveté*, that the author attributes to him in the first pages of his romance.

Then comes the distinctly educational journey which every man must live out and which humanity has known as well. This is the period “under the law” (*sub lege*) which is so well illustrated by the “commandments”⁵⁰ received from Gornemant, and which are not, by the way, without connotations of the Judaic law and its meticulous prescriptions. This period is also illustrated by the sentimental education received from Blanche fleur, whom Perceval will abandon “as if it were Ascension Day”⁵¹ with a promise to return . . . at the end of time.

But this period, that of human apprenticeship, was inaugurated—and this is another essential element of the journey staged here (*mis en scène*)—by the murder of the mother. This is the figure of an original sin of which Perceval is not even conscious—“a sin of which you know not a word”⁵² the hermit will later say to him — but a sin which implied degradation and death, a sin which “cut off [his] tongue,”⁵³ making him incapable of asking the famous questions which would have opened the doors of the Other World for him. This murder of the

mother is like the feminized equivalent—and we may have here the distinctively Celtic contribution—of the murder of the Father, the murder of God. This mother, this woman who gives life, can moreover be assimilated to God the Creator. Is she not presented by the hermit as the very sister of the “spiritual” King, figure of the transcendent God, the God who is all Spirit (v. 6200)? In this perspective, man/Perceval, victim of the satanic seduction of those knights who are “more beautiful than God”⁵⁴ and whom he even prepares to “worship,”⁵⁵ is going to revolt, to rebel against divine order, represented by his mother, and he will have to renounce the paradisiac sojourn of his innocent childhood. Disobedience to his mother, to God the Creator, is staged here on the plane of romance—an original sin that will hereafter follow and accompany man/Perceval all through his sinful life . . . with, all the same, a promise of regeneration represented perhaps by the “damsel”⁵⁶ (that other woman), the bearer of the mysterious Grail whom we would willingly risk assimilating with the Virgin Mother, refuge of sinners, whose intercession is, for the men of the Middle Ages, the supreme recourse for obtaining redemption from their sins: think only of the famous *Miracle de Théophile*.⁵⁷ In that superb sword offered to Perceval but destined to break in his hands, we have this same problematic of original sin, for only the divine “blacksmith” who polished the sword can one day “remake” it (vv. 366-67).

But more initiatory than educational is the third stage of Perceval’s journey—the stage inaugurated by the call of Grace, the passage of the Grail: man henceforth is called to live “by grace” (*sub gratia*), the theologians would say. But this ultimate stage concerns eschatology rather than this world below. One can only tend toward it and not reach it: the Grail passes and disappears. That is the whole theme of the quest, this vain quest that is always begun again. Perceval, although regenerated, is sent back by the hermit to the realm of his brother men, but he knows henceforth, after having guessed his own name with such difficulty, the “names of Our Lord,”⁵⁸ that is, the very person of God. For the symbolic thematic which attaches itself in this romance to the play of silence and speech—and the name is the quintessence of speech—is here very present and very meaningful (as we have shown in the past),⁵⁹ and it is moreover subtly announced in the Prologue itself with the evocation of that “seed” which the Gospel calls “the word of God” (Luke 8.11). There was the sinful silence of Perceval, answered, if we may say so, by the silence of God—five years of “forgetfulness of

God” from which Perceval suffered without really knowing it. But God, without speaking, gives a sign to man, and this is the Grail’s own calling, the calling of Grace.

#

Whatever has sometimes been said, there is indeed such a thing as Christian tragedy that the *Conte du Graal* expresses in its way, just as it was also expressed in the *Romance of Tristan* (*Roman de Tristan*) with that Potion taken “by error” which makes the lovers “guilty innocents.” We are in the presence of a fallen, sinful, wounded, disabled man—and he can’t do anything about it, for he is the victim of a kind of dark original cataclysm that corresponds, from the beginning of our romance, to the story Perceval’s mother tells her son of the inexplicable “decline” (*descheance*) which struck all her lineage (vv. 410-52). This is, moreover, the reason these romances—which have profound anthropological as well as religious truth—do not come to an end. For the glimmer of the Grail is only a glimmer which one must always pursue,⁶⁰ just as the blood of suffering and of death continually form droplets on top of the Lance. These so-called unfinished romances, as we have said elsewhere (in connection with this text as well as with the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris), are in fact romances without end, in all senses of the word.⁶¹ In them, one continues to live through the Good Friday of the Bleeding Lance at the same time that one hopes for the Easter of the Grail, as the last verses of the Perceval part of our romance testify:

Thus Perceval came to know that God was
crucified and died that Friday. On Easter,
Perceval received communion with a pure
heart.⁶²

The “lance which bleeds” symbolizes the mystery of Redemption—that human and divine suffering called to exorcise the Evil always present in this world. The nourishing and saving Grail symbolizes the mystery of the Incarnation, an incarnation constantly renewed through the Eucharistic rite, as shown by the little host which is hidden and reproduced in the Grail itself. Not by chance either does Chrétien, in this same episode, rhyme “confession” (*confession*) and “communion” (*comenion*) (vv. 6149-50). One eats, one lives with the

“Crippled” King who willingly shares our wound and our finite nature, but one yearns with all one’s being for the “Spiritual” King who, never showing himself, gives us a sign through the mediation of the Grail.

We have lived through Genesis—the paradisiac awakening in a forest that one does not yet know to be a wasteland (v. 75) —, then the long course of a completely human education which could not, which cannot, satisfy us. The hermits or their substitutes are there to bring us revelation, apocalypse, to invite us to leave again, always wounded, on the always rebegun sea of this world while waiting for the Second Coming of which the Grail/Grace is in some way the precursor.

All this, then, has to do, not with what one likes to call the “marvelous,” be it Celtic or not, but instead with a human and spiritual experience which, for all that it is profoundly true—for any research, any quest, is always a quest for truth—is nonetheless extraordinarily poetic. And the “stepping stone” of myth thus transforms itself into a mystical message in the sparkling of a Grail which is never extinguished.

NOTES

The Knight of the Cart: An Allegory of Salvation?

1. The article reproduced here originally appeared in French in the journal *L'Ecole des Lettres*, II, n. 10, a special issue devoted to “Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la Charrette de Chrétien de Troyes” (Paris, 1997). This article is only a very brief resumé of a work of almost two hundred pages that I published in 1972 (reissued in 1991): *Chrétien de Troyes, Le Chevalier de la Charrette, essai d'interprétation symbolique*. Hence the slightly “abrupt” character of these pages which are meant above all to be illustrative. They could not include the justificatory developments which were doubtless needed, as a few notes I have seen fit to insert here and there attest.

2. Cf. Frappier (1968) 144. Owen (1970) 42ff. Fowler 382-83, 389—even if these last two critics give an essentially parodic interpretation of the “messianic theme.” See also Adler.

3. We endorse here the perspectives opened by the works of D.W. Robertson Jr., when he correctly warns against an anachronistic reading of the works of the Middle Ages while emphasizing the specificity of medieval thought and writing. See especially his important work *A Preface to Chaucer, Studies in Medieval Perspectives*.

4. Line references in this article are to *Chrétien de Troyes, Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la charrette*, ed. Jean-Claude Aubailly. [Translator's note: The English translations of Chrétien are based on those in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. and ed. David Staines (*The Knight of the Cart*, 170-256). In some instances, I have modified Staines's stylistically elegant and idiomatic translations when more literal renderings seemed necessary for the purposes of Professor Ribard's text.]

5. See Frappier (1968) 135, Foulon 81 and Topsfield 117. Whatever meaning the said sources might lend to the cart, moreover, what counts here is what it represented to Chrétien himself and, above all, the meaning he wanted to give the cart in order to "orient" the reading of his romance.

6. *pilori* (322, 327); *larrons* (330).

7. [Translator's note: For all English translations of biblical quotations, I use *The Jerusalem Bible*.]

8. [Editor's note: A coffinlike structure which represents the corpse at a requiem Mass.]

9. *covertor d'or estelé* (v. 507)

10. *lez le costé* (v. 525)

11. *es mains et es piez* (v. 3106)

12. *l'oignemant as trois Maries* (v. 3358)

13. *molt grant folie* (v. 389)

14. *autel* (v. 4718)

15. Human love—with its carnal component—has never posed a problem as an allegorical expression of the mystical union of the soul and God. Let it suffice to recall in this regard the traditional interpretation of the famous Song of Songs, without forgetting the amorous expressions, of a metaphorical nature, which the great mystical writers have always used. As to the difficulty which the adulterous situation could raise in the present context, it does not seem to have caused a problem at the time, as some significant texts testify. See especially Zink 377, and Robertson (1951) 691. In any case, whatever the romance "heritage" that Chrétien was led, like it or not, to use, my interpretation of the work situates itself at such a level of mystical allegory that it totally eliminates the problem, since the Christic role played by Lancelot consists precisely in returning Guinevere to Arthur and in thus reestablishing the integrity of Man, an integrity compromised by a separation which is an image of death.

16. *pris à la trape / el rëaume don nus n'eschape* (vv. 1935-6)

17. It may be useful to recall here that the expression "l'Autre Monde" (Other World) is (at least in French) by no means reserved for Celtic legends. A

Christian “Other World” indeed exists—that of Paradise and its dark shadows, Hell and Purgatory—a purely spiritual kingdom that we also traditionally call the “Beyond” in opposition to the “Here Below.” To this “Other World,” to this “Beyond,” Man (or more precisely his spiritual principle, his soul) normally accedes after death. Hence the abusive assimilation of this “Other World” to the world of the dead, in opposition to the world of the living which would be the Here Below—when on the contrary the Christian Other World is exactly the world of immortal beings, of spirits, be they properly spiritual creatures like angels (good or bad) or be they human souls awaiting the resurrection of their bodies.

18. On the symbolic decoding of proper names in medieval literature, see my work *Le Moyen Age, Littérature et symbolisme* 73-90 and more particularly for what interests us here 84-85.

19. *del rëaume de Logres nez* (v. 1930)

20. *Je sui de ceste terre rois* (v. 3340)

21. *congié* (v. 651)

22. *molt plains d'orguel* (v. 6152)

23. *suer Meleagant* (v. 6243)

24. *la fille Bademagu* (v. 6619)

25. Let us recall that Christian theology, as made explicit by Thomas Aquinas, presents the nature of man, in opposition to that of the angels, as the substantial union of a body and a soul, which is the spiritual principle of the body. The union of these two elements—the “human composite”—is so intimate that the soul separated from its body (what we call death) is in a state of suffering until it has refound its body—hence the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh. Thus it is only at the end of time that the body (symbolized by Arthur in our romance), resuscitated, that is to say spiritualized, will be able in turn to have access to the kingdom of spirits, to this kingdom of Gorre which its soul (Guinevere) was able to reach alone, as if by anticipation, in a kind of mystical ecstasy.

26. *Pansers li plest, parlars li grieve* (v. 1335)

27. On this subject one could refer to my article “Amour et Oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes.”

28. *maleoite costume* (v. 2096)

29. *letres escrites* (1899)

30. *moinnes molt viax* (v. 1847)

31. *cheáz des nues* (vv. 6792-93)

32. *an toz tanz estoit novele* (v. 6988)

33. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Hebrews (12:24), explicitly compares the sacrifice of Abel, a prefiguration of that of Christ, with the role of Jesus, who is “mediator of a new alliance.” In some sense, we here “finish up” the story of Salvation, which is, we believe, the very subject of our romance.

34. On the Celtic influence which might have been exerted on the author, see among others Topsfield 15-18, 117-19, 126, 137, and *passim*. But some Celtic specialists have themselves called into question the weight we should give to these “sources.” Thus Kenneth Jackson (230) does not hesitate to affirm, in regard to the Grail romances, that “the nexus of Celtic influences remains to be determined” but that “it is certain that this nexus has been overestimated” (*le noyau d’influences celtiques reste à déterminer. . . il est sûr que ce noyau a été surestimé*). Would not what is true for the Grail romances be equally so for *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*?

The Grail: A Christian Symbol from the Very Beginning?

1. This second article is the English translation of “Le Graal: symbole chrétien dès l’origine?”, a talk presented at the 1995 Colloque de Cerisy. The proceedings of that conference have been published under the title “Graal et Modernité” in the journal *Cahiers de l’Hermétisme* (Paris 1996).

2. [Translator’s note: The expression which Professor Ribard uses here means “to smell of sulfur” (*sentir le soufre*). The association is between hell and heresy.]

3. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, heading *GRAAL (le Saint)*, 6: 672-700.

4. [Translator’s note: Ribard is playing in this sentence on *dérives*, drifts or driftings (cf. English *derivation*) and *de* (from) *rives* (banks or shores).]

5. Frappier (1972).

6. See on this subject *Problèmes du mythe et de son interprétation, Actes du colloque de Chantilly, 24-25 avril 1976* and notably the paper of Gilbert Durand entitled “Pérennité, dérives et usure du mythe.” 7. On this subject see a work which is already old but has kept all its value, Edgar de Bruyne’s *Etudes d’esthétique médiévale* (1946).

8. See on this subject Frappier (1972) 164 ff.

9. Chenu 42.

10. This expression “black suns” is my figurative way of saying that the great Christian mysteries (the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption) are, by definition, rationally incomprehensible and thus opaque, “black,” but the spiritual light that they laterally project illuminates and gives meaning to all that surrounds them.

11. Kenneth Jackson 230.
12. *livre* (v. 67)
13. *Conte del graal* (v. 66)
14. *li cuens Phelipes de Flandres* (v. 13)

15. On the value of these terms for medieval literary criticism one can refer to the prologues of two romances by Chrétien de Troyes: *Erec et Enide* (*conjointure* figures in verse 14) and *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (*matiere* "matter" and *san* "meaning" figure in verse 26).

[Translator's note: While I have followed Staines in translating *conjointure* as "pattern," no translation for this word is adequate. Its exact meaning is a matter of dispute. Douglas Kelly (200) calls *conjointure* "the result of the interlacing of different elements derived from the source or sources (or, for that matter, from the artist's imagination)." Tony Hunt (338-39, 321) suggests that Kelly attributes too much importance to "interlacing" and defines the term as the "organization of the author's material according to some unifying intention or pattern." In explaining *conjointure* as the signifying composition (*la composition signifiante*), Professor Ribard is reminding us that *conjointure* is an arrangement that confers meaning upon the material.]

16. My quotes and line references are to *Chrétien de Troyes, Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*, ed. F. Lecoy.

[Translator's note: The English translations of Chrétien are based on those in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. and ed. David Staines (*The Story of the Grail*, 339-449). In some instances, I have modified Staines's stylistically elegant and idiomatic translations when more literal renderings seemed necessary for the purposes of Professor Ribard's text. Readers of modern French may wish to consult Professor Ribard's translation of the *Conte du Graal* (1983).]

17. *Evangile* (v. 29, 37)
18. *Sainz Pos* (v. 49)
19. *Phelipes de Flandres* (v. 13); *Alixandres* (v. 14)
20. *Dex est charitez, et qui vit
an charité, selonc l'esprit,
sainz Pos lo dit et je le lui,
il maint an Deu et Dex an lui.* (vv. 47-50)

21. In contrast with the Gawain section, which makes no mention of the Grail.

22. *saint hom* (v. 6095)
23. *tant sainte chose* (v. 6209)

24. *oiste; y vient* (vv. 6206-12)

25. *esperitaus* (v. 6210)

26. See on this topic the article by Owen (1968) which presents the episode of the hermitage as an interpolation, and the detailed response of David G. Hoggan, which makes an opposing argument. See also Topsfield (219 ff.).

27. Since one and three refer to the divine (in its unity or its trinity), five is traditionally considered as the number of Man, combining in itself (2 + 3) the two, which affirms his terrestrial and imperfect nature, and the three, which refers to his spirituality and recalls his divine imprint. On this subject, see Ribard (1984) 27-30.

28. *c'onques de Deu ne li sovint* (v. 6029)

29. Ribard. *Du Philtre au Graal, pour une interprétation théologique du "Roman de Tristan" et du "Conte du Graal"* (1989). [Translator's note: Both works are available in English. See Works Cited.]

30. *ciel et terre* (v. 3033)

31. *Lors vit devant lui an un val*

le chief d'une tor qui parut. (vv. 3044-5)

32. [Translator's note: Involuntary mental activity that results in hallucinations and dreamlike visions.]

33. On this subject one can refer to Ribard (1995 b) 315-325: "Introduction à une étude polysémique du *Roman de la Rose* de Guillaume de Lorris." [Translator's note: *Le Roman de la rose* is available in English translation. See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg.]

34. *blanche lance* (v. 3180); *tailleur d'argent* (3219)

35. "*Et s'est escrit qu'il ert encore*

que toz li reaumes de Logres,

qui jadis fu la terre as ogres,

ert destruite par cele lance." (vv. 5962-65)

36. *A chascuns mes don l'an servoit*

le graal trespasser veoit

par devant lui tot descobert. (vv. 3287-89)

37. What is in question here is the famous passage devoted to the three Tables: that of the Last Supper, that of the Holy Grail, and the Round Table. Here are the terms in which the author expresses himself concerning the second one, the "Table of the Holy Grail" ("*Table dou Saint Graal*"):

And then he (Joseph of Arimathea) ordered all the people to sit as if they were at the Holy Table. And he broke the loaves and put them here and there and put at the head of the table the Holy Grail, by which it came about that the twelve loaves multiplied so that all the people, of whom there were easily four thousand, were in a very marvelous way filled and satisfied.

Et lors comanda (Joseph d'Arimacie) a tout le pueple qu'il s'aseissent ausi come s'il fussent a la Ceinne. Et il despeça les pains et les mist ça et la et mist ou chief de la table le Saint Graal, par qui venue li douze pain foisonerent si que toz li pueples, dont il avoit bien quatre mile, en furent repeu et rasaziez trop merveilleusement. (La Queste del Saint Graal [1965] 75.)

[Translator's note: For an English edition of the *Quête*, see *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. Trans. Pauline M. Matarasso.]

38. *lanproies, saumons* (v. 6205)

39. *esperitaus* (v. 6210)

40. *Mahaignez* (v. 3496)

41. *Rois est il, bien le vos os dire,
mes il fu an une bataille
navrez et mahaigniez sanz faille...
Il fu feruz d'un javelot
parmi les hanches amedos.* (vv. 3494-99)

42. *Vostre peres, si nel savez,
fu par mi les janbes navrez
si que il mahaigna del cors.* (vv. 433-35)

43. *chambre* (v. 3230)

44. One remembers the famous passage of the *Quête* where this phonic and symbolic equivalence is underlined: "And because (the dish of the Last Supper) has so agreeably served all people, it must be called the Holy Grail"—with the echo effect a few lines further: "... filled with the grace of this holy Vessel" (*Et por ce que ele a si servi à gré toutes genz doit ele estre apelee le Saint Graal . . . repeu de la grace de cest saint Vessel*) (*La Queste del saint Graal* [1965] 270-71).

45. *tot descobert* (v. 3289)

46. [Translator's note: Professor Ribard is alluding here to the theology of Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202), who divided history into three stages. The first age was that of the Father and the Law. In the second, that of Christ and the institutional church, humankind was under grace. The third age would be the reign of the Holy Spirit, in which humankind would enjoy a more ample grace. For a summary of the theology of Joachim of Fiore, see Pelikan 301-03.]

47. *armes vermoilles* (v. 2766)

48. *grant feu ardant* (vv. 3083-4)

49. On this distinctly theological aspect see my work *Du Philtre au Graal* 70-71.

50. *comandemanz* (v. 1614)

51. *com s'il fust jor d'Acenssion* (v. 2936)

52. *uns pechiez don tu ne sez mot* (v. 6177)

53. *trancha la lengue* (v. 6193)

54. *plus biax que Dex* (v. 177)

55. *aorer* (v. 151) 56. *dameisele* (v. 3209)

57. *Le Miracle de Théophile* is a play written c. 1260 by Rutebeuf. In this drama, the Virgin forces the Devil to return the deed which entitles him to Théophile's soul.

58. *nons Nostre Seignor* (v. 6263)

59. See on the subject my little thematic anthology *Chrétien de Troyes, Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)* 71-89.

60. As we know, at the very end of the *Quête* (p. 279) the Grail is taken from men, seized by a mysterious hand which is obviously that of God.

61. See my article "*De Chrétien de Troyes à Guillaume de Lorris: ces quêtes qu'on dit inachevées.*"

62. *Ensi Percevaux reconut
que Dex au vanredi reçut
mort et si fu crocefiez.*

*A la Pasque comeniez
fu Percevaux mout simplement.* (vv. 6283-87)

CHAPTER 6

The Allegory of Adventure

An Approach to Chrétien's Romances¹

Tom Artin

Condescension toward the object of our study deprives us of full insight in a variety of ways. Diachronic studies sometimes shortchange the artist's synchronic achievement. Psychological analyses project our own mindset onto the medievals by viewing them in their best moments as forerunners of ourselves. Our real goal is to discover in what terms characteristics jarring to us—especially indirection in the plot—did make sense to Chrétien and his audience. The answer is: allegory along the lines of clerkly exegesis of Scripture. The traditional term for this discipline—hermeneutics—was expanded in the twentieth century to apply to the interpretation of literature generally.

I

In his chapter on *Yvain*,² Erich Auerbach offers an illuminating description of the mystifying narrative style of Arthurian romance. The courtly ideal of the medieval aristocracy—that exclusive ethos of chivalry—was quite separate from and indeed served to conceal the real ruling function of the class, he notes. This ethos, itself a fantasy opposed to social and political reality, helps explain the appeal that the fantastical “matter of Britain” had for its courtly audience, in contradistinction to the style Auerbach identifies as more typically Christian; the new low style (*sermo humilis*) was modeled on the immediacy of the Incarnation, a style in which simple reality, expressed in simple language, became the vehicle of transcendental meaning.

The courtly-chivalric ideal centered on personal election, over and above the distinction of birth. The aristocracy as a whole functioned as an exclusive social and political group, but within it "there were tendencies at work which sought to base the solidarity of the group not on descent but on personal factors, on noble behavior and refined manners" (121). The character of the true knight depended not on the accident of birth alone, nor on mere physical prowess, but on the development of inner values that led to personal election to knighthood. "But the most important point," Auerbach continues, "is that this emphasis on inner values by no means brought a closer approach to earthly realities. On the contrary: in part at least it was precisely the emphasis laid on the inner values of the knightly ideal which caused the connection with the real things of this earth to become ever more fictitious and devoid of practical purpose" (122). The realities of social and political life had neither function nor importance in the courtly ideal; Auerbach shows how this generalization is borne out in the case of Yvain. "Calogrenant . . . has no political or historical task, nor has any other knight of Arthur's court. Here the feudal ethos serves no political function; it serves no practical reality at all; it has become absolute. It no longer has any purpose but that of self-realization" (116-17).

If the courtly audience had a taste for fantasy, we can easily understand why the stories revolving around the court of King Arthur, stories derived in large part from bits and pieces of the mythology of the Celts, satisfied it. For the reality of myth lies not in its outward fiction, but in the inner experience the fiction expresses. Thus, fragments of a mythology appear mere fantasy when, reworked and rearranged, they become divorced from their original structure of meaning.

Yet this very appearance of meaninglessness paradoxically undoes itself. Precisely because the narrative of Arthurian romance typically gives so little sense of reality, of literal coherence, it betrays its mythological origins, and tantalizes with intimations of hidden meanings. All the inconsistencies of plot and characterization, the curious anomalies apparently taken for granted by the poet, the casual tone with which marvels are narrated, rather more insistently raise questions than resolve them. Nevertheless, even when the romance gives us intimations of meaning, it is difficult to find a coherent thread on which to draw it out. Hence, although Auerbach accounts for the

style of romance, he is frankly baffled by its meaning: "It is sometimes possible to make out symbolic, mythological, or religious motifs . . . but it is rarely possible to define the meaning precisely, at least so long as the courtly romance remains true to type" (114).

Interesting as it may be for its own sake, tracing the sources of the courtly romancers to occasionally identifiable origins in Celtic mythology and elsewhere is at best of incidental value in determining the courtly poet's meaning. Typically, source studies have ignored the problem of meaning altogether. For example, R.S. Loomis, comparing the texts of Chrétien's poems with their putative sources, apparently concludes that the poet had little interest in (not to say comprehension of) his materials; rather, he meant only to put together and dress up some good stories in terms of courtly and chivalric conventions. Coherent narrative was not his concern, only the evocation of quaint fantasy and the reflection of courtly sentiment. The casual attitude Loomis ascribes to Chrétien suggests that the poet was a somewhat mindless link in a literary process essentially independent of him. Chrétien, he writes, "displayed little originality . . . in the composition and shaping of his narratives, and deserves little blame for certain strange oversights and incoherences."³ These "strange oversights and incoherences" are the consequence of reproducing "both the defects and the excellences of his originals. Thus only can one explain the many mystifying characteristics of his work, the many oddities which suggest that he was drawing on a body of inchoate and ultimately foreign tradition, and the exaltation of an alien king and court" (24). Loomis correctly attributes the characteristic inconsistencies in the Arthurian tradition to conflation of originally discrete narrative materials. But he implies it was the poet's lack of skill or literary sophistication that allowed these inconsistencies to remain. Loomis fails to see that the real coherence of meaning lies elsewhere than in the surface of his narrative. He must therefore conclude that Chrétien had little interest in "reconciling conflicting stories." The ideal of the courtly literary aesthetic was neither verisimilitude nor narrative consistency.

The weakness of the source studies is their tendency to focus on the sources to the neglect of the poems themselves. Interpretive criticism of the romances has proved equally inadequate because generally it has proceeded along lines of psychological analyses of character and action. Gustave Cohen, for instance, praises the poet for his finesse in describing Laudine's acceptance of her husband's

murderer's suit: "Chrétien is a remarkable depicter of women, and he excels at revealing their tricks and turns" (360).⁴ After having shown her tearing her gown, and rending her face and throat with her nails in excessive grief over her husband's death, "with rare finesse" he depicts her slide "from grief to curiosity, and from curiosity to love" (360).⁵ When we look at the text of *Yvain*, however, we find *not* the scene that Cohen praises as psychologically subtle, but rather a highly stylized scene, in which the poet attempts rather to represent a typical action than to describe or evoke a unique one. In effect, Cohen's praise condescends to the medieval poets, in whose works—as it were—we are occasionally amazed to find first, awkward gropings toward the real achievements of later, more sophisticated authors.

The same modern biases that lead Cohen to discover in Chrétien's work the anticipation of future artistic modes lead him to criticize Chrétien for the incoherence of the overall structure of his romances. The works are marred, he argues, by a plethora of unconnected adventures, grafted onto the major story line, determined only by random fantasy, and not arising by necessity out of the character of the protagonist. "But that is the one small flaw inherent in the genre" (354).⁶ Surely it is odd to consider a characteristic inherent to a genre a fault. A "genre" is, after all, no more nor less than the sum of characteristics inherent to it. Cohen's judgment proceeds from anachronistic criteria. The historical critic's task, however, must be to discover in what terms characteristics jarring to modern sensibilities *did* make sense to Chrétien and his audience. Cohen properly suggests that Chrétien derived Yvain's lion from the Bestiary tradition, not from actual experience with lions, but he fails to follow up the implications of that connection. The Bestiary lion was nothing more than an overgrown poodle, he asserts, and Chrétien's lion thus has about him more of the faithful dog than the lion (*felis leo*). Cohen's mistake is to view the animal from a modern naturalist's perspective, while the medieval bestiaryist (and, we may infer, Chrétien) views it from a moralist's.⁷

Jean Frappier recognizes the currency of just such ideas of nature as the Bestiary represents. "The precious stones, the animals, the colors, the numbers had a hidden meaning, a 'significance,'" he writes. "Confronting a text, a frequent attitude of the medieval scribe was that it was necessary to 'gloss the text,' as Marie de France says in the prologue to her *Lays*, or, again, to 'moralize,' to uncover a religious

signification, and this even in pagan fables.”⁸ But Frappier does not apply this insight to his interpretation of the poems. Despite the fact that “symbolism belonged to the intellectual equipment of the Middle Ages,”⁹ the actual influence on Chrétien’s work of this medieval way of seeing in visible things the vehicle of spiritual meaning, he concludes, was small. Chrétien’s interest lay rather in psychology, in the depiction of character. Frappier works out ingenious and complex psychological analyses of the characters’ behavior, but they do not correspond to our actual experience of the poems. More important, the twelfth-century poet was precluded by precisely the *ouillage mental* (intellectual equipment) of which Frappier speaks, the intellectual framework in which he worked, from so much as the conception of “psychology,” much less an overriding interest in it. Frappier’s subtle analysis of Laudine’s vacillation, for example, is impressive in the reading, but it does not correspond to the abrupt, psychologically coarse and humorous treatment we find when we return to the text. Again, he speaks of the character of Yvain as evolving. In fact, though, Chrétien shows us nothing like a continuous psychological evolution of character, but rather a series of static phases, each ushered in by an abrupt change in Yvain—his falling violently in love with Laudine at first sight, for example, or his plunge into desperate insanity, and the equally sudden cure miraculously effected by the damsels. Modern psychology sees character and behavior in Hegelian terms, as the synthesis of internal tension. But the medieval view of psychic states and their alterations is typified in the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, in which allegorized virtues struggle with, but ultimately triumph over the vices. In the medieval view, the tension between virtue and vice does not result in a third term, a synthesis, but in the unequivocal victory of one over the other.

As works of adaptation from pre-Christian sources, Chrétien’s romances are rather typical of their time than otherwise. So many of the literary works of the Middle Ages have non-Christian sources—classical, Germanic, and Celtic—that “Christianization” of alien materials might be considered the major characteristic of medieval literature. But it is a characteristic as misconstrued as it is pervasive. The question continually arises whether pagan sources have actually been assimilated into their new Christian context. Pious interpolators are suspected of having tampered with a pristine urtext. Sometimes the poet himself is said to have introduced Christian elements merely to

conform with necessary proprieties, even though he probably had little interest in serious religious ideas, which he must have found intrusive. Such efforts to distinguish and weed out newer from earlier literary material easily lead us away from a consideration of the work as it was actually received by its medieval audience.

Scholars disturbed by what they consider contamination of earlier sources overlook the empirical fact that real medieval audiences were willing to accept adulterated goods. One may legitimately pursue an interest in pre-Christian literature by extrapolation from surviving—and from that viewpoint genuinely contaminated—medieval texts. But if we wish to understand medieval literature on its own terms, our measure must be the actual values of medieval poets and their audiences. In this light, it is clearly irrelevant to ask whether a work of adaptation from pagan sources, *Beowulf*, for instance, or the *Nibelungenlied*, or Gottfried's *Tristan* has been fully "Christianized." Their audiences received these works in the context of Christian ideas so pervasive and so comprehensive that a poet did not need to evoke them explicitly to be understood in those terms. In fact, since medieval consciousness was Christian, not pagan, it could make sense of even explicitly pagan literature in no other terms. Christian theology constituted the medieval worldview. The question, then, is not *whether* the medieval poet and his audience understood a certain work to reflect Christian ideas and values, but rather *how* they understood it to do so.

As early as 1915, W.A. Nitze, in his important article on the relationship between Chrétien's meaning and his sources,¹⁰ argued that Chrétien's attitude toward the narrative materials on which he drew, the Celtic stories of adventure, was shaped by clerly exegesis of Scripture and the classics. "Whatever the source of his material, his meaning is essentially the product of the monastery schools of the twelfth century, modified however by the new and pressing needs of the life of French courts" (35–36).¹¹ The very word *meaning* (*sans*) as Chrétien employs it in *Lancelot* is adapted, according to Nitze, from the Latin exegetical term *sense* (*sensus*); the poet worked quite consciously in the tradition of patristic exegesis, even though he was perhaps equally conscious of the novelty of applying such techniques to literature in the vulgar tongue.

Not surprisingly, Nitze cites as parallel Dante's explanation in the letter to Can Grande of the four senses of allegory in the *Paradiso* by analogy with patristic exegesis of Scripture. Dante's letter is a

remarkable document, for it is not merely the judgment of some monkish commentator, but the statement of the poet himself, setting forth his own conscious intentions. The meaning of his work, Dante declares, is not simple but multiple; while there is a *literal* meaning, there are as well *allegorical* meanings indicated by the letter. He illustrates his method by analogy with the standard fourfold exegesis of Psalm 113:1.¹² Dante apparently intended his own poem to be understood in terms of a similar fourfold scheme.

Patristic exegesis was based largely on the principle of typology, that is, the discovery of analogy among events of sacred history, all of which are connected in the central focus of Christian time, the Incarnation. Jean Daniélou points out that the typology of the New Testament has its foundations in the Old Testament prophecies of the greater works, analogous to the divine works of the past, which God would ordain in the future: there was to be a New Deluge, a New Exodus, a New Paradise, and so on.

These prophecies constitute a primary typology that might be called eschatological, for the prophets saw these future events as happening at the end of time. The New Testament, therefore, did not invent typology, but simply showed that it was fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. With Jesus, in fact, these events of the end, of the fullness of time, are now accomplished. He is the New Adam with whom the time of the Paradise of the future has begun. In Him is already realized that destruction of the sinful world of which the Flood was the figure. In Him is accomplished the true Exodus which delivers the people of God from the tyranny of the demon. (5)

Thus, the events of the Old Testament are connected eschatologically with the end of time, and with the life of Christ. But they are connected by analogy with the life of the Church too; there is a sacramental as well as a Christological typology. The Deluge and the Crossing of the Red Sea, for example, are both figures of Baptism; the manna with which the Israelites were fed in the wilderness is a figure of the Eucharist, and so on. "This means," Daniélou explains, "that the sacraments carry on in our midst the *mirabilia*, the great works of God in the Old Testament and the New: for example, the Flood, the Passion and Baptism show us the same divine activity as carried out in three different eras of sacred history" (5).

Its transcendence of time is the key to understanding typology. A scriptural figure relates to its allegorical meaning not simply as a sign to its referent. Rather, typology reveals the underlying equivalence among seemingly disparate events scattered throughout history. Consequently, it undermines the significance of time; historical or temporal distinctions are discovered to be superficial only, merely “literal.” Time is carnal, but Scripture, in which letter and spirit are one, transcends it. As Auerbach writes:

A connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally—a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension (if I may be permitted to use this term for a temporal extension). It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding. The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event[s]. (64–65)

We can explain the unreality of time in Arthurian romance in similar terms: events are related spiritually; time, although it has great symbolic significance, has no convincing reality as causal or sequential order among events. Salvation occurs in the here and now. The cyclical nature of the liturgical calendar adumbrates the transcendence of the temporal realized through sacramental participation in the life of Christ. *Yvain* begins at Pentecost; *Erec*, at Easter; *Lancelot*, at the Feast of the Ascension.¹³ These are recognizably conventional openings in medieval romance: a sequence of knightly adventures is initiated at Arthur’s court amid the celebration of some feast of the Christian calendar—Christmas, or Easter, or Pentecost. To recognize a *topos* as such, however, is only the first step towards interpretation. For the *conventional* is so only insofar as it is commonly understood by its audience. The real convention at work here is this: the medieval author of romance typically employs the settings of the liturgical calendar to indicate major themes around which his work has been built.¹⁴

The source studies show us that Chrétien's romances are not constructed whole out of the poet's imagination, but are made up in large part of preexisting narrative materials, reordered and given new meaning. Accordingly, their allegorical significance is not constructed with the schematic integrity of poems like the *Psychomachia* or the *Commedia*, and we must not expect to find a continuous and consistent allegorical relationship between the levels of narrative and meaning. In fact, whereas the delimiting characteristics of a conventional allegorical figure—the representation of a virtue or vice as a woman, for instance—keep it quite isolated in both abstractness and particularity, typology tends to view all things and persons and events as potentially equivalent.¹⁵ Thus, such allegorized material is likely to be considerably more complex and difficult to interpret. Characters are not simple allegorical figures, nor even necessarily consistent in their signification. Events are not linked one to another by a consistent logic, but by a shifting logic. No single detail provides the key to understanding the whole meaning of the poem; the meaning emerges rather from the accumulation of significant details—sacramental analogies, scriptural echoes and parodies, conventional symbols, and the like. By and large, the poet has been guided by the possibilities that have appeared to him in the given material, rather than by a deliberate and absolute principle independent of the fiction.

Rosemond Tuve refers to this characteristic of romance when she speaks of "intermittently significant" allegory. "The word 'intermittent' does not indicate the stop and go of some mechanical inner traffic light but rather the greater or lesser penetration of details of an incident with metaphorical meaning, the incident as a whole lending itself to a metaphorical as well as a literal reading."¹⁶ The writer of this kind of allegory, she argues, is concerned with the creation of a total context of meaning, not with working out a consistent mechanism of equivalences. "I am not trying to show that symbolic meanings jerk about and reverse themselves irresponsibly," she writes, "but that the method of allegory forbids one to make rigid correspondences with objects; the writer is making a web of his connected meanings, not setting down notions in a picture-language of translatable signs" (430). Tuve explains the special character of an allegorical figure in romance. As in the typology of Scripture on which it was patterned, a figure in romance is not simply a sign for something else; rather, the figure *shares* the meaning of some other thing or event. So Yvain's

experience at the fountain of storms, for instance, is imbued with the meaning of baptism. But we are not meant to understand this adventure in the enchanted forest actually to be an allegorical representation of the sacrament administered in church. Our vision is, rather, of a chivalric life illumined and filled with sacramental meaning. Further, in her chapter "Imposed Allegory," Tuve enunciates the principle according to which we must understand such figures. It is the large context of meaning that emerges through the course of a romance, what she calls the "principal drift," that controls the significance of details. "The principal drift *governs* the meanings attributable to the incidents borne upon the stream; the latter cannot take their own moral direction as they choose" (235).

Approached in this light, the romances do reveal coherent patterns of meaning in the sequence of adventures their protagonists undertake—adventures that are otherwise confusing in their appearance of whimsy. In the stories he heard from itinerant story-tellers (*conteurs*), the poet presumably detected a "drift" of meaning that he reinforced and drew together in reworking the narratives, and it is rather in the structure of this allegorical meaning than in the story-line that the coherence of his romances will be found.¹⁷ The difficulty for the modern reader is that much that was commonplace for Chrétien's twelfth-century audience is now obscure. The connection between narrative and meaning depends often on what has become for us arcane and unrelated information. Yet the major equipment necessary to the interpretation of these romances is really quite basic: a knowledge of Scripture, and of common exegesis of important passages, such as is represented by the *Glossa Ordinaria*; a knowledge of the liturgy; an understanding of the sacraments and their administration; and access to such popular sources of symbolism as the Bestiary, lapidaries, and the like. Consultation of patristic writings may appear at times arcane, yet it is often the only way to retrieve what was common knowledge among sophisticates of the Middle Ages.

The meaning of these adventures lies in their analogical relation to events of sacred history and to the sacraments, through whose agency those events are caused to be present in our daily lives. Love and adventure are, as we have always understood, the subject of romance, but the meaning of love and adventure does not remain in the realm of secular courtly ideals alone, but transcends those fictional ideals to partake of the meaning of their spiritual counterparts, grace and

sacramental participation in the life of Christ. The road that leads to knightly adventure is the way also of spiritual perfection.

II

Remote as we are from the consciousness of the courtly society of twelfth-century France, we are lucky to have Chrétien's own indications how he wished his poems to be received. Even the audience for which they were intended, he apparently feared, was likely to listen with only the fleshly ear, not the ear of the spirit, and so fail to hear their inner meaning. Modern readers must be all the more alert to admonitions that even his contemporaries needed—an audience for whom romance-form and allegory were idiomatic, rather than quaint. That there is deeper significance than at once meets the eye in the fashionable Arthurian stories of adventure is covertly the principal theme of Chrétien's prologue to *Erec*:

The peasant says in his proverb
That one often holds a thing in contempt
That is worth much more than one thinks¹⁸

the poem begins. The proverb expresses a general principle: things aren't always what they seem; outward form may deceptively conceal inner reality. But the proverbial statement is itself in the form of an example of the principle: proverbs are themselves precious bits of wisdom, spoken in the mouths of peasants. The peasant's lowly appearance conceals—yet paradoxically reveals—the wisdom he carries within him. Unless you have a peasant to speak it, the wisdom of the proverb remains hidden. This paradox, that the revelation of truth depends on its concealment, that the relationship between outward form and inner reality is hidden, yet intimate, is the essential nature of parables and allegory.

Marie de France, probably writing in the generation after Chrétien, also raises the question of obscurity, for the same reason—namely, to admonish her audience to apply more than casual attention to the fictions of the Bretons, and to labor diligently to understand their inner meaning. She begins the prologue to her lays with a theme that Curtius shows to be a standard rhetorical *topos* of the exordium: “The

possession of wisdom makes it a duty to impart it.”¹⁹ Her words seem meant to recall Christ’s parable of the lamp (Mark 4:21):

Whoever God has given wisdom
And the eloquence of speaking well,
Ought not keep it silent or hide it,
Rather ought he willingly to show it forth.²⁰

Good words bring forth flowers, she goes on, somewhat covertly employing the symbolism that Christ elaborates in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:14). Words are sown in the ears of those who hear them:

When a great good is heard abroad,
Then it has come into its first bloom,
And when it is praised by still others,
Then its flowers have spread.²¹

But the word must fall on good soil, as Christ explains; that is to say, in the ears of those “who hear the word and receive it, and yield fruit, the one thirtyfold, another sixty, and another a hundred” (Mark 4:20). It is diligence in laboring to discover the inner meaning within the outer “husk” of the letter that distinguishes good “soil” from bad. The ancients, Marie says, customarily wrote their books obscurely for the sake of those who should come after them, that they might diligently apply themselves to the interpretation of the letter, and supply the remainder, that is the inner meaning, from their own wisdom.²² Such diligent study of the letter, as well as the author’s own diligence in writing, sharpens the intelligence and shows the way to eschew vice and sorrow, and therefore, for her own sake and the reader’s, Marie has thought of drawing the lays of the Breton *conteurs* into French.

Marie’s prologue is intended to reveal to the reader how the tales that follow are to be understood. The first tale is an adventure that she will show, she says, “according to the letter and the scripture.”²³ These words underscore the need for the reader to supply the remainder from his own wisdom, as she has put it a few lines earlier, for in using the terms “letter,” “scripture,” “sense,” and “gloss,” to describe the method of reading she requires, she evokes, as Leo Spitzer has observed, a very particular model of interpretation, namely patristic exegesis. “Marie de

France," he writes, "thinking 'medievally' . . . sees her own book as only another 'text,' which will be 'glossed,' after the model of the Old Testament commented on by Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, etc.—after the model of Virgil and Ovid 'moralized'" (96).

D.W. Robertson has argued that Marie's three terms *lettre*, *sens*, and *surplus* correspond precisely to the three parts of the standard exegetical reading of Scripture, *littera*, *sensus*, and *sententia*, that is, grammatical and syntactical analysis of the letter, determination of its literal signification, and determination of its spiritual, or allegorical meaning.²⁴ Spitzer takes the word *surplus* more literally to indicate simply an interpretation "super-added" to the literary work by the reader, but just the same, he concludes that Marie was thinking of "the gloss technique of biblical exegesis which, over the course of centuries, develops the whole meaning implied or latent in the text—the progress achieved by the latest readers being foreseen, as it were, by divine inspiration: even such 'this-worldly' poets as Marie de France . . . could not help but see their secular works in the same light as that of the sacred book, the Bible" (96).

The exegetical expectations of these "secular" poets, moreover, were not limited to technique. Spitzer calls Marie *clerc*, and *poeta philosophus et theologus*, by which he means that she is a serious poet, and no mere versifier or entertainer. Marie's work ought to be approached, he argues, in light of the conventional classical and medieval identification of poetry with philosophy, as well as with theology.²⁵ When in the prologues to both her lays and her fables Marie refers to ancient "philosophers" as her models, she is not distinguishing herself as poet from these "philosophers," but on the contrary identifying herself with them.

Marie's literary concerns are similar to those Chrétien takes up in his prologue to *Erec*. He too makes the conventional assertion of the folly of hiding the light of one's wisdom. He does well who turns his efforts to wisdom, he says, for whoever forgoes such efforts often conceals something that gives great pleasure. The labor that Chrétien is about to undertake, then, has two aspects: wisdom and pleasure. We are familiar with the same dichotomy under the terms *instruction* and *delight*, classically defined as the ends of poetry.

There are really two prologues in *Yvain*, spoken by the two story tellers, Chrétien himself and the fictional Calogrenant. In the interior prologue, Calogrenant, the knight who tells a story "not to his honor,

but to his shame," explains how to listen to what he is about to tell. Calogrenant admonishes the knights who have gathered at Arthur's court to listen not with their ears only, but also with their hearts. Calogrenant's theme of inner, that is to say, spiritual understanding contrasted with merely superficial, carnal understanding, parallels an idea basic to medieval biblical and literary interpretation, the distinction, epitomized by St. Paul, between the letter of a work and its spirit.²⁶

Paul's distinction between letter and spirit becomes, in the patristic commentaries, the underlying principle of exegesis. The idea is expressed in innumerable analogies, from the sublime analogy of the Incarnation—Christ's invisible divinity contained within yet shadowed forth by his visible humanity—to the commonplace analogy of the kernel within the shell, or as Chaucer's priest Sir John puts it, the "fruyt" within the "chaf." Of course, a scriptural text is true on the literal level also, but the literal sense contains within it a spiritual sense of higher, mystical truth, which it is the function of exegesis to reveal.

Chrétien's contemporary, Alanus de Insulis, puts in the mouth of his figure Natura a statement of poetics that shows this approach was not limited to the reading of the Bible. "In the superficial shell of the letter," Natura explains, "the poetic lyre sounds forth falsehood; but within, it speaks to those who hear, the secret of a higher understanding, so that the exterior shell of falseness having been cast away, the reader may discover within secretly the sweet kernel of truth."²⁷ Alanus here expresses the standard medieval approach to all serious literature.²⁸ W.A. Nitze has argued that Chrétien evokes this dichotomy explicitly in his prologue to *Lancelot* when he speaks of "narrative material" and its "signification" (*matiere et san*). Calogrenant implies the same distinction through the parallel contrast between the heart's interior understanding and the superficial hearing of the ear. *Yvain's* opening at Pentecost suggests the advent of the Holy Spirit as on the disciples in Acts, when, inspired to speak "in tongues," they were sent into the world to preach the "good news" of the Gospel (Acts 2:1–12):

Some told the news,
Others spoke of love . . .
And of the great good
The disciples of his covenant often derive from it.

(ll. 12–16)²⁹

Similarly, the Easter season of *Erec's* opening indicates the theme of death and resurrection. This sequence of knightly adventures begins, appropriately, in no ordinary forest, but *an la forest aventureuse* (l. 65), a realm in which the marvelous is commonplace, though nonetheless marvelous for that. The Forest of Adventure, the setting in which the Matter of Britain typically is acted out, is the literary descendant of the Other World of Celtic mythology, and just as Easter is a time of heightened spirituality, so this realm of marvels is a locus of heightened spirituality. Meanings here, precisely because of the marvelous nature of events, are obscure, but we sense their presence as we sense the presence of obscure meaning in the fragments that survive from Celtic mythology. This obscurity, which hides meaning in order to reveal it, and which, by posing the conundrum of its meaning, makes us more than usually aware of an inner reality that permeates also the everyday world, is the characteristic obscurity of allegory.

Knighthood can be best understood to be a type of the Christian soul, passing through the world, the "Forest of Adventure," in quest of salvation. Adventure, in these romances, is the form of spiritual perfection. "Adventure" and "advent" both derive from the Latin *advenire* "to come to," or "to happen." *Adventurus*, the Latin future participle, from which "adventure" most directly derives, characterizes that which is to come. The anticipation of advent, both the historical and the eschatological advents of Christ, as well as the advent of the Holy Spirit, of grace to the individual Christian as on the disciples at the first Christian Pentecost, is so central to the Christian faith and so pervasive in its theology that it need not seem overly ingenious to suggest that the poet was conscious of this verbal nexus. It is most evident in *Erec*, where the sequence of adventures, the hero's perfection as a knight, culminates in the season of Advent, so that the coronation of Erec on Christmas Day as earthly king is juxtaposed with the advent of Christ, King of Heaven.³⁰

Through the behavior of Erec, who ceases to function properly in the world of chivalry when he withdraws into the self-centered pursuit of pleasure with his new wife, the romance shows that it is foolish not to use to the utmost the talents God has given. But "one may know and show" this lesson as well by the example Chrétien himself sets in writing the poem in the first place, spreading his own wisdom abroad under the guise of fiction. Similarly, Marie's labor in translating the

Breton stories is exemplary of the very diligence she asks of her readers.

The seriousness of Chrétien's attitude toward his poetry, as well as the intimate relation of form and inner meaning, is attested by his passing remark that the story of Erec is often garbled by merely mercenary *conteurs* (storytellers). The story of adventure (l. 13) is, after all, that apparently worthless thing that turns out to be of great value. In fact, he asserts, punning on his name, this story will be remembered so long as Christianity lasts—an expression by which he means “a very long time,” but which also suggests the story is imbued with a particularly Christian meaning.

NOTES

1. Excerpted from pages 15–28 and 31–54 of *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's 'Erec' and 'Yvain.'*

2. Auerbach. “The Knight Sets Forth.” *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.* 107–24.

3. Loomis (1949) 38.

4. “Chrétien est un remarquable peintre de la femme, et il excelle à en montrer les revirements et les ruses.”

5. “Il s'applique avec une rare finesse à la montrer, sous l'adroite pression de la suivante, glissant de la douleur à la curiosité, et de la curiosité, à l'amour.”

6. “Mais c'est là un petit défaut inhérent au genre.”

7. Cf. C.S. Lewis 45–46.

8. Frappier (1957) 21: “Les pierres précieuses, les animaux, les couleurs, les nombres avaient un sens caché, une ‘senefiance.’ En face des textes, une disposition fréquente du clerc médiéval était qu’il fallait ‘gloser la lettre,’ comme dit Marie de France dans le prologue de ses *Lais*, ou encore ‘moraliser,’ découvrir une signification religieuse, et cela jusque dans les fables du paganisme.”

9. Frappier (1957) 21: “La symbolique appartenait à l’ ‘outillage mental’ du Moyen Age.”

10. “Sans et matière dans les oeuvres de Chrétien de Troyes.”

11. “Quelle que soit la source de sa matière, son sans . . . est essentiellement le produit des écoles monastiques du XII^e siècle, modifié toutefois pour satisfaire aux nouveaux et pressants besoins de la vie des cours françaises.”

12. DeNeef 209: "the literal, or surface meaning; the allegorical, referring to the Church; the tropological, pertaining to the spiritual constitution of the individual; and the anagogical, referring to the afterlife." Cf. also Frye (*Code*) 220–25.

13. But cf. Darrah 13 ff. His emphasis is diachronic, while mine is synchronic.

14. Schneider, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, shows that this fourteenth-century romance, for instance, is built around the meaning of Christmas and New Year (feast of the Circumcision).

15. Cf. C.S. Lewis 44 ff.

16. Tuve 391–92.

17. Cf. Luria ("The Christian Tempest"); Luria's chapter on *Yvain* has been published as "The Storm-making Spring and the Meaning of Chrétien's *Yvain*." D.W. Robertson, Jr. has outlined interpretations of *Cligés* and *Lancelot* in his *Preface to Chaucer*, 87–94 and 448–57. Less persuasive is the work of Urban T. Holmes, Jr., and Sister M. Amelia Klenke on scriptural and liturgical parallels in *Perceval*, gathered in their *Chrétien, Troyes, and the Grail*. Also of interest, though not concerned with the works of Chrétien, is Hans Schneider, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

18. "*Li vilains dit an son respit/ Que tel chose a l'an an despit,/ Qui mout vaut miauz que l'an ne cuide . . .*" Kristian von Troyes, *Erec und Enide*, 1,11. 1–3. Quotations from *Erec et Enide* are from this edition throughout. Quotations from *Yvain* are also from Foerster's critical text, *Chrestien de Troyes, Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*.

19. Curtius 87.

20. *Lais* (3): "*Qui deus a duné esciënce / e de parler bone eloquence, / ne s'en deit taisir ne celer, / ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer*" (ll. 1–4).

21. *Lais* (3): "*Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz, / dunc a primes est il fluriz, / e quant loëz est de plusurs, / dunc a espandues ses flurs*" (ll. 5–8).

22. For discussion of Marie's allusion to Priscian, see Donovan.

23. *Lais* (6): "*sulunc la lettre e l'escriture*" (l. 23).

24. Robertson (1949).

25. Spitzer bases his argument on Curtius; see his chapters 11 and 12, "Poetry and Philosophy," and "Poetry and Theology" (203–27).

26. "For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth." (2 Corinthians 3:6)

27. Quoted and translated in Huppé and Robertson (5).

28. See Huppé and Robertson (1–31).

29. *Li un racontoiënt noveles,*

Li autre parloient d'amors . . .

*Et des granz biens, qu'an ont sovant
Li deciple de son covant. (ll. 12–16)*

30. The adventure of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is similarly played out against the background of the Advent season and its meaning. Arthur will not by custom begin to eat at this feast until he has heard “*of sum aventurus thyng,*” which turns out to be the advent of the Green Knight.

CHAPTER 7

The Symbolic Use of a Turtledove for the Holy Spirit in Wolfram's *Parzival*¹

Anne Huntley-Speare

This essay, by focusing squarely on the textual evidence, attempts to get past the issue of projection. Regardless of the modern critic's own religious orientation, in medieval Europe the turtledove symbol exercised an exemplary function with a decidedly Christian core.

The stone is also called the Grail.

This very day there comes to it a message

wherein lies its greatest power.

Today is Good Friday, and they await there a dove, winging down from Heaven.²

—Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*

A turtledove appears on eight occasions in *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach: once near the beginning,³ three times shortly after the midpoint,⁴ and four times near the end of the narrative.⁵ The present study examines these occurrences critically, presenting textual and traditional evidence that the dove represents the Holy Spirit and analyzing the narrative contribution that this metaphor makes. This device is presumably original in Wolfram's reworking since it is entirely lacking in his French source, *The Story of Parceval (Le Roman de Perceval)* by Chrétien de Troyes.⁶ As a compositional element of Wolfram's account, the vital role of the turtledove figure is apparent from the above quotation: the dove transmits divine power to earth and

brings supreme energy and strength. The turtledove, as an active figure, is essential for the very life of the community centered on the Grail.

The word given in Wolfram's text is "turtledove" (*turteltûbe*), except for one instance each of "dove" (*tûbe*) and "little turtledove" (*turteltiubelîn*). These variations are apparently made necessary by the requirements of rhythm in one case and of rhyme in the other. According to the definition of New High German *Turteltaube* in Grimm's dictionary of the German language, the etymological roots of the term lie in the onomatopoetic Latin *turtur* for the first element, and the Old High German *-tuba* for the second part of the compound noun.⁷ The corresponding Middle English term *-douff(e)* is cognate with Middle High German *tûbe*.⁸

Several characteristics of the turtledove make it suitable for use as a symbol. It has a wide distribution: the original home of the creature is in Mesopotamia, from where it probably spread to the Celtic and the Germanic peoples by way of Italy.⁹ This bird flies rapidly, gracefully, and extensively (this last during its winter migrations to Africa).¹⁰ It eats mainly seeds and cereals.¹¹ Individual members are monogamous:¹² according to tradition, the turtledove remains faithful for life and mourns its dead mate.¹³ These features—territorial pervasiveness, nonpredatory gentleness, and lasting fidelity—are important elements in the metaphorical significance of this image. Based on these attributes, an allusion to love is particularly apt.

The symbolic use of a turtledove with references to a divine being and to affectionate devotion long predates Christianity. In Western and Eastern antiquity, from time immemorial a dove accompanied the goddess of love.¹⁴ From the third century A.D. comes to us by way of the Thorsberg Moor, presumably a principal cult location of the Angles, a frieze found on a sheet of silver that depicts a bird, possibly a dove, as one of five creatures denoting the attributes of Germanic gods.¹⁵ Again, the reference is to love: this figure alludes to Frigg or Freya, who shared connections to fertility.¹⁶ By the time of the High Middle Ages, however, the increasing dominance of Christianity in Germanic regions resulted in the adaptation or rejection of earlier imagery to conform with Christian thinking.¹⁷

In Christian usage, the dove continues to serve as a symbol of love, but it can also signify purity, peace, or the Holy Spirit. The idea of peace is only incidental to the present discussion of *Parzival*, however, and this concept is at any rate subordinate to the Holy Spirit as one of

its fruits.¹⁸ In contrast, the senses of love and the Holy Spirit figure far more importantly here. Theologically, they combine in the New Testament equations of God with love¹⁹ and with spirit.²⁰ This essay focuses first on the Holy Spirit and then on God as the embodiment of love in action.

The basis for representation of the Holy Spirit by a turtledove is the biblical account in all four Gospels of Jesus's baptism, followed immediately by the appearance of the Holy Spirit "descending like a dove" and alighting on him.²¹ This scene has for centuries captured the Christian imagination, as numerous paintings and other works of art attest.²² The choice of a bird to signify the transmission of divine power from God the Father—in the spiritual realm—to God the Son—in the physical realm—derives logically from the ancient equation of Heaven, or Paradise, with the heavens, or sky. The selection of a dove in particular²³ finds its explanation in the behavioral traits noted above.²⁴

On the occasion of Jesus's baptism, the Holy Spirit, symbolized in the figure of a dove, granted supernatural aid and presence to a human figure at the time of his dedication to and commencement of public ministry. Medieval Christian thinking extended this act to include giving assistance to other persons in leadership roles, particularly religious ones.

Beginning earlier and continuing beyond 1200, approximately when *Parzival* was written, there appear repeated, tangible examples of officials commemorating such aid with the symbolic figure of a dove. Several flags based on seals and dating from this time have a dove as a distinctive mark, perhaps also in combination with a cross (making the religious connotation unmistakable).²⁵

Among noted clergy, Pope Gregory XVI and William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, bore a dove or doves in their coats of arms.²⁶ In the political sphere, the coin and seal of Edward the Confessor (English king 1042–1066), as well as his posthumously-conferred arms, each incorporated a dove or doves in its composition.²⁷ Other leaders and institutions, including Westminster Abbey and School, borrowed Edward's device as part of their own.²⁸ In summary, visual evidence points to a perception during the High and Late Middle Ages of the Holy Spirit's support of pious human endeavor.

The account of Jesus's baptism, including the role played by the Holy Spirit, would have been well known to Wolfram and his readers or hearers. It therefore serves as the basis of this discussion. As

mentioned above, the foremost activity the dove performs at Jesus's baptism is to grant supernatural aid and presence to a human being. However, the act of alighting reveals four additional roles: the dove identifies the recipient of its attention, affirms the truth of his status, communicates love from a distant source, and invites others' acceptance of the designated one. The present study compares the functioning of the dove in Wolfram's *Parzival* to that in the four gospel accounts of Jesus's baptism.

THE EIGHT REFERENCES

The first mention in *Parzival* of a turtledove occurs in the introductory section on Parzival's heritage: Belakâne's happiness retreats with the departure of her beloved Gahmuret, Parzival's father. Wolfram compares her directly with a turtledove:²⁹

1.

Her joy sought the withered bough, as the turtledove still does, for
that bird was ever of the same mind:

When she a loved one loses, she
Will perch upon a withered tree.³⁰

Here the poet links the turtledove directly to inner qualities of joy, love, and faithfulness. There is no overt mention of the Holy Spirit. Indirectly, however, the connection is clear, considering St. Paul's enumeration in Galatians 5:22–23 of all three of these qualities among the fruits of the Spirit.³¹ The dove as depicted in this first selection from *Parzival* has a more nearly passive rather than active role: it chooses to withdraw from association with others, owing to the absence of the beloved. This behavior is typical for its species, as noted earlier.³² In this instance, the turtledove practices constancy and preserves hope while waiting patiently for a more propitious time for action.

The attitude underlying this behavior finds a parallel in the placement within the text of the several references to a turtledove. The author, by introducing this figure at the outset of the work, presents one of its important elements, but at the same time he indicates that the time

has not yet come for extended development of this theme. The narrator reveals this technique at the approximate midpoint of the tale:

From Trevrizent now Parzival will hear the mysteries of the Grail. Anyone who asked me before about the Grail and took me to task for not telling him was very much in the wrong. Kyot asked me not to reveal this, for Adventure commanded him to give it no thought until she herself, Adventure, should invite the telling, and then one *must* speak of it, of course.³³

The writer declares here that there are mysteries connected with the Grail, ones that he has deliberately kept secret until the internal progress of the narrative makes their disclosure necessary. Like the turtledove, he exercises patience for the sake of favorable timing.

The appropriate conditions for revelation, according to the organizational structure of the text, occur with Parzival's voluntary submission to God's unconditional leadership, recounted in the preceding thirty-line section. This step proves to be the turning point in the young man's efforts to find his way to the Grail castle, Munsalvaesche. Immediately after making this decision and spurring his horse onward, Parzival arrives at Fontân la salvâtsche, near his goal, where he receives further guidance from Trevrizent.

Soon after this moment, Wolfram mentions the turtledove for the second time. Its reintroduction at this juncture points toward its involvement with the secrets of the Grail, an assumption that receives confirmation in the following passages. On first meeting his nephew, Trevrizent reveals the source of the Grail's strength:

2.

The stone is also called the Grail. This very day there comes to it a message wherein lies its greatest power. Today is Good Friday, and they await there a dove, winging down from Heaven. It brings a small white wafer, and leaves it on the stone. Then, shining white, the dove soars up to Heaven again. Always on Good Friday it brings to the stone what I have just told you, and from that the stone derives whatever good fragrances of drink and food there are on earth, like to the perfection of Paradise. I mean all things the earth may bear. And further the stone provides whatever game lives beneath the heavens,

whether it flies or runs or swims. Thus, to the knightly brotherhood, does the power of the Grail give sustenance.³⁴

In this selection, already quoted in part in my opening remarks, the dove transmits divine power to earth, bringing the source of supreme energy and strength to the Grail stone.

The downward movement of the bird here is very similar to that in the account of Jesus's baptism. Once more, this figure brings supernatural aid to earth, demonstrating divine provision and care. The wafer it brings down to the stone symbolizes Christ's sacrificial death on Good Friday. The timing of this act, and the allusion to Communion bread—as Koppitz and Lewis point out in separate studies³⁵—make the connection unmistakable. As at Jesus's baptism, all three persons of the Trinity take part in the scene: God the Father as Giver from above, God the Son (represented by the wafer) as Reconciler between God and man,³⁶ and God the Holy Spirit (embodied in the dove) as the Messenger to humanity. These occasions share other similarities: in each one, the Father's role is clearly primary, the Son's is largely passive, and the Holy Spirit's is undoubtedly active. The dove's behavior in the present passage, contrasting with its passive waiting in connection with *Belakâne*, has shifted to vigorous performance. Its return to heaven does not signify permanent abandonment but rather temporary leave-taking, thanks to the habitual nature of its winged visitation. This creature reveals itself as a representation of the Holy Spirit by what it does, including where it flies.

In subsequent references, the turtledove that Wolfram depicts carries out the other four functions that characterize the Holy Spirit at Jesus's baptism. Firstly, this mark identifies its bearer (if a material emblem) or its recipient (if a spiritual signifier). In the third and fourth references, this sign distinguishes a horse or its saddle:

3.

[Trevrizent asks Parzival:] Sir, are you *Lehelin*? For in my stable stands a horse that looks exactly like the horses belonging to the company of the Grail. On the saddle is a turtledove. That horse comes from *Munsalvaesche*. It was *Anfortas* who assigned his knights this emblem, which formerly only their shields had borne when he was

still a man of joy. Titurel bequeathed this emblem to his son, *le roi* Frimutel, who, wearing it on his shield, lost his life in a joust.³⁷

4.

Then he [Gawan] said, "Is it you, Gringuljete, that Urians stole from me with his lying plea? He's good at that, but he ruined his honor by it just the same. Who has put such armor on you since then? If it is really you, God has sent you back to me already, as He often averts distress." He dismounted again, and then he noticed a mark: on its hock it was branded with a turtledove, the coat of arms of the Grail.³⁸

In both cases, the device identifies the horse as belonging originally to the Grail society. In references five through seven (quoted below), the turtledove decorates Cundrîe's garments; and in the eighth, it accompanies the Grail knights. Significantly, in almost every instance the turtledove appears on an article of clothing or a piece of equipment, not directly on the creature displaying it. The lone exception is the brand on Gringuljete's hock: this particular deviance is logically necessary because the new owner has replaced the original trappings.³⁹

Second, the emblem affirms to its viewers the truth of the designated one's status. Its appearance on Cundrîe's clothing in the following passage convinces Parzival of the verity of his appointment as the next Grail king:⁴⁰

5.

A maiden was now seen approaching: her garments were sumptuous and of fine cut; costly and of the French style was her hooded mantle of rich velvet blacker than a civet cat; Arabian gold gleamed thereon, wrought as many small turtledoves, the emblem of the Grail. Much was she gazed at in curiosity.⁴¹

Parzival cites the guarantor of her veracity in his response to Cundrîe's message:

6.

Your garments vouch for the truth of all this, for when I was at Munsalvaesche with the grieving Anfortas, all the shields I found hanging there were marked the same way as your garments, with the same turtledoves that you are now wearing.⁴²

Cundrîe's garments indicate her point of origin and source of authority by exhibiting the same sign as do the shields in Munsalvaesche, the castle pertaining to the Grail. In this way, they convince Parzival that her testimony is true.

Not long thereafter, when Parzival, Feirefiz, and Cundrîe enter the Grail Kingdom, her clothing again proclaims Parzival's special status. This time the observers are the Grail knights who come out to meet them:

7.

The leader of the group said, as soon as he saw the many turtledoves glittering on Cundrîe's garments, "Our grief has come to an end. With the Grail's insignia there comes to us here he whom we have ever desired since the rope of sorrow bound us. Halt! Great joy approaches us!"⁴³

The horsemen recognize Parzival by means of the turtledove device, which communicates to them a message of great joy. Cundrîe is returning with the person who will rescue their leader from his suffering.

Third, this symbol communicates love from a distant source. This function is discernible when Parzival rides out from the Grail Kingdom to meet Condwîrâmûrs, the wife from whom he has been separated for five years. His party's turtledove sign reminds Condwîrâmûrs's uncle and escort of the love his cherished wife bore him, now parted from him in death:

8.

The daylight was still grey, but Kyot immediately recognized the coat of arms of the Grail on the troop—they were marked with turtledoves.

The old man sighed, for Schoysiane, his gentle wife, had brought him happiness at Munsalvaesche until she died in giving birth to Sigune. Kyot advanced toward Parzival and welcomed him and his men with courtesy.⁴⁴

These lines suggest the supernatural power of the entity represented by the turtledove, since its ability to convey messages transcends even the dividing line of death.

Fourth, as at Jesus's baptism, the turtledove invites others to accept a favored one. In the previous selection, Kyôt's fond remembrance of the past leads to a favorable attitude in the present. The mark of the turtledove prompts Kyôt to welcome Parzival as the leader of the Grail company. On this occasion, one sees that time, as well as distance and death, proves no barrier to the functioning of the turtledove. The power it symbolizes evokes the past, affects the present, and shapes the future.

THE ARTISTIC FUNCTION OF THE DOVE

The turtledove in *Parzival* fulfills the one major and four additional tasks that the Holy Spirit performs at Jesus's baptism. Wolfram even preserves the relative proportions among the roles in the respective lengths he devotes to their treatment. His initial mention of a dove, while concerning itself more with the qualities it inspires rather than the functions it exercises, typifies the nature of its antecedent. The repeated and consistent occurrences of the turtledove motif in this narrative, taken together, display an apparent intentionality on the author's part. They offer, collectively, a detailed portrayal of the characteristic essence and behavior of the Holy Spirit.

The figure of a turtledove in Wolfram's *Parzival* is a theologically orthodox representation of the Holy Spirit: but the question then arises of the purpose its inclusion serves. The answer lies in the didactic aspect of Arthurian epic as a genre.⁴⁵ The hero's conduct is instructive as a model, whether positive or negative.⁴⁶ Parzival's behavior answers this description: his early wanderings and errors demonstrate undesirable behavior, but his later purposefulness and atonement illustrate exemplary conduct. In Wolfram's words, the hero becomes "slowly wise" (*traeclîche wîs*, Pz. 4,18). His progress is slow, but its tempo results not from insufficient desire but from faulty direction. The turning point comes when the wanderer follows God's leading instead

of his own desires. His reward for doing so is entry into and leadership of the Grail Kingdom. Parzival's suitability as a positive role model depends on his actions toward the end of the narrative: correspondingly, his conduct is instructive precisely in its portrayal of what one must do to achieve integration into the ideal society.

This realm of the Grail is Wolfram's literary creation, a remarkable and harmonious combination of courtly and Christian ideals, as critics have repeatedly noted.⁴⁷ One enters this realm not by self-determined striving, but by self-effacing submission to God's direction. This guidance comes from the spiritual sphere. As Trevrizent explains to Parzival, the means by which divine aid and presence come to man is the Holy Spirit, making the power of Christ's death and resurrection (embodied in the wafer) accessible.⁴⁸ This mediative function is the first of Wolfram's two reasons for depicting the Holy Spirit by means of the turtledove: if the author is going to invite emulation of the hero, he must show *how* one enters into the Grail Society. The vital, guiding role of the Holy Spirit in Parzival's attainment of the position of Grail King is confirmed by the day on which the announcement takes place:⁴⁹ Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit first came to the apostles.⁵⁰

It is not sufficient, however, for Wolfram to illustrate the method of entry into the Grail community without also portraying its means of maintenance. Here again, the turtledove figures prominently. In six instances in the text (the third through eighth references above), the turtledove as a symbol for the Holy Spirit is the insignia of the Grail Kingdom. Widespread use of an emblem for the purpose of identification,⁵¹ and its frequent equivalency in meaning with the person to whom it refers,⁵² are accepted matters of course for both the knightly society Wolfram addresses and the Grail community he depicts. The practice of followers bearing the same or a similar sign as their leader is likewise known.⁵³ By this choice of heraldic device, Wolfram marks the Grail society as under the command of the Holy Spirit and subject to identification in the same way. Its members, by behaving in the same ways and furthering the same goals as their head, work to preserve the distinctiveness of their community.⁵⁴

The use of the turtledove as a symbol for the Holy Spirit is, however, more complicated than the previous remarks might suggest. In Christian theology, the Holy Spirit is not a largely independent entity, but one of three persons of the Trinity.⁵⁵ As a result, the artistic function of the turtledove in Wolfram's *Parzival* is linked to the hero's

boyhood question about the nature of God: "Oh dear, Mother, what is God?" ("*Ôwê muoter, waz ist got?*" *Pz.* 119,17). Part of his mother's answer highlights God's love that leads to action, particularly in the form of assistance to mankind: "His fidelity has ever offered help to the world" (*sîn triuwe der werlde ie helpe bôt*, *Pz.* 119,24). As we have already seen, divine help may well come by means of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. In the New Testament scene of Jesus's baptism and in Parzival's second reference to a turtledove, this symbolic figure brings aid to Earth from Heaven.

Parzival himself ultimately receives assistance from a God who actively takes part in the affairs of man. Although the young man, when leaving Arthur's court, again inquires into the nature of God and doubts His power to intervene for good (*Pz.* 332, 1-16), Parzival's own inadequacies in finding the Grail Kingdom prompt him to reopen the issue and ask for help (*Pz.* 451,3 - 452,12).

This aid is immediately forthcoming. From then on, the recurring motif of the turtledove accompanies the now successful wayfarer as he reaches the Grail Kingdom and assumes its leadership.

Throughout the remainder of the tale, the symbolic figure of the turtledove guides the questing youth—as we have seen in the above references—to genuine insight into the nature of God. The culmination of such effort is Parzival's adoption of the characteristic behavior of the Holy Spirit, symbolized in the turtledove, as his own. For instance, the now exemplary figure offers outside assistance to another when he asks the cause of Anfortas's distress, implying a readiness to alleviate or correct the situation. Parzival performs additional roles characteristic of the Holy Spirit when he identifies his son Kardeiz as heir of his patrimonial lands and when he affirms the truth of this status by having the child crowned. He furthermore communicates love from a distant source when he goes to meet his wife after five years' separation and when he sends Kardeiz to assume a successor's duties. On this occasion, the father likewise follows the Holy Spirit's lead in inviting others (in this case, his vassals) to accept a favored one. From ignorance to doubt to belief to action, Parzival illustrates in his conduct the typical path followed by someone with an ever-increasing knowledge of the nature of God.

In Wolfram's *Parzival*, the artistic function of the turtledove proves effective in guiding the hero, and by implication the readers and hearers of the epic, to greater awareness and voluntary emulation of the

nature of God. As a result of Parzival's report to Trevrizent of Anfortas's recovery, the overjoyed hermit affirms God's benevolent and powerful nature in a response that derives from experiencing both severe trial and ultimate success:

And he said, "God has many secrets. Who hath ever sat in His council or who knoweth the end of His power? [Jeremiah 23:18] Not all the angels with their company of saints will ever come to know its limit. God is man and also His Father's Word, God is Father and Son, His Spirit can lend great aid."⁵⁶

Once more, the Holy Spirit is present in this description of a Triune God that offers divine aid.

According to the text, all people, like Parzival's half-brother Feirefiz at his baptism in the closing scenes of the work, stand to gain much from dedicating themselves to the service of the Triune God. The priest who officiates on that occasion gives the text's final answer to its theological inquiry into God's nature by affirming that His help is everywhere and His Trinity is all-powerful:

He said, "You shall believe—and thereby rob the Devil of your soul—in the Highest God alone, whose Trinity is universal and everywhere of equal yield.⁵⁷ God is man and His Father's Word. As He is both Father and Son, Who are held in equal honor, and of equal rank with His Spirit, may this water fend heathenry from you with the full power of all Three . . ."⁵⁸

These words affirm that the Holy Spirit, of equal rank with the Father and the Son in the Trinity, is present and active in the act of baptism. For readers and hearers of Wolfram's tale, as for Parzival and Feirefiz, the presumed result of submitting unconditionally to God's leadership is access to God's mighty power and great aid.

It is only appropriate, in the light of our present discussion, that the same person who first informed his nephew of the turtledove's crucial role in the Grail society⁵⁹ rejoice, with Parzival at Anfortas's recovery,⁶⁰ and that the one who now leads this group travel under a banner with that very emblem.⁶¹ It remains then at the conclusion of the tale for Wolfram's public to join the Grail King and Community in heeding the sign of the turtledove and adopting the behavior of the

entity it represents, the Holy Spirit of the Trinity. In so doing, Wolfram seems to be saying, the audience will fulfill his apparent purpose in introducing this symbol into an Arthurian epic with Christian as well as secular overtones.⁶²

NOTES

1. In slightly different form, this material was presented at the Thirtieth International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo 1995), and in *Mystics' Quarterly* 22 (1996): 111–30.

2. *der stein ist ouch genant der grâl.
dar ûf kumt hiute ein botschaft,
dar an doch lît sîn hôhste craft.
Ez ist hiute der karvrîtac,
daz man vâr wâr dâ warten mac,
ein tûbe von himel swinget.*

Pz. 469,28 - 470,3. Translation by Mustard and Passage, page 252.

Subsequent references in this essay cite these two sources. Section and line numbers are from Lachmann's Middle High German edition.

3. Pz. 57, 10–14.

4. Pz. 469,28–470–20; 474,1–13; and 540,17–27.

5. Pz. 778,16–25; 783, 18–23; 792,25–793,2; and 800,1–10.

6. Chrétien de Troyes. *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*. Ed. William Roach. Instead, there are mentions of Pentecost (lines 3961, 10257 and 10470 in the Potvin edition or lines 2785, 8888 and 9103 in the 1932 Hilka edition), the Trinity (line 8006 or 6640) and the Holy Spirit (6454 or 5076).

7. "Turteltaube." Grimm, col. 1907.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Schneeweis, col. 693.

10. Smith and Wilson 353–56.

11. Smith and Wilson 356–57.

12. Smith and Wilson 357; and Schneeweis, col. 694.

13. Schneeweis, col. 694; Gertrude Jaron Lewis 111–12; and Spitzer ("Zweig") 270–73 plus ("Correspondence") 620. Willson (100–101) quotes from St. Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, repeating descriptions of a widowed turtledove, with explicit reference to Belakâne.

14. Scheibelreiter 83. Gertrud Jaron Lewis 110 cites ancient and medieval linkages of the turtledove with love, faithfulness, and chastity.

15. Scheibelreiter 83–84.
16. Scheibelreiter 81, 83.
17. Scheibelreiter 86.
18. Galatians 5:22–23 lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The more expanded symbol for peace is a turtledove with an olive branch in its mouth. The biblical source of this image is Genesis 8:8–12, the account of Noah's sending out a dove to discover whether the waters of the Flood had subsided. When the dove returned bearing an olive leaf, Noah knew that the crest of God's wrath toward mankind had passed. The reappearance of dry land was an indication of reconciliation between God and man.
19. 1 John 4:8b.
20. John 4:24a and 2 Corinthians 3:17a.
21. Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, and John 1:32.
22. Gánter Ristow provides a variety of examples with commentary.
23. Zips 377, qtd. in Gertrude Jaron Lewis 113.
24. Lakoff and Johnson 40 summarize beautifully the reasons underlying the metonymy of the dove for the Holy Spirit.
25. Galbreath 254.
26. Hall 73.
27. Scott-Giles 33–34.
28. Scott-Giles 32–34 and 119–120; and Dennys 106–108.
29. See also Willson 100–101.
30. *ir vröude vant den dárren zwîc,
als noch diu turteltûbe tuot.
diu het ie den selben muot:
swenn ir an trûtscheft gebrast,
ir triuwe kôs den dárren ast.*

Pz. 57, 10–14; trans. Mustard and Passage 32.

Mustard and Passage's prose translation suddenly arranges these two lines as a rhymed couplet—a means of emphasis significant for the present discussion.

31. Arguably, every single one of the attributes St. Paul lists applies to the turtledove in this instance: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (New International Version)

32. See note 13.

33. *an dem [Trevrizent] ervert nu Parzivâl
diu verholnen maere umbe den grâl.
Swer mich dervon ê vrâgte*

*unt drumbe mit mir bâgte,
ob ichs im niht sagte,
unprîs der dran bejagte.
mich bat ez helen Kyôt,
wand im diu âventiure gebôt
daz es immer man gedaechte,
ê ez diu âventiure braechte
mit worten an der maere gruoz
daz man dervon doch sprechen muoz.*

(Pz. 452,29–453,10; trans. Mustard and Passage 243).

34. *der stein ist ouch genant der grâl.
dar ûf kumt hiute ein botschaft,
dar an doch lît sîn hôhste craft.
Ez ist hiute der karvrîtac,
daz man vâr wâr dâ warten mac,
eine tûbe von himel swinget:
ûf den stein diu bringet
ein cleine wîze oblât.
ûf dem steine si die lât:
diu tûbe ist durchliuhtec blanc,
ze himel tuot si widerwanc.
immer alle karvrîtage
bringet si ûf den, als ich iu sage,
dâ von der stein enpfæhet
swaz guotes ûf erden draehet
von trinken unt von spîse,
als den wunsch von pardîse:
ich mein swaz diu erde mac gebern.
der stein si vârbaz mêr sol wern
swaz wildes underm lufte lebt,
ez vliege oder louffe, unt daz swebt.
der ritterlîchen bruoderschaft,
die pfrâende in gît des grâles craft.*

Pz. 469,28 - 470,20; trans. Mustard and Passage 252.

35. Koppitz 205; and Gertrude Jaron Lewis 113. *Oblate*, Grimm, col. 1109 traces this word to Latin *oblata* (or *hostia*) and *oblatum*, the offering proffered in Mass. Grimm cites Pz. 470,5 as an illustration of this religious definition.

36. Ephesians 2:11–16.
37. [*Trevrizent fragt Parzival:*]
Hêrre, sît irz Lâhelîn?
sô stêt in dem stalle mîn
den orsen ein ors gelîch gevar,
diu dâ hoernt an des grâles schar.
ame satel ein turteltûbe stêt:
daz ors von Munsalvaesche gêt.
diu wâpen gap in Anfortas,
dô er der vröuden hêrre was.
ir schilte sint von alter sô:
Tytarel si brâhte dô
an sînen sun rois Frimutel:
dar unde vlôs der degen snel
von einer tjoste ouch sînen lîp.

Pz 474, 1–13; trans. Mustard and Passage 254.

38. *dô sprach er [Gâwân] 'bistuz Gringuljete?*
daz Urjâns mit valscher bete,
er weiz wol wie, an mir erwarp:
dâ von iedoch sîn prîs verdarp.
wer hât dich sus gewâpent sider?
ob du ez bist, got hât dich wider
mir schône gesendet,
der dicke kumber wendet.'
er erbeizte drab. ein marc er vant:
des grâles wâpen was gebrant,
ein turteltûbe, an sînen buoc.

Pz. 540, 17–27; trans. Mustard and Passage 287.

39. Gertrude Jaron Lewis 121–125 examines how Gringuljete enters and re-enters Gâwân's possession and how the horse foreshadows and mirrors Gâwân's state.

40. Gertrude Jaron Lewis 111.
41. *man sach ein juncvrouwen komen,*
ir cleider tiure und wol gesniten,
kostbaere nâch Franzoyser siten.
ir kappe ein rîcher samît
noch swerzer denn ein gênît.

*arâbesch golt gap drûffe schîn,
wol geworht manc turteltiubelîn.
nâch dem insigel des grâles.
si wart des selben mâles
beschouwet vil durch wunders ger.*

Pz. 778, 16–25; trans. Mustard and Passage 404–5.

42. *die wârheit sagt mir iuwer wât.
dô ich ze Munsalvaesche was
bî dem trûrgen Anfortas,
swaz ich dâ schilde hangen vant,
die wârnen gemâl als iuwer gewant:
vil turteltûben tragt ir hie.*

Pz. 783, 18–2; trans. Mustard and Passage 407.

43. *der selben rotte meister sprach,
dô er vil turteltûben sach
glesten ab Cundrien wât,
'unser sorge ein ende hât:
mit des grâles insigel hie
kumt uns des wir gerten ie,
Sît uns der jâmerstric beslôz.
habt stille: uns naehet vröude grôz.'*

Pz. 792,25 - 793,2; trans. Mustard and Passage 413.

44. *Des tages blic was dennoch grâ.
Kyôt iedoch erkante aldâ
des grâles wâpen an der schar:
si vuorten turteltûben gar.
do ersiufte sîn alter lîp,
wan Schoysiâne sîn kiusche wîp
ze Munsalvaesche im saelde erwarp,
diu von Sigûnen gebârte erstarp.
Kyôt gein Parzivâle gienc,
in unt die sîne er wol enpfienc*

Pz. 800, 1–10; trans. Mustard and Passage 417.

45. Several thumbnail descriptions of this genre emphasize its instructional value. See for example Lacy ("Typology") 38–46; and W.T.H. Jackson 137–38.

On the other hand, Peters 486 warns against a one-sided overemphasis on the instructive value of an Arthurian epic. Kratz (see his chapter in the present volume) argues against a Christian reading of Arthurian literature.

46. W.T.H. Jackson (vii): “Epics always have strong social overtones. They are always thought of as presenting some kind of model for behavior in a particular society...”

47. Spiewok 2:701; Mustard and Passage, viii-ix; Keferstein 96–103; Koppitz 241–44; and Haferland 296.

48. See the second reference above.

49. Haferland 263–70 calculates the date with the help of textual references.

50. Acts 2:1–41.

51. Scott-Giles 2; Galbreath 17; Dennys 33–37; and Gertrude Jaron Lewis 103–12.

52. Scott-Giles 5–7; Galbreath 275–77; Dennys 24; and Hall throughout. Gertrude Jaron Lewis 103 writes of a possible identification of animal and character.

In *Parzival*, once the hero slays Ithêr and takes his armor, Wolfram vividly illustrates the perception that the heraldic sign applies to its bearer by transferring Ithêr's title “the Red Knight” to Parzival.

53. Scott-Giles 7–8; Galbreath 29–30 and 235; and Dennys 37–42. In Wolfram's *Willehalm* (sec. 329, lines 1–20 and 332,21 - 333,8), each contingent under Willehalm's command receives instructions to share the flag and the battle-cry of its commander.

54. Haferland (281–83) cites Rupert von Deutz's schematization of religious history according to the Trinity, placing the history of the Church (after the resurrection of Christ) in the age of the Holy Spirit. Haferland also mentions Joachim of Fiore's revision, designating Pentecost as the start of a third age in a future of yet undetermined date. Haferland later (288) names an age of the Holy Spirit in *Parzival*—the time of Parzival's kingship of the Grail society.

See below for specific instances of the characteristic conduct of the members of the Grail kingdom.

55. Daniélou (“Le symbolisme” 35) credits the Council of Nicaea with making the doctrine of the Trinity clear. Southern (61–67) traces the divergence in subsequent formulations of the Nicene Creed (A.D. 381). Greek wordings differ from Latin in their description of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Southern also summarizes the extent of the influence of each interpretation.

56. *dô sprach er 'got vil tougen hât.
wer gesaz ie an sînen rât,
oder wer weiz ende sîner craft?
al die engel mit ir geselleschaft
bevindent ez nimmer an den ort.
got ist mensch unt sîns vater wort,
got ist vater unde sun,
sîn geist mac grôze helfe tuon.'*

Pz. 797,23–30; trans. Mustard and Passage 415–6.

57. Mustard and Passage note at this point (425): “Wolfram’s word here is *gurbort*, which has the dual meaning of land cultivated to yield crops and land yielding income from taxes. The statement signifies: ‘God helps everywhere.’”

58. *der sprach 'ir sult gelouben,
iuwer sêle den tiuvel rouben,
an den hôhsten got al eine,
des drîvalt ist gemeine
und al gelîche gurbort.
got ist mensch und sîns vater wort.
sît er ist vater unde kint,
die al gelîche geêret sint,
eben hêre sîme geiste,
mit der drîer volleiste
wert iu diz wazzer heidenschaft,
mit der Trinitâte craft. . . .'*

Pz. 817,11–22 (Mustard and Passage 425–6)

59. See the second reference to a turtledove, quoted earlier.

60. See the quotation in note 56.

61. See the eighth reference, given earlier.

62. See note 47.

CHAPTER 8

The Crusades and Wolfram's *Parzival*¹

Henry Kratz

Henry Kratz is a vigorous critic of Arthurian christianism.² The connection between the Crusades and Wolfram's Parzival makes ready sense within the political-economic framework of feudalism: fighting for the cause of Christianity constitutes service to both a temporal and an eternal Lord, and will be well rewarded, perhaps by both but certainly by the latter. Nor do Wolfram's allusions to the Crusades add up to a concrete portrait of some particular representative of contemporary Christendom. The Grail Knights may well be modeled on the Knights Templar, but not in order to sharpen our picture of Richard the Lion-Hearted.

What if Wolfram's Book I originally had nothing to do with the rest of the story? The Anjou (Richard) material has a bearing on the structure of Wolfram's masterpiece.

In addition to his own robust reading, Kratz affords fellow readers a road map to the secondary literature (Total Evaluation 5–8).

THE CRUSADES AS A PRODUCT OF THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK OF FEUDALISM

Wolfram's work must be viewed against the backdrop of his time, in the light of the ideas and institutions of the ideal chivalry that flourished in the courtly romance of the High Middle Ages. To what extent these chivalric ideals were embraced and practiced in real life, and to what extent they were a literary convention, is at this distance not so easy to tell.

The feudal relationship of service and reward is basic in the social system of the period: in return for his service to his lord, the vassal is rewarded by the latter. The reality of the feudal world is seldom stressed in the Arthurian romances, yet in the real world all of life must have been pervaded by the complicated contracts between lord and vassal, with the attendant breaches of contract, the inevitable grumbling over niggardly lords or disloyal vassals, the currying of favor for promising fiefs or benefices, etc. We hear only distant echoes of this world in the romances. The typical lord is generosity itself, and delights in bestowing rich gifts upon his loyal subjects and friends.

The concepts of feudalism so permeate all of life that they are transferred from the political sphere to other areas as well. Thus the knight tends to look upon his relation to God in the same light as his relationship to his liege lord: he serves him (in worship, in fighting for the cause of Christianity) for his reward (presumably life after death). This concept is carried by Parzival to its most drastic conclusion when he renounces his allegiance to God, as if he were a feudal lord who did not live up to his end of the contract:

“I gave allegiance to him in service,
expecting mercy in return.
Now I am renouncing my service to him:
if he hates me for this I’ll bear it.”³

Scholars tend to look upon Parzival’s view of religion at this point in his life as incredibly naive and/or sinful, so that to attain the Grail Kingship he has to undergo a complete transformation of character. The idea of a service-reward relationship between God and man is too primitive to be taken seriously. But all the indications in the work are that such is precisely the view of God that Wolfram has. Parzival’s error is not in viewing his relationship to God in feudal terms, not even in renouncing God, but in believing that God cannot (or will not) help us, that is, reward us. When Parzival comes to Trevrizent and complains that God does not help him, Trevrizent does not chide him for his feudal picture of God, but rather tries to convince him that God really does help us all.⁴

It has often been remarked that the clergy play a negligible role in Parzival. While at one point Wolfram pays lip-service to them, the very tone of the words he uses (“one must protect women and priests”)

hardly suggests great respect. It is true that there are two rather saintly recluses in the work, but neither of them, Sigune nor Trevrizent, is a true ecclesiastic. Sigune's primary allegiance is to her dead lover, Schionatulander, and her saintliness consists in her great devotion to him and to ideal love rather than to God. Trevrizent leads the life of a holy man, but he is a retired knight, and has adopted the life he leads as a sacrifice in the hope of helping his brother. It is made clear in the work that he is able to make an impression upon Parzival by virtue of the fact that he is of the knightly classes, and understands their problems.

The vocabulary and the concepts of the feudal relationship are also extended to the erotic sphere.

GAHMURET AND FEIREFIZ

The question of the source of the first two books of *Parzival*, which have no counterpart in Chrétien's work, has long been a thorn in the side of scholarship. Those who believe in Wolfram's alleged source Kyot use these two books as evidence for their belief.⁵ Others have maintained that Wolfram compiled these two books out of material taken from one source or another, and fitted them in with what he had taken from Chrétien. Modern research has shown quite clearly that other influences are manifest in them. There is a quite evident kinship between them and the older prechivalric German epics of the twelfth century, such as *König Rother*, *Herzog Ernst*, *Kaiserchronik*, and *Alexanderlied*, at least with regard to the locale, the colorful Fairy Tale Orient (*Märchen-Orient*) (Kuhn, *DVjs* 165) of the Middle East—a reflex of the early Crusades and an attempt, says Kuhn (175), at a reinterpretation of a collective consciousness.

Some scholars have seen the inspiration for Wolfram's Gahmuret in the deeds and character of Richard the Lion-Hearted. While this possibility was alluded to in earlier works (cf. Richey 52), the principal studies are those of Panzer (*Gahmuret*) and Snelleman (*Haus Anjou*), who arrived at their similar conclusions independently of each other at approximately the same time. Panzer (63–67) lists nine similarities between Gahmuret and Richard:

1. Both are lords of Anjou, and reign over Norgals and Waleis (North and South Wales).

2. Gahmuret's coat of arms, after he settles down, is a black panther (101,7–8); Richard's (according to a travelogue of the day)⁶ was likewise a beast of prey.⁷
3. Gahmuret is a younger son who ascends the throne upon the death of his brother, who is already the king. Richard's older brother, Henry, had already been crowned when he died suddenly at the age of twenty-eight. Snelleman (22–25) regards Gahmuret's departure from Anshouwe and his brother as a reflex of the historical situation that existed between Richard and his older brother Henry. His father, Henry II, had originally intended leaving England to his eldest son, and Eleanor's inheritance to Richard. Later he changed his mind, and demanded that Richard take an oath of vassalage to Henry. This Richard refused to do, and retreated to Aquitaine to defend his lands. Snelleman regards Gahmuret's refusal to accept Galoes's handshake (*hantgemælde*), friendly as it is, as the watered-down equivalent of Richard's defiance of his brother and father.
4. Gahmuret (8,17 ff.) speaks of chivalric love-journeys he and his brother made together, and his brother dies near Muntori on such a journey. Richard's brother Henry was known as a model knight who made many such trips, and who died during a campaign waged against his father and brother (1183).
5. Both Gahmuret (cf. *P* 10,12–12,2) and Richard were close to their mothers. Richard's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, supported the latter against Henry, suffered prison for him, ruled England for him when he was away on the Third Crusade, raised a ransom for him, and took it to Germany, even though she was in her seventies.
6. Since childhood Gahmuret had been closely connected with Amphlise, "Queen of France" (*rêgin de Franze*) (*P* 76,13), who had taught him much about chivalry, who had made him gifts, who offered him her hand and crown, and objected strongly to his marrying Herzeloyde. Richard was betrothed by his father when he was eleven years old to Adelaide, age eight, daughter of Louis VII of France. But Richard and his father held back in spite of France's urging, and when Richard came to Sicily on his Crusade, he became engaged to Berengaria, daughter of Sancho of Navarre.

7. Gahmuret goes to the Orient, does valorous deeds in the service of the Baruc, and when his ship is driven by a storm upon a strange coast, he wins a crown and a queen. Richard on his way to the East is shipwrecked on Cyprus, and there marries Berengaria. He does valorous deeds at Ptolemais, Arsuf, Joppe, etc. He has dealings with Saladin and his brother Malek al Adel, for which he is later reproached. Arab writers say that he offers to marry his sister Johanna, the widow of King William of Sicily, to Saladin's brother.
8. Gahmuret had Saracens in his retinue at Patelamunt and Kanvoleis, and Richard had Saracens among his troops in France that fought against Philip Augustus.
9. Gahmuret dies of battle wounds acquired at Baldac, and Richard dies of battle wounds acquired near Limoges.

While these parallels are undeniably striking, it should be pointed out that there are also many ways in which the two men do *not* coincide. For example, probably the three best-known facts about Richard are his kingship of England, his participation in the Third Crusade, and his being held for ransom in Austria. There is no parallel to any of these facts in the career of Gahmuret. Even though Richard was known to have been on friendly terms with Saladin, it is a far cry from this friendship between two enemies to the outright service that Gahmuret renders the Baruc. Also, while Gahmuret marries a pagan woman, Richard did not. Panzer explains these divergences in part by claiming that Wolfram tried to erase his trail. He changed the capital of Anjou (Angers) to Bealzenan, did not mention England, and gave the Angevins names far removed from historical reality. But why, may we ask, does he not change the name of Anjou, which would have been much more likely to give away the secret?

If one excepts the name of Anjou, there is very little, actually, that Gahmuret had in common with Richard that he did not equally well have in common with many other crusaders. The question still remains: why Anjou? If Wolfram meant to glorify Richard so that he would be recognized, he certainly would have used the other characteristics mentioned above. If he meant to conceal him, he would have concealed the name of Anjou. I am of the opinion that Anjou was contained in his source material, which, however, told a tale with a different hero, or at

best a highly fictionalized Richard. If some of the traits of Richard were added by Wolfram they are mere gratuitous embellishments.

Snelleman adduces further evidence to support his allegation that Richard I is the model for Gahmuret. His argumentation is a little confusing, because he seems to regard evidence of the influence of the Third Crusade, or the Crusades in general, or the Orient in general, as being at the same time proof of Richard's influence. Now, that there is a strong Oriental influence upon *Parzival*, stemming for the most part from the Crusades, no one would deny. But that this influence should always point toward Richard is not so readily apparent. Snelleman asserts (77) that the route of Richard's crusade can be traced "almost in its entirety" in *Parzival*, that is, in the place names in *Parzival*; but when we examine his material, we find that most of the names are such as would be known to any well-informed man of the period, and are, moreover, not mentioned in the order Richard must have encountered them on his crusade. Indeed, many of them are not even connected with Gahmuret, but occur later in the story, some in the Gawan sections. Wîzsant (Witsand) in England, from which the Angevin kings (according to Snelleman) often set sail, is merely used proverbially ("from Paris to Witsand"/"von Pâris unz an Wîzsant"—note that it also appears in *Willehalm* 366,28). Rouen in Normandy, where the Angevins "may have assembled their troops" (78) is mentioned in *Parzival* only in a speech by Killirjacac (47,14 ff.) in which he tells Gahmuret how he came to the East. Some Spanish names are included (like *Dôlet* [Toledo], *Spâne*, *Sibilje* [Seville], *Averre* [Navarre?]), which Snelleman looks upon as reminiscent of the many skirmishes in Spain that crusaders took part in. But, after all, Richard did not go to Spain on his way to Palestine.

Among the Oriental names that are so well-known as to be meaningless, and which Snelleman (81) cites in this connection, are *Baldac* (Bagdad), *Persiâ*, *Damasc*, *Hâlap* (Aleppo), *Kaukasas*, *Acratôn*. The name of the castle where Clinschor was castrated, *Kalot enbolot*, and the name of Clinschor's country, *Terre de Lâbûr* (656,14) point, it is true, to Sicily, which Henry VI conquered from his base at Terra di Lavour, and where Tancred's widow fled to the fortress Kalata bellota; but again, not specifically to Richard or the route of his crusade. Nor does the name *Ascalûn* (again, in the Gawan section!) necessarily point to Richard, even though it "bore witness to so many of Richard's deeds of valor." It was a name known far and wide. And if

indeed *Zazamanc* is a corruption of *Casa Mansa* in Ethiopia, mentioned by Marco Polo, there is no direct connection with Richard, who never went there.

Snelleman also points (82; 113–21), as did Hagan before him (*ZfdPh* 38,20 ff.), to the similarity between the route taken by Trevrizent in the chivalrous journey of his younger days and that taken by Richard on his return to England, as narrated in the chronicles of Coggeshall and Hoveden. This may well be true. But it is strange that it is Trevrizent rather than Gahmuret that takes the route. Snelleman (140–42) believes that the apparent patterning of the Grail knights after the Knights Templar may be due to the close connections between Richard and the Templars, one of whom was supposed to have accompanied Richard on his ill-fated trip homeward. Is, he asks, Trevrizent, the model of a good Templar, meant to suggest this knight, or even Richard himself, who, according to one version of the story, was disguised as a Templar? At any rate, this route was such a common trade route across Europe that Wolfram may well have used it without any thought of Richard at all.

Snelleman also maintains (86–89) that the Baruc's foremost antagonists, Pompeius and Ipomidon of *Babylôn* (Cairo) were no others than Saladin and his brother Saphadin, who struggled with other Moslem rulers for the possession of Egypt. In these struggles the Christian princes in Palestine often took sides, so that Gahmuret, a Christian fighting in the ranks of the Baruc against Saladin and Saphadin, could be based on historical fact. Wolfram asserts that the two brothers' uncle was Nabuchodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar), and Snelleman claims this was a common association, due to confusion with the ancient Babylon of the Bible. He cites Coggeshall, who states that Saladin, king of Babylon, conquered Babylon the way Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had done in Biblical times.

But, if Saladin and Saphardin are meant by the *Babylône* (*P.* 21,20), then can we really maintain that the Baruc, their antagonist, is also meant to represent Saladin?

Snelleman (90–92) notes other touches of the Orient in *Parzival*, such as various military innovations that came from the East to the West, including the defensive outer fortifications of castles (cf. 376,1; 386,12); bowmen (*turkople*, 386,7); "Greek fire" (205,28). The latter was used with success by the Saracens against a Christian fleet commanded by Richard, and is mentioned by Hoveden. Again, none of

these point directly to Richard. The Greek fire does not appear in the Gahmuret adventures, but rather was brought to the defenders of Pelrapeire by the ship that brought them provisions. Nor is the mention of camp followers in the Gawan section (341,19) any real indication that Wolfram was thinking of the "strict measures" that Richard had to take against such people on his crusade.

The material that Snelleman presents in the last section of his work militates against rather than for his main thesis. He cites many examples of Oriental influence to be found in *Parzival*—reflexes of Arab superiority in medicine, astrology, textile manufacture, tapestry-weaving, the abundance of Oriental gems and spices. Snelleman also stresses the possible Oriental influence on Wolfram's conception of the Grail and the ceremonies at the Grail Castle, on the appearance of Cundrie, etc. The very universality of this influence makes dubious any theory that would trace it to a single source or to events or a milieu surrounding a single figure. Wolfram must have had access to all sorts of material pertaining to the East and the Crusades—from oral reports and tall tales of crusaders returned from the Holy Land to learned or semi-learned accounts of pagan astrology and astrologers. Among this material there were undoubtedly tales of Richard the Lion-Hearted, and it is not surprising that traces of this material should appear in Wolfram's work. While Bumke's contention (1964, 38) that the similarities between Richard and Gahmuret are confined to a few superficialities dismisses the evidence too easily, I find it hard to believe that Richard was the inspiration for the character of Gahmuret.

BOOK ONE (WOLFRAM'S *PARZIVAL*)

All of the studies dealing with the Introduction regard it as an entity in itself, and bestow high praise upon its composition. It does, of course, relate the adventures of Gahmuret, and thus possesses a certain unity. But, if we examine it closely it becomes apparent that there are considerable differences between Books 1 and 2. In Book 1, from the end of the Prologue almost till the end of the book (Gahmuret's letter to Belakane, 55,21–56,26), there is, with one exception, no mention of Parzival, of Herzeloyde, of Gawan or King Arthur, of Waleis, of Sigune, or any of the many other characters and places that figure so prominently in the main body of the work.⁸ Divested of the Prologue and the one letter of Gahmuret's in which he claims kinship to Arthur,

the first book tells a tale that goes like this: A younger son of the house of Anjou goes off adventuring to the Middle East to gain fame, love and fortune. He is equipped by his brother the king, his mother, and a lady friend. He acquires great fame fighting in the service of the most powerful pagan potentate, and wins the hand and the kingdom of a beautiful black pagan princess. He deserts her, leaving her pregnant. Not long after his departure she bears a son. Later (750,24–26) we find out she pines away and dies.

In direct contrast to Book 1, Book 2 contains many tie-ins with King Arthur, and with many of the other characters who play roles in the story proper (Books 3–16). The second book has Gahmuret return to Europe where in a tourney he wins Herzeloide's hand in marriage, fathers Parzival, goes off to the wars again and is killed before the latter's birth. With the marriage to Herzeloide the tie-in with the rest of the work is obvious.

What is the function of the house of Anjou, or Anjou, in the work? For the purpose of the plot it is necessary only that Parzival be of the royal blood of the Grail Kingdom, and that he be related to King Arthur and his house. Chrétien's Perceval is from Wales, and it would be understandable that Wolfram would retain this trait of his source. But why go the source one better, and make Parzival not only heir to the Grail Kingdom and Wales, but also to Anjou and, on top of all that, Norgals, which Herzeloide had inherited from her first husband? Some modern scholars think that it is merely a reflex of the tremendous prestige and popularity that Richard the Lion hearted enjoyed in this period,⁹ that Wolfram simply included elements from his life because he admired him tremendously. Perhaps, but if so it is at the cost of unnecessarily loading down his work. And if with Kolb (9–50; 195–207) we believe much of the first two books to be a tribute to the house of Anjou found in the lost original of the semimythical Kyot, we must make excuses for the poet's formlessness.

But what if Wolfram's Book 1 originally had nothing to do with the Parzival story, and was not meant to be connected with it? This intriguing thought makes many things understandable that otherwise are puzzling. There is no mention of King Arthur or Arthurian knights in the first book because the original Gahmuret had no connection with them. Wales and Herzeloide are not mentioned because they were not part of the original plan. It does appear that Wolfram abandoned his original plan and used the poem he was working on as an introduction

to *Parzival*, blending it in to the Arthurian world at the Kanvoleis scenes. The single reference to Parzival's beauty (39,24–28) could easily have been a later interpolation.

The role that the Angevin elements of the first two books play in the ensuing books, as Snelleman has noted (39;74), casts light upon the essentially foreign nature of these elements. While Parzival is frequently referred to as "Gahmuret's son," and his connection with Anjou is of course manifest (cf. 316,25 ff.), nowhere is he referred to, as is Feirefiz, as "the Angevin," although in the recognition scene with Feirefiz he seems to lay claim to the title (746,1 ff.). Rather, when he is referred to by nationality it is always as "the Welshman" ("der Wâleis") (cf. Snelleman 56–57), in conformance with Chrétien's hero, "Perceval the Welshman" ("Perceval li galois"). Snelleman notes (pp. 42–46) that Chrétien uses the term more sparingly than Wolfram, and in a different way. Whereas when Wolfram speaks of "der Wâleis" he means "member of the ruling house of Wales," when Chrétien uses the term *li galois* he simply means "one from Wales," and states that they are "as stupid as the beasts in the field" (*Graal* 242 ff.), a reflex of which appears in the corresponding scene in Wolfram's work.

Snelleman has also analyzed (64–74) the role that Anshouwe or Anjou plays in the Gawan episodes. Occasionally, he notes, Feirefiz, his wife Secundille and their land Tribalibot (India) are mentioned, but "more as an Oriental motif than an Anjou element." For example, Cundrie la surziere and her brother Malcreature, the hideous dwarf who serves Orgeluse, were given by Secundille to Amfortas, who then gave Malcreature to Orgeluse (519,21–30). The miraculous pillar likewise came from Feirefiz's lands (589,5–11). Snelleman calls these matters trifling, their only purpose being to keep Feirefiz alive in the reader's memory. Occasionally other figures that appear in Books 1 and 2 play a role: In Book 13 (668,9 ff.) a beautiful tent is compared with Isenhart's tent, which Gahmuret took with him from the East (but Gahmuret is not mentioned). In Book 12 (586,14 ff.) Gahmuret and Galoes are numbered among Gawan's relatives who have suffered distress for love. In Books 10–13 the words *Anshouwe* and *Anshevîn* do not occur at all, nor are there any further references to Anjou except for a few references to Parzival as Gahmuret's child. In Books 6–8 the connection with the House of Anjou is a little more pronounced. King Vergulaht, who is also descended from Mazadan and a sprite [*fei*] appears to Gawan to be a "second Parzival" and to resemble Gahmuret

as he saw him at Kanvoles (400,4 ff.). When Gawan presses Antikonie to grant him her favors, she rebuffs him with a reference to the relationship between Amphilise and Gahmuret.¹⁰

And later, when Gawan is so sorely beset by Vergulaht and his men in the tower, with nothing to defend himself with except a chessboard and an iron rod, Wolfram regrets the disgrace that this action of Vergulaht's brings upon his grandfather, Gandin (410,13 ff.). One of Vergulaht's advisers is Liddamus, a character with no counterpart in Chrétien, who advises the king to kill Gawan (417,1-8). It is he who, incidentally, fills us in on Vergulaht's ancestry (420,6 ff.). Snelleman (70) characterizes him as a "foreign element" in the story, who is used only to state "something important about the Anschouwe family" and to delineate "the type of a cowardly knight." He wonders (70, fn. 1) whether with this suggestion that the safe-conduct given Gawan be broken, Liddamus does not typify "the many family feuds in the House of Anjou at the time of Henry II and Richard I." Later Liddamus does an about-face and makes a sensible suggestion that is followed by the king (namely, to let Gawan go in return for his taking over Vergulaht's promise to search for the Grail.) This is in accord with the advice given by a wise vavasor in Chrétien (6088 ff.). Snelleman sums up the character of Liddamus as follows:

In Wolfram Liddamus is assigned a role for which he is not fit. I believe Liddamus was part of the Anjou matter, but that (like other Anjou elements) he is only loosely connected to the plot by virtue of this early material [*ganz locker durch den alten Stoff verwoben*]. Wolfram's attempt to give him an important role in Gawan's later life, and thus to incorporate him into the novel as an important, operative factor, is a psychological mistake in which we clearly see the flawed attempt to join two disparate traditions. When you replace the 'very wise lord' [*vavassor de mout gran san*] with someone like Liddamus, you pay a price for it. (71)

This is very sharply observed, and I have no doubt but that Snelleman is right, as he is when he observes (72) that Anschouwe remains an "ornamental epithet" (*epitheton ornans*) in Book 8 as well.

We can only agree wholeheartedly with Snelleman when he observes (73) that, because of Feirefiz, Books 14-16 are inseparably linked with Books 1 and 2 and the elements pertaining to Anjou that are

contained in them, but that in Books 3–13, the books that follow Chrétien, the House of Anjou is a foreign element that is of no consequence to the plot. However, when he draws (74) from these facts the inference that Wolfram added these elements later to an alleged first version, his purpose being to extol the House of Anjou, in accordance with Kyot's work, we simply cannot concur. We may leave unanswered the question as to whether Wolfram wrote *Parzival* in two phases or one, but let us briefly consider this allegation that his purpose is to glorify the House of Anjou.

To be sure, the Gahmuret adventures necessarily extol the virtues of this house, and the fact that Parzival and Feirefiz both are descended from Gahmuret necessarily means that their deeds and the honors that accrue redound to the glory of Anjou. But why did he not change some of the references to Parzival from *der Wâleis* to *der Anschevîn*? Snelleman's answer to this, namely that an Angevin because of his erotic infidelity would not be good enough to gain the Grail, is certainly barbed. What a glorification this would be, to assert that the very house he is glorifying is not good enough to attain the Grail! This is an insubstantial argument anyway, because Wolfram makes no secret of Parzival's Angevin blood. Nor does this argument explain the strange omission of Anschouwe in Books 10–13. If Wolfram *did* go over a previous version to amend it in the manner Snelleman indicates, then he did so quite superficially. For the very nature of the references to Anjou points to a concern on Wolfram's part to keep the entire work unified, and to keep the memory of all the characters alive.

The role of Feirefiz, Blamires claims (438), is more important than that of Gahmuret. While the latter furnishes "a courtly background that is both historically and geographically redolent of the Crusades," Feirefiz "gives the story of the Grail a wider horizon and a broader basis" than that of Chrétien's work, "extends the relevance of the Grail beyond the narrow bounds of Christianity," and "presents a charitable assessment of the position of the heathen from the point of view of Christian tolerance."

Feirefiz's appearance, in Blamires's view (440), "expresses the primitive, albeit strikingly imaginative, conception that Wolfram, in common with most of the people of his time, had of the distant and therefore mysterious Orient." It "is to be understood as an example of the wonderful and praiseworthy in the creation, as well as

demonstrating in a remarkable and memorable form his black and white ancestry.”

Whatever the origins of the first two books of *Parzival* may have been, they have become an integral part of the whole, so that it is difficult to conceive of the work without them. Indeed, their presence adds dimensions to the work that contribute in no small measure to its effectiveness. As Hilda Swinburne has noted,

their main function is to give the story of Gahmuret in full precisely because he is the father of Parzival, the one from whom Parzival has inherited his great qualities both as knight and lover, and because the first part of that story narrates the birth of Feirefiz, son of Gahmuret and Belakane, destined by Wolfram to play an important part in Parzival's own story. (200)¹¹

But these first two books achieve much besides this. They bring a note of reality, of the real world, into the work. The parallelism with the deeds of Richard the Lion-Hearted, the association of Gahmuret with the House of Anjou, the adventuring in the Orient with its overtones of the Crusades, the personality of the Baruc, reminiscent of the famous Saladin, all serve to identify *Parzival* with the greatest men and the highest powers of the day. The Introduction joins with the closing Feirefiz episodes to enclose Parzival in a real frame of universality. This puts the work into the realm of high politics. The more I concern myself with *Parzival*, the more convinced I am that Wolfram's message is one pertinent to the world of his day and the conditions that prevailed in it, and the setting in which the Parzival story proper is placed makes that clear from the very beginning.

NOTES

1. [Selections, made by the editor and approved by the author, are from *Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival: An Attempt at a Total Evaluation*: 36, 42, 43, 44, 153, 464–70, 154, 156, 154, 156, 158–59, 160–62, 572, 202. Chapter title, heading inserts and, unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the editor.]

2. [Kratz (1966, 75) has taken Wolfram's use of "abstractions from the ethico-religious sphere such as *doubt, inconstancy, fidelity (zwivel, unstæte, triuwe)*" into consideration.]

3. [*ich was im dienstes undertân,
sit ich genâden mich versan.
nu wil ich im dienst widersagen:
hât er haz, den wil ich tragen.* (332,5–8) Translation by Kratz.]

4. Cf. *Total Evaluation* 292–294 and Mockenhaupt 99.

5. See Excursus G in *Total Evaluation*.

6. [The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*.]

7. [Two golden lions facing each other and snarling, each stretching out a paw as though to tear the other to pieces (*Binis aureis sese respicientibus hirriendo leunculis, singulorum uno pedum anteriorum versus alterutrum [t]anquam ad lacerandum porrecto*), corresponding to Richard's seal of 1189, while his seal of 1198 shows three such beasts. Original: *lanquam* (for *tanquam*).]

8. The only exception is the passage (39,24–28) where Kaylet's beauty is compared to that of Beacurs and Parzival.

9. Cf. Richey 14–15 and 64–65.

10. Cf. *Total Evaluation* 328.

11. Cf. Gerhard (37), who regards it as part of the detailed depiction of culture and environment that is typical of a novel which presents a hero's coming of age (*Entwicklungsroman*.) [Editor's note: *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* is another example of the genre, and displays some structural similarity to the features under discussion here.]

CHAPTER 9

Lady Love, King, Minstrel
Courtly Depictions of Jesus or God
in Late-Medieval Vernacular
Mystical Literature

Deborah Rose-Lefmann

*Arthurian romance had so permeated late-medieval culture that authors of mystical and didactic literature for women could assume familiarity with courtly matter, and used its conventions to help readers envision themselves wedded to Christ (“spouses of Christ”/sponsae Christi). Jesus, the Beloved, the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs, is portrayed by mystics as the Lady Love of *hohe Minne*, as a courtly king with marked similarities to Arthur, and even as a minstrel or *Minnesinger*.*

The influence of the language and literature of courtly love on mystical literature has not gone completely unnoticed. It is not surprising, given the tradition of the use of bridal imagery from the Song of Songs to describe the relationship between God and the Church, or God and the human Soul, that late-medieval mystics, particularly those writing in the vernacular, adopted the language and imagery, and often the form, of the vernacular love lyric and the courtly, especially Arthurian, romance for this purpose. The courtly and biblical language and imagery could be merged in original and often surprising ways. Jesus, the Beloved, the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs, is portrayed by mystics as the Lady Love of *hohe Minne*, as a courtly king with marked similarities to Arthur, and even as a minstrel. One particularly interesting transformation involves a surprising reversal of genders: the

(male) Bridegroom is transformed into the (female) Lady Love, while the seeking Bride (female) becomes the knight (male) in the Lady's service. Other essays in this volume address the issue of Christian influence in Arthurian literature. In this essay I intend to argue the converse: that the courtly/Arthurian literature in turn influences mystical and didactic religious literature of the later Middle Ages.

LADY LOVE

The first of these symbolic linkages, that of God or Jesus with the figure of Lady Love, rests on the common element of desire on the part of the admirer. Both Hadewijch, a Beguine writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, and Henry Suso, a fourteenth-century Dominican friar, portray themselves as knights-errant in the service of the Lady Love, who is God or Jesus. Hadewijch's *Poems in Stanzas* are mystical love lyrics, in which the forms and conventions of the poetry of courtly love are used to express the emotional tension of the soul's longing for God. The loving soul is portrayed as the knight-errant; the service offered by the knight to his lady becomes the service offered to God by the loving soul, and the suffering inherent in this service and the lover's complaint that his lady does not reward him are transformed into the trials of the soul longing for God.¹ The object of Hadewijch's devotion is addressed as *Minne* (the Middle Dutch and Middle High German word for courtly love), a concept which, as Hadewijch uses it, sometimes represents a personification of the ideal of courtly love (usually translated as Lady Love), sometimes the experience of love, and sometimes the object of that love (i.e., God), but always remains the distant, unapproachable Lady of *hohe Minne*. Hadewijch's *Minne* is most clearly equated with Jesus or God in Stanzaic Poem 20:

God, who created all things
And who, above all, is particularly Love²

*God, die ghemaechte alle dinghe,
End boven al es minne sonderlinghe*

and in Stanzaic Poem 29:

The Father in the beginning

Kept his Son, Love,
Hidden in his bosom.³

*Die vader van anegeghinne
Hadde sine sone, die minne.*

In the third of the Poems in Couplets, the Virgin Mary is described as the Mother of Love.⁴ Hadewijch's use of the term Minne is complex and has been subject to varying interpretations,⁵ but it is clear that the object of her devotion and metaphorical knightly service is God.

Henry Suso's *Life*, ostensibly an (auto)biography, has been described by Richard Kieckhefer as "auto-hagiography"⁶ because, as Frank Tobin explains in the introduction to his translation, ". . . large portions of the book are so obviously intended to make the protagonist serve as a spiritual model for the reader that strictly autobiographical traits are deeply colored by pastoral concerns."⁷ Julius Schwietering points out that, as a literary work, Suso's *Life* was patterned after the courtly romance as well as the traditional saint's life.⁸ Not only does the *Life* contain images from courtly romance, but it is also structured like a classical courtly romance, with the well-known bipartite structure: initial success and worldly honor for the hero, followed by a crisis which forces him to suffer and struggle to regain his lost honor, and more. At the turning point between the two parts of the narrative Suso experiences a vision in which he is actually knighted by an angel at God's command:

Deep in such meditation the world around him faded, and it seemed that a fine young man looking very virile entered carrying two elegant knightly boots and other clothing usually worn by knights. He came up to the servant, clothed him with knightly garb, and said to him, "Be a knight! Until now you were just a squire. Now God wants you to be a knight. . . . He who endeavors to lead the life of a spiritual knight of God with valor will encounter many more dangerous battles than happened of old to the famous heroes in the bold knightly contests the world proclaims in song and tale."⁹

In diser betrachtung entsunken im aber sin sinne und duht in, wie doert her in kemi ein suber jungling, der was gar manlich gestalt, und braht mit ime zwen kluog riterschuoh und endrú kleider, dú riter

pflegent ze tragene. Er gie zuo dem diener und leit im an dú riterkleid und sprach zuo im: bis ritter! Du bist unz her kneht gesin, und got wil, daz du nu riter siest. . . . Wer die geischlichen ritterschaft gotes wil unverzageklich fueren dem sol vil me grosses gedranges begegnen, denn es ie tete hie vor bi den alten ziten den verruemten helden, von der kechen ritterschaft dú welt pfliget ze singen und ze sagen.¹⁰

The angel uses the exact words of the actual German knighting ceremony, “Be a knight!” (“*Bis ritter!*”). With the words “proclaims in song and tale” (*ze singen und ze sagen*) the angel makes explicit reference to courtly literature. Suso, who is described—perhaps by himself, perhaps by his editor Elsbeth Stagl—as having “from his youth a heart filled with love,”¹¹ casts himself as a *Minneritter* in the service of Eternal Wisdom, a feminine personification that is equated with Christ.¹² Like worldly *hohe Minne*, his service causes him to increase in virtues and honor as he suffers in the hope of his Lady’s greeting.¹³ As he is advised in another vision,

If you wish to devote yourself to sublime love, you should take gentle Wisdom as your dearly beloved, because she bestows on her lover youth and vitality, nobility and abundance, honor and advantage, great power and an everlasting name. She makes him handsome and teaches him courteous behavior, and how to win people’s praise and fame in battle.¹⁴

Wellest du hoher minne pflegen, so solt du zuo einem minneklichen lieb die zarten wisheit nemen, wan sie git iren minnern jugent und mugent, edli und richtum, ere und gefuer, grossen gewalt und einen ewigen namen. Sie machet in minneklich und lert in wesen hoflich, lob vor den lúten, ruom in den scharen; si machet in lieb und werd got und den lúten.¹⁵

Suso draws yet another parallel between worldly and spiritual knighthood in Chapter 44, when the Servant of Eternal Wisdom meets a knight in courtly dress, who describes himself as an *aventúrer*. They discuss the reward that a knight can expect for winning a tournament: if he fights on bravely to the very end, smiling despite his wounds, demonstrating the virtue that Wolfram von Eschenbach called

“uncowed manly courage” (*unverzaget mannes muot*),¹⁶ he will be given a golden ring by the most beautiful Lady present. The servant contrasts this to the eternal reward of the spiritual knight:

“Noble sir, if the knights of this world have to take such sufferings upon themselves for so small a reward, which is nothing in itself, dear God, how just it then is that one must suffer many more trials for the eternal prize! O gentle Lord, if only I were worthy of becoming your spiritual knight. Beautiful, comely, eternal Wisdom, whose riches of grace find no equal in all the lands, if only my soul could receive a ring from you! Indeed, for that I would be willing to suffer whatever you wanted.”¹⁷

*“Ach wirdiger herre, muessen die riter diser welt solichú liden
empfahen umb so klainen lon, der an im self nüt ist, ach got, wie ist
denn so billich, daz man umb den ewigen pris noh vil me erbeten
erlide! Owe, zarter herr, wan weri ich dez wirdig, daz ich din
geischliche riter were! Eya, schoenu, minneklichú ewigú wisheit, dero
gnadenrichkeit nit glich ist in allen landen, wan moehti miner sele
von dir ein vingerli [66v] werden, ach dar umbe woelti ich liden, waz
du iemer woeltist!”¹⁸*

Suso’s notion that “the one who suffers the most blows and sallies and does not falter but rather displays boldness and manliness”¹⁹ takes the prize in a tournament seems unrealistic, being an oddly passive view of an essentially active endeavor. Surely, as a scion of a noble family, he must have known from experience that active skill in combat, not merely patient endurance of suffering, is what wins worldly tournaments. Patient endurance of suffering is a religious virtue, not a knightly one. Kieckhefer points out that Suso’s “romantic conception of the lady who awards a prize to the knight who suffers the most heroically owed more to literature than to the practice of the joust.”²⁰ Both Suso’s portrayal of Christ as Eternal Wisdom, the Lady who rewards successful knights, and his concept of what it takes to earn that reward are derived from literary models.

Many manuscripts of Suso’s *Life* carry an illustration of Eternal Wisdom, portrayed as a noble lady or as a Christ-figure, presenting the Servant with a ring symbolizing the detachment from earthly ties and the acceptance of suffering (*gelassenheit*). In the example reproduced

below, the angels bring the Servant knightly garb marked with IHS, the coat of arms of his Lord, the knights on horseback carry banners marked IHS, and Christ the Eternal Wisdom, here portrayed as a bearded man, gives the Servant a ring.

As noted in our first paragraph, the (male) Bridegroom is transformed into the (female) Lady Love, while the seeking Bride (female) becomes the knight (male) in the Lady's service. Contemporaries apparently found some aspects of this inversion disorienting: the illustrators of Suso's work sometimes draw the figure of Eternal Wisdom with clearly female characteristics, sometimes as a bearded man, intended to be recognized as Christ, and sometimes as an undifferentiated figure.²¹ In Hadewijch's poems the figure of the knight-errant is further complicated by its adoption as a masculine persona by a female poet writing for a group of young Beguines.

This entire extended metaphor is an inversion of the Christ-Knight allegory commonly found in medieval preaching books and instructional manuals, such as the *Ancrene Riwe*, the *Gesta Romanorum*, or *Dives and Pauper*.²² Christ is depicted as a lover-knight who fights to save the lady he loves (the human soul), whose castle is beset by foes. By so doing he hopes to win her love. The knight dies to save his lady, thus proving himself worthy of love, and causing the lady to realize that she loves him. The lady's response is the point of the narrative, which romanticizes Christ's sacrificial death and encourages the reader/hearer to imitate the lady of the allegory and return his love.²³

KING

An alternative object of the knight's service was not the aristocratic and socially distant Lady but her male counterpart, the noble and politically superior King. The portrayal of God or Jesus as king is a literary commonplace with biblical precedents including the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs, often identified with King Solomon, and the depiction of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation (chapter 21), in which God has his throne. Because the courtly romance caught the popular imagination in such a way as to make life imitate art,²⁴ medieval visions and exempla which portrayed God or Jesus as king often endowed him with characteristics typical of the kings of courtly romance, particularly, of course, Arthur. The thirteenth-century

Begune Mechthild von Magdeburg describes the *hovereise der sele*, the “soul’s journey to the court” in which Jesus is the prince:



Fig. 9.1. Manuscript illumination: Eternal Wisdom gives the Servant a ring representing *gelassenheit*. (Ms. K, fol. 88r)

How the soul to Whom God Shows Himself Comes to Court: The poor soul is well-spoken and well-behaved when she comes to court, and she cheerfully looks at her God. Ah, how lovingly she is received. . . . Just as the noble prince and the little servant girl embrace and become one like water and wine. She is consumed by Him and takes leave of herself; when she has had enough, He is still just as lovesick for her as ever since his desire neither waxes nor wanes.²⁵

*Von der hovereise der sele, an der sich got wiset: Swenne die arme sele kumet ze hove, so ist si wise und wol gezogen. So siht si iren got vroelichen ane. Eya, wie lieplich wirt si da empfangen. . . . Alse sich der hohe fürste und die kleine dirne alsust behalsent und vereinet sint als wasser und win, so wirt si ze nihte und kumet von ir selben. Als si nüt mer moegi, so ist er minnesiech nach ir, als er ie was, wan im gat zuo noch abe.*²⁶

She also describes God in a scene of mystical union as addressing his Bride in a courtly fashion:

He greets her with courtly language, not likely to be heard in this kitchen. He dresses her in clothes fit to be worn in a palace, and puts himself at her disposal. Her wish is his command.²⁷

*So gruesset er si mit der hovesprache, die man in dirre kuchin nüt vernimet, und kleidet sú mit den kleidern, die man ze dem palaste tragen sol, und git sich in ir gewalt. So mag sú bitten und vragen was si wil, des wirt si gewert und beriht.*²⁸

God takes on the role of a courtly king, receiving courteously those who come before him, however lowly, greeting his guests appropriately in a courtly fashion, and giving generous gifts and granting boons to those who dare to ask for them.

In the *Life and Revelations of the Viennese Beguine Agnes Blannbekin* (†1315) God is described as a king in the courtly mode on two separate occasions. Once, when she doubts that God heeds the prayers of a sinner like herself, she is told by God himself that he values those prayers, but that the prayers of the just delight him as a king takes delight in the performance of minstrels and players:²⁹

Then the voice of God said to her: "God wills that he be prayed to by sinners too, and it pleases God, because the sinner realizes that he can have nothing except from God. How much greater God's joy and delight in the prayers of the just, just as a great prince, when actors and jesters practice their various arts and plays before him, enjoys and delights in it. So God enjoys and delights in the various devotions and devoted prayers of the just."

*Tunc vox dei ad eam: "Vult deus," inquit, "ut exoretur etiam a peccatoribus, et placet deo pro eo, quod peccator cognoscit se nihil posse habere nisi a deo. Multo magis oration[e]s justorum faciunt deo immensum gaudium et jocunditatem, quemadmodum magnus princeps aliquis, [247v] si coram eo mimi et joculatores artes suas et ludos suos exerceant varios, unde dominus jocundatur et gaudet. Sic deus gaudet et jocundatur de devotionibus variis et devotis orationibus iustorum."*³⁰

On another occasion it was revealed to her that God is sovereign in the soul:

God as he exists in the soul rules like a king in his kingdom: in the same manner he gives great gifts, holds counsel like a prelate with his people, shows himself familiar with the soul as the Bridegroom with the Bride. God rules like a king. . . . The king also gives presents to three kinds of people: to his knights, to entertainers and to his bride. God the King is honored threefold in his knights, that is, in their dignity or nobility, in their strength and in their fidelity. . . . The entertainers are the five senses, who praise, rebuke, and cheer up with new songs. . . . To the Bride God gives three presents. . . .

Deus existens in anima iudicat sicut rex in regno, item largitur munera magnifica, item tractat consilia sicut praelatus cum suis. Item exhibet se animae familiarem, sicut sponsus se sponsae. Deus velut rex iudicat. . . . [Cap. LXVIII. De rege, qui largitur dona tribus generibus hominum, scilicet militibus, mimis et sponsae suae] Rex etiam largitur dona tribus generibus hominum: militibus, mimis, et sponsae suae. Deus rex tripliciter honoratur in suis militibus, scilicet in dignitate eorum sive nobilitate, in eorum strenuitate, in eorum

*fidelitate. . . Mimi sunt quinque sensus, qui laudant, vituperant, novis cantilenis exhilarant. . . Sponsae deus largitur tria dona. . .*³¹

Both visions are reminiscent of the court scenes in Arthurian romance, in which Arthurs knights gather at his court and entertainers are part of the festivities. It is particularly emphasized here that God exhibits the courtly virtue of largesse, or *milte*, giving gifts generously to his knights and entertainers as well as to his Bride.

Katharina Tucher, a fifteenth-century Nuremberg widow who left a journal of her mystical experiences, writes of a series of visions in which Christ appears to her as a courtly king in scenes reminiscent of courtly romance. In the twenty-fourth entry of her *Confessions*, the Lord rejects the soul because she is not fit for his court, and she begs him to make her so. He does this, and then invites her to participate in a stag hunt, a traditional pastime of the court in Arthurian romance. Instead of killing the stag, however, he invites it to return to his court as a guest:

“Come, we want to ride to the hunt, we want to fell a stag that has a hundred wonders and a hundred miracles.” The Lord, the King mounts up splendidly with his crown and scepter, as befits a king, splendid with 15 white hounds, and sets the spirit, the soul on a little white lamb and rides off to hunt the stag.

”Ah, dear lord, the little lamb cant keep up!”

The king said, “Yes, it runs fast, it will follow along.” And the lord hunted the stag into a nice big flowing water. The stag stood with a free spirit and shook its head, on which it had three horns, and cooled itself in the water and drank. The stag was in good spirits. The king ran up and the little lamb said, “I’ll drown in the water, it is too big for me.” The king said, “No, hold on to me, nothing will happen to you.” The king said to the stag, “If you will be in my court, I will set you free. I will guarantee that no harm will come to you.”

The stag said, “Yes, if you promise that no harm will come to me I will stay at your court as long as I live.”

With that the king, the lamb and the stag, all three, went together into his city of Jerusalem. He was received in splendor there by his people.

“Wol auf, wir wollen iagen reiten, wir woln ein hirssen feln, der hat hundert bunder und hundert marackel.” Der her, der kunnig sitz auf herlichen mit kron, mit zepter, als eim kunnig zu gehort, herlichen mit xv weissen winden, und setz den gaist, die sel auf ein weis lemlein und reit nach iagen dem hirs.

“Eia, lieber her, daz lemlein mag niht gefolgen!”

Der kunnig sprach: “Ia ez ist snels lauf, ez folgt wol nach.”

Und der her iaget den hirs in ein schon grosz flissent waszer. Der hirs stunt mit freiem gemut und schut sein kopf, dar auf het er drew horner, und kult sich in dem waszer und tranck. Dem hirs wahs wol zu mut. Der kunnig rant zu und daz lemlein sprach: “Ich verdirb in dem wasser, daz ist mir zu grosz.”

Der kunnig sprach: “Nein, halt dich an mich, dir gewirt niht.”

Der kunnig sprach dem hirs zu: “Wiltu an meim hof sein, ich wil dich freien, ich wil dich sichern, daz dir kain verserung geschicht.”

Der hirs sprach: “Ia, wiltu mich freien, daz mir kain verserung geschicht, so wil ich an deim hof beleiben, die weil ich leb.”

Mit dem rait der kunnig, daz lamp, der hirs alle drew neben ein ander auf in sein stat Gerusalem. Herlichen da wart er empfangen van dem seinen.³²

This vision blends biblical motifs—the stag that pants after the flowing water (Psalm 42:1), the lamb of God, which speaks here with the voice of the soul, the Heavenly Jerusalem—with those from courtly literature—the hunt as a courtly pastime, to be followed by a courtly festival. It also groups symbols for Father, Son and Holy Ghost in a new way—king, lamb and stag—and brings them together at the end of the festival in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

In the twenty-fifth entry Katharina dices with Christ for her soul. Christ wins, and in doing so wins not only his Bride, but also his city and his inheritance. He then takes his newly won Bride back to his Father:

The king said, “Come, we want to have a festival” to his court servants. “I want to treat myself, everyone rejoice with me, for I have won my city and my paternal inheritance.” And it seemed to me that two angels led me as a bride before the king. He handed me the scepter, he crowned me, he clothed me, he gave me beautiful jewelry for my arm and everywhere. He put a ring on my finger and wed me.

He said to the father: "This is the wealth I have gained, this is my spouse."

The father said, "She is a very beautiful one, she pleases me well. We shall give her servants and land of her own, as much as she needs and is suitable for her. Even so, she shall always be at our court."

Ez sprach der kunnig: "Wol auf, wir woln ein hohzeit machen" ze seim hof gesind. "Ich wil mich zu legen, seit alle frolichen mit mir, ich hab gebunnen mein stat und mein feterlich erb." Und mir wabs wie mich zben engel furten sam ein praut fur den kunnig. Er raicht mir daz zepter, er kronnet mich, er klaidet mich, er gab mir ein schon klainnot an mein arm und uber all, er stisz mir ein fingerlein an und gemehelt mich. Er sprach zu dem vater: "Daz ist mein gebunnen gut, daz ist mein gemahel."

Der vater sprach: "Ez ist gar ein schonne, sie gefelt mir wol. Wir schuln ir hof gesind geben und aigen lant, dez sie bedarf und ir zu gehort genung. Da pei schol sie sein altag an uderm hof."³³

The Bride is wedded to the king, who gives her gifts of jewelry, makes her his queen, and even gives her the traditional post-nuptial dowry (*Morgengabe*).

In the twenty-seventh entry she is invited to a tournament in the heavenly Jerusalem. Mary is the Queen, the Lady of the court, the soul is to be one of her maidens:

"Come, the Lord invites you to a tournament in the eternal Jerusalem, which is outfitted in the eternal life for a tournament. Yes, make yourself ready, so that you come with adornments appropriate to your nobility, so that the Lord will not be ashamed of you. There will be a tournament and dancing and splendor to praise God, such as you have never seen. You are invited. Mary will also be there with her court, with beautiful maidens and women, and invites you there for dancing, singing, playing of stringed instruments, all kinds of amusements. She wants to go into the garden of heavenly fruit. She wants to pluck lilies, roses, and violets. She wants to amuse herself well."

“Wol auf, der her let dich zu eim stech hof in ewig Gerusalem. Der ist aus gerust in ewig leben zu eim stech hof, ia bereit dich, daz du mit schon kleinneten kumst erberklichen, daz sich der her dein niht scham. Ez wirt ein stech hof und tantzen und herlichkait got zu loben, dez du nie gesehen hast. Du pist geladen. Maria wil auch ein hof haben mit schon junckfraun und fraun, und let dich dar zu mit tantzen, mit singen, mit saiten spil, mit aller kurtz weil. Sie wil in den garten gen der himelischen fruht. Sie wil lilgen, rossen, feial prechen. Sie wil ein schon kurtzweil haben.”³⁴

The idea of God holding a joust may make the modern reader smile, but this is, after all, what is expected of a proper courtly king. Explicitly religious imagery of the heavenly court is blended with imagery from the courtly and Arthurian romance in these depictions of the relationship between Christ the King and the loving Soul that is His Bride.

MINSTREL

Another clearly defined role at the Arthurian court, besides those of Lady Love and the King, is that of the musical entertainer or minstrel. Some mystics combine courtly imagery with that of the Song of Songs and portray Christ, the Bridegroom, as a minstrel or Minnesinger wooing his Bride, the Soul. In his study of the late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century Spanish mystic Joana of the Cross (Juana de la Cruz), Ronald Surtz points out that the image of the visionary as a musical instrument played upon by God, which “involves necessarily the equally traditional motif of God as a musician,”³⁵ was commonly used by the Fathers of the Church in referring to the prophets, and was adopted by medieval female mystics to portray themselves as passive instruments of God’s revelation. In the later Middle Ages, this image was combined with the images of God as musician, Christ the lover-knight, and the mystic as Bride of Christ, and assimilated to literary images of serenading lovers.³⁶

Mechthild von Magdeburg describes a wedding scene in which the Bridegroom, referred to as a “prince” and as a “youth,” commands the Bride to dance for him. She boldly tells him that she cannot dance unless he leads her by singing for her, which he gladly does:

Then the youth comes and says to her: "Maiden, you shall dance as well as my chosen ones have danced." To that she says: "I cannot dance, Lord, unless you lead me. If you want me to leap, then you must lead me with your singing. Then I will leap into love, from love into knowledge, from knowledge into enjoyment, from enjoyment beyond all human senses. There I will stay and yet will still crawl onward."

Then the youth shall sing: "Through me into you and through you from me."

"Gladly with you, away from you reluctantly."

So kumt der jungeling und sprichet ir zuo: "Juncfrouwe, alsust fromeklich sont ir nach tantzen, als úch mine userwelten vor getanzet hant." So sprichet si: "Ich mag nit tanzen, herre, du enleitest mich. Wilt du, das ich sere springe, so muost du selber vor ansingen; so springe ich in die minne, von der minne in die bekanntnisse, von der bekanntnisse in die gebruchunge, von der gebruchunge úber alle moenschliche sinne. Da wil ich bliben und will doch fürbas crisen."

Unde muos der jungeling singen alsus: "Dur mich in dich und dur dich von mir."

"Gerne mit dir, noete von dir!"³⁷

In another passage the Soul awaits the arrival of her Beloved, who takes away all her distress with his "sweet sounds of strings":

When my lord comes, I take leave of myself,
 For he brings me many sweet sounds of strings,
 Which rid me of all my mortal fickleness,
 And his music is so full of sweetness,
 That it rids me of all heartache. . . .
 And as Divinity sounds,
 Humanity sings.
 The Holy Ghost finds the lyres of the Heavenly Kingdom,
 Sounding all the strings,
 Which are strung in love.³⁸

Swenne min herre kumt, so kum ich von mir selben, wan er bringet mir so mangan suessen seitenklang, der mir benimet allen mines fleisches wank, und sin seitenspil ist so vol aller suessekeit, da mit er

mir benimet alles herzeleit. . . .³⁹ und wie dú gotheit clinget, dú moenscheit singet, der helig geist die liren des himelriches vingeret, das alle die seiten muessent clingen, die da gespannen sint in der minne.⁴⁰

Katharina Tucher also portrays Christ as a minstrel who will play the fiddle and the harp for the Soul to dance to, and will even make a fiddle out of her to play sweet music upon:

“Come, my beloved, my dear dove, I want to rest upon you. I want to fiddle for you, I want to play the violin for you, I [want to] harp for you, I want to play the trombone wondrously for you. I want to sing to you, ‘Come, my chosen spouse, my beautiful one, let us pluck roses and lilies and violets.’ ”

“Kum mein gemintew, mein liebew taub, ich wil auf dir ruen. Ich wil dir [265v] fideln, ich wil dir geigen, ich dir herpfen, ich wil dir pussaumen herlichen. Ich wil dir singen, ‘Kum, mein auzderweltew gemahel, mein schonne, wir wollen rosen und lilgen und feial prechen.’ ”⁴¹

“My child, you have given me your heart. Leave it to me, then I will make a fiddle out of you and will pick you up by the neck and will fiddle and will have my joy with you.”

“Kint meins, du hast mir dein hertz geben, daz lasz mir, so wil ich ein fideln ausz dir machen und wil dich an den hals hohen und wil fideln und wil mein freud mit dir haben.”⁴²

This motif, uncommon among the German mystics, is highly reminiscent of, and was most likely inspired by, a fifteenth-century broadsheet known as “Christ and the Loving Soul” (*Christus und die minnende Seele*). The broadsheet consists of a series of pictures with captions, not dissimilar from a comic strip. The captions each consist of two couplets, one spoken by Christ and one by the loving Soul. In the eighteenth and nineteenth frames there is an unusual motif: the Bridegroom plays the fiddle (*mein saytenspyl; gygen*) and the drum (*pauken*) for the Soul to dance to (*den rayen treten*):

18: Wait and see, love, how my string music
Will draw you so sweetly to me.
“If you want to fiddle for me
Then I must be sweet to you.”

*Warte lieb wie dich mein saytenspyl
So lieblich zuo mir ziehen wil.
“Wilt du mich also vergygen
So muß ich lieb zuo dir sygen.”*

19: Leave off crying and praying
Come, you must dance a roundel.
“Love, if you will drum and fiddle
I will leave all sorrow behind.

*Wirff hin wainen und betten
Wol auff du muost den rayen treten.
“Lieb wilt du mir baucken und gygen
So laß ich alles trawren ligen.”*



Fig. 9.2. *Christus und die minnende Seele*, Bilderbogen M.

Frames 18 and 19, read from the bottom up. Christ plays the fiddle and the drum for the Soul to dance to. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Einblatt III, 52f.

As I have argued elsewhere (see Works Cited), a significant number of Katharina Tucher's visions, including this one, show evidence of having been inspired by meditation on works of religious art. Given this tendency and the striking nature of the image that the vision and the broadsheet have in common, it is likely that the broadsheet or one of its manuscript versions, used as a devotional text and image, inspired the vision that so resembles it.

Henry Suso recounts a vision in which a heavenly minstrel comes to comfort him with sweet music and singing; the minstrel is then revealed to be Christ himself:

That same night it seemed to him in a vision that he was in a sickroom. Outside the room he heard someone singing heavenly music, and the melody sounded more pleasant than any earthly harp had ever produced. It was as though some twelve-year-old schoolboy were singing alone. The servant [Suso] forgot all about any earthly food as he listened to the dulcet tones and said longingly, "Ah, what is this music? I have never heard any melody so delightful on earth." A fine young man standing there answered him and said, "Know that this boy who sings so pleasantly sings for you. You are the reason for his song." The servant said, "Oh, dear God! Ah, young man from heaven, ask him to keep on singing!" He sang again and it echoed high in the air. He sang three heavenly songs from beginning to end. . . . [The young man then tells him] "This was the charming boy and Son of the heavenly Father who sang for you. He really cares for you very much."⁴³

Des selben nachtes was im vor in einer gesichte, daz er weri in einer siechstuben. Also hort er ussrenthalb der stuben neiswen singen ein himelsches gesang, und daz gedoene erklang als suesseklich, daz nie dein natürlichú harpf so susseklich sprach, und was dem glich, als ob ein zwelfferiges schueleri da sungi alleine. Der diener vergass aller liplicher spise und loset dem suessen gedoene, und sprach mit begirlichem herzen: "ach waz ist daz da singet? Ich gehorte doh uf ertrich nie so suess gedoene!" Do entwürt im ein stolzer junglich, der stuond da und sprach also: "du solt wüssen, daz dise wolsingender knabe dir singet, und daz er dich meinert mit sinem gesang." Do sprach der diener: "owe, gesah mich got! Ach himelscher jungling, heiss in me singen!" Er sang aber daz es in dem luft hoh erschal,

und sang wol drú lieder us und us. . . . [The young man then tells him] “. . . der wunneklich knab und sun dez himelschen vaters, der dir och gesungen hat. Ach wie hat er dich so recht lieb!”⁴⁴

The fourteenth-century Dominican friar Henry of Nördlingen was not mystically gifted himself, according to his writings, but he encouraged many mystically gifted women in their spiritual quest both by means of personal visits and sermons and through letters, many of which were collected and copied. In a letter to the Dominican nun Margaret Ebner in the convent of Maria Medingen he likens his plight as a preacher whose own inner life was lacking to that of a piper to whose tunes others knew better how to dance than he himself:⁴⁵

What many a player pipes is probably sweeter to others than to himself, and they dance it better than he. Pray that I master the dancesteps of a true life according to the sweet piping of your dear Jesus Christ.

Es pffifet auch manger gar wol, das dem hörer suszer ist den dem pffiffer und die andern tantzent mer dar nach dan er selber: pit hie fur mich, das ich den tantz eins warhaften lebens trett nach der suszen pffifen deins liebs Jhesu Christi.⁴⁶

Henry's metaphor casts Jesus as a sort of Pied Piper whose music leads others to follow him, dancing to the tune he plays. The variety in these portrayals reflects the varied roles of the musician in courtly society. Jesus is envisioned as a Minnesinger wooing his Lady, the human Soul; as a minstrel singing and/or playing instruments for dancing, as part of courtly or bridal festivities, and as a musician whose playing comforts the distressed.

Courtly portrayals of Jesus and God in mystical literature of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries clearly have their origin in the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs, but these portrayals are made more timely and appealing to their audiences by giving the Bridegroom the characteristics typical of courtly life as described in secular literature, particularly *Minnesang* and the Arthurian romance. God or Christ is depicted as the Lady Love served by a knight-errant, who grows in virtue and desire as a result of this service. God also appears as a king who engages in courtly pastimes, holds courtly festivals and demon-

strates courtly virtues, such as courtesy and largesse. Most unexpected, perhaps, is the portrayal of God as a minstrel whose music is both a comfort to the distressed and an essential part of courtly festivities, particularly the bridal festivities. Much of this literature, whether written by men or women, was aimed at a primarily female readership, which was assumed to be familiar with the conventions of courtly romances. The reader's knowledge of a popular secular genre could be used to lead her into envisioning herself as a contemporary "wife of Christ" (*sponsa Christi*).⁴⁷ In this way, Arthurian literature, designed for public recital and reception, came to influence mystic writings, with their origins in private devotions.

NOTES

1. Hart 19.
2. Hadewijch, Stanzaic Poem 20, 25–26 (page 181).
3. Hadewijch, Stanzaic Poem 29, 41–43 (page 209).
4. Hadewijch, Poem in Couplets 3, 25–33 (page 322).
5. De Paepe 8: *Een studie van de minne in het kader der 12^e en 13^e eeuwse mystiek en profane minnellyrik*. Petroff 184.
6. Kieckhefer 6.
7. Suso 41.
8. Schwietering 115: "Auf den höfischen Roman weisen nicht nur einzelne Motive, Einzelzüge und Bilder, sondern vor allem Aufbau und Gliederung im Sinne einer Kontinuität des Geschehens und einer damit verbundenen äußeren und psychischen Ursächlichkeit, wie sie der Legende als solche fehlt."
9. Suso 99–100.
10. Seuse 55–56.
11. Suso 67; Seuse 11 ("*er hat von jugent uf ein minneriches herz*"). Throughout this essay, Suso refers to the English translation and Seuse to the German edition.
12. "Now Eternal Wisdom presented itself in sacred scripture as lovable as an agreeable beloved who gets herself up in finery to please male inclinations, speaking softly, as a woman does, so that she might attract all hearts to her." Suso 67. Cf. Proverbs 9:1.
13. Schwietering 116.
14. Suso 67–68.
15. Seuse 12.

16. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, I,5. The caption attached to an illustration of this scene in ms. A reads, "God's knight shall have the uncowed heart of a man in every sorrow" (*Wer sich goetlicher ritterschaft nimet an, der sol in allem liden eins mannes herz in vnverzagter wise han*). Bihlmeyer 51*.

17. Suso 172.

18. Bihlmeyer 151–52.

19. Suso 171.

20. Kieckhefer 75.

21. Diethelm 211.

22. Woolf 106.

23. Woolf 104.

24. "The courtly romance had a way of insinuating itself into the real world" (*Der höfische Roman des Hochmittelalters hatte die vorbildhafte Kraft, ins Leben auszustrahlen.*) Schwietering 115.

25. Translation based on Galvani (Mechthild 9 [I,4]).

26. Mechthild, *Licht*, 10–11 (I,4).

27. Mechthild, *Light*, 7 (I,2).

28. Mechthild, *Licht*, 7 (I,2).

29. Blannbekin (Introduction) 14–15. The extant text of Agnes Blannbekin's *Life and Revelations* is in Latin, but it is very likely that Agnes's confessor translated her revelations as she told them to him in the vernacular. Occasional German words remain in the Latin text, and the style also gives evidence that it was a translation. The confessor is careful to distinguish his own observations and commentary from Agnes's text by putting his own words in the first person.

30. Blannbekin 199.

31. Blannbekin 169–171.

32. Tucher 271^r-72^r.

33. Tucher 272^v.

34. Tucher 273^v.

35. Surtz 63.

36. Surtz 71.

37. Mechthild, *Licht* 28–29 (I,44).

38. Mechthild, *Light* II,3. 31–2.

39. Mechthild, *Licht* II, 2. 38–9. Galvani puts the chapter break at a different place than Neumann.

40. Mechthild, *Licht* II,3. 40.

41. Tucher 265^r-265^v.

42. Tucher 271^r.

43. Suso 81–82.

44. Seuse 31–32.

45. Ebner (Introduction) 36.

46. Strauch (Letter XLVIII) 257.

47. Elizabeth Robertson (72) argues this with regard to the *Ancrene Wisse*;
I think that it applies to these texts as well.

Contributors

This volume is a collection of essays that have not yet appeared in English in their present form. Authors writing in English have composed new essays, or revised previously published work in dialogue with other contributors. Other commentary originally appeared in Welsh, German or French.

IFOR WILLIAMS (TR. WAYNE HARBERT)

Some will wonder at inclusion here of our excerpt from Williams's 1930 preface to the authoritative edition of *The Four Branches* (*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*). While the larger cycle of *Mabinogi* includes Arthurian material, the same cannot be said of the smaller cycle (*The Four Branches*). And even for the larger cycle: we don't know the direction of influence for this Arthurian material relative to the French romances of Chrétien (the so-called "*Mabinogi* question"). The relationship between the smaller *Mabinogion* and the Arthurian romance as a genre, it might be argued, is not close enough to warrant linking the two cycles here.¹

Though not usually held to be *itself* a source for any of our romances, however, the *Four Branches* is the most famous work in a *tradition* which is often regarded as the main source for most Arthurian material on the continent. This Welsh tradition is sometimes pitted against the Christian tradition in an opposition pair: "Welsh vs. Christian origin of Arthurian romance."

Thus Williams explains "the baptism which was done then" as a reference to a pre-Christian ceremony, and, of course, he may be right. On the other hand, the phrase would be thinkable in entirely Christian terms. Controversies abound in the Middle Ages on various aspects of

Christian baptism: Celtic rite or Roman rite,² who can perform the ceremony, immersion versus sprinkling, water versus oil,³ adult versus infant baptism.⁴ Any one of these issues, or some combination of them, might have prompted the first poet's use of that phrase in a single baptism scene. The phrase might then have been generalized across all remaining instances of baptism as a kind of refrain.

Similarly, the *Four Branches* may represent a by and large successful segregation of the pre-Christian era from the Christian era which nevertheless includes a few inevitable anachronisms, as the present selection maintains. On the other hand, a Celtic Christian wishing to make sense both of the more traditional and the more innovative aspects of his world might have consciously yoked Beli (first century B.C.) and Maximus (fourth century A.D.) into one setting in the interest of artistic synthesis.

Ifor Williams was born in 1881 near Bethesda, Caernarfonshire. He was educated at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, where he taught until his retirement in 1947. He was knighted in that same year for his numerous accomplishments in the field of early Welsh literature. He died in 1965.

Wayne Harbert is on the linguistics faculty at Cornell University and president of the Welsh Studies Institute in North America.

JOACHIM BUMKE (TR. PETER MEISTER)

This major figure in twentieth-century medieval criticism was born in Berlin into the family of a physician in 1929. He was associated with the University of Heidelberg in Germany, and, in the United States with Johns Hopkins and Harvard. In 1965 he returned to West Berlin, joining the faculty of the Free University of Berlin. In 1971 he moved to the University of Cologne. After retirement in 1995, he accepted visiting professorships at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Washington. His books include *Wolfram's Willehalm, Narrative Structure and the Concept of Holiness in Late Courtly Literature* (1959) and *The Concept of Knighthood in the 12th and 13th Centuries* (1964).⁵ Our present selection offers an overview of the "Celtic vs. Christian" debate as it touches Wolfram's *Parzival*.

For a sketch of the translator, see below.

G. RONALD MURPHY, S.J.

In a well-known scene in Goethe's *Faust*, a young girl named Gretchen asks the hero what he thinks of religion.⁶ A paraphrase of this "Gretchen question" (*Gretchenfrage*), rather than chronology or genre, might be regarded as the one which Murphy puts to German literature generally: "What do you make of God?" He has written a book on a twentieth-century author (*Brecht and the Bible*) as well as two on the ninth century (*The Saxon Savior* and his *Heliand*), and has also recovered the annotated Greek New Testament which once belonged to Wilhelm Grimm (nineteenth century). For the purposes of this volume, the Gretchen question may be recognized in Parzival's youthful "Ah, Mother, what is God?"

A second thread in Murphy's scholarship is the wish to trace a thing to its source. For him the Christmas tree goes back to Yggdrasil⁷ and the *Heliand* to the Gospel of John.⁸ In his essay here, the notion of chivalry, especially as it presented itself to Wolfram, may have been foreshadowed in the *Heliand*. Perhaps it was this "source" aspect in Murphy's scholarship that led him to that form of German which can most fairly be said to have given rise to the English language: Old Saxon (or Old Low German).

The question for this Jesuit scholar is not which of two world views gave rise to early literature, but how several realms interrelated. The mingling of English and Saxon to produce Anglo-Saxon, and the interplay between Germanic and Christian in the *Heliand*, provide a model of the kind of relationship which might be envisioned between polytheistic (Celtic, Germanic, Greek or Roman) and Christian (Celtic or Roman) images in Arthurian literature on the continent. Arthur does not need to remain entangled in a tug of war between Christianity and Druidism, for the legends themselves are a braided record of that centuries-long contest. Should Murphy's *Saxon Savior* model be accepted in the Arthurian arena as well, our long-running tournament would give way to aesthetic appreciation of the blending that has taken place among a range of approaches to the invisible. Under the rubric of multiculturalism, Murphy's work suggests a land bridge between christianism and postmodernism.

Father Murphy is professor of German at Georgetown University.

JACQUES RIBARD (TR. HELEN L. HARRISON)

Available here for the first time in English, this prominent French critic lays great stress on patterning (a notion fundamental to linguistic as well as to literary theory). He does not himself mention the standard view in German studies that Hartmann von Aue's companion stories *Erec* (the hero's failing is to lounge around too much) and *Iwein* (too much adventuring) are explorations of complementary themes. All the same, established patterning in translations of Chrétien buttresses Ribard's reading of two of Chrétien's own titles: aristocratic (*The Knight with the Lion*) versus popular (*The Knight of the Cart*). Suggestive of Jesus's surprising birth in a stable, this new polarity contrasts Lancelot's royal birth with a humiliating ride in a cart.

Working independently of D.W. Robertson, Ribard began teaching at the Sorbonne in 1964 and completed his doctorate there five years later. In 1969 he went to the new Faculté des Lettres of Amiens as tenured Professor of the Chair of French Medieval and Renaissance Literature. In 1972, he published *The Knight of the Cart: An Essay of Symbolic Interpretation (Le Chevalier de la Charrette, essai d'interprétation symbolique)*.⁹ The work suggested approaching Arthurian romance in terms of symbolic networks rich in mythic but above all mystical and Christian implications. Though each aspect of his reading is contestable in itself, Ribard writes, these details bolster each other and add up to an undeniably coherent reading of Chrétien.

One difference between Robertson and Ribard is that while the American drew heavily on French sources (as well as architecture and painting), his specialty was Chaucer. Ribard, on the other hand, is a native Parisian whose specialty is medieval French romance. Unlike Robertson, in other words, Ribard cannot be accused even wrongly of stepping outside his field of expertise.

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TOM ARTIN

In the introduction to *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's "Erec" and "Yvain,"* Artin writes movingly of an undergraduate English course he took under D.W. Robertson. Attributing the broad

outlines of his inquiry to this inspiring teacher, Artin mines Robertson's work on the English fourteenth century for insights into Arthurian romance of the French twelfth century. The Celtic origins of Artin's corpus are not a problem: "The reality of myth lies not in its outward fiction, but in the inner experience the fiction expresses." How does one arrive at this inner experience? By knowing when to let go of the literal: The ears are only the pathway to the heart.

For Artin, the idea is to look—figuratively, of course—at Chrétien's material through Chrétien's eyes. Some theorists would deny that this—even figuratively—is a sensible goal. But Artin is not naive about the complications involved in a synchronic reading. When his mentor, Robertson, explored the effect of the Romantic period on our own conception of art, he was in search of a way around the impasse of projection. In other words, he had anticipated a problem which has since become associated with literary theory

While Artin's contemporaries grew wary of awe (or Scylla), Artin avoided the Charybdis of belittling the object of one's study. Artin's notion of a Christian of Troyes (by birth or conversion) systematically working out the tenets of his faith gains from a slightly earlier Jew in Troyes who performed that very task on behalf of Judaism.¹⁰

Tom Artin has a doctorate in comparative literature from Princeton University and has taught English at several small colleges.

KATHRYN MARIE TALARICO

While Christianity is a marginal matter in German studies, in French studies the "theological reading" of the Vulgate has been so important as to produce a new wave of scholars who wish to downplay theology.¹¹ This difference between French and German studies may be due to the explicit association of the Grail with Joseph of Arimathea in the Vulgate Cycle, whereas any link between Grail and Eucharist in medieval German literature is suggestive only.

Talarico argues that we should not lose the adventure story in the theology, particularly if this forces everyone to regard the Vulgate from the same angle. Our mistake has not been to notice Christian elements in the Vulgate, but to misread them as discursive, orthodox theology. Such Christian elements as may be there were intended as fiction, and

enabled prose fiction in the vernacular to make serious statements of the sort which heretofore had been the province of Latin. Talarico thus establishes a dichotomy between laity (vernacular/fiction) and clergy (Latin/theology), while providing a clear overview of recent scholarship on matters related to these clusters. Her own stress is on the third aspect of this opposition pair (fiction vs. theology), with some additional tension between orthodox and maverick theology.

Kathryn M. Talarico is chair of the department of foreign languages at City University/College of Staten Island.

ANNE HUNTLEY-SPEARE

Huntley-Speare is a Christian who regards any overlap she might perceive between her faith and Wolfram's as an advantage, rather than a problem. This overlap is not a projection to be filtered out, but the simple recognition of a kindred spirit. Lacking her love of the Holy Spirit, Huntley-Speare would argue, many another reader overlooks the dove in *Parzival*, even when it has been pointed out to them. Not that a nonreligious person *cannot* recognize a literary motif, but such a reader may find it hard to pay attention to a motif that doesn't matter. In other words, projection cuts in myriad ways. It is possible to make a mirror of medieval material, whether one is interested in Christianity or not; and another name for *conscious* projection may be empathy, the very prism that made the New Testament an open book for Wolfram.

Huntley-Speare's other approach to projection is to acknowledge both non-Christian and Christian significance in the same emblem, depending upon culture. Diachronically (relative to Wolfram), the dove has non-Christian religious significance for early Germanic tribes; synchronically (relative to Wolfram), it has Christian religious significance in northern Europe in the early thirteenth century. Christian symbolism in Wolfram's day thus rests comfortably upon a pre-Christian bed. This polytheistic-Christian dynamic may have been of particular interest to the *Parzival* poet. Since six of Wolfram's eight references to the turtledove are associated with the Grail community, associating the evocative image of the turtledove with the pagan figure of Belakane has the effect of blurring a heretofore self-evident divide.

Anne Huntley-Speare is a doctoral candidate at the Pennsylvania State University.

HENRY KRATZ

Arthurian literature has more to do with historical events and socioeconomic realities than we generally give it credit for, and thus is much concerned with the Crusades.¹² But this doesn't link courtly romance to Christianity. Feudalism is the system through which all other Arthurian reality is filtered. In Wolfram's *Parzival* (332,5–8), the hero's renunciation of God is largely a matter of economics:

The concepts of feudalism so permeate all of life that they are transferred from the political sphere to other areas as well. Thus the knight tends to look upon his relation to God in the same light as his relationship to his liege lord: he serves him (in worship, in fighting for the cause of Christianity) for his reward (presumably life after death). This concept is carried by *Parzival* to its most drastic conclusion when he renounces his allegiance to God, as if he were a feudal lord who did not live up to his end of the contract.¹³

Our formula breaks down when we get to Kratz. Synchronic readers link Christianity to courtly romance, we suggested, while diachronic readers might not. Henry Kratz's focus is synchronic, but he is a leading critic of Arthurian christianism.

Apart from our topic, the present selection contains helpful commentary on the puzzling structure of Wolfram's Grail narrative. The essayist is professor emeritus of German philology at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

DEBORAH ROSE-LEFMANN

A century or so after the Crusades, Christian mysticism flourished in Germany along the Rhine. One way to view Rhine mysticism—Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Suso—is as a reversal of our discussion to date: However arguable the influence of Christianity on courtly literature, influence in the other direction is commonly accepted. In the fourteenth century, Heinrich Suso (or Seuse) borrowed enough courtly vocabulary to have become known as a spiritual troubadour (*geistlicher Minnesänger*).

From a christianist perspective, Rhine mysticism would not be an inversion at all, but an extension of the process by which Arthurian literature made its way across the continent: pagan Celtic material first

worked its way into the world view of a European Christian laity, there becoming vaguely Christian material; in the following century, it reached the clergy, where it was turned to explicitly sacred use.

Whether an inversion of courtly romance or a continuation of the progression that brought Arthur to the continent, Christian mysticism after the Crusades “blends biblical motifs—the stag that pants after flowing water (Psalm 42:1), the Lamb of God, which speaks here with the voice of the soul, the Heavenly Jerusalem—with those from courtly literature—the hunt as a courtly pastime, to be followed by a courtly festival.” Though the two pictures often overlap, God as spouse stands in striking contrast to the more familiar (but, in a democracy, somewhat unwieldy) image of God as king.

Rose-Lefmann—who takes no sides in the christianist debate—received her Ph.D. in medieval German from Princeton University and has done manuscript research as a Fulbright scholar in Augsburg, Germany. Her current work in library and information science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign emphasizes manuscripts written from a unique or unusual perspective.

PETER MEISTER

The editor of this volume is associate professor of German at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. His criticism includes “Parzival’s Innocence” and *The Healing Female in the German Courtly Romance*. He completed his undergraduate degree in German Romanticism at the University of Pennsylvania and has a doctorate in medieval German from the University of Virginia.

NOTES

1. Sten Maulsby (personal correspondence): “We are not here reading about Arthur. We’re concerned with whether an eleventh-century work is about pre-Roman, pre-Christian Britain, or about Christianity.”

2. Murphy (personal correspondence) believes that the Mabinogi poet was referring to contentions between Irish and Roman missionary churches in Britain on many matters (including baptism), finally resolved at the Synod of Whitby (A.D.663–664) in favor of Roman practices. The Mabinogi poet responsible for this phrase (“the baptism used in those days”) would thus have been composing after 664, but using material inherited from before that date. See also Murphy (*Heliand*) 218.

3. Cf. Murphy (*Heliand*) 210.
4. Russell 73, 85.
5. Only available in German (*Wolframs Willehalm, Studien zur Epenstruktur und zum Heiligkeitsbegriff der ausgehenden Blütezeit* and *Studien zum Ritterbegriff im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*). Biographical information from Eckehard Simon (personal correspondence) and Berger and Rupp 334–35.
6. Faust I, “*Marthens Garten*,” 3415: “*Wie hast du’s mit der Religion?*”
7. “Yggdrasil, the Cross and the Christmas Tree.” *America*, Vol. 175, No. 19, December 1996. 14–21 (esp. 16–20).
8. “The Light Worlds of the *Heliand*.” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 89, No. 1, Spring 1997. 5–17.
9. Titles which are not available in English (as this one is not) will not usually be translated in this volume. The importance of this title warrants making an exception.
10. Epstein 253: “A prince of commentators arose in France in the person of Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (1040–1105), affectionately called Rashi, who has exerted a profound influence on Jewish thought and education. His running Commentary on practically the whole of the Talmud, in which hardly a term, idea, phrase, or concept is allowed to pass without interpretation or explanation, has almost from the time of its first appearance been the indispensable aid of Talmudic teachers and students alike.”
11. To be sure, Kratz made the same plea among German scholars in *Total Evaluation* (7). But he was responding to a relatively small handful of offenders, foremost among them Benedikt Mockenhaupt, who—like Kratz—felt himself to be bucking a trend.
12. Cf. Joos and Whitesell, 239–43.
13. *Total Evaluation* 42.

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The distinction between primary works in the original, primary works in translation, and secondary works is not always sharp. A translation (most Arthurian literature), or even a study (Coleridge on Shakespeare) may sometimes be an object under discussion in its own right. Taken flexibly, these categories do provide a sensible point of departure.

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