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### **Representations of the grail quest in medieval and modern literature**

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# **Representations of the Grail Quest in Medieval and Modern Literature**

**Anastasija Ropa**

In fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Bangor  
University

Bangor University  
2014

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the representation and meaning of the Grail quest in medieval and modern literature, using the methodologies of historically informed criticism and feminist criticism. In the thesis, I consider the themes of death, gender relations and history in two medieval romances and three modern novels in which the Grail quest is the structuring motif.

Comparing two sets of texts coming from different historical periods enhances our understanding of each text, because not only are the modern texts influenced by their medieval precursors, but also our perception of medieval Grail quest romances is modified by modern literature. Studying medieval and modern Grail quest literature side by side also places the phenomenon of modern medievalism into a new perspective; this approach brings out the differences between the Grail quest in texts written in a society that shared a set of Christian values and those written in a post-religious context. Research conducted in the thesis shows that the texts within each group also differ between themselves, depending on the socio-historical circumstances in which the texts were written and read.

In the first part of the thesis (Chapters 1-4), I discuss the themes of death, the role of women as spiritual guides, and the relation between familial and world history in two medieval romances. I approach these issues from the perspective of minor characters, women and non-elect knights (who have previously been little studied). I argue that the experiences of these marginal characters are important for understanding both the

context in which the romances' major characters operate and the representation of questers in modern literature, which often places the unheroic, ordinary or even deviant characters into the limelight.

In the second part of the thesis (Chapters 5-7), I consider three modern novels that use the Christian motif of the Grail quest to structure their narratives, examining ways in which modern writers use medieval tropes in a post-religious age. In each chapter, I explore the place of death, relations between the questers and female characters and the impact of family and the world histories on the individual's identity in the respective novel. The conclusion brings together the research findings and suggests areas for further research in medieval and modern literature about the Grail quest.

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## List of Abbreviations

Ars. – Paris, Bibliothèque d’Arsenal

b. – born

BnF – Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale

BL – British Library

Bodl. – Oxford, Bodleian Library

c. – circa

CUP – Cambridge University Press

d. – died

*Déodat* – Michel Zink, *Déodat, ou la transparence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002)

*DMF* – *Dictionnaire Moyen Français*, references are to *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, version 2012 (DMF 2012). ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine. <<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf>>

EEBO – Early English Books Online

EETS – Early English Text Society

fol. – folio

fols – folios

*Lancelot* – Walker Percy, *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977; repr. New York: Avon Books, 1978)

*Lancelot-Graal* cycle – the Vulgate cycle; references are to Sommer, H. O., *The Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances*, 7 vols. (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1909-1913)

*MED* – *The Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Robert Lewis (Michigan, University of Michigan, 2001)

*Morte* – *Le Morte Darthur*; references are to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. by Eugene Vinaver, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. edn. by P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 3 vols

MS Add. – MS Additional

MS Bodmer – Geneva-Cologny, MS Martin Bodmer Foundation

MS f. fr. – MS fonds français

OUP – Oxford University Press

o.s. – Original Series

PUF – Presses Universitaires de France

*Queste* – *Queste del Saint Graal*; references are to *La Queste del Saint Graal, Roman du XIII siècle*, ed. by Albert Pauphilet, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Paris: Champion, 1923)

r – recto

‘Sankgreal’ – ‘Tale of the Sankgreal’, part of Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*

*Small World* – David Lodge, *Small World: An Academic Romance* (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1984; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1995)

v – verso



## **Note on the referencing system used in the thesis**

I have chosen to split the numbering of footnotes by chapter in order to ease the reader's navigation of the references. However, I used a continuous system of referencing throughout.

## Introduction

The popularity of the Grail quest and Arthurian literature is a point of intersection between medieval and modern cultures, with the Grail quest exercising a special appeal both to modern popular imagination and academic research. Nonetheless, modern attitudes to medieval philosophies and cultural practices are ambiguous. Michel Zink remarks that the Middle Ages are generally seen as barbaric, violent and lacking in education as opposed to the preceding classical and the subsequent modern periods. Zink also considers that the Grail quest constitutes an exception to these attitudes, a metaphor standing for a desirable, though hard to reach, aim and applied to various moral, ethical, political and economic objectives.<sup>1</sup> In turn, Gwendolyn Morgan, commenting on twentieth-century attitudes towards the Middle Ages, states that ‘in the popular imagination, to be rooted in the medieval is to have unquestioned tradition and authority, to be legitimized’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, despite popular stereotypes of the ‘dark’ and ‘distant’ Middle Ages, certain medieval topoi, such as chivalry, Arthurian adventures and, particularly, the Grail quest, have been consistently intriguing to the modern imagination and may even appear as an answer to modern anxieties, as will be explored further in this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

In recent decades, despite the growth of studies in the field of medievalism, there has been no attempt to compare closely medieval and modern representations of the Grail quest. Studies of

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Zink, ‘*Non pedum passibus, sed desiderii quaeritur Deus*’ (Saint Bernard). *Que cherchaient les quêteurs du Graal?* Collège de France, 04 December 2008 <<http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/michel-zink/>> [accessed 4 July 2013]. See also Zink, *La Quête du Graal et la chevalerie*. Collège Belgique, séance d’inauguration au Palais des Académies, 20 January 2009 <<http://www.academieroyale.be/>> [accessed 4 July 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Gwendolyn Morgan, ‘Medievalism, Authority, and the Academy’, in *Defining Medievalism(s). Studies in Medievalism*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 55-67 (p. 55).

<sup>3</sup> In commenting on the popularity of Arthuriana in contemporary American culture, Albrecht Classen argues, for instance, that ‘the Middle Ages appear as a world in which aura and charisma, but then also the ideal of honor were still more or less intact, thus providing material for modern dreams about true human values lost in the capitalistic humdrum of modern life’ (‘The Challenges of the Humanities, Past, Present, and Future: Why the Middle Ages Mean So Much for Us Today and Tomorrow’, *Humanities*, 3 (2014): 1-18, p. 5). See also the recent study of Arthurian cartoons by Michael Salda, *Arthurian Animation: A Study of Cartoon Camelots on Film and Television* (London: McFarland, 2013).

the Grail quest that mention both medieval and modern texts usually concentrate on one of the periods.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, a comparison of medieval and modern texts about the Grail quest can shed light on two aspects of the interaction between medieval and modern societies: first, on the different sets of moral and spiritual issues to which the Grail quest provides a solution in medieval and modern societies and, second, on the use of medievalist tropes in modern culture. Defining the way medievalist tropes, such as the Grail quest, are perceived in the modern world, M. J. Toswell argues that

always a medievalist trope is perceived first through the sceptical modern eye of the twenty-first-century scholar, second (though not invariably) through the romanticizing eye of nineteenth-century medievalist scholarship and study that is the foundation of the medievalizing impulse in the contemporary world; and third through the variable (reaching toward ‘authentic’) eye of the creator(s) of the text.<sup>5</sup>

A study of medieval and modern Grail quest texts can reveal the medievalist tropes that are used creatively and critically by modern writers who set their novels in the medieval past or in the modern world that, in some respects, remains grotesquely or dauntingly akin to the medieval.

In this thesis, I undertake a comparative study of the representation of the Grail quest and its significance in two medieval and three modern texts. In the first part of the thesis, I will study two medieval romances written in the early thirteenth and the late fifteenth century to reveal the continuities and differences in medieval attitudes and practices related to death, the role of women

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, Raymond Olderman in *Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties* focuses on the American novels that explore the motif of the waste land, but he does not consider the medieval sources of the motif (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). Another example is John Marino’s *The Grail Legend in Modern Literature*, which includes summaries of medieval Grail quest romances, followed by an overview of modern Grail literature in English (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> M. J. Toswell, ‘The Tropes of Medievalism’, in *Defining Medievalism(s)*, ed. by Fugelso, pp. 68-76 (p. 74).

in the Grail quest and the place of family and world histories in defining individual identity. In the second part of the thesis, I will analyse the use of the Grail quest tropes in three modern novels, comparing their responses to the Grail quest to those of medieval romances. The methodology I use for studying the texts can be described as historically informed criticism, considering the texts in terms of the periods they were composed and read. This approach will enable me to show ways in which medieval authors and audiences viewed the Grail quest and in what respects modern responses to the quest differ from the early ones. Given the fact much of my discussion, especially in Chapters 3, 4, 5.3, 6.3 and 7.3, is shaped by feminist questions, I also employ elements of feminist criticism in my discussion of the texts. Within the present Introduction itself, I will discuss the basic differences between medieval and modern writers' approach to the Grail quest, the rationale for selecting the corpus of texts studied, the methodology used in the thesis, the reasons for excluding from my discussion literature written between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries and, finally, the themes addressed in the chapters.

The main difference between medieval and modern visions of the Grail quest is the attitude towards spirituality in the societies in which these texts were written. Medieval authors wrote for a society which shared their belief in the existence of spiritual realities; for them, the Grail quest was a religious search which could bring an individual closer to God. In modern society, that assurance of faith in a spiritual reality is largely rejected: even if the author, like Walker Percy, is a practising Catholic, he cannot be sure that his readers will share his faith or, indeed, if they care about his religious convictions. Accordingly, Percy, who often uses the Grail quest as a structuring motif for his novels, comments in his essay 'The Delta Factor' on the failure of modern culture to give meaning to individual life:

[t]here does not presently exist [...] a consensus view of man such as existed, for instance, in thirteenth-century Europe or seventeenth-century New England, or

even in some rural communities in Georgia today. Prescinding [sic] from whether such a view is true or false, we are able to say that it was a viable belief in the sense that it animated the culture and gave life its meaning. It was something men lived by, even when they fell short of it and saw themselves as sinners. It was the belief that man was created in the image of God with an immortal soul, that he occupied a place in nature somewhere between the beasts and the angels, that he suffered an aboriginal catastrophe, the Fall, in consequence of which he lost his way and, unlike beasts, became capable of sin and thereafter a pilgrim or seeker of his own salvation, and that the clue and the sign of his salvation was to be found not in science or philosophy but in news of an actual historical event involving a people, a person, and an institution.<sup>6</sup>

Percy's words show why twentieth-century writers are so interested in the medieval Grail quest, a product of Christian culture which at first glance may seem irrelevant in a secularised, post-religious society. In a world which contains no answer to the individual's question of who he or she is and which rejects the possibility of such an answer, seeing reality as arbitrary and meaningless, writers have to create, if need be even impose, meaning in order to live. MaryLynn Saul contends that, in modern literature, the Grail can be used to comment on 'the uncertainty of a world where God has been declared dead, but where no clear substitute [...] has been found', which 'suggests that modern humans need some meaningful order in the world and illustrates our inability to accept Nothing'.<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* epitomizes, the search for order and meaning by an individual faced with modern *ennui* and the nostalgia for a world where meaning existed; such *ennui* in many ways distinguishes the modern Grail quest literature and is common to the three

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<sup>6</sup> Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> MaryLynn Saul, 'The Unholy Grail: Recasting the Grail Myth for an Unbelieving Age', in *Modern Retellings of Chivalric Texts*, ed. by Gloria Allaire (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 51–66 (p. 57).

novels examined in the thesis.<sup>8</sup> Eliot's choice of the Grail quest to structure his narrative search for meaning was probably suggested by Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, which remained influential throughout the Modernist period and into the 1930s, providing models both of moral order and of individual Grail quests. Wagner's *Parsifal* informed ideas about the Grail quest of many prominent Modernists, not only Eliot, but also Forster, Lawrence, and, ironically, given Wagner's fall from popularity after the Second World War, the French philosopher Simone Weil.<sup>9</sup>

The Grail quest in modern literature thus functions differently from the Grail quest of medieval romances. However, modern writers usually have some knowledge of their medieval sources, most often of Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, but also of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval, ou le conte du Graal*, the anonymous French *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste del Saint Graal*. For my corpus of medieval texts, I chose the romances that, judging by the numbers of surviving manuscript copies and of early printed editions, were well-known to their medieval audiences. These romances are related to each other, but they come from different geographic areas and historical periods: the French anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal*, part of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century, is the source of the English 'Tale of the Sankgreal', which is part of Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, written in 1469-70.<sup>10</sup>

The *Lancelot-Graal* cycle (consisting of *L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, *L'Estoire de Merlin*, *Lancelot*, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, *La Mort le roi Artu*) is preserved in its entirety in nine manuscripts,<sup>11</sup> as compared to the total of approximately 200 copies of parts of the cycle<sup>12</sup> and fifty-

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<sup>8</sup> I refer to Eliot's poem later in relation to modern novels, see Chapter 6, pp. 200-14. See also J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (London: Associated University Press, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> I will return to Weil's view of the Grail quest in Chapter 7, pp. 248-49.

<sup>10</sup> Editions used in the thesis are *La Queste del Saint Graal, Roman du XIII siècle*, ed. by Albert Pauphilet, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Paris: Champion, 1923) and *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. by Eugene Vinaver, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. edn. by P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 3 vols. References are given parenthetically, and translations of the *Queste* are from *The Quest for the Holy Grail. The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 6, trans. Jane Burns (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), unless indicated otherwise. 'Sankgreal' is used as the short title for 'Tale of the Sankgreal' in the thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Miranda Griffin, *The Object and the Cause in the Vulgate Cycle* (London: Legenda, 2005), pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Alison Stones, 'Seeing the Grail, Prolegomena to a Study of Grail Imagery in Arthurian Manuscripts', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira Mahoney (London: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 301-66 (p. 302).

six manuscripts presenting the complete *Queste* or its fragments.<sup>13</sup> The *Queste* was popular from the early thirteenth century, when it was written, to the sixteenth century, as confirmed by the number of surviving manuscripts produced across Europe, not only in France and England but also, for instance, in the territory of the present-day Belgium and Italy. From the late fifteenth century onwards, the *Queste* appeared in printed editions.<sup>14</sup> The *Queste* is also the source of Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal', a choice which is remarkable in itself, because Malory had access to other versions of the Grail quest, both English and French, apart from the one presented in the *Queste*: John Hardyng's *Chronicle*, the French prose *Tristan* and, possibly, *Perlesvaus*.<sup>15</sup> These versions are less intensely religious than the *Queste*, so Malory's decision to follow the *Queste* text closely is noteworthy. For the other books of the *Morte*, Malory often used several sources, but, in the 'Sankgreal', Malory uses the *Queste* text as his only source, though his omissions and subtle alterations can result in changing the meaning of the original.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Fanni Bogdanow, 'A Little Known Codex, Bancroft ms. 73, and its Place in the Manuscript Tradition of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Arthuriana*, 6:1 (1996), 1-21 (p. 2).

<sup>14</sup> The *Queste* manuscripts and early printed editions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, pp. 30-42. The first printed editions of the *Queste* produced by Antoine Vérard date from 1488 (see C. E. Pickford, 'Antoine Vérard: Éditeur du *Lancelot* et du *Tristan*', in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature françaises du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance offerts à Charles Foulon* (Rennes: Institut de français, Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980), vol 1, pp. 280-84). On Vérard's editions of Arthurian romances, see Mary Winn, 'Vérard's Editions of *Tristan*', *Arthuriana* 19:1 (2009) 47-73.

<sup>15</sup> On the French and English sources that were possibly available to Malory, see, most recently, P. J. C. Field, 'Malory and the Grail', in *The Grail, the Quest and the World of Arthur*, ed. by Norris Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 141-55; see also Terence Mc Carthy, 'Malory and His Sources', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 75-95. On Malory's use of Hardyng's *Chronicle*, see Ralph Norris, *Malory's Library: The Sources of the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), especially pp. 15-18.

<sup>16</sup> The studies of Malory's treatment of the *Queste* have a long history, beginning from Vinaver's edition of the *Morte*; the development of these studies is described by Roberta Davidson, 'The "Freynshe booke" and the English Translator: Malory's Originality Revisited', *Translation and Literature*, 17:2 (2008), 133-49 (dealing with Malory's claimed sources for the entire *Morte*). The most detailed study of Malory's changes to the *Queste* is S. N. Ihle, *Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). See also Dhira Mahoney, 'The Truest and Holiest Tale: Malory's Transformation of *La Queste del Saint Graal*', in *Studies in Malory*, ed. by James Spisak (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1985), pp. 109-28; P. E. Tucker, 'The Place of the Quest of the Holy Grail in the *Morte Darthur*', *MLR*, 48 (1953), 391-97; Charles Moorman, 'Malory's Treatment of the Sankgreal', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 496-509; Moorman, "'The Tale of the Sankgreal': Human Frailty", in *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), pp. 184-204; Jill Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Archibald and Edwards, pp. 203-20; and, more recently, Joerg Fichte's essay 6 in *From Camelot to Obamalot: Essays on Medieval and Modern Arthurian Literature* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher, 2010). In Chapters 2-4, I comment on some of the changes Malory introduces to the episodes under analysis and explain how these changes could influence the interpretation of the episodes and, indeed, of the entire Grail quest.

Critics have pointed out that Malory's *Morte Darthur* must have been very popular with its English audience; although only one manuscript of the romance survives, the *Morte* went through six printed editions from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. According to A. S. G. Edwards, Malory's *Morte* benefited from a 'sustained audience' in this period, having been reprinted five times (by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498 and again in 1529, by William Copland in 1559, by Thomas East in 1582 and by William Stansby in 1634), after its original printing by William Caxton in 1485.<sup>17</sup> The small number of surviving early printed copies suggests that the books were heavily used by their readers, who regarded them as utilitarian objects, unlike some of the surviving lavish manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle. In the words of Edwards, the early printed versions of the *Morte* were literally 'read to destruction'.<sup>18</sup> As I explain further in the Introduction, when medieval romances, including Arthurian literature, came into fashion again in the nineteenth century, the *Morte* version of Arthurian adventures and the Grail quest remained one of the best known – at least among English speaking audiences. Moreover, many modern readers and writers first became acquainted with the Grail quest through the *Morte*, an adapted edition of Malory's romance, such as Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur* (1880) or, at the very least, a film or work of fiction that draws on it.<sup>19</sup>

The modern writers whose works all knew Malory's romance or its adaptation, and one of them at least also knew the *Queste*. My selection of modern texts also comes from different geographic and linguistic areas: the American Walker Percy's *Lancelot* (1977), the English David Lodge's *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984) and the French Michel Zink's *Déodat, ou la*

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<sup>17</sup> A. S. G. Edwards, 'The Reception of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Archibald and Edwards, pp. 241-52 (p. 241).

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, 'Reception', p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> According to Beverly Taylor and Elizabeth Brewer, 'Lanier retold Malory's stories about heroism, gallantry, and purity, especially emphasising conduct on the tournament and battle grounds and on the Grail quest' (*The Return of King Arthur: British and American Literature since 1800* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), p. 164). As explained further in the Introduction, Walker Percy's inspiration for his novel *Lancelot* (1977) came from Lanier's edition. In turn, David Lodge decided to use the Grail quest as a structuring motif for his novel *Small World* (1984) after watching John Boorman's film *Excalibur* (1981).



*transparence* (2002).<sup>20</sup> These novels illustrate different aspects of Toswell's definition of the medievalist trope, quoted above, exhibiting Romantic, creative and scholarly responses to the Grail quest.

Walker Percy was an American writer who drew on the chivalric heritage of the Old South and, in *Lancelot*, he explores elements of the Southern Gothic to a larger extent than in any of his other novels. Being a Roman Catholic, Percy probably found the religious and Eucharistic elements of the Grail quest appealing, but, writing in a post-Christian culture, he makes his protagonist claim that he seeks not God or 'good', but its opposite, evil, the 'Unholy Grail' of sexual sin. As I explain later in this Introduction, Percy's *Lancelot* is manifestly unheroic, unlike his namesake. Alan Lupack and Barbara Lupack explain that Percy was inspired by Lanier's '*The Boy's King Arthur*, one of the first books he ever read', a juvenile illustrated edition based on Malory's *Morte*; Percy himself wrote in a letter to Alan Lupack that 'the provenance of my *Lancelot* [...] is *The Boys* [sic] *King Arthur* and most importantly the marvellous illustrations'.<sup>21</sup> Percy's view of Arthurian literature is thus partially filtered through the prism of nineteenth-century Romantic medievalism, but he uses the Grail quest to comment on the moral challenges of the modern world, such as sexual promiscuity, political corruption and psychological alienation.

In *Small World*, David Lodge approaches the Grail quest from a different perspective, being not only a novelist but also a literary critic and academic, though not a medievalist.<sup>22</sup> Lodge recalls having read a version of Malory's romance as a child, but the idea of using the Grail quest as a structuring motif for *Small World* came to him after watching John Boorman's film

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<sup>20</sup> Page references to these texts are given parenthetically in the thesis: Percy, *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977; repr. New York: Avon Books, 1978); Lodge, *Small World: An Academic Romance* (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1984; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1995); Zink, *Déodat, ou la transparence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Alan Lupack and Barbara Lupack, *King Arthur in America* (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 1999), p. 229. Percy was also familiar, of course, with Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Eliot's sources, Wagner's *Parsifal* and Jessie Weston's study *From Ritual to Romance*. Percy's Arthurian sources, which might have also included some edition of the *Queste*, are further considered in Chapter 5.1 below, pp. 144-45.

<sup>22</sup> By upbringing Lodge is, like Percy, a Roman Catholic.

*Excalibur*, which itself claims to be based on the *Morte*.<sup>23</sup> Lodge includes a variety of literary allusions in the novel, referring to medieval romances – Chrétien de Troyes’s and Geoffrey Chaucer’s, for example – as well as non-medieval romances and literature that make use of Arthurian motifs, such as Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. In an interview with Raymond Thompson, Lodge explains that *The Waste Land* and Jessie Weston’s study *From Ritual to Romance*, used by Eliot for his poem, were his primary sources for the Grail quest motif in *Small World*. However, he acknowledges being familiar with some medieval romances, such as *King Horn*, and with scholarly studies of romance, including Patricia Parker’s *Inescapable Romance* and Northrop Frye’s works, when writing *Small World*.<sup>24</sup> Lodge uses the Grail quest as a structural motif to convey his view of the global academic community in the 1980s, which, as Lodge remarks, represents society in microcosm: ‘[t]he university is a kind of microcosm of society at large, in which the principles, drives and conflicts that govern collective human life are displayed and may be studied in a clear light and on a manageable scale’.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, his novel describes a quest for meaning that, as already mentioned, is prominent in modern literature; the quest in *Small World* is set in the context of literary studies, where the very idea of meaning is under threat from new literary theories, post-structuralism and deconstruction.

The third author whose work I study is Continental, Michel Zink; unlike Percy and Lodge, Zink is primarily known as an academic, a scholar of medieval literature, rather than a novelist.

Zink’s *Déodat* is set in the medieval Arthurian kingdom, and he uses a variety of details and

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<sup>23</sup> Lodge says that ‘[i]n spite of the slightly absurd style of the film, I was reminded again what a tremendous story the Arthurian legend is. It’s quite powerful. Then it struck me that here was a story which could provide the mythic skeleton or underpinning necessary to give shape to my modern comedy of academic manners’ (Raymond Thompson, ‘Interview with David Lodge’, in *Taliesin’s Successors: Interviews with Authors of Modern Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Raymond Thompson <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/intrvws/lodge.htm>> [accessed 10 May 2013]). Davidson notes that ‘Boorman is somewhat dismissive of Malory, even though the film announces itself as based on Sir Thomas Malory’s book’ (‘The Reel Arthur: Politics and Truth Claims in *Camelot*, *Excalibur*, and *King Arthur*’, *Arthuriana*, 17:2 (2007), 62-84 (p. 68)).

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, ‘Interview’.

<sup>25</sup> Lodge, *Write On: Occasional Essays ‘65-’85* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), p. 169.

historical terms to describe his setting. Moreover, Zink appends a note to the novel, citing his sources, all of which are medieval: *Perlesvaus*, Chrétien's romances and the Breton lays.<sup>26</sup> He does not specifically mention the *Queste*, but at least one of his characters, Galahad, must have been borrowed from it, because Galahad does not appear in the earlier Grail quest romances. Zink's use of the Grail quest trope comes closest to what Toswell terms 'the sceptical modern eye of the twenty-first-century scholar', but it is also an 'authentic', 'creative' approach.<sup>27</sup> Melanie Hackney considers the novel as participating in the collaborative effort of creating a view of the Grail which differs from Chrétien de Troyes's Grail, an enterprise begun by Robert de Boron.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Zink treats the Grail quest in a way analogous to the work of a medieval scribe, who threads his romance from various, often contradictory sources, in order to present a coherent story that would also be relevant to the author's contemporaries.

Albeit stylistically very idiosyncratic, the novels discussed in Chapters 5-7 have in common the fact that they are all written by male authors, just as the medieval Grail quest romances whose authors are known are also male-authored. Moreover, like the authors of medieval Grail quest, the modern authors whose novels I have selected for discussion share a Roman Catholic background, which influences their presentation of the Grail, even when, as in Percy's and Lodge's novels, it is not directly associated with the Eucharist, and of the gendered aspects of the Grail quest. In these modern novels, women are not presented as questers, a fact which contributes to the continuity between the medieval and modern versions of the Grail quest examined in the thesis, because in both medieval and modern versions women play the roles of guides, ladies in distress and temptresses.

Just as the authors' backgrounds are very different, so the novels are very dissimilar in stylistic terms and in their treatment of the Grail quest. To reflect the differences in the novels'

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<sup>26</sup> For Zink's sources, see Chapter 7, p. 222.

<sup>27</sup> Toswell, 'Tropes', p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Melanie Hackney, 'The Collaborative Lens: Robert de Boron's Overshadowing of Chrétien de Troyes', *Paroles gelées*, 25 (2009), 75-92.

style, I have modified my approach to each of the novels and have used different kinds of critical literature in discussing each of the novels, treating them separately in Chapters 5-7. Walker Percy's novel *Lancelot* is presented mostly as a monologue of title character, Lancelot, an inmate of a mental hospital. The atmosphere in the novel is very heavy and emotionally charged, and, to comment on the psychological component of the novel, I have relied on the writings of Erich Fromm, the American psychologist who was Percy's contemporary and with whose work Percy was familiar. In turn, David Lodge's *Small World* is a comic novel, which is structured, like medieval romances, as an interlaced narrative, and which uses numerous literary allusions to bring out the similarity between the novel's characters and the characters of medieval and post-medieval romances and Arthurian texts. Thus, I have considered the developments in literary criticism, particularly the theories of structuralism, deconstruction and Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and the dialogic novel to reflect on Lodge's version of the academic Grail quest. My approach to *Small World* employs elements of intertextual reception theory, which is also applicable, to an extent, to the other modern novels examined in the thesis. In fact, the third novel I analyse, Michel Zink's *Déodat*, incorporates numerous allusions to Arthurian romances, though, unlike Lodge, Zink does not refer to these allusions in the texts but appends a note on his medieval sources at the end of the novel. *Déodat* as a romance is self-consciously artificial; although the novel is structured as the Grail quest and incorporates abundant historical details, it is narrated in a very modern way, presented from the point of view of a socially insignificant, marginal character. Moreover, the abundance of realistic details results occasionally in rendering the atmosphere of the novel 'uncanny', a psychological notion that is productively used in literary criticism, for instance, by Nicholas Royle.<sup>29</sup> However, I also refer to medieval sources, both in their edited form and in the form of illuminated manuscripts, to comment on Zink's interpretation of the Grail quest.

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<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

As I have suggested above, both medieval and modern authors use the Grail quest in a way that would best meet the challenges of their respective societies. Although Malory translates or summarises his source with considerable fidelity, there are differences between the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, which, as I point out in Chapters 1-4, reflect cultural differences between the thirteenth-century French society where the *Queste* was written and Malory’s fifteenth-century England. Likewise, the modern search for meaning is conducted in very different settings in Percy’s, Lodge’s and Zink’s novels. In the first part of the thesis (Chapters 1-4), I will examine the depiction of certain social and religious practices (preparation for death, deathbed practices and funerals) and attitudes (the representation of female recluses as guides and the role of family and public histories in forming one’s identity) especially as revealed through the experiences of minor characters and non-elect knights. The study of these attitudes is shaped by historically informed criticism, and I also use feminist criticism to comment on the representation of female characters in Chapters 3 and 4. In the second part of the thesis (Chapters 5-7), I again employ the methodology of historically informed criticism, together with the study of literary genre, to discuss the modern novels one by one. I divide each of the chapters into four sections to reflect on the same themes as in the medieval part: first, the society where the novel is set; second, strategies of coping with death and bereavement; third, gender relations and the role of women as guides; and, fourth, the interaction between individual, family genealogy and social history in the characters’ quest. Again, to reflect the portrayal and narrative function of women characters in each of the modern novels, I have recourse to aspects of feminist criticism. Before commenting on each of these themes further in the Introduction, I will explain my decision to concentrate on minor characters and non-elect knights and the reasons for taking a diachronic approach to the study of the Grail quest, as well as exclusion from discussion of Grail literature written between the sixteenth and the late twentieth centuries.

In both medieval and modern literature, the Grail quest narrative represents one version of the human struggle to achieve existential authenticity, a quest which is equally important to *all* people, including ordinary and unexceptional individuals. Accordingly, my discussion of medieval texts focuses on the experiences of minor characters and non-elect knights in medieval romances, since such an approach helps to present well-known texts from an unusual angle and can lead one to re-examine one's assumptions about the representations and experiences of the major as well as the minor characters. Later in the Introduction, I will explain that there are no 'heroes' in modern Grail quest literature in the sense that the protagonists of modern novels are not distinguished by spiritual or moral virtues, so that they resemble the non-elect knights and minor characters of medieval romances rather than the elect knights.

As I further demonstrate in Chapter 1, the episodes of medieval romances examined in Chapters 2-4 are essential in the development of the plot and in the main characters' quest, which is confirmed by the manuscripts' and early printed books' illustrative programmes. However, I focus on minor women characters and non-elect knights, who have been little, if at all, studied by scholars. There are two reasons for concentrating on minor characters in the medieval texts: firstly, within the thesis, these characters will provide a link between medieval and modern Grail quest literature, and, secondly, such a study can change our reading of medieval texts because of the minor characters' functions in the narrative. P. J. C. Field observes that, in Malory's *Morte Darthur*,

the minor characters exist mainly, not in themselves, but in relation to the major ones. In this we can distinguish four interrelated functions which they fulfil. The minor characters provide continuity of background, contrast of character, historical authenticity, and enhance the stature of Lancelot.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Field, 'Four Functions of Malory's Minor Characters', *Medium Aevum*, 37 (1968), 37-45 (p. 38).

Field's explanation is valid not only for Malory's romance, but also for other Grail quest romances, except that, in those texts where Lancelot's role is less prominent, the minor characters' function is to increase the prestige of some other hero: the Grail champion or an elect knight. A study of minor characters can thus expand our understanding of the text's historical background and of the major characters, such as Lancelot, the elect knights and major female characters (Perceval's sister, Queen Guinevere).<sup>31</sup>

As Field indicates, medieval romances often contrast minor and major characters, but modern Grail quest fiction has no 'heroes' in the sense that a 'hero' is a person of superior moral or spiritual qualities. The characters of modern Grail quest literature lack heroic qualities if judged by the standards of medieval Grail quest romances; they are unexceptional, ordinary or even comic individuals. A modern author can employ the name of a famous Arthurian knight, such as Lancelot or Perceval, for a protagonist who fails to live up to the expectations raised by this name.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in such narratives, the adventures of Arthur's knights can be presented from the point of view of a minor or marginal character, someone who is barely mentioned in the romances.<sup>33</sup> The appearance of ordinary, ridiculous, deviant or even downright criminal individuals as the main characters of modern Arthurian literature reminds the reader that the modern world has no place for 'heroes', at least not for heroes of outstanding moral or spiritual virtue. This particular use of Arthurian heroes and the interest in Arthurian minor characters manifestly distinguishes modern literature from the literature of the preceding centuries, at the same time as constituting a bridge between medieval romance and the modern novel.

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<sup>31</sup> For instance, Thomas Crofts shows the importance of Malory's minor knights, who are anonymous in Malory's source and whom Malory names, for the reader's experience of the romance: '[i]n his naming and in his death, each of Malory's knights remains the *same* knight, and there are fewer of those unnamed "extras" who teem in the periphery of most romance, representing, by synecdoche, a great plenitude of potential actors' ('Death in the Margins: Dying and Scribal Performance in the Winchester Manuscript', in *The Arthurian Way of Death: The English Tradition*, ed. by Karen Cherewatuk and K. S. Whetter (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 115-23 (p. 116)).

<sup>32</sup> Walker Percy's protagonist in *Lancelot* comments on the absurdity of his being the namesake of the best Arthurian knight when he tells how he has been discharged from the army with diarrhea (*Lancelot*, 29; see Chapter 5.1, p. 146).

<sup>33</sup> Michel Zink's novel *Déodat, ou la transparence* is presented from the point of view of an obscure boy, the brother of a minor character, Cahus, from the anonymous French *Perlesvaus*.

As explained above, one of the principal reasons for taking a diachronic approach to the Grail quest literature and studying first medieval romances and then modern novels is the existence of a gap in Arthurian and Grail quest literature between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, when few authors seriously engaged with these medieval tropes. In the early modern period, interest in the Grail quest and Arthurian literature in general declined and, after Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), disappeared almost entirely. Beverly Taylor and Elizabeth Brewer remark that:

[a]lthough between Malory's romance, printed in 1485, and Tennyson's publication in 1832, Arthurian works had appeared in England in an inconstant but unbroken flow, these works generally had little connection with medieval tradition other than names or occasional episodes familiar from the Middle Ages. By and large these Renaissance and Enlightenment works, such as Spenser's epic *Faerie Queene*, Dryden's dramatic opera *King Arthur*, or Fielding's play *Tom Thumb*, simply wove Arthur or his famous knights into a tapestry of situations and events remote from Arthurian stories and concerns.<sup>34</sup>

Malory's *Morte Darthur*, having gone through several editions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was last edited by William Stansby in 1634, after which it ceased to be published for nearly two centuries, until 1816, when 'two editions of the *Morte Darthur* appeared as a response to the revival of interest for this particular legend'.<sup>35</sup> According to Marylyn Parins, negative attitudes towards Malory's romance, and Arthurian and Grail quest romances in general, are 'linked to the devaluing of products of the barbarous, non-classical and Catholic Middle Ages' in early modern Britain. Parins notes that '[e]ven the Grail story – the moralistic mainstay of many a nineteenth-

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<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Return of King Arthur*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Takako Kato, 'Towards the Digital Winchester: Editing the Winchester Manuscript of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *International Journal of English Studies*, 5 (2005), 175-92 (p. 176).



century critic – is dismissed by Nathaniel Baxter as “vile and stinking”, presumably because it represents monkish and superstitious fanaticism’.<sup>36</sup> Baxter’s response is that of a Puritan author, who was naturally offended by the prominence given to the Eucharist in the ‘Sankgreal’ and by Malory’s representation of the Grail as a holy relic.<sup>37</sup>

With the Romantic and Victorian interest in medievalism, the Arthurian and the Grail quest themes make a spectacular reappearance in the nineteenth century:

[f]rom Alfred Tennyson’s early Arthurian poems published in the 1830s and 1840s, through William Morris’ *Defence of Guinevere* volume published after mid-century, to Algernon Charles Swinburne’s *Tristram of Lyonesse* and *The Tale of Balen* appearing in the last two decades of the century, Arthurian materials fascinated important writers throughout the Victorian era.<sup>38</sup>

However, the Victorian Grail quest, and Victorian Arthurian literature generally, register a break from both medieval and early modern models. Taylor and Brewer observe that ‘the broad medievalism of the Romantic period began as varied reactions against neo-classical symmetry, decorum, and order’.<sup>39</sup> Whereas reliance on imagination and fantasy was discouraged in neo-classical culture, nineteenth-century authors were no longer deterred from appropriating Arthurian legends by the proliferation of marvels and miracles in them. Accordingly, Michael Alexander maintains that ‘[t]he values attributed to reason and imagination changed in the course of the eighteenth century: to see reason as needing supplementation is an infallible sign of Romanticism’.<sup>40</sup> In these circumstances, Arthurian literature could be put to various uses, including

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<sup>36</sup> Parins, *Malory: The Critical Heritage* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Baxter was ‘a poet, preacher, author of Puritan tracts, and Greek tutor to Philip Sidney’ (Parins, *Malory*, p. 58).

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Return of King Arthur*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Return of King Arthur*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 105.

the invocation of a romantic pre-industrial world as well as building British identity by reference to the heroic values of the historical past. With the movement from Romanticism to Victorian culture and the growth of the Empire, there appears an increased sense of Britishness, and the Arthurian material provides historical roots and a validation of this notion. M. L. Morris maintains that ‘in the nineteenth century, imagination appears as a key element of historical discourse; it materializes the past and transfers the nobility of past heroes onto modern bodies’.<sup>41</sup> Arthurian material reworked by Victorian authors was thus regarded as casting light on British history and identity.

Apart from the emphasis on imagination and national identity, another stress in Victorian Arthuriana was laid on moral and religious discourses. According to Inga Bryden, nineteenth-century interest in Arthurian chivalry was stimulated by ‘[t]he desire to restore connections within society, in a rapidly industrializing context’.<sup>42</sup> Longing for social, religious and moral stability facilitated the popularity of Arthurian chivalry, which, in the nineteenth-century imagination, appeared as heroic, loyal and morally upright. Arthurian matter, especially the Grail quest, answered the need for religious stability and security at the time when industrialism, new philosophies and scientific theories (materialism, Darwinism) and dissenting religious movements undermined the established religious and moral values. The Arthurian world, as seen, above all, by Tennyson, is distinguished by clear Christian values, a firm social hierarchy and moral stability. However, the association between the Grail and Catholic ritual in medieval Arthurian romances limited that specific legend’s appeal to the Victorian audience. Roger Simpson explains that nineteenth-century poets and prose writers tried to avoid presenting the Grail as a tangible ‘holy relic’ or a Eucharistic vessel; this constituted a substantial change from Malory’s Grail and the Grail of Malory’s sources. He notes that the majority of Victorian works which include the Grail tend towards ‘allegory and

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See also Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>41</sup> M. L. Morris, “‘Recalled to Life’: King Arthur’s Return and the Body of the Past in the Nineteenth-Century England”, *Arthuriana*, 21:2 (2011), 5-27 (p. 10).

<sup>42</sup> Inga Bryden, ‘All Dressed Up: Revivalism and the Fashion for Arthur in Victorian Culture’, *Arthuriana*, 21:2 (2011), 28-41 (p. 30).

symbolism', and the Grail itself was partially devalued by identification with 'the achievement merely of a local and moral aim'.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, the Victorian Grail quest, concentrating primarily on its social and moral aspects, is very different from both the medieval spiritual (and individual) search for God and the modern existential search for meaning.

As has been mentioned above, the medieval and modern writers whose works I discuss use the Grail quest to suggest answers to the religious and psychological issues topical in their societies. In Chapters 1, 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1 of the thesis I consider the representations of the Grail quest and attitudes towards it in the societies which the texts describe, to provide the context for analysing each of the medieval and modern texts. The medieval Grail quest romances addressed audiences who belonged, aspired or associated themselves with the chivalric stratum of society, and these romances offer a picture of spiritual chivalry: religious salvation is promised to those knights who achieve the ideal of spiritual chivalry, yet both Malory and the *Queste* author caution their audiences against purely mechanistic adherence to worldly chivalric standards.<sup>44</sup> Richard Barber relates the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and Malory's *Morte* to 'manuals of knighthood, usually written with a secular audience in mind, but with strong religious overtones'.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Karen Cherevatuk views the 'Sankgreal' as the fictional equivalent of 'ethical manuals' popular among the English fifteenth-century nobility and gentry, such as Ramon Lull's and Christine de Pizan's texts.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and Malory's *Morte* provided ethical and moral lessons to knights, conveying broadly the same message as chivalric treatises, but in a different form.

However, in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the readers are urged to surpass the limits of

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<sup>43</sup> Roger Simpson, 'Sacred Relics: Travelers and the Holy Grail', *Arthuriana*, 21:2 (2011), 42-58 (pp. 51-52).

<sup>44</sup> On the interpretative effort required of both knights and the audiences, see, for example, Laurence de Looze, 'A Story of Interpretations: The *Queste del Saint Graal* as Metaliterature', *Romanic Review*, 76 (1985), 129-47.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Barber, 'Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Archibald and Edwards, pp. 19-35 (p. 22).

<sup>46</sup> Cherevatuk, "'Gentyl' Audiences and 'Grete Bookes': Chivalric Manuals and the *Morte Darthur*", in *Arthurian Literature XV*, ed. by James Carley and Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 205-16.

‘earthly’ chivalry. In fact, Zink cites the *Queste* as an example of secular literature written with the view of furthering the audience’s salvation.<sup>47</sup> This interpretation was probably shared by the *Queste*’s early audiences: as I argue in Chapter 1 (pp. 36-38), the manuscript evidence suggests that the romance could have been read by laymen, some of them very pious, as well as clerics, and, in at least one manuscript, Geneva-Cologny, MS Bodmer Foundation 147, the *Queste* and two other romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle were copied with interpolations from the Bible and devotional texts.<sup>48</sup> Malory’s romance itself, and the ‘Sankgreal’ especially, was advertised in the prologue by its early editor William Caxton as edifying reading, while Wynkyn de Worde, Caxton’s pupil and successor, reprinted the *Morte* in such a way as to highlight the importance of the ‘Sankgreal’ and the religious component of the story in general.<sup>49</sup> Both the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ were viewed as romances with a didactic value. At the same time, interestingly, according to Muriel Whitaker, the knights’ journey in these narratives is ‘essentially psychological, though it is projected into an external landscape’.<sup>50</sup> In this respect, the two romances can be related to such modern Grail quest novels as Walker Percy’s *Lancelot*, in which the author tells his audience ‘what they must do and what they must believe, if they want to live’,<sup>51</sup> using what Bradley Dewey terms ‘an indirect method of persuasion’.<sup>52</sup>

However, in modern literature, the Grail is not an object that can fulfil the need for stability. In medieval literature, the Grail is always a single, tangible object, though it can be endowed with different powers: healing, nourishing and dispensing divine grace. In modern literature, however,

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<sup>47</sup> Zink, *Poésie et conversion au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), pp. 252-53.

<sup>48</sup> MS Bodmer 147 is available from *E-Codices. Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland* <<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch>> [accessed 10 July 2013].

<sup>49</sup> The relevant part of Caxton’s prologue is cited in Chapter 1, pp. 40-41. On de Worde’s edition, see Kevin Grimm, ‘Wynkyn de Worde and the Creation of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory’s Morte Darthur*, ed. by Thomas Hanks and Jessica Brogdon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 134-53, particularly p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> Muriel Whitaker, *Arthur’s Kingdom of Adventures* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> Jay Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 300.

<sup>52</sup> Bradley Dewey, ‘Walker Percy Talks about Kierkegaard: An Annotated Interview’, in *Conversations with Walker Percy*, ed. by Lewis Lawson and Victor Kramer (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), pp. 101-28 (p. 126). For Percy’s strategy of ‘telling’ his readers how to achieve psychological ‘salvation’ see Chapter 5.1, p. 150.

the Grail appears in a plurality of forms, both as a material object but also as a metaphysical and ultimately psychological phenomenon, with beneficial or destructive powers. Saul demonstrates that, in the modern, unbelieving society, the Grail is, more often than not, an 'Unholy Grail', a dangerous instrument of those who seek power and domination, often appearing as 'a site upon which humans write the stories of their own greed, jealousy and ambition'.<sup>53</sup> Percy's Lancelot is engaged in what he terms a 'quest for the Unholy Grail', in fact a search for sexual sin, triggered by the discovery of his wife's adultery. The academic characters of Lodge's *Small World* are seeking a lucrative academic position, the prestigious and well-paid UNESCO chair of literary criticism, and their search is motivated mostly by career ambitions and greed rather than by desire to make a contribution to their field. Likewise, in Zink's *Déodat*, the Grail which Arthur's knights seek is not only a vessel filled with Christ's blood but also an object that would bestow upon them secret knowledge, ensuring their glory in this world and their elite position in the celestial hierarchy. Zink's *knights* are less interested in understanding Christ's suffering and the Christian message of charity than in winning worldly and heavenly glory, though the humble central character, Déodat, achieves another perspective than this, just as Lodge's academic 'knights' crave the prestige and material advantages they can gain by taking the UNESCO chair of literary criticism.

Moreover, several Grails often appear within one text. In the three novels examined in the thesis, there is no single Grail, and the characters are engaged in the search for different modes of fulfilment or Grails; indeed, one character may be pursuing several 'Grails'. In *Lancelot*, there is Lance's 'Unholy Grail', but there is also, presumably, the Grail of Percival/Fr John.<sup>54</sup> In *Small World*, while most academics strive for the UNESCO chair, Persse, a young and romantic Irishman, is pursuing not academic prestige but a girl, Angelica. In Zink's novel, while Déodat briefly engages in the Grail quest undertaken by other knights, he is primarily trying to identify his

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<sup>53</sup> Saul, 'The Unholy Grail', p. 56.

<sup>54</sup> Lancelot's childhood friend, Percival, has taken orders with the name Fr John. The reader does not learn much about Fr John's quest, apart from the fact that it is different from Lancelot's.

brother's murderer and, in the end, he discovers that, all this time, he has been ultimately searching for his identity, his place in the world. A tendency to give several, often contradictory meanings, to one and the same object or phenomenon, the Grail, is characteristic of modern and post-modern fiction, which is 'motivated by a conviction that a false state of mind is one which accepts reality at face value, or believes that meaning is stable'.<sup>55</sup> The appearance of multiple Grails within the same text indicates modern anxiety that meaning, after all, is unstable and that the Christian Grail of medieval romance cannot provide an acceptable, relevant solution in post-Christian age, when a new Grail has to be invented or discovered.

As has already been highlighted, the aim of the medieval Grail quest is religious salvation: the achievement of the quest would ensure the individual's well-being in the *next* life as well as his glory in this world. However, non-elect knights could also be reasonably sure about their salvation provided they followed certain rules, common to all Christians: confession, communion, burial rites and post-mortem prayers were meant to assuage the fears of the dying and the sorrow of the bereaved.<sup>56</sup> Roberta Gilchrist argues that, in medieval society, the dead remained part of their community: 'they were an age cohort perceived to continue their social existence in a parallel plane to the living'.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Jane Gilbert comments on the difference between medieval and modern attitudes towards death, highlighting the fact that, in the Middle Ages, '[d]ying [was] seen as ceasing to be one kind of person and becoming another, significantly altering but by no means destroying social roles and relations'.<sup>58</sup> For most people in the twentieth century, death means extinction, rather than a continuation of life in a different form, and in fact the discussion of this theme is usually avoided, as there is no adequate frame of reference for death. Frederick Paxton summarises the situation as follows:

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<sup>55</sup> Bran Nicol, 'Introduction: What We Talk About When We Talk About Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, ed. by Bran Nicol (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 1-10 (p. 7).

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 48-50.

<sup>57</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life. Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Jane Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 2.

[i]n medieval Europe, the dominant Christian world view embedded death, dying, and the care of the dead within layers of ritual. Modernity changed all that.

Scientific progress weakened religious belief, which led to the loss of the comfort provided by ritual behavior. [...] Death was hidden away, seldom witnessed or even discussed.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, the strategies of coming to terms with the death of others and with the fear of one's own death in medieval romances and in modern novels are utterly different. In the three episodes from the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the non-elect knights Bagdemagus, Yvain and Calogrenant are wounded on the battlefield. However, such provisions as confession, communion, Christian funerals and post-mortem prayers ensure that, although their deaths cause grief to their fellows, the knights can be reasonably sure of their ultimate fate: not only do they join the community of the dead, remembered by Arthurian knights and the romance's readers, but they also hope to achieve salvation. No such reassurance is offered to characters of modern Grail quest novels, unless they abandon the modern view of death as annihilation and rely on essentially medieval models of being. In Lodge's *Small World*, Morris Zapp is so much afraid that his kidnappers might kill him that he can think of nothing else. He is freed, but the shock of this experience makes him renounce his belief in deconstruction, a theory which can offer no help to a person about to be 'deconstructed'. His colleague, Philip Swallow, having narrowly escaped a plane crash, describes the experience in terms that liken him to a knight surviving an adventure and entering a castle, where he meets a beautiful hostess in a long gown, Joy (72).<sup>60</sup> Later, he hears that Joy is dead and decides that, in his heart, he 'shall always keep a little shrine to Joy' (76). Swallow's words are merely metaphorical,

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<sup>59</sup> Frederick Paxton, 'End of Life: Listening to the Monks of Cluny', in *Why the Middle Ages Matter: Medieval Light on Modern Injustice*, ed. by Celia Chazelle and others (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 41-53 (p. 41).

<sup>60</sup> Zapp's and Swallow's experiences are discussed in Chapter 6.2.

but they recall Malory's England, where those who could afford it endowed a shrine or ensured some other way that the memory of the dead should be preserved on both material and spiritual levels.<sup>61</sup> Thus, modern Grail quest novels frequently include *allusions* to medieval strategies of dealing with bereavement and death on personal and inter-personal levels, especially to those strategies which are associated with medieval Christianity and chivalry.

Swallow's encounter with Joy gives him back a taste for life and, for a while, she becomes his muse. Indeed, Swallow's personal quest, which he terms 'a quest for the intensity of experience' (212) is intimately associated with women, his lover Joy on the one hand and his wife Hilary on the other hand. In both medieval and modern Grail quests, women have a special role in relation to the questers, acting as guides to them. In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', a hermit announces at the beginning of the quest that no woman can enter it, but this prohibition is broken when Perceval's sister joins the elect knights. Otherwise, the questing knights rarely encounter women during their adventures, except for devils disguised as attractive damsels. The only two women with whom knights have prolonged conversations are female recluses, who teach Perceval and Lancelot through their 'sermon-commentaries' and personal example.<sup>62</sup> In modern novels, women also guide the questers in their search, teaching them the nature of unselfish love, though naturally their 'lessons' take a very different form from the guidance provided by medieval recluses. In Percy's *Lancelot*, women make Lancelot realise that they should not be treated as objects, whether adored as 'ladies' or exploited as 'whores': it is a lesson Lancelot has to learn from the victim of rape, Anna, with whom he falls in love. Even before meeting Anna, however, he hears the same thing from Margot, his adulterous wife who may have taken lovers exactly because Lancelot never considered her as an individual: '[w]ith you I had to be either – or – but never a – uh – woman' (265). Lancelot, who is

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<sup>61</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, pp. 62-63, Arthur's non-elect knight, Yvain, charges his fellow Gawain to make sure that Yvain's death is remembered at court.

<sup>62</sup> For the discussion of these two episodes, see Chapter 3, pp. 87-105. The term 'sermon-commentaries' is used by Field to describe the exegesis of knights' adventures delivered by hermits, monks and recluses in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' ('Malory and the Grail', p. 149).



obsessed with women's sexual promiscuity, must learn to love and respect women as persons, which is the only way for him to achieve not the 'Unholy Grail' of sexual sin, but the Holy Grail of genuine love.

In Zink's *Déodat*, the solution to the protagonist's quest for identity is found in the story told by his (grand)mother, who simultaneously reveals the mystery of the boy's parentage and teaches him about love. After the themes of death<sup>63</sup> and the role of women in the quest,<sup>64</sup> I discuss a related theme, the interplay between personal, family and the world histories in the quester's search.<sup>65</sup> Individuals' histories are closely linked to their family histories and to the history of their communities, countries or the entire universe in both medieval and modern Grail quest narratives. As a result, knowledge of one's true ancestry helps the quester and other characters find their place in the world and change, albeit on a small scale, world history, achieving a 'mini-redemption' of their community or of those people with whom the quester shares his revelation. When *Déodat* learns who his parents were, he realizes that his family descent does not control his life and that he can be socially insignificant, 'transparent', yet remain important in God's eyes. He shares this revelation with the girl he loves, so that they can make a new start together – an ending very similar to the ending of Percy's *Lancelot*, where Lancelot is promised a new life with Anna, in a world that will be different, less corrupt than the America he has previously seen around him.

In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the ship of Solomon episode, where the questers hear the histories of Adam and Eve as well as of King Solomon and his wife, is of major importance, because it reveals that the ship had been designed by Solomon's wife for Solomon's descendant Galahad and the material for it had been provided by Eve. When Galahad and his companions learn about the building of Solomon's ship, they head straight to the Grail castle and from there to Sarras, where their quest ends. Knowledge of ancestral history links them to the community of the dead,

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapters 2, 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapters 3, 5.3, 6.3 and 7.3.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapters 4, 5.4, 6.4 and 7.4.

Adam, Eve, Solomon and Solomon's wife. This knowledge also shows that even such 'bad', 'sinful' women as Eve and Solomon's wife contribute to the achievement of the quest. The themes of history and identity are thus closely linked to the themes of death and gender roles in the quest.

In both modern and medieval texts, the quester can approach the Grail only after learning a family secret. What is more, this new knowledge about family history leads to the quester finding his true companion: in the romances, Galahad forms a symbolic union with Perceval's sister, who girds him with a marvellous girdle; Percy's Lancelot is about to be joined by Anna when the novel ends; in *Small World*, Persse realizes he loves Cheryl, while all around him happy couples come together at the MLA conference; and, in Zink's novel, Déodat shares his revelation of divine love with a dishonoured girl. Thus, the achievement of the Grail quest leads to 'redemption', spiritual or psychological, which, unlike Christ's redemption of the world, affects only a rather limited group of people. In fact, if one defines psychological salvation as the reversal of alienation and leading to a regaining of meaning for an individual's life, then modern Grail quest novels, in analogy to their medieval sources, can be described as a 'literature of salvation'.

The theme of history in medieval and modern Grail quest literature takes us back to the theme of medievalism outlined at the beginning of the Introduction. As I have mentioned, knowledge of history, whether of family history or of wider history, helps people make sense of their lives and their place in the world; on a larger scale, knowledge of the past can determine the way a society defines itself. Zink remarks that

[t]he idea governing any return to the sources – that one's choices are justified by such an encounter [with one's origins] – explains why the Middle Ages are in fashion even though they are perceived as a somber, almost barbaric period – or, rather, for that very reason, since they are viewed as our Limbo.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Zink, *The Invention of Literary Subjectivity*, trans. by David Sices (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 2.

As I have indicated already, the Middle Ages possess something that modern society does not: what Percy calls ‘a consensus view of man’,<sup>67</sup> in other words, a set of clear ethical and moral references. Such a framework ensures that people see themselves as part of a structured world; it informs them about their place in society *and* in the divine universe, relates them to the past, reassures them about their destiny after death and helps them to build relations with others. Medieval chivalric romances and ethical manuals, with which I open the discussion of medieval texts in the following chapters, also make use of the mythical or legendary past to validate their view of chivalry.<sup>68</sup> However, as I have suggested, medieval authors constructed their narratives of struggle for transcendence in a society which shared their belief in the existence of spiritual realities. Modern authors of the Grail quest novels write in a society with no stable religious, moral or ethical values, a society in which no divine authority is recognised. Whereas medieval writers turned to scriptural writings and legends to confirm their point as well as invented authoritative sources which do not actually exist, modern writers look back to medieval models, such as the Grail quest, to create order and meaning in the world.

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<sup>67</sup> Percy, *Message*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> The Ship of Solomon episode is characteristic, as it offers a view of Solomon as a feudal ruler, surrounded by knights, while his household is run by his wife, as further explained in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 1

### Historical Contexts for the *Queste del Saint Graal* and Thomas Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal'

An awareness of the literary and historical context in which the texts were written is instrumental for our understanding of the way in which the Grail quest is represented in medieval romances. The aim of this chapter is to examine the contexts in which the *Queste del Saint Graal* and Thomas Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal' were written. In the present chapter I will, first, discuss the theoretical underpinnings of chivalry in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', referring to ethical treatises on chivalry, notably Ramon Lull's thirteenth-century *Libro del orden de caballeria*. Second, I will consider the place of the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', respectively, in the manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and the early printed editions of *Le Morte Darthur*, because these manuscripts and books provide the material context in which chivalric ideology found its expression.<sup>1</sup> Third, I will explain the choice of themes (death, the role of women in the Grail quest and the relation between family and world histories) and methodology used in the subsequent chapters (2-4) on the medieval romances.

Prior to the thirteenth century, chivalric ideology and the organisation of society into orders belonged to learned, clerical discourse. St Bernard's writings about spiritual chivalry provide an example of such clerical discourse, which, however, was not entirely inaccessible to thirteenth-century lay audiences: Dolores Frese remarks that the *Queste* author 'entered deeply into the symbolic chivalric mentality of Bernardine Cistercianism'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, from the second half of the

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<sup>1</sup> Such a discussion is also useful in view of the fact that several of the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' episodes examined in Chapters 2-4 are illustrated, such as the meeting between Perceval and his aunt, which appears in the *Queste* manuscripts and de Worde's edition of Malory's *Morte*.

<sup>2</sup> Dolores Frese, 'Rewriting the Moral Cosmos in the Thirteenth-Century *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Cosmos*, 15 (1999),

thirteenth century onwards, the discourse on moral rights and obligations of knighthood appears in secular literature, such as Ramon Lull's treatise *Libro del orden de caballeria*, and other texts, including chivalric treatises and mirrors for princes.<sup>3</sup> According to Barber, chivalric romances and ethical manuals appear in the same historical period: '[a]t the same time as the first chivalric romances, we begin to find manuals of knighthood, usually written with a secular audience in mind, but with strong religious overtones'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, chivalric romances and treatises could influence each other; thus Elspeth Kennedy argues that the chivalric ideology present in Lull's treatise was influenced by the prose *Lancelot*,<sup>5</sup> the romance immediately preceding the *Queste* in the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle.<sup>6</sup> In turn, Malory's ideal of chivalry is indebted to Lull's treatise on chivalry and similar texts: accordingly, Malory's 'representation of knighthood seems to have been formed by those classic treatises which describe the office of the High Order of Knighthood in political terms'.<sup>7</sup> Considering late medieval chivalric ideology is important for understanding the Grail quest romances, the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', just as it is necessary to consider the material form, the manuscripts and early printed books, in which the romances circulated in the Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup>

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202-21, (p. 219). For St Bernard's writings about chivalry, see *On Grace and Free Choice: Praise of the New Knighthood*, in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Daniel O'Donovan and Conrad Greenia (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1997), vii, pp. 127-67. On St Bernard's notion of chivalric duties and discipline, see, for instance, Jean LeClercq, 'Saint Bernard's Attitude Towards War', in *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, Cistercian Studies 24, ed. by John Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), ii, pp. 1-39. The impact of St Bernard's writings on the *Queste* is analyzed by Pauline Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste del Saint Graal* (Genève: Droz, 1979), particularly pp. 218-22. See also Fanni Bogdanow, 'An Interpretation of the Meaning and Purpose of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* in the Light of the Mystical Theology of St Bernard', in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance. Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford: a Tribute by the Members of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society*, ed. by Alison Adams et al. (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 23-46.

<sup>3</sup> Ramon Lull, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, translated and printed by William Caxton from a French version of Ramon Lull's 'Le libre del ordre de cavayleria' together with Adam Loutfut's Scottish Transcript (Harley 6149)*, ed. by Alfred Byles, EETS o.s. 168 (London: OUP, 1926). In fifteenth-century England, mirrors for princes, chivalric treatises and similar texts were often copied in miscellanies; on the reception of ethical manuals in Malory's time, see Cherewatuk, 'Chivalric Manuals', p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Barber, 'Chivalry', p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Elspeth Kennedy, 'Social and Political Ideas in the French Prose *Lancelot*', *Medium Aevum*, 26 (1957), 90-106, (p. 103).

<sup>6</sup> As explained later in the chapter, although romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle often appear together in manuscripts, they were written by different authors, and the *Queste* is later than *Lancelot*.

<sup>7</sup> Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Allusions to chivalry and chivalric ideology also have a prominent place in modern Grail quest literature, as argued in

Two concepts of medieval chivalry are particularly useful in approaching the representations of chivalry in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’: the division of society into three orders (those who pray, those who fight and those who labour) and the obligations of the feudo-vassalic system. The idea of three orders originated in the late tenth century in clerical circles and seems to have been little known at first among the lay nobility. According to Georges Duby, two bishops, Adalbero of Laon and Gerard of Cambrai, were particularly influential in formulating this view of society, as ‘[t]hey regarded their mission as one of revealing to him [King Hugh Capet] the principles behind his worldly actions, and, in particular, the hidden structure of human society, i.e., its tripartite division’.<sup>9</sup> However, Constance Bouchard argues that the idea of three orders came to be universally accepted by French lay people only at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when King Philip IV called the first Estates General.<sup>10</sup> In thirteenth-century France, the most prominent quality of a knight was to be, according to Susan Reynolds, the knight’s loyalty or faithfulness, because ‘he owed fidelity or fealty’ to his lord.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, loyalty is a recurrent theme in both the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and in Malory’s *Morte*: in the *Queste*, knights identify themselves as members of King Arthur’s court, while in the ‘Sankgreal’, they usually refer to the Round Table fellowship.<sup>12</sup> However, in both the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, spiritual chivalry is foregrounded against earthly chivalry, and knights are required to be faithful first to God, their supreme lord and then to King Arthur.<sup>13</sup> Beverly Kennedy describes several instances in the *Morte* when questing knights have to balance ‘rival claims’ upon their loyalty, and there are cases when honouring God, the knight’s

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Chapters 5-7, but, needless to say, modern ideas about chivalry differ significantly from the medieval ones.

<sup>9</sup> George Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Constance Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 28-30.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 2, pp. 60 and 69 and Chapter 3, p. 87, includes examples of the ‘Sankgreal’ knights referring to the Round Table fellowship in places where the *Queste* knights mention King Arthur’s court.

<sup>13</sup> The potentially conflicting obligations of spiritual and earthly chivalry are further discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 63-64 and 7-71, and Chapter 3, pp. 97-98.

‘temporal lord’, and the knight’s lady simultaneously is a ‘delicate business’ indeed.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most influential texts on the order of chivalry was Ramon Lull’s *Libro del orden de caballeria*, which Kennedy describes as the ‘classic statement of the religious view of knighthood as the governing class of society’.<sup>15</sup> Lull’s book was written in the late thirteenth century and translated into French soon afterwards.<sup>16</sup> In Malory’s time, there were two translations of Lull’s treatise from French into English, one by William Caxton and another by Sir Gilbert Haye.<sup>17</sup> Kennedy believes that Lull’s and other treatises on chivalry informed Malory’s representation of the order in the *Morte*: ‘to speak of knighthood as a “High Order”, as Malory does, is to take for granted the Christian ideology taught by these treatises, that God himself ordained knighthood to undertake the task of temporal governance’.<sup>18</sup> According to Kennedy, both Lull and Malory viewed the mission of chivalry from a religious perspective, although they associated it with governance in this world.<sup>19</sup> The *Queste* author also implies that chivalry has a spiritual dimension and, indeed, that only spiritual chivalry is true chivalry.<sup>20</sup>

The religious view of chivalry appeared in eleventh-century France as part of the Peace of God and Truce of God movement, instigated by high-ranking clergy, and their view of chivalry was somewhat different from its later interpretation by Lull and Malory. Initially, members of a chivalric order were admonished not to attack representatives of the clerical and working orders. As a further addition, the Church encouraged knights to refrain from fighting against any Christians, including

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<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, *Knighthood*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, *Knighthood*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ramon Lul, *Le Livre de l'Ordre de Chevalerie*, Paris, BnF, MS f. fr. 1971. The manuscript is dated between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries.

<sup>17</sup> See reference to Caxton’s translation above, p. 26; also see ‘A New Edition of Sir Gilbert Haye’s *Buke of the ordre of knyghthede*’, ed. by Jonathan Glenn (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, *Knighthood*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, *Knighthood*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> The view is voiced by a recluse, who explains the significance of a tournament between the white and the black knights to Lancelot (the episode is examined in Chapter 3, pp. 93-95).

other knights, and to bear arms only against the enemies of God.<sup>21</sup> As a result, any knight fulfilling these requirements became part of the *militia Christi*, one of the true servants of God whom the *Queste* author extols. Remarkably, the clergy who developed the Peace of God framework did not require that knights lay aside their arms altogether but only that they use arms in God's service. Potentially, the requirement that a knight's primary duty was to serve God could lead to a conflict of interest with the secular lord to whom a knight might owe service as well.

Belonging to a chivalric society appears to imply different duties for the *Queste* author and Malory. According to the French author, knights who were not virgin or celibate were discouraged from taking up adventures, particularly adventures of a spiritual nature. Meanwhile, for Malory, a knight's duty was to embark on adventures, whether secular or spiritual, irrespective of the knight's marital status and his spiritual virtues. Kennedy explains that, in the fifteenth century, a knight was expected to habitually imperil his life; having considered Haye's translation of Lull's treatise, Kennedy concludes that 'it is the perils which assault a man's body and "worschip" as well as his "saule" which make the life of the knight the most difficult' and, by implication, the most celebrated.<sup>22</sup> Kennedy's definition of the attractions of chivalry is useful, because it brings together the spiritual and secular dimensions of knighthood, an order that may bestow simultaneously worldly success and glory in this life and salvation in the next life. Similarly, in the Peace of God tradition, the knights who adhered to the Church's instructions were promised salvation, although there seem to be more restrictions on wielding arms and greater emphasis on penitence.

The somewhat problematic relation between earthly worship and spiritual salvation is at the very centre of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, of which the French *Queste* is a part. Indeed, in many manuscripts the *Queste* is found in conjunction with other romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle,

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<sup>21</sup> Another requirement was that bloodshed and war should cease on certain days, such as Sundays and Lent as part of the Truce of God. The movement is described in Duby, 'Peace of God', in *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. by Cynthia Postan (California: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 123-33.

<sup>22</sup> Kennedy, *Knighthood*, pp. 15-16.



even though there are only nine manuscripts in which all the romances occur together.<sup>23</sup> Miranda Griffin contends that

[m]any other surviving manuscripts, however, were almost certainly full cyclic transmissions at the time of their production, or were conceived as such: the fragments which survive indicate that they are history's random offerings, rather than deliberate selections or extracts from a larger work.<sup>24</sup>

At least some manuscripts were intended to contain or once contained more of the *Lancelot-Graal* romances than they do now. Thus, in BnF, MS f. fr. 747, the beginning of *Lancelot* ('En la marche de Gaille' [on the border of Gaul]) is announced but absent from the codex, while Tours, BM, MS 951 contains a catchword for the *Lancelot*, but not the text itself.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, in London, BL MS Harley 6341-2, the *Queste* is promised after the *Lancelot*, but is missing from the manuscript.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in many cases the patrons or compilers of the manuscripts regarded the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle as an entity, which, in turn, would have influenced the reading and interpretation of the *Queste*.

On the other hand, in certain manuscripts the compilers seem to have deliberately selected some, but not all texts from the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle. Their choice may indicate how the manuscript patrons or producers interpreted the *Queste* and other *Lancelot-Graal* texts or at least what impression the texts were supposed to leave on the audience. In some cases, it seems that the *Lancelot-Graal* material was valued for its instructional potential rather than as a source of

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<sup>23</sup> A useful list of *Lancelot-Graal* manuscripts is compiled by Alison Stones ('The Lancelot-Grail Project: Chronological and Geographical Distribution of Lancelot-Grail Manuscripts', *The Lancelot-Graal Project* (2007, rev. 2008, 2009, 2010) <<http://www.lancelot-project.pitt.edu/LG-web/Arthur-LG-ChronGeog.html>> [accessed 10 May 2013]). The manuscripts containing all the *Lancelot-Graal* romances are Paris, BnF, MS f. fr. 110; BnF, MS f. fr. 344; Bonn, Universitätsbibliothek, MS S. 526; London, British Library, MS Additional 10292-4; BnF, MS f. fr. 117-120; Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal MS 3479-80.

<sup>24</sup> Griffin, *Object*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Stones, 'Lancelot-Grail Project'.

<sup>26</sup> Stones, 'Lancelot-Grail Project'.

entertainment. An example of this approach is found in Cologny, MS Martin Bodmer Foundation 147, which contains material from the *Estoire*, the *Merlin* and the *Suite de Merlin*, as well as the entire *Queste*, and *La Mort le roi Artu*, but no material from the *Lancelot*. The manuscript compiler has inserted, among other things, the Gospel (fols. 3<sup>v</sup>-16<sup>v</sup>) and the Genesis (fols 20<sup>r</sup>-57<sup>r</sup>) to the *Estoire* and the history of Troy (fols 121<sup>r</sup>-158<sup>v</sup>) at the end of the *Merlin*. Apart from the *Lancelot-Graal* texts, the manuscript also includes a commentary on the Crede (fol. 58<sup>r</sup>), Maurice de Sully's sermons, a treatise on confession examining the sin of pride (fols 59<sup>r</sup>-60<sup>r</sup>) and a translation of Innocent III's 'De miseria conditionis humanae' ('La misere de home', MS Bodmer 147, fol. 66<sup>v</sup> [The misery of man]).<sup>27</sup> In this case, the manuscript patron or compiler appears to have been interested in the edifying potential of the *Lancelot-Graal* texts.

On balance, the *Queste* does not normally appear on its own in manuscripts. It has already been mentioned that there are nine manuscripts in which the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle is represented in its integrity. In some other manuscripts *Lancelot-Graal*, the *Queste* is followed by the *Mort Artu*,<sup>28</sup> and, in two manuscripts, the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* are preceded by the *Estoire del Saint Graal*.<sup>29</sup> The combination (*Estoire*)-*Queste*-*Mort* may be evocative of Christian history, particularly given that the *Queste* and the *Estoire* both include biblical, apocryphal and legendary material about the Genesis and the Passion, so that the destruction of Arthur's kingdom can be figuratively viewed as the end of history. The *Queste* in particular combines elements of family and Christian history in the ship of Solomon episode.<sup>30</sup> Often, the *Queste* is found after the *Lancelot* and before the *Mort*

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<sup>27</sup> The standard description of the manuscript is by Françoise Vielliard, *Manuscrits Français du Moyen Âge* (Cologny-Geneva: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1975), pp. 46-60. See also Vielliard, "'Ci dist li contes et la sainte Escripiture le tesmoigne". Histoire et fiction dans le manuscrit Bodmer 147', *Bien dire et bien aprendre*, 22 (2004), 79-90 and Vielliard, 'Un texte interpolé du cycle du Graal (Bibliothèque Bodmer, Manuscrit 147)', *Revue d'histoire des textes*, 4 (1974), 289-337.

<sup>28</sup> Berkeley, CA The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, MS UCB 73; Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er, MS 9627-8; BL, MS Add. 17443; BnF, MS f. fr. 25520; and New York, Morgan Library MS 807 (Stones, 'Lancelot-Grail Project').

<sup>29</sup> BL, MS Royal 14 E III and Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 476 (644) (Stones, 'Lancelot-Grail Project').

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 106-10 and 136-37.

*Artu*.<sup>31</sup> In the latter case, the context is more conducive to viewing the ensemble as a romance trilogy centring on Lancelot, although Lancelot is to an extent eclipsed in the *Queste* by his son Galahad. The comparison of manuscript contexts in which the *Queste* appears indicates that the *Queste* may have been prized by some audiences as a narrative of instruction and by others as a narrative of chivalry. This reflects on the nature of romance as a genre; as K. S. Whetter remarks, '[s]ome romances are considered exemplary and didactic, some celebrate chivalry and chivalric excess, whilst others attempt to reform earthly chivalry'. Whetter further explains that '[t]he Vulgate *Queste* provides a notable example of this reforming movement'.<sup>32</sup> This brief overview of the *Queste* manuscript context suggests that different *Queste* audiences throughout the Middle Ages could read the romance as celebrating spiritual chivalry, suggesting ways for reforming earthly chivalry or both. However, further consideration of the *Queste* manuscript ownership and of the *Queste* illustrations is needed to confirm this observation.

Discussing the *Queste*'s projected and real audiences is a complex task, because the *Queste* continued to be copied, reworked and translated from the early thirteenth century to the end of the Middle Ages, and then appeared in print in the sixteenth century. Originally written for the thirteenth-century French nobility, the *Queste*, and other *Lancelot-Graal* romances, were copied in other countries, such as England, the Low Countries and Italy.<sup>33</sup> Many of the surviving *Queste*

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<sup>31</sup> BL, MS Royal 19 C.XIII; BnF, MS f. fr. 751; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawley D. 899; BnF, MS f. fr. 339; Ars., MS 3347; BnF, MS f. fr. 123; BnF, MS f. fr. 342; Bodl. MS Digby 223; BL, MS Royal 20.C.VI; BnF, MS f. fr. 12580; BnF, MS f. fr. 1422-4; BnF, MS f. fr. 122; MS Bodmer 105; BnF, MS f. fr. 111; and Giessen, Universitätsbibliothek Gießen, MS 93-94 (Stones, 'Lancelot-Grail Project').

<sup>32</sup> K. S. Whetter, 'Subverting, Containing and Upholding Christianity in Medieval Romance', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalind Field, Phillipa Hardman and Michelle Sweeney (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 102-18 (p. 104).

<sup>33</sup> The *Queste* is dated 1214-27 by Albert Pauphilet (*Études sur 'La Queste del Saint Graal' attribué à Gautier Map* (Paris: Champion, 1921), p. 12) and Jean Frappier dates it 1225-30 (*Étude sur 'La Mort le roi Artu', roman du XIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), p. 138). Stones, however, dates the first illustrated *Lancelot* manuscript to the 1220s, which makes it likely that the entire *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, including the *Queste*, was written prior to 1220 ('The Earliest Illustrated Prose *Lancelot* Manuscript?', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 3 (1977), 3-4). For the geographical distribution, see, for example, the Flemish BnF, MS f. fr. 1424 produced in Tournai about 1330-40, BnF, MS f. fr. 122 dated 1344, and BnF, MS f. fr. 343 produced in Italy (Pavia or Milan) about 1380-85. The dating and origin of the manuscripts are available from <<http://mandragore.bnf.fr>> [accessed 10 November 2013]. According to Roger Middleton, the *Lancelot-Graal* manuscripts of English provenance are BL, MS Royal 20 A. II; BL, MS Egerton 2515; BL, MS Royal 19 C. XIII; BL, MS Royal 20 C. VI; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 45; and BL, MS Royal 19 B VII ('Manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle in England and Wales: Some Books and Their Owners', in A

manuscripts are expensive, illuminated volumes, written on quality parchment, and even cheaper, unilluminated versions, such as Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS P.A. 77, often have initials in red and blue.<sup>34</sup> Alison Stones concludes that

illustrated copies of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle emerge early (by ca. 1230), last late (to the end of the fifteenth century), and survive in very large numbers (close to 200 copies), and their chronological and geographical distribution can be plotted with a fair degree of accuracy.<sup>35</sup>

The considerable number of surviving illustrated copies may point to an affluent audience who could afford commissioning or buying an expensive manuscript. However, the social standing of the *Queste* audience was probably far from homogenous; according to Roger Middleton, alongside many manuscripts that are ‘richly decorated with miniatures and other artwork’, there exist other manuscripts, which ‘are entirely plain’. Moreover, Middleton cautions that

[t]he high proportion of extant manuscripts with miniatures is not likely to be an accurate reflection of the original state of affairs. Their status as luxury items, as well as any interest aroused by the paintings themselves, will have tended to preserve the illustrated books in greater numbers.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, physical features, such as the format and illuminations, give some indications of

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*Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. by Carol Dover (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 219-35 (p. 223)). Editions of the *Lancelot*, *Queste*, *Mort Artu* and the *Tristan* were printed by Antoine Vérard from 1488 onwards (Pickford, ‘Antoine Vérard’, pp. 280-84).

<sup>34</sup> The Lyon MS does not have illuminations, but is decorated with red and blue penwork initials (<<http://weblex.ens-lsh.fr/pub/kq>> [accessed 13 April 2013]).

<sup>35</sup> Stones, ‘Seeing the Grail’, p. 302.

<sup>36</sup> Middleton, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 219.

the way in which the manuscript producers and owners regarded the romance. Approaching illuminations as visual commentary on the narrative is a notoriously problematic approach.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the manuscript illuminations had at least some effect on the audience's experience of the text and, therefore, should be taken into account when discussing it. Thus, Lesley Lawton argues in relation to the English context that, '[s]ince an illustrated book involves a considerable capital outlay, it is a measure of the value accorded a certain work that it, rather than any other, was selected for embellishment in this way'.<sup>38</sup> Initially, expensive illuminated manuscripts would have been available only to the French and Anglo-Norman nobility, but Catalina Girbea remarks that by the fourteenth century wealthy townspeople in France could afford such manuscripts.<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly, the evidence of the surviving *Lancelot-Graal* manuscripts suggests that their English audience tended to be more interested in the texts than in their appearance: Middleton indicates that 'a higher-than-expected proportion of those written in England, and even of those that were brought here during the Middle Ages, are severely utilitarian in appearance'. He also comments that '[t]here is certainly no question of their ever having been used for the purposes of display' and that many of the manuscripts that were in England during the Middle Ages 'show signs of having been read, and of having been read with close attention'.<sup>40</sup> The examples cited by Middleton indicate that the *Lancelot-Graal* manuscripts were owned by representatives of both nobility and gentry, and many of these manuscripts are mentioned in wills and testaments. However, when the manuscript itself has not survived or cannot be located, it is impossible to be sure whether the reference is to the *Queste*, to another French or English manuscript about the Grail quest or even

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<sup>37</sup> The illuminator may misinterpret the text or the instructions for executing the illustration. Moreover, it is hard to ascertain who decided which episode to illuminate, what to include into the illumination and where to position it in the particular manuscript. The initiative may come from the patron, the workshop owner, the scribe or the illuminator. Many manuscripts have similar illustrative programmes because they were produced in the same workshop or copied from an exemplar.

<sup>38</sup> Lesley Lawton, 'The Illustration of Late Medieval Secular Texts, with Special Reference to Lydgate's "Troy Book"', in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 41-69 (p. 42).

<sup>39</sup> Carolina Girbea, *Communiquer pour convertir dans les romans du Graal (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010), p. 339.

<sup>40</sup> Middleton, 'Manuscripts', p. 234.

to an entirely different text. Thus, Middleton mentions that in 1412 ‘Elizabeth Darcy left to her husband her “Lanselake” and her “Sainz Ryall”’.<sup>41</sup> In this case, we may be certain that at least the ‘Sainz Ryall’ in question is an Arthurian romance, and probably the *Queste*, as it is mentioned alongside the *Lancelot*. The evidence is more ambiguous in the cases when references to the Grail book, which may be the *Queste*, the *Estoire*, another French romance about the Grail or not a romance at all, are found side by side with references to religious and spiritual texts. Thus, Sir Thomas Chaworth, who lived in the first half of the fifteenth century, left a detailed will mentioning some of his books. In the part which, according to Thorlac Turville-Petre, describes ‘religious books for the chapel or the chamber’, Sir Thomas enumerates:

the best Mes boke, another olde Messe boke with a boke of Placebo and Dirige  
liggyng in his seid closed at the chapel, in the which are titled of olde tyme the  
obitts of the auncetors as welle of the faders of the said Sir Thomas as of his  
moder, the lesce Antiphoner of iiij, a Graile, a Manuell, a litel Portose, the which  
the saide Sir Thomas toke w’ hym alway when he rode.<sup>42</sup>

The ‘Graile’ Chaworth mentions could be the French *Queste* or another French book dealing with the Grail quest. Other books in Chaworth’s will are English, of devotional or religious nature, including a book of saints’ lives, ‘an Englissh boke called Grace de Dieu’ and ‘an Englissh booke called Orilogium Sapienciae’. Turville-Petre comments that Chaworth was a member of the gentry, ‘who lived in style’, ‘subscribed to the latest in fashionable literature, and probably bought his books in London’.<sup>43</sup> In Chaworth’s will, the Grail book, if indeed it is a romance about the Grail quest, is listed among texts of a liturgical and didactic nature, whether by chance or as a conscious

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<sup>41</sup> Middleton, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 221.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Thorlac Turville-Petre, ‘Some Medieval English Manuscripts in the North-East Midlands’, in *Manuscripts and Readers*, ed. by Pearsall, pp. 125-41 (p. 133).

<sup>43</sup> Turville-Petre, ‘English Manuscripts’, p. 133.

decision on the testator's part to include a text of a spiritual nature among his religious books.

However, some manuscripts mentioned in a will survive, such as BL, MS Royal 14 E III, the history of which is comparatively well documented. The manuscript was produced in France and owned by the French kings Charles V and Charles VI, then possibly purchased by John of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford, as part of Charles V's library.<sup>44</sup> In his will of 1481-82, Sir Richard Roos bequeathed the manuscript he describes as 'my grete booke called saint grail bounde in boordes couerde with rede leder and plated with plates of laten' to his niece Eleanor Haute, wife of Sir Richard Haute.<sup>45</sup> The book was passed on to Elizabeth Woodville (b. c. 1437, d. 1492), wife of Edward IV. There are inscriptions made by Sir Richard, Eleanor Haute, Elizabeth Woodville and Joan Grey (Elizabeth's sister) in the manuscript itself.<sup>46</sup> The volume contains the *Estoire*, the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* and is generously decorated with colour and gold miniatures, initials and, on the texts' opening pages, border illuminations. It is difficult to judge whether the owners appreciated more the literary texts or the decorative features of the manuscript, but P. W. Fleming believes that Eleanor Haute at least 'appreciate[d] it as literature as well as *objet d'art*'.<sup>47</sup> Sir Richard himself, who is known as the translator of Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*,<sup>48</sup> was probably aware of the book's literary value, but his matter-of-fact will includes only one qualifier, 'grete booke', apart from the manuscript's physical features.

Moreover, lay people were not the only ones to commission, buy or own manuscripts containing the *Lancelot-Graal* romances. Helen Cooper points out that '[r]omance writing and reading were [...] not confined to the laity, however much the stories focus on their concerns'; '[m]en of high rank within the Church – bishops and abbots – were largely drawn from the upper

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<sup>44</sup> See 'Detailed Record for Royal 14 E III', in *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts*, British Library <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts>> [accessed 14 July 2013].

<sup>45</sup> Cited in P. W. Fleming, 'The Hautes and their "Circle": Culture and English Gentry', in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Daniel Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987), pp. 85-102 (p. 91).

<sup>46</sup> 'Record for Royal 14 E III'.

<sup>47</sup> Fleming, 'Hautes', p.91.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Roos, 'La Belle Dame sans mercy', in *Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. by Walter Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897; repr. New York: Cosimo, 2008), pp. 299-326.

echelons of society, and would have grown up with romances: an interest they did not necessarily lose the moment they were ordained'.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Middleton identifies two cases when English monasteries received manuscripts containing the *Lancelot-Graal* romances, probably including the *Queste*. In 1305, Guy de Beauchamp Earl of Warwick bequeathed to Bordesley Abbey (Worcestershire) '[u]n Volum en le quel est le premier livre de Launcelot', 'un Volum del Romaunce Iosep ab Arimathie e deu Seint Grael' and '[u]n Volum de la Mort ly Roy Arthur e de Mordret', which, as Middleton suggests, may be 'a set of the complete *Cycle* despite the apparent gaps'. At least half a century later, between 1352 and 1392, but within the same geographic region (Worcestershire), Nicholas of Hereford, Prior of Evesham granted a considerable part of his library, among it 'Mort de Arthor cum Sankreal in eodem uolumine' to his monastery. Middleton believes, however, that such books were kept by the recipients 'probably more as a memorial to the donor than out of any interest in the texts themselves'.<sup>50</sup> However, clerics could also value secular genres, including chivalric romances, as a medium through which they could more effectively reach the lay people than through the traditional medium of sermons. Charlotte Morse argues that the adoption of Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1213), which led to 'mass spiritual education', 'implied the sanctioning of fiction that urged repentance' such as the *Queste*.<sup>51</sup> In the above-mentioned MS Bodmer 147, the *Estoire* includes interpolated material on confession discussing the sin of pride, a sin of which the *Queste* knights, particularly Lancelot, are often accused by hermits and recluses in the romance.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it is not unlikely that religious people, such as the above-cited Prior of Evesham, could take interest in the *Lancelot-Graal* romances and appreciate them not only as a source of entertainment but also as bearers of a spiritual message.

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<sup>49</sup> Helen Cooper, 'Introduction', in *Christianity and Romance*, ed. by Field, Hardman and Sweeney, pp. xiii-xxi (p. xiv).

<sup>50</sup> Middleton, 'Manuscripts', p. 220.

<sup>51</sup> Charlotte Morse, *The Pattern of Judgement in the Queste and Cleanness* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> According to Vielliard, the material on confession as included in MS Bodmer 147, fols 59<sup>r</sup>-60<sup>f</sup> reproduces the fourth part of *Miroir du Monde*, a treatise that examines the seven capital sins; only the part concerned with the sin of pride is copied in MS Bodmer 147 (Vielliard, *Manuscripts*, p. 48). In the episode examined in Chapter 3, p. 95, a recluse accuses Lancelot of pride.



Certain parts of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, namely, the *Estoire*, the *Merlin* and the *Queste*, contain a large amount of biblical and apocryphal material, drawing, in particular, on the Gospel of Nicodemus. Zink comments that many later manuscripts exclude the more chivalrous narrative of the *Lancelot* and contain only the more ‘religious’ parts of the cycle, the *Estoire*, the *Merlin* and the *Queste*.<sup>53</sup> One such manuscript is Brussels, MS BR 9246, dated 1480-82, containing Guillaume de la Pierce’s adaptation of the *Estoire*, *Merlin* and *Suite de Merlin* for Jean-Louis de Savoie, bishop of Geneva.<sup>54</sup> According to Zink, manuscripts such as MS BR 9246 and others, like the above-mentioned MS Bodmer 147 that includes interpolations of religious texts in the romance, testify to the success the Grail quest romances enjoyed as ‘porteur[s] d’une révélation religieuse’ [bearing a religious revelation].<sup>55</sup> Zink explains that this revelation was part of the universal Christian revelation, a part of the Christian history documented in the canonical and apocryphal gospels.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, there is evidence that the *Estoire* and the *Queste*, with material borrowed from the apocryphal legends, were regarded by some readers as trustworthy sources of Christian history or at least as edifying, pious material. Indeed, Roger d’Argenteuil, author of the *Bible en François*, borrowed from the *Estoire* and, possibly, the *Queste*, elements of the True Cross and St Veronica’s legends.<sup>57</sup> Thus, such texts as the *Estoire*, the *Merlin* and the *Queste* could have been viewed by their readers as narratives of Christian history as well as romances, which to some extent explains why they could be regarded as suitable reading for both clerical and lay audiences.

In contrast to the *Queste*, of which a number of manuscripts has been preserved, there is only one *Morte* manuscript. Moreover, it is likely that the *Morte* was never widely known in

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<sup>53</sup> Zink, *Poésie*, p. 253.

<sup>54</sup> Stones, ‘Lancelot-Grail Project’.

<sup>55</sup> Zink, *Poésie*, p. 253.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Une révélation inscrite dans le développement, le cadre, l’histoire et, si l’on peut dire, la programme de la révélation chrétienne. Une révélation ainsi associée à celle des Saintes Écritures (canoniques et apocryphes), dont le roman semble se prétendre le prolongement et l’égal’ (Zink, *Poésie*, p. 253) [A revelation inscribed in the development, the frame, the history, and, if one may say so, the programme of Christian revelation. A revelation thus associated with the Holy Writings (canonical and apocryphal) which the romance pretends to continue and to equal].

<sup>57</sup> Phyllis Moe, ‘Introduction’, in *The Middle English Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en François* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977), pp. 8-43 (p. 26 for St Veronica legend and p. 30 for the Cross legend).

manuscript form. N. F. Blake believes that there might have been only three copies: the original, the Winchester manuscript (British Library Additional Manuscript 59678)<sup>58</sup> and the one Caxton used as his main text.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, S. E. Holbrook argues that the *Morte* was a little known text and that Caxton took a risk when publishing it.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the *Morte* would have been known to the greater part of its audience as a printed book. Like the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, the *Morte* must have been highly popular, running through five editions after its first publication.<sup>61</sup> Completed in 1468-69, it was printed by Caxton in 1485 and reprinted by de Worde with a new introduction, some minor textual changes and woodcut illustrations in 1498, and again in 1529.<sup>62</sup> Only two copies survive of Caxton's 1485 edition, and only one of de Worde's 1498 edition.<sup>63</sup> This 'negative' evidence testifies to the high popularity of the *Morte*, at the same time as indicating a slight shift in the audience's attitude to books and reading. According to Edwards, 'it is clear that Caxton's edition and its early reprints by de Worde were widely read', and the low rate of survival 'suggests the degree to which Malory's work, like other early editions of romances, was literally read to destruction'.<sup>64</sup>

However, even buying a printed book of this length involved a significant outlay of money. Moreover, Blake points out that some early printed books could include illuminations and initials drawn by hand and coloured in, so that they were not drastically different from manuscripts; hence

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<sup>58</sup> The Winchester manuscript is available at the Malory Project website <<http://www.maloryproject.com>> [accessed 16 April 2013].

<sup>59</sup> N. F. Blake, 'Caxton Prepares his Edition of the *Morte Darthur*', in *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 199-212 (p. 201) (first publ. in *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 8 (1976), 272-85). See also Kato, *Caxton's 'Morte Darthur': The Printing Process and the Authenticity of the Text*, Medium Ævum Monographs, n.s. 22 (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2002) and *Mistakes and Scribal Corrections in the Winchester Manuscript: Textual Studies of Malory's Morte Darthur* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> S. E. Holbrook, 'On the Attractions of the Malory Incunable and the Malory Manuscript', in *The Malory Debate: Essays on the Text of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler, Robert Kindrick and Michael Salda (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 323-36 (p. 325).

<sup>61</sup> For the *Morte* printed editions after the sixteenth century, see the Introduction, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> For a comparison between Caxton's and de Worde's edition of the *Morte*, see Edwards, 'Reception', pp. 241-52 and Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde', pp. 134-53.

<sup>63</sup> An incomplete copy of Caxton's edition is in the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, Deansgate 18930 (*Le Morte Darthur: Facsimile of the copy in the John Rylands University of Library of Manchester*, EEBO, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>> [accessed 16 April 2013]) and another, complete copy is in Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, PML 17560, ChL 1782. The unique copy of de Worde's 1498 edition is in John Rylands Library, JRL 15396.

<sup>64</sup> Edwards, 'Reception', p. 243.

Blake concludes that '[t]he invention of printing did not change people's reading habits overnight'.<sup>65</sup> Neither Caxton's nor de Worde's editions of the *Morte* include any colour decoration, but de Worde's edition does include woodcuts and other visual features possibly designed to guide the reader through the text. According to Kevin Grimm, 'de Worde's additions to the appearance of the book might serve not only to make it more attractive to a buyer, but would certainly render it more easily usable to a reader, particularly to a repeat reader'.<sup>66</sup> Commissioning the woodcuts and introducing book titles, rubrics and running page headings would have involved an additional investment, making the book not only more attractive and easier to use but also more expensive. It is possible that de Worde may have had a particular audience in mind, and that this audience may have been different from Malory's or Caxton's. According to Field, Caxton aimed at the widest readership possible, from nobility to gentry, while Malory's target audience would have been more exclusive, limited to those who had a passion for Arthurian romances and would read the book from cover to cover. De Worde further expanded the circle of his potential readers to include those who were not of noble birth but could afford to buy books.<sup>67</sup>

In fact, Caxton's printed edition of the *Morte* incorporates a number of changes that, according to Grimm, 'generated a particular understanding' of the *Morte*.<sup>68</sup> In the *Morte* preface, Caxton famously recommends the romance not only as a book from which the audience can learn about history, chivalry and courteous behaviour but also as a collection of edifying exempla:

herein may be seen noble chyalrye, Curtosye, Humanyte, frendlynesse,  
hardynesse, loue, frendshyp, Cowardyse, Murdre, hate, virtue, and synne. Doo

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<sup>65</sup> Blake, *William Caxton*, p. 276.

<sup>66</sup> Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde', pp. 145-46. Caxton's and de Worde's representations of the *Morte* are also considered by Tsuyoshi Mukai in 'De Worde's Displacement of Malory's Secularization', in *Arthurian and Other Studies Presented to Shunichi Noguchi*, ed. by Takashi Suzuki and Tsuyoshi Mukai (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 179-87.

<sup>67</sup> Field, 'Malory and His Audience', in *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 21-32.

<sup>68</sup> Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde', p. 134.

after the good and leue the euyl and it shal brynge you to good fame and  
renomme.<sup>69</sup>

Caxton's prologues, however, should hardly be taken at face value. Blake argues that Caxton 'was a clever promoter of books who took advantage of whatever material or circumstance prevailed at the time an edition was set up'.<sup>70</sup> The strategy of advertising a romance as a work of edifying value was applied by Caxton to other texts, such as *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, which, according to Raluca Radulescu, he recommends as 'a worthy medium for the instruction of ladies'. Moreover, Radulescu points out that in his prologue to *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry* (Caxton's translation of the above-mentioned chivalric treatise by Ramon Lull), Caxton 'stresses the parallel between chivalric treatises and romances when one needs to understand and learn chivalry'.<sup>71</sup> Caxton's prologue may reflect his marketing strategy, but it also influenced the way his audience viewed the books they bought and read.

In Caxton's 1485 edition, the prologue is followed by a table of rubrics, providing a brief description of the contents for the twenty-one books in which he has divided the volume. However, Grimm argues that the layout of Caxton's volume 'offers only modest and inconsistent guide-posts to the reader', because the book titles and chapter headings mentioned at the beginning of the volume do not appear systematically throughout the book.<sup>72</sup> Potentially, the table of contents and chapter headings, like the programme of illuminations encountered in the *Lancelot-Graal* volumes, could suggest to the reader a particular interpretation of the text and its episodes, but Caxton's omission of book and chapter titles from the body of the volume decreases the extent of such an influence. However, de Worde, printing from Caxton's 1485 edition in 1498, made a number of

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Vinaver, ed., *Works*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Blake, *Caxton*, p. 106.

<sup>71</sup> Raluca Radulescu, 'How Christian is Chivalry?' in *Christianity and Romance*, ed. by Field, Hardman and Sweeney, pp. 69-83 (p. 71).

<sup>72</sup> Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde', p. 136.

layout alterations that influenced the reader's perception of Malory's romance. Grimm argues that '[d]e Worde's additions to the layout of the volume – printing Caxton's rubrics at the head of each chapter, and adding book titles, illustrations, and running page headings – constitute a substantial elaboration of the framework within which a reader experiences Malory's text'.<sup>73</sup>

De Worde's choice of layout for his edition of the *Morte* raises the question to what extent the physical and visual peculiarities of a book or manuscript influenced the text's interpretation by its audience. Grimm comments that de Worde's editorial decisions resulted in increasing the religious constituent of the *Morte* and, especially, the importance of the 'Sankgreal', lessening the importance of chivalric prowess in the narrative. According to Grimm, 'de Worde seems to be more moralistic than either Malory or Caxton – less interested in knightly worship than religious morality'.<sup>74</sup> Grimm remarks that in Book 18, which opens with the return of Lancelot and Bors to the court, Caxton's heading and its later treatment by de Worde and his compositor 'emphasizes the importance of the Grail quest, thus reinforcing a perspective established in the preface to the volume. Malory's text at this point, however, seems more interested in the personal relations of his central knights'.<sup>75</sup> The way in which the heading is printed on the page makes the reference to the Grail quest stand out, whereas in the Winchester manuscript the knights' names, written in red ink, are visually more prominent than the reference to the quest.

Another way in which de Worde changed the appearance of Caxton's edition was by providing woodcut illustrations for every one of Caxton's books; the woodcuts, according to Edwards, were commissioned by de Worde especially for the romance.<sup>76</sup> However, because there is only one woodcut per book, their influence on the reader's experience and interpretation of the narrative is limited. James Wade contends that the woodcuts usually refer to events at the beginning

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<sup>73</sup> Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde', p. 139.

<sup>74</sup> Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde,' p. 137.

<sup>75</sup> Grimm, 'Wynkyn de Worde,' p. 150.

<sup>76</sup> Edwards, 'Reception', p. 241.

of the book rather than to the most important events in the book.<sup>77</sup> By contrast, many *Queste* manuscripts contain elaborate illustrative programmes, which not only guide the reader through the text but also, to an extent, comment on the narrative and interpret it in ways that may differ from the author's idea.

The consideration of chivalric ideology that appears in medieval chivalric treatises and romances provides the background necessary for discussing particular aspects of the Grail in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Naturally, the discourse of chivalry changed from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. These changes are reflected in the representation of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle in manuscript form as well as in attitudes towards chivalric romances among lay and clerical audiences. Moreover, in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England, there was a particular interest in the ideology of chivalry, linked to the political events in the country. The publication of *Le Morte* and other chivalric romances, as well as of Lull's treatise on chivalry, by William Caxton and his successor Wynkyn de Worde reflects this interest in chivalry and contributes to the discourse on chivalry among noble and gentle audiences. Thus, awareness of the ideas and expectations that governed the authors', manuscript producers', printers' and audiences' approach to the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' is necessary in order to understand the representation of the Grail quest in these romances.

The subsequent chapters consider the relationship between the questing knights and the chivalric community in life and after death, the knights and religious women and the issues of family and universal history in a selection of episodes. The discussion focuses on the experiences of minor characters, from non-elect knights (Chapter 2) to recluses (Chapter 3) and the legendary couple of King Solomon and his wife (Chapter 4). Several of the episodes selected for analysis may have been viewed as important by the manuscript compilers, patrons and audiences, since their

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<sup>77</sup> James Wade, 'The Chapter Headings of the *Morte Darthur*: Caxton and de Worde', paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Triennial Congress of the International Arthurian Society, 25-30 July 2011, University of Bristol (*Modern Philology*, 110 (forthcoming 2014)).

opening is signalled by an illustration in many of the illuminated *Queste* manuscripts.<sup>78</sup> In many illustrations, the minor characters appear alongside the elect knights and other prominent characters, such as Lancelot and Gawain, and previous studies of these episodes tended to focus on the major characters. The aim of Chapters 2-4 is to concentrate on the experiences of minor characters, because such a study will help us to understand the historical context in which the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ were written, particularly the psychological, moral and spiritual concerns with which the romance authors engaged. As outlined earlier in the Introduction, the principal difference between medieval and modern Grail quest narrative is the fact that a medieval author constructs the narrative in a religious world, for an audience who shares with the author the belief in the existence of God. However, this certainty about the existence of God does not mean that, in difference from the modern, post-religious world, the Middle Ages were free from spiritual and psychological anxieties. The themes discussed in the chapters reveal these anxieties, and they are related to the principal concerns that a religion, in this case, Christianity, is meant to address: death, the relations between the individual and other people and the relations between the individual and God.

Death played a prominent part in medieval chivalric society, being an ever-present concern. Members of the non-militant social orders were more likely to die in peaceful circumstances than the knights, who could not be sure they would have time to prepare for death by confessing their sins and receiving communion. Therefore, some strategy to counterbalance the dread of *mors improvisa*, sudden death, was needed to assuage the knights’ anxiety about their fate after death. In the next chapter (2), I will discuss the ways in which knights confront the danger of death on the battlefield, using the examples of non-elect knights King Bagdemagus, Sir Yvain and Sir Calogrenant. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will consider the question of gender and authority; despite the fact that medieval society was patriarchal, this did not prevent women from acting, on occasion,

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapters 2-4 for references to particular manuscripts in which the episodes are illuminated. All the episodes examined in the thesis are illustrated in one or several of the *Queste* manuscripts. The illuminated manuscripts examined are BnF, MS f. fr. 110; BnF, MS f. fr. 111; BnF, MS f. fr. 112 (3); BnF, MS f. fr. 116; BnF, MS f. fr. 120; BnF, MS f. fr. 122; BnF, MS f. fr. 123; BnF, MS f. fr. 339; BnF, MS f. fr. 342; BnF, MS f. fr. 343; BnF, MS f. fr. 344; BnF, MS f. fr. 1424; BnF, MS f. fr. 12573; BL, MS Royal 14 E III; and MS Bodmer 147.

with considerable authority. Indeed, although women at Arthur's court are prohibited from entering the Grail quest alongside their knights, other women play an important part in the quest, guiding the questers, admonishing them and providing inspiration by their personal example. In Chapter 3, I discuss the spiritual authority that religious women, in this case, recluses, could possess, and the lessons they teach the questing knights. Finally, in Chapter 4, I consider the role of the medieval family in understanding eschatological Christian history and in forming the identity of the individual Christian. I refer to the episode that provides the pre-history of the Grail and confirms Galahad's role as the elect knight and a messianic character by tracing his descent from Adam and Eve through Solomon and Solomon's wife. This episode constitutes a vivid example of the relations between spouses and their co-operation in ensuring the future of their lineage. In medieval chivalric society, where death was an ever-present concern, securing the continuity of the family's lineage was a task requiring the spouses to collaborate, because the existence of heirs and ancestral memory was connected to the well-being of the deceased members of the family. In fact, as the following chapter will show, Arthurian knights express particular concern that the memory of the dead knights be preserved both at the court and for the future generations of knights.



## Chapter 2

### **The Relationship between Non-elect Knights and their Community in Life and in Death**

The aim of this chapter is to explore the model of social relations between the living and the dead projected in the Grail quest narrative and to assess the extent to which the adventures of certain non-elect knights provide viable alternatives to the achievement of elect knights. Analyzing the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' will also shed light on the model of mutual obligations between a knight and his community during the knight's life and after his death, building on the discussion of chivalry in the previous chapter. However, there are differences between the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' models of chivalric death, because the romances were intended for different audiences and their authors had different priorities. In general, death, an ever-present contingency of chivalric life, did not separate the dead entirely from the community of the living in medieval Christian society. Bagdemagus, Yvain and Calogrenant, whose adventures are considered in this chapter, die during the quest, but their deaths have repercussions for Arthur's kingdom, because, from the Christian point of view, they are still connected with their fellow knights and their lord, Arthur. In order to elucidate the Christian model of relations between the living and the dead, it is necessary to consider the rituals associated with death and dying described in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', taking into account the socio-historical context in which their authors worked in thirteenth- and fifteenth-century French and English societies. Then it will be possible to determine whether non-elect knights provided examples with which the audiences could sympathize and even identify themselves.

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that the *Queste* can be read against the background of the Fourth Lateran Council and its provisions for instructing the laity about the

Church rituals. Concerning preparations for death, there are two detailed schemes in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’: one involves confessing one’s sins to a priest and receiving the communion, the other involves no priest and is applicable to the circumstance of sudden death. The first scheme is described in the episode where Gawain wounds Yvain to the death, and the latter asks to be taken to a religious house, where he confesses, receives communion and dies (*Queste*, 152-54; ‘Sankgreal’, 944-45). Before he dies, Yvain is also reconciled with Gawain, acting as a good Christian must to avoid hell. This episode is not often illustrated in manuscripts, but its conventional scenario of preparation for death would have been familiar to the *Queste* English and French audiences.<sup>1</sup> The second scheme is applied to the episode in which Bors’s brother Lionel murders Calogrenant, an Arthurian knight who tries to save Bors. There is no priest to hear Calogrenant’s confession, so he confesses his sins directly to God (*Queste*, 191-92; ‘Sankgreal’, 973). The entire episode of Lionel trying to murder his brother Bors is striking, and the illuminations usually show Lionel killing the hermit who tried to defend Bors or fighting with Calogrenant.<sup>2</sup>

Bagdemagus’s death is not described in either the *Queste* or the ‘Sankgreal’; it is only late in the Grail quest that Lancelot discovers Bagdemagus’s tomb, so it is impossible to tell whether Bagdemagus was able to confess his sins to a priest and receive communion (*Queste*, 261-62; ‘Sankgreal’, 1020). However, the White Shield episode, in which Bagdemagus is dangerously wounded (*Queste*, 26-31; ‘Sankgreal’, 877-79), constitutes an important stage in the Grail quest; it frequently appears in manuscript illuminations which show Galahad’s meeting with Bagdemagus and Yvain,<sup>3</sup> Bagdemagus defeated by the White Knight<sup>4</sup> or Galahad in conversation with the White

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<sup>1</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 342, fol. 106<sup>v</sup> shows the battle between Yvain and Gawain. BnF, MS f. fr. 116, fol. 643<sup>v</sup> has Yvain kneeling before the priest to receive the host; Yvain is supported by a knight, presumably Gawain. The episode is also illuminated in BnF, MS f. fr. 343, fol. 36<sup>r</sup> (the battle) and fol. 36<sup>v</sup> (Gawain taking Yvain to the abbey), an Italian manuscript dated c. 1380-85 containing an extensive illustrative programme.

<sup>2</sup> Lionel killing the hermit: BnF, MS f. fr. 112(3), fol. 159<sup>r</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 120, fol. 552<sup>r</sup>. In BnF, MS f. fr. 342, fol. 120<sup>v</sup>, the illumination shows Lionel threatening to kill Bors, with the hermit addressing Lionel. In BnF, MS f. fr. 111, fol. 258<sup>r</sup>, the same illumination combines the decapitated hermit, Lionel threatening to kill Bors, and Calogrenant arriving on the scene. BnF, MS f. fr. 343 has Lionel raising his sword to kill the hermit on fol. 47<sup>r</sup> and Lionel fighting Calogrenant on fol. 47<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 111, fol. 239<sup>r</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 122, fol. 224<sup>r</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 342, fol. 67<sup>r</sup>. Bagdemagus carrying the shield

Knight.<sup>5</sup> The episode is also relevant to the discussion of sin, salvation and preparations for death in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, because it foreshadows the tragic adventures of non-elect knights later in the narrative.

The *Queste* author and Malory emphasize the words of repentance pronounced by Yvain and Calogrenant before their deaths, and this focus on penitence corresponds to the development of Christian ritual in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. Accordingly, Clive Burgess asserts that from the late twelfth century onwards, ‘[p]enances, be they prayers, almsgiving, financial bequests to clergy and churches, or the commission of pious acts and services – good works, in short – became worthwhile and immensely popular’.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Burgess explains that penance had both a religious and a social significance, because the Christian who has expiated his sin would be readmitted not only to the bosom of the Church but also to Christian society. As Eamon Duffy demonstrates, the customary way of doing penance was by good works, and the content of late medieval English wills demonstrates the importance people from different social strata attached to good works.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it was also accepted that good works alone did not suffice to ‘buy’ access to heaven: only by feeling heartfelt repentance and relying on God’s mercy could an individual be saved. Thus, penance and other pious observances were part of the doctrine to which thirteenth-century lay people were introduced in sermons and literature, including the romances. Yvain’s desire to confess and be shriven indicates his acceptance of the latest developments in Christian ritual. By Malory’s time these rituals were well ingrained not only among the nobility but

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from the abbey is depicted in BnF, MS f. fr. 339, fol. 233<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 112(3), fol. 8<sup>v</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 116, fol. 614<sup>f</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 343, fol. 10<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 112(3), fol. 9<sup>f</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 116, fol. 614<sup>v</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 343, fol. 11<sup>v</sup> (on fol. 10<sup>v</sup> a monk is handing Galahad the shield).

<sup>6</sup> Clive Burgess discusses the discourse on penance from the late twelfth century onwards in France and England in the first half of his essay, ‘“A fond thing vainly invented”: An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England’, in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 56-84 (p. 66). See also Burgess, ‘Longing to be Prayed for: Death and Commemoration in an English Parish’ in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 44-65 (p. 49).

<sup>7</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altar: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 338.

also among other social strata, such as the gentry and wealthy townspeople. Accordingly, Duffy states that, in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England, ‘the constantly reiterated concern to secure shrift and housel in the hour of death clearly represents a strong lay conviction, and not merely the mechanical acceptance of ecclesiastical directives’.<sup>8</sup> In adopting the episode of Yvain’s death from the *Queste*, Malory omitted details about Yvain’s confession, penitence and communion possibly because, for him and his intended audience, these rituals were taken for granted (944-45).<sup>9</sup>

However, there is another episode where the *Queste* author describes the death of a non-elect knight, Calogrenant, and Malory retains more material in this episode than he does in the episode of Yvain’s death. A possible reason for this difference is that, unlike Yvain, Calogrenant does not benefit from receiving ‘shrift and housel’ before his death. There is no clergy present at Calogrenant’s death, so his salvation is imperilled through lack of preparation. Duffy remarks that sudden death was the most fearful for fifteenth-century English lay people:

“mors improvisa,” sudden and unforeseen death, was universally dreaded. The certainty of death was made more terrible by the uncertainty of the hour of its coming, which might catch the unsuspecting soul unawares and sweep it to Hell.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Calogrenant’s sudden death highlights the fact that knights ran a higher risk of dying unshriven than other lay people. For Calogrenant, the solution is to address his Creator directly. He asks God to receive him precisely because his death results from his performance of chivalric duty to his fellow knight. His action fits well with the discourse on the spiritual dimension of knighthood and its later development by Lull and his followers.

The deaths of Bagdemagus, Yvain and Calogrenant also highlight the relationship between

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<sup>8</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 313.

<sup>9</sup> The episode will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

<sup>10</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 310.

the dead and the living Christians. The tombs of Yvain and Bagdemagus mark the landscape of the Arthurian world, and Yvain's rich funeral is mentioned in both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Accordingly, when Malory writes that Hector and Gawain buried Yvain 'as them ought to bury a kynges sonne' (945), the audience would have had the notion of an elaborate burial similar to those practiced in the late fifteenth century. The 'Sankgreal' lacks the references to a beautiful and rich silken shroud and the burial service found in the *Queste* (154), because mentioning the status of the deceased replaces the description of a ceremony with which Malory's audience would have been very familiar.<sup>11</sup> Christine Carpenter notes that gentry funerals 'tended to grow more, not less, elaborate'.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Colin Richmond draws attention to the funeral of John Paston in 1466, which he describes as a 'splendid show'.<sup>13</sup> Dame Anne Sulyard's will made in May 1519 is characteristic of the luxury with which funerals were conducted, and Richmond comments on 'the visual splendor of her departure from the world'.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Malory's audience would have found reference to a princely funeral congruous with their experience.

Moreover, both Yvain and Calogrenant remember in their speeches the world from which they are about to depart, and they expect their deaths to have an impact on Arthur's kingdom. Yvain, in particular, is worried that his death at Gawain's hand would harm the reputation of the Round Table, and he also asks to be remembered at the court. Duffy maintains that 'concern for an enduring place in the memories, and therefore the prayers, of surviving kindred features large in the preoccupations of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century testators'.<sup>15</sup> Asking other Christians to pray for one's soul was an integral part of the 'art' of dying by the fifteenth century: by means of

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<sup>11</sup> On the gentry funerals in Malory's time, see Cherewatuk, 'Christian Rituals in Malory: The Evidence of Funerals', in *Malory and Christianity: Essays on Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. by Thomas Hanks and Janet Jesmok (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 77-91.

<sup>12</sup> Christine Carpenter, 'The Religion of the Gentry in Fifteenth-Century England', in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Williams, pp. 53-74 (p. 61).

<sup>13</sup> Colin Richmond, 'Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage*, ed. by R. B. Dobson (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), pp. 193-208 (p. 196).

<sup>14</sup> Richmond, 'The Sulyard Papers: The Rewards of a Small Family Archive', in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Williams, pp. 199-228 (p. 216). The will is cited at the end of the article.

<sup>15</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 350.

commemorative prayers and masses the dead remained part of the community of the living Christians. Burgess indicates that '[t]he abundance of pious provision in late medieval England suggests that the dead were, by their design no less than by the calculation of the living, a very real presence in everyday life'.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Duffy explains that '[f]riendship and kindred [...] are constantly recurrent notions in the cult of Purgatory' and that the interaction between the living and the dead was perceived as necessary for both sides: the dead needed the prayers of the living, whereas the 'dead in Purgatory continued to care for their families on earth'.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Yvain's last words in the 'Sankgreal', where he expresses his concern for the reputation of the Round Table and his desire to be remembered at Arthur's court (945), correspond to the notion that Malory's audience had about the relations between the living and the dead.

In both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the Grail quest is directed towards the redemption of the individual, of the chivalric community and, ultimately, of humankind. Pauline Matarasso contends that Galahad is a perfect *sponsa*, but he is also *sponsus*, an allegorical 'Christ-figure', who is to redeem the world. According to Matarasso, Galahad's redemptive efforts are directed towards a particular social institution, knighthood: 'in its prehistory the story of the Holy Grail is to be seen as a renewal of the Covenant, in its actuality as the redemption of chivalry through the life and death of Galahad'.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Galahad's perfect life and death do not guarantee universal salvation. According to Karen Pratt, the *Queste* underscores 'the responsibility of the individual to obtain his or her own salvation',<sup>19</sup> and the same is true in the 'Sankgreal'. Each knight is judged individually, and the audience is offered a range of models for recognition, imitation or repudiation. It is unlikely that either the *Queste* or the 'Sankgreal' readers could aspire to achieve the same level of perfection as the elect knights, but readers were expected to avoid following the examples of

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<sup>16</sup> Burgess, 'Purgatory', p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 349.

<sup>18</sup> Matarasso, *Redemption*, p. 37. The role of history in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' is discussed further in the present thesis, see Chapter 4, pp. 106-13.

<sup>19</sup> Karen Pratt, 'The Cistercians and the *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 21 (1995), 69-96 (p. 79).

sinner, such as Gawain and Lyonel. It is possible that, given the social and religious implications of Christian chivalry mentioned in the previous chapter, the adventures of Bagdemagus, Yvain and Calogrenant could be viewed as versions of tragic achievement, similar in type, though not in degree, to the elect knights' achievement. The ensuing discussion of the episodes in this chapter thus considers whether these non-elect knights can hope for salvation in the next world and whether their deaths make a contribution towards the well-being of their chivalric community, which would make their adventures typologically similar to the elect knights' adventures.

The first non-elect knight to be discussed is King Bagdemagus, because his adventures are described early in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Remarkably, his appraisal or condemnation in both texts is more uncertain than the appraisal or condemnation of Yvain and Calogrenant. In this episode, Bagdemagus tries to take a miraculous white shield out of an abbey despite the monks' warning not to attempt it and is severely wounded by a White Knight. The White Knight then instructs Bagdemagus's squire to take the shield to Galahad, because the latter was meant to receive the shield from the very beginning. Although the sequence of events is the same in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', there are details affecting the interpretation of the episode. It seems that whereas the *Queste* Bagdemagus is punished for his presumption, the 'Sankgreal' Bagdemagus suffers an unavoidable misadventure.

The episode begins in a similar way in the *Queste* and in the 'Sankgreal': Galahad arrives at a white abbey and there finds two fellows of the Round Table, King Bagdemagus and Yvain li Avoutres. They tell Galahad about a marvellous shield, which cannot be taken from the abbey without the bearer being killed or wounded within days. Bagdemagus declares his intention to bear the shield the next day, and at this point an important difference occurs between the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. In the *Queste*, Galahad expresses his interest in the adventure, and Bagdemagus courteously asks him to take the shield, believing that Galahad would succeed. Galahad, however, says that Bagdemagus should first ascertain whether the adventure is such as it is reputed to be: '[j]

voil, fet il, que vos i essaiez avant por savoir se ce est voirs ou non que len vos a dit' (27) ['I want you to try it first,' Galahad said, 'to see if what they told you was true' (19)]. In the 'Sankgreal', Bagdemagus asks Galahad to try his hand after him rather than in his stead: 'and I may nat encheve the adventure of thys shyldes ye shall take hit upon you, for I a[m] sure ye shall nat fayle' (877). Essentially, the difference is that Malory's Bagdemagus places moral obligation on Galahad, whereas the *Queste* Bagdemagus obeys Galahad's request to ascertain the truth of the adventure.<sup>20</sup>

These differences are significant in interpreting Bagdemagus's behaviour further in the episode. In the *Queste*, Bagdemagus is warned the next morning by a religious man and by the inscription on the shield that only the best knight could take it, but he declares his eagerness to undertake the adventure: 'que qui m'en doie avenir, je l'emporterai de ceanz' (28) [I'll carry it away from here, whatever the consequences (20)]. He further asks Galahad to wait until news of the adventure comes back, and Galahad promises to do it, confirming their previous agreement. It seems that, in the *Queste*, Bagdemagus's self-assuredness is at least partially based on Galahad's request to try the adventure. Meanwhile, Bagdemagus can be seen as guilty of pride, because he takes the adventure clearly meant for a better knight. His wounding, therefore, appears as penance imposed on him by God via the mediation of the White Knight. A monk of the abbey to which Bagdemagus is taken implies as much when he says to Galahad:

je vos dis qu'il est molt durement navrez, et si ne l'en doit len mie trop plaindre.

Car nos li avions bien dit que se il l'escu emportoit, que il l'en mescherroit; et il

l'emporta sor nostre deffens, dont il se puet tenir por fol. (30)

[I warn you that he's very seriously hurt. Yet one shouldn't feel too sorry about it,

for we told him that misfortune would befall him if he tried to take the shield. He

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<sup>20</sup> In the *Morte*, the weaker of two knights often volunteers to try an adventure first, so that the stronger knight may be able to avenge him in case of failure; for instance, Yvain offers to fight Marhalt at the beginning of the *Morte* (160).



foolishly ignored our warning (21)]

Through these words, the *Queste* author suggests that representatives of earthly chivalry should be guided, just as other lay people are, by the clergy.

In the ‘Sankgreal’, the situation is presented from a different perspective. Accordingly, Bagdemagus is warned only once by a monk, to whom he replies humbly: ‘I wote well I am nat the beste knyght, but I shall assay to bere hit’ (877). Bagdemagus’s determination to try the adventure in which, as he acknowledges, he is unlikely to succeed, may appear surprising, but it is logical within the ‘Sankgreal’. Bagdemagus explains in his conversation with Galahad: ‘I shall beare hit to-morne for to assay thys adventure’ (877). A questing knight must take up any adventure he encounters, even if as a result he may be ‘myscheved other dede within three dayes, other maymed for ever’ (877).<sup>21</sup> For the *Morte* audience, if they were thinking within the framework of chivalric treatises, such as Lull’s book, Bagdemagus’s behaviour would be entirely justified, because authors of chivalric manuals underline that a knight was responsible for protecting peace and order in the realm. As a result, King Bagdemagus perceives it as his duty to find out why knights who take the white shield are wounded or killed. For those fifteenth-century readers who were also familiar with chivalric treatises, it was natural that a king, who was also a knight, such as King Bagdemagus, should want to investigate and eradicate any potential injustice or danger in the land. As a result, it seems that the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ intended audiences would judge Bagdemagus’s behaviour differently, as foolish or unlucky, respectively.

Moreover, the reasons which bring Bagdemagus and Yvain to the abbey are somewhat different in the *Queste* and in the ‘Sankgreal’. The *Queste* knights come to witness a marvellous adventure and want to ascertain if the rumour is true: ‘nos i venismes por veoir une aventure qui i

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<sup>21</sup> *MED* contains three entries for ‘myscheve’ as a noun; entry 1a is ‘misfortune, affliction, trouble,’ entry 1b is ‘hardship’ and ‘stress of war’, entry 3 contains ‘injury’. The word derives from Old French ‘meschief’. The *Queste* equivalent is a different word, ‘meschiece’ (27).

est trop merveilleuse, ce nos a len fait entendant [...] Si somes venu por savoir se ce est voirs que len en dit' (27) [we came here to witness what we were told would be a wondrous adventure (...) We have come to find out whether what they say about this shield is true (19)] explain Bagdemagus and Yvain to Galahad. Again, Bagdemagus hopes that, after he bears away the shield, 'lors savré se l'aventure est telle come len la devise' (27) [(he)'ll know whether or not the stories about the shield are true (19)]. Likewise, Galahad asks Bagdemagus to try the adventure 'por savoir se ce est voirs ou non' (27) [to see if what they told (him) was true (19)]. The knights' desire to see ('veoir') the adventures echoes Gawain's motivation in entering the quest: 'ne ne revendrai a cort por chose qui aviegne devant que j'aie veu plus apertement qu'il ne m'a ci esté demostrez' (16) [I will not return to court, no matter what happens, until I have seen the Grail more clearly than I did today (13)]. In other words, the French questers' aspiration is to witness the adventure; hence, their position in the quest is relatively passive.

By comparison, the position of the 'Sankgreal' questing knights is more active. When Galahad asks Bagdemagus and Yvain what has brought them to the abbey in the 'Sankgreal', Bagdemagus explains that it is not to see but 'for to assay thys adventure' (877). Hence, Bagdemagus's words reinforce the impression that he undertakes the shield adventure as part of his chivalric duty in the 'Sankgreal'. On the other hand, the *Queste* Bagdemagus is guilty of presumption, assuming he is able to complete a task which is too hard for him. In the 'Sankgreal', however, Bagdemagus does not question the difficulty of the task or his inability to accomplish it: as Andrew Lynch mentions, in Malory's world, worship comes with endeavour, not with success.<sup>22</sup> Malory's Bagdemagus must try his hand in the adventure, even if he knows he is bound to fail.

The outcome of Bagdemagus's adventure in both texts is tragic. He is struck down by a White Knight, and the words with which the White Knight chastises Bagdemagus are essential for an understanding of the entire episode. In the *Queste*, the White Knight addresses Bagdemagus:

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), p. 89.

‘[s]ire chevaliers, trop fustes fox et musarz qui cest escu pendistes a vostre col. Car il n’est otroiez a nul home a porter, s’il n’est li mieldres chevaliers qui soit ou monde’ (29) [(s)ir knight, you were foolish and naive to wear this shield. No one will be allowed to carry it but the world’s best knight (20)]. The White Knight accuses Bagdemagus of being foolish (‘fox et musarz’),<sup>23</sup> because he aspires to mundane glory, trusting in his prowess rather than in God’s mercy. Unlike the elect knights who always follow the clergy’s advice, Bagdemagus trusts in his own judgement. His wounding is his chastisement and his penance, and the *Queste* author specifies that the monks took care of his wound, which was ‘grant et merueilleuse’ (30) [large and surprisingly deep (21)].<sup>24</sup> It is symbolic that Bagdemagus is tended by the monks who have previously warned him off: if his wound represents penance for pride, the cure appropriately comes from the Church representatives.

Meanwhile, Malory’s audience could have seen Bagdemagus’s actions as heroic rather than arrogant: although Bagdemagus realises that his attempt is probably hopeless, having been warned that the shield is for the world’s best knight, he is determined to proceed. In the ‘Sankgreal’, the White Knight reproaches Bagdemagus his folly, but not his falseness: ‘[k]nyght, thou hast done thyselff grete foly, for thys shyld ought nat to be borne but by hym that shall have no pere that lyvith’ (878). Malory must have recognised Bagdemagus’s gesture as folly worthy of a true knight. The ‘Sankgreal’ readers could also notice that Bagdemagus’s folly harms only himself (‘thou hast done thyselff grete foly’) and can potentially benefit others, in particular Galahad. Accordingly, the White Knight sends the news to Galahad that the shield is destined for him, as Bagdemagus’s squire reports to Galahad: ‘that knyght that wounded Bagdemagus sende you gretyng, and bade that ye sholde bere thys shyld wherethorow grete adventures sholde befalle’ (879). Bagdemagus’s misfortune turns out to be providential for Galahad, who promptly responds: ‘[n]ow blyssed be

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<sup>23</sup> Matarasso translates ‘fox et musarz’ as ‘overweening and foolish’ (*The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 55).

<sup>24</sup> Note that the *Queste* author describes the wound as ‘great and marvellous’, and these epithets are usually employed by the author to describe different objects and phenomena encountered by the questors; see, for instance, the description of the objects in the Ship of Solomon episode discussed further below, Chapter 4, p. 123. Matarasso translates the words describing the wound as ‘gaping and terrible’ (*Quest*, 56).

good fortune!’ (879). The folly and sufferings of Bagdemagus are not underscored in the ‘Sankgreal’ as they are in the *Queste*. Therefore, the theme of punishment for pride is replaced by the idea of self-sacrifice, even though Bagdemagus’s sacrifice may appear to be accidental rather than conscious.

Whereas Bagdemagus’s sufferings are rendered meaningful through Galahad’s achievement of the shield, Yvain’s death at the hand of his fellow Gawain is meaningless, and it also portends the civil war at the end of King Arthur’s reign. Yvain and Gawain are Round Table fellows, so Yvain’s murder implies fratricide, particularly because, as Whetter indicates, ‘[t]he brotherly love between Yvain [sic] and Gawain is something of a romance commonplace’.<sup>25</sup> Their battle has parallels in the *Morte* with episodes where the Round Table knights kill fellows, whether by accident, as when Lancelot strikes down Gawain’s brothers, or knowingly, as when Lyonel murders Calogrenant. The Winchester manuscript marginalia renders specific a detail that is not otherwise clear in the text, that Yvain and Gawain are cousins: ‘[h]ere sir Gawayne slew sir Uwayne his cousin germayne’ (944).<sup>26</sup> Thus their combat continues the theme of murder between family members, commencing with the mutual killing of Balin and Balan and culminating in the combat between Arthur and Mordred, so that the encounter between Yvain and Gawain has links to other parts of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and the *Morte*.

Meanwhile, the interpretation of the episode in which Gawain slays his fellow knight Yvain is determined by the larger narrative context. In the *Queste*, the names of Yvain and Gawain occur together for the first time when Galahad hears that the seven brothers, whom he had previously unhorsed, were killed by three Round Table knights. A servant of the castle delivered by Galahad brings the news: ‘quant il partirent de vos, si encontrerent en cel tertre monseignor Gauvain et Gaheriet son frere et monseignor Yvain. Si corurent sus li un as autres; si torna la desconfiture sor

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<sup>25</sup> Whetter, ‘Love and Death in Arthurian Romance’, in *The Arthurian Way of Death*, ed. by Cherevatuk and Whetter, pp. 33-49 (p. 98).

<sup>26</sup> *The Malory Project*, directed by Takako Kato and designed by Nick Hayward <<http://www.maloryproject.com/>> [accessed 22 September, 2013], fol. 378<sup>f</sup>.

les set freres' (51) [(y)esterday, after leaving you, sir, they met Sir Gawain, his brother Gaheriet, and Sir Yvain. (...) They fought one another, and the seven brothers lost (33)]. The audience learns of the event before it occurs in the narrative flow and might, together with Galahad, wonder at the adventure.<sup>27</sup> The next section shows the battle of which the report has already been given. Gawain and his brother Gaheris meet Yvain, hail him, and Yvain 'les conoist a la parole' (52) [recogniz(es) their voices' (34)]. They deplore the lack of adventures, decide to ride together until 'God send [them] some adventure',<sup>28</sup> are attacked by the seven brothers, kill them all and separate. Subsequently, a hermit explains to Gawain that he acted sinfully in murdering the seven brothers, unlike Galahad, who 'les conquest sanz ocirre' (54) [(h)e conquered them without bloodshed (35)]. Gawain's actions indicate his sinfulness, and, when the story turns to him again, the misfortune of murdering his fellow becomes both proof of and punishment for his sin. The Yvain who participates in the seven brothers' murder is not the Yvain Gawain strikes down in the *Queste*, but the similarity of names serves to establish a causal link between the episodes.

However, the subject of sin, so prominent in the *Queste*, is subdued in the 'Sankgreal'. Lynch, discussing Malory's ideology of war, concludes that Malory's 'overall method could be more accurately categorized as a refusal or avoidance of consistent moral scrutiny', although in the 'Sankgreal', 'a heavy stress falls on moral analysis of motives such as pride or anger'.<sup>29</sup> For instance, in the 'Sankgreal', as in the *Queste*, Gawain meets a hermit, who comments with disapproval that, unlike Gawain, Galahad did not kill the seven brothers, because Galahad's 'lyvying ys such that he shall sle no man lyghtly' (892). Lynch uses this famous quotation to explain that, in the 'Sankgreal', 'the issue of motivation thus cannot be avoided as it usually is in the purely

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<sup>27</sup> Galahad's reaction is described thus: '[e]t il se merveille de ceste aventure' (51) [Galahad marvelled at the outcome of the adventure (Matarasso, *Quest*, 76)]. Cf. Burns's translation: '[a]mazed by this account, Galahad asked for his armour' (33). The use of the word 'merveille' and its derivatives in the *Queste* is discussed further below, p. 65 and Chapter 4, p. 123.

<sup>28</sup> 'Or chevauchons tuit ensemble, fet Gaheriez, tant que Diex nos envoit aventure' (52) ['Let's all ride together,' said Gaheriet, 'till God send us an adventure' (34)].

<sup>29</sup> Lynch, "'Thou woll never have done": Ideology, Context and Excess in Malory's War', in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. by Hanks and Brogdon, pp. 24-41 (pp. 31 and 28).

“chivalric” view: earthly glory is not a sufficient justification for arms, and knights are called to account for needless killings’.<sup>30</sup> When Yvain and Gawain attack each other later in the tale, their ‘spiritual blindness’ appears to be caused by their earlier sin. Paradoxically, although Yvain is killed in the episode, it seems that Gawain’s punishment is more severe. In the *Queste*, Yvain and Gawain do not recognise each other until Gawain carries his wounded opponent to an abbey. By contrast, in the ‘Sankgreal’, Yvain knows who Gawain is, whereas Gawain does not know who he has wounded. Hence, there is an overtone of reproach in the words Yvain addresses to his fellow:

I am of kynge Arthurs courte, and was a felow of the Rounde Table, and we were sworne togydir. And now, sir Gawayne, thou hast slayne me. And my name ys sir Uwayne le Avoutres, that somtyme was sone unto kynge Uryen, and I was in the queste of the Sankgreall. (944-45)

In the episode, Gawain’s spiritual blindness and, therefore, his sin, seem to be greater than Yvain’s. The impression is sustained when comparing the description of the battle with the seven brothers in the *Queste* and in the ‘Sankgreal’. The *Queste* author specifies that each of the companions kills at least one of the brothers: ‘mesires Gauvains en ocit un, et mesires Yvains un autre, et Gaheriés le tierz’ (53) [Sir Gawain killed one, and Sir Yvain another, and Gaheriet a third (35)]. Malory names only Gawain slaying one of the brothers, although it is implied that Gareth and Yvain have contributed to the slaughter by unhorsing (and probably also killing) the opponents: ‘[a]nd by fortune sir Gawayne slew one [of] the brethren, and ech one of hys felowys overthrew anothis, and so slew all the remenaunte’ (891). Gawain’s companions share his responsibility for the murder in the *Queste*, but Malory associates only Gawain’s name with the idea of slaughter, and the slaughter made by Gawain’s companions remains implicit.

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<sup>30</sup> Lynch, ‘Ideology’, p. 28.

In the French text, the Arthurian knights join to seek an adventure and disperse after they have participated in what they take for an adventure sent by God; companionship is of secondary importance for the *Queste* author. Elizabeth Archibald maintains that ‘compagnie’ is ‘common in the French romances in the sense of temporary companionship, but apparently much rarer as a collective abstract noun in the sense of an established knightly order’.<sup>31</sup> It seems that the word ‘compaignons’ (53) by which the French author designates the three knights in the episode is used in the more usual meaning of short-term association. Malory translates the French ‘compaignons’ as ‘knyghtes’, but for him ‘fellowship’ is a more profound concept, and he uses the word ‘felowys’ to distinguish the Arthurian knights from their opponents, the ‘seven brethirn’ (891). Therefore, the dispersal of the three fellows is not a logical outcome of the adventure in the ‘Sankgreal’, but a manifestation of ‘suddayne fortune’ (891) at work.

In the respective moral settings of the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, the significance of Yvain’s death is different. Thus, in the *Queste*, the connection between the two episodes (murder of the seven brothers and Yvain’s death) is indirect, because they involve distinct characters bearing the same name, Yvain. First, Gawain, Gaheris and Yvain kill the seven brothers. Later, Gawain and Hector encounter a different Yvain, Yvain li Avoutres. However, the *Queste* audience may have been expected to make a link between the two episodes, in which the meeting of questing knights is so tragically dissimilar. In the earlier episode Yvain recognises Gawain and his brothers, and their meeting is joyous. On the contrary, when Yvain li Avoutres sees Hector and Gawain, he cries ‘[j]oste!’ (152) [(j)oust! (94)], and there is no opportunity for mutual recognition. Gawain and Hector marvel that they have met with a knight who offers to joust with them, but both are eager to take up the adventure which turns out to be a ‘mesaventure’ (153, 154). In this episode, the eagerness of Gawain and other secular-minded knights to seek adventures is criticized. The *Queste* readers would be further impressed by the great sorrow Gawain and Hector show when they leave

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<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, ‘Malory’s Ideal of Fellowship’, *Review of English Studies*, 43:171 (1992), 311-28 (p. 313).

the abbey after Yvain's funeral, 'dolent et corrouciez de ceste mesaventure' (154) [saddened and depressed by the misadventure].<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the *Queste* author illustrates the need for penance by bringing out the negative example of knights who look for adventures and are punished for their sin. In the shield adventure, Bagdemagus is expressly rebuked for being 'fox et musarz'; for a careful reader, Yvain's death and Gawain's determination to continue on the quest could bring to mind the former adventure.

In thirteenth-century French penitential literature, the concept of an unrepentant or lapsed sinner was important. To illustrate the representation of the unrepentant sinner in the *Queste*, Matarasso provides an example from Maurice de Sully's sermons with a commentary on the healing of a dumb man, and describes the effect of repenting, confessing and doing penance as 'breaking the paralyzing bonds of sin'.<sup>33</sup> Because Gawain does not do penance for his sins, his failure in the quest is inevitable. On his way back to court Lancelot learns that Gawain has slain Bagdemagus; this new murder provides additional evidence for the *Queste* audience that a sin for which no penance has been performed leads to another sin, and that confession, penance and obedience to one's religious advisor are essential for salvation in the next world and honour in this world.

Indeed, Yvain seems to be one of the few non-elect *Queste* knights who end their lives after confessing and receiving communion, so that his salvation is likely. Apart from the elect knights Galahad and Perceval, Yvain and Calogrenant are the only questing knights whose reconciliation with God appears almost certain. The reader cannot be assured that Yvain and Calogrenant are saved, but their deaths are Christian: because of their heartfelt repentance, they can hope for divine mercy. The *Queste* audience were likely to regard Yvain's death as exemplary for an ordinary knight. When Yvain is mortally wounded, his only wish is to be taken to a religious house. Once in the abbey, he asks for communion, and, as soon as the host is brought in, Yvain makes a public

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<sup>32</sup> Matarasso, *Quest*, p. 168. Burns translates 'mesaventure' as 'adventure' (*Quest*, p. 96). Matarasso's translation of this particular episode will be used in the chapter, with references cited in footnotes.

<sup>33</sup> Matarasso, *Redemption*, p. 120.



confession, tearfully expresses his repentance and cries for mercy (153). His actions are not extraordinary and would have been familiar to any audience. Because the account is so detailed, it may serve as a guide to a Christian knight on how to act in case of a serious wound. After Yvain has received communion ‘o grant devocion’ (153) [with great devotion],<sup>34</sup> he asks Gawain to draw the spear out of his wound. Upon Gawain’s request, Yvain announces his name and the purpose of his quest: ‘[s]i estoie meuz en la Queste dou Saint Graal o mes autres compaignons’ (153) [I set out on the Quest of the Holy Grail with the rest of my companions].<sup>35</sup> Yvain explains his defeat in providential terms and forgives Gawain for injuring him: ‘einsi est ore avenue, par la volenté Nostre Seignor ou par mon pechié, que vos m’avez ocis; si le vos pardoin debonement, et Diex ausi le vos pardoint!’ (153) [now it has come about, by the will of God or through my sin, that you have killed me; the which I forgive you cordially, and may Our Lord do likewise!].<sup>36</sup>

In medieval Christian doctrine, the customary way of preparing for death, often reflected in the deaths of medieval romance characters included professing one’s faith, making a confession, forgiving one’s living enemies, making provisions for almsgiving and other pious distributions, commending one’s soul to God and choosing the place where one is to be buried.<sup>37</sup> Almost all of these elements are explicit in the account of Yvain’s death. The profession of faith, confession and pardon occur after Yvain is taken to the abbey, and the choice of burial is implicit in Yvain’s request to be taken to the particular abbey where he directs Gawain. Furthermore, when Yvain hears the other knight’s name, he asks Gawain to greet Arthur’s knights and the court on his behalf and asks for their prayers. Yvain’s last words imply a commendation of his soul to God as well as a request for prayers: ‘si lor dites [...] qu’il lor soviegne de moi en lor proieres et en lor oroisons et qu’il prient Nostre Seignor qu’il ait merci de l’ame de moi’ (154) [tell them (...) to remember me in their

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<sup>34</sup> Matarasso, *Quest*, p. 168.

<sup>35</sup> Matarasso, *Quest*, p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> Matarasso, *Quest*, p. 168.

<sup>37</sup> See Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, ‘Introduction: Placing the Dead in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’ in *The Place of the Dead*, ed. by Gordon and Marshall, pp. 1-16 (pp. 3-5).

prayers and orisons, and to pray to Our Lord to have mercy on my soul].<sup>38</sup> Moreover, speaking with Gawain, Yvain also uses the words ‘compaignons’ and ‘fraternité’ in a sense that suggests more than temporary association (154), but again the overtones may be slightly different from Malory’s concept of fellowship, because on his deathbed Yvain is likely to refer to spiritual brotherhood as well as King Arthur’s household. Yvain’s death serves as a model for a Christian knight; his tearful repentance is not the result of any particular sin that would be known to the *Queste* audience would be aware of but a part of normative religious practice.

It is likely that Malory shortened the description of Yvain’s preparation for death and his burial because they would have been all too familiar and would be taken for granted by him and his readers. It has been explained earlier in the chapter that confession, communion, requests for prayers and sumptuous funerals were conventional among the fifteenth-century gentry. Malory mentions briefly that Yvain ‘resceyve hys Creature’ (944), but not that he confesses and repents his sins, because Malory probably did not think his readers would need detailed instructions on how to behave in case of being mortally wounded. Malory’s additions to his source also reveal his preoccupation with other moral issues topical in the late fifteenth century, namely, civil war and fratricide, as Yvain says on his deathbed: ‘now forgyff the God, for hit shall be ever rehersed that the tone sworne brother hath slayne the other’ (945). The request for God’s mercy, which the French author associates with murder, is here linked with fratricide. As Lynch observes, wounding and killing other knights are corollary to ‘wars, tournaments, formal duels and knight errantry’, without which achieving worship is impossible.<sup>39</sup> The concept of worship won and supported through fighting might offer a clue why Yvain dismisses Gawain’s grief with the words: ‘[n]o force, [...] sytthyn I shall dye this deth, of a much more worshipfuller mannes hande myght I nat dye’ (945). Nonetheless, killing members of the same affinity is inadmissible, and Gawain describes the accident as a ‘mysadventure’ (945). Moreover, the emphasis is not on the actual fact of one

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<sup>38</sup> Matarasso, *Quest*, p. 168.

<sup>39</sup> Lynch, ‘Ideology’, p. 26.

companion killing another, but on the rumour it will cause: Yvain says 'hit shall be ever rehersed'. Maintaining appearances may seem unrelated to one's spiritual well-being, but duty towards one's affinity and the maintenance of honour were part of fifteenth-century gentry and noble obligations. Thus, it may occur that, by increasing his worship, a knight impeaches his and his group's honour. Philippa Maddern contends that in fifteenth-century English provincial society "'conscience", the sanction of the soul, came to stand together with, and sometimes in successful opposition to, the public "shame" which discourages breaches in chivalric honour'.<sup>40</sup> In this episode, Gawain's fame would apparently be increased by yet another victory, but by slaying his sworn brother he compromises the honour of his fellowship. Whereas Gawain's and possibly even Yvain's chivalric worship are increased,<sup>41</sup> the reputation of the Round Table suffers, so that Malory's audience would be aware of the fact that the event has both public (political) and private (moral) connotations.

The battle between Calogrenant and Lyonel, which is observed by Bors, is another episode that the *Queste's* contemporary audience were likely to regard in terms of sin and salvation, as, indeed, they were supposed to consider the entire *Queste*. The same episode in the 'Sankgreal' would have been read by Malory's contemporary audience not only in view of the characters' moral choices but also in view of a discourse on honour. The general framework of events is the same in the *Queste* and in the 'Sankgreal'. Lyonel attacks his brother Bors for having chosen to aid a maiden rather than to succour him. Despite Bors's excuses, Lyonel, possessed by uncontrollable anger, is determined to kill Bors and anyone who would come to his aid. Lyonel's mad rage, which resembles demonic possession, drives him to kill a hermit who wants to protect Bors. Lyonel is about to strike off Bors's head when a knight of the Round Table, Calogrenant, arrives and tries to defend Bors. Calogrenant is also murdered, and Bors takes up the sword to defend himself, when he

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<sup>40</sup> Philippa Maddern, 'Honour among the Pastons: Gender and Integrity in Fifteenth-Century English Provincial Society', *Journal of Medieval History*, 14 (1988), 357-57 (pp. 367-68).

<sup>41</sup> Yvain's post-mortem worship may be increased because, as it has already been mentioned, according to Lynch, 'in Malory, to be of worship is to be named, and therefore to be named is (usually) to be worshipful', even when the participant loses the battle (*Malory's Book of Arms*, p. 39).

is saved by divine intervention (*Queste*, 190-93; 'Sankgreal', 971-73). Bors's inability to fight against a member of his family, thus, leads to the deaths of a hermit and of Bors's fellow knight. The order in which these deaths occur is remarkable. However outrageous the murder of an old, unarmed hermit may appear, it seems that Lyonel's killing of his fellow, whom he recognizes (unlike in the fight between Gawain and Yvain) is even more preternatural.

In the *Queste*, Calogrenant's surprise and even shock are described throughout the episode, beginning with the sight of the dead hermit: '[q]uant il voit le preudome ocis, si se merveile mout que ce estoit' (190) [Calogrenant was shocked at the sight of the dead man (118)]. The verb 'se merveile' [to marvel] indicates that Calogrenant reacts to the sight of a murdered man in the same way as Galahad does when he hears that Gawain, Gaheris and Yvain have murdered the seven brothers (51). Wonder is a common reaction of virtuous people to manifestations of sin: when Bagdemagus, who has been wounded in punishment for his falsehood, is carried back to the abbey, the monks perceive his wound as 'merveilleuse' (30) [marvellous]. Calogrenant's incredulity when he sees Lyonel intent on killing his brother is described with touching detail:

[s]i saut a terre et prent Lyonel par les epaules et le tire si fort qu'il le tret arrieres et li dit: "Que est ce, Lyonel? Estes vos fors del sens, qui volez vostre frere ocirre, qui est un des meillors chevaliers que len conoisse?" (190-91)

[Calogrenant leapt off his horse and grabbed Lionel by the shoulders, violently pulling him backwards as he asked, 'What is this, Lionel? Have you gone mad, wanting to kill your own brother? He's one of the best knights we know' (118)]

For Calogrenant, Lyonel's actions imply madness, first, because Bors is Lyonel's brother and, second, because Bors is one of the best knights of the world. Previously, the hermit cites Bors's

worthiness as a main argument for Lyonel to refrain from murder: ‘se tu l’ocis, tu seras morz de pechié, et il sera trop outrageus damages de lui; car ce est uns des plus preudomes dou monde et des meilleurs chevaliers’ (190) [(k)illing him will be a mortal sin and a great loss, for he is one of the most worthy men and one of the best knights in the world (118)]. Both Calogrenant and the hermit present fratricide and killing one of the world’s best knights as the principal objections that should surely appeal to Lyonel.

Likewise, Malory’s Calogrenant addresses Lyonel with the following words: ‘Woll ye sle youre brothir, the worthyest knyght one of the worlde? That sholde no good man suffir’ (971). Killing a better knight than oneself is an important concern for Malory, and Lancelot has already presented it as one of the principal objections to illicit love in the ‘Tale of Lancelot’:

knyghtes that bene adventures sholde nat be advoutrers nothir lecherous, for than they be nat happy nother fortunate unto the werrys; for other they shall be overcom with a sympler knyght than they be hemself, other ellys they shall sle by unhappe and hir cursednesse bettir men than they be hemself. (270-71)

Similarly, in the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, after returning from the Grail quest at the beginning of the *Mort Artu*, Gawain regrets having killed the knights who were no worse than himself and attributes his acts to his sinfulness and ill fortune:

[j]e vos di por voir que g’en ai ocis par ma main dis et uit, non pas pour ce que ge fusse mieudres chevaliers que nus autres, mes la mescheance se torna plus vers moi que vers nul de mes compaignons. Et si sachiez bien que ce n’a pas esté par ma chevalerie, mes par mon pechié; si m’avez fet dire ma honte.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *La Mort le roi Artu: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Jean Frappier (Genève: Droz, 1964), p. 2.

[I tell you truly that I myself killed eighteen, not because I was a better knight than any other, but because misfortune afflicted me more than any of my companions. And you may be assured that it was not a feat of prowess, but rather the consequence of my sin. Now you have made me confess my shame.]<sup>43</sup>

The murders constitute Gawain's shame and portend the succession of disasters leading to the destruction of the Round Table. Miranda Griffin argues that '*mescheance* and *pechié* are the same thing when viewed from the angle of hindsight established by the *Mort*'s preamble'.<sup>44</sup> However, within the *Queste*, Gawain is expected to take responsibility for the murders he unwittingly commits. These examples, coming from the romances that immediately precede or follow the Grail quest narrative in manuscripts and early printed books are important to an understanding of Calogrenant's decision to prevent the murder of Bors by his brother, Lyonel.

In fact, the idea that a worse knight should not slay a better one is so deeply ingrained in the *Queste* that Calogrenant believes it his knightly duty to prevent the crime: '[a] non Dieu, ce ne vos soffreroit nus qui preudons fust' (191) [(i)n God's name, no decent man would allow you to do this! (118)]. Invoking God, as the hermit did earlier, Calogrenant appeals to the highest authority; his reasoning refers to universally accepted standards within the text's value system. Calogrenant's words are in stark contrast with Lyonel's self-centred argumentation:

“Coment? fet Lyonel, volez le vos rescorre? Se vos plus vos en entremetez, je le lairé et me prendrai a vos.” Et cil le resgarde, qui toz est esbahiz de ceste chose, et li dist: “Coment, fet il, Lyonel? Est ce a certes que vos le volez ocirre?” – “Ocirre, fet il, le voil je et ocirrai, que ja por vos ne por autre nel lairai: car il m'a tant

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<sup>43</sup> *The Death of Arthur*, trans. by Norris Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 4

<sup>44</sup> Griffin, *Object*, p. 45.

meffet qu'il a bien mort deservie." (191)

[‘What?’ asked Lionel. ‘Do you intend to rescue him? If you meddle in this further, I’ll leave him aside and take you on.’

Calogrenant looked at him, amazed by what he had heard and said, ‘How can this be, Lionel? Do you really intend to kill him?’

‘I intend to kill him, and I will do so. He has so wronged me that he deserves to die. I won’t change my mind for you or anyone else.’ (118)]

Lyonel’s insistence on his will (‘[o]cirre, fet il, le voil je et ocirrai, que ja por vos ne por autre nel lairai’, 191) resembles Bagdemagus’s determination to carry the shield out of the abbey: ‘que qui m’en doie avenir, je l’emporterai de ceanz’ (28). It appears from this episode that, in the *Queste*, sin is associated with folly as well as with wilful ignorance manifested by Gawain and Bagdemagus. At the same time, spiritual blindness that occurs without one’s knowledge is represented by the *Queste* Yvain.

In the previous episodes (the shield adventure and Yvain’s death), Malory reduces the *Queste* material to a considerable extent. The confrontation between Bors and Lionel, however, is an exception. Lynch remarks that, ‘[a]lthough Malory’s work considerably abbreviates his French original, its use of the brevity topos in relation to fights is infrequent, and carefully employed to effect gradations of worship’.<sup>45</sup> In this episode, Malory not only translates the battle scenes but also extends the conversations between the knights. In the ‘Sankgreal’, the focus is on the conflict between two brothers, which draws into its orbit an ‘ermyte-pryste’ (972) and a member of the Round Table, a confrontation that prefigures the civil war in the final tales of the *Morte*. Bors, one of the best knights, is about to be killed by his enraged brother. Lionel’s determination to ignore the

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<sup>45</sup> Lynch, *Book of Arms*, p. 42.

reasons of Bors, the hermit and Calogrenant is echoed towards the end of the *Morte* when Gawain wants to take revenge on Lancelot and refuses to be reconciled with his former companion. Moreover, the very possibility of family members murdering one another anticipates the battle between Arthur and Mordred.

Malory's treatment of the confrontation between Bors and Lyonel, in which Calogrenant participates, foregrounds such aspects of social relations as kinship and fellowship. These concepts are mostly expressed through dialogue, so that, if the *Morte* were read aloud, the audience would 'hear' the knights' voices. Fellowship is one of the episode's key themes. When Lyonel is about to strike off Bors's head, Calogrenant appears on the scene, and he is described as a member of the Round Table:

[a]nd natforthan he restrayned hym nat of hys evyll wyll, but toke hys brothir by the helme and unlaced hit to have smytten off hys hede, and had slayne hym had nat a felowe of hys of the Rounde Table com whos name was called sir Collegrevaunce, a felow of the Rounde Table, that com thydyr as Oure Lordis wyll wolde. (971)

The French author stresses Calogrenant's belonging to King Arthur's household as well as to the Round Table company: 'vint par la volenté Nostre Seignor Calogrenant, uns chevaliers de la meson le roi Artus et compainz de la Table Reonde' (190) [Calogrenant, a knight of King Arthur's court and member of the Round Table had (...) come along by the grace of God (118)]. Similarly, Yvain mentions his feudal bond to Arthur before his membership of the Round Table (*Queste*, 153). It seems to be a common practice among the *Queste* knights to introduce themselves as members of King Arthur's court, whereas the 'Sankgreal' knights usually identify themselves by reference to the



Round Table.<sup>46</sup> In these two ‘Sankgreal’ episodes, belonging to the Round Table characterizes Yvain and Calogrenant, and, because they are slain by their companions, their deaths are particularly tragic. However, Calogrenant’s last words before the fight underline his relationship to Bors and exclude Lyonel from the fellowship: ‘[s]ir my name ys sir Collgrevauce, one of his felowis’ (972), possibly because Lyonel disqualifies himself from their fellowship through his unworshipful actions. Raluca Radulescu explains that, for the fifteenth-century gentry, the concept of fellowship could mean common professional or political interests: ‘membership of a particular fellowship defined one’s social status and political affiliation, while it could also damage a reputation if associated with groups acting against the king’s peace’.<sup>47</sup> Fellowship thus encompassed

household, kin and close associates, also temporary association of violent bands of fighting men (connected with private feuds over land properties), old fellowship dictated by profession, affinity or mutual interests, and political fellowship, whether local or seen in the structure of the higher circles of the court.<sup>48</sup>

Calogrenant and Bors belong to the same political group, although Calogrenant is a minor knight, while Bors and Lyonel are better-known knights. The same would be true about the positions of Yvain and Gawain: on the social scale, Gawain is the nephew of the king who is also the head of the fellowship. Yvain, the son of King Uriens, is a less famous or less ‘worshipful’ knight in the *Morte*. The criticism of Lyonel’s and Gawain’s violent acts comes from knights who are somewhat lower on the social scale or at least less reputed, namely Calogrenant and Yvain. As a result of the

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<sup>46</sup> According to Archibald, ‘in Malory’s French sources, the *Prose Tristan*, the *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the *Mort Artu*, and the *Suite du Merlin* [...] Arthurian knights generally identify themselves as “de la maison le roi Artus” and “compaignons/compainz de la Table Reonde”. [...] In Malory knights are often called “felow”, and they are identified in relation to the Round Table rather than to Arthur’ (‘Ideal’, pp. 312-13).

<sup>47</sup> Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory’s Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), p. 37.

<sup>48</sup> Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, p. 37.

criticism, the readers may feel that not only Lionel and Gawain are wrongdoers but that their wrongdoing disrupts the bonds of the affinity which they represent and endangers social order. Gawain kills his fellow unwittingly, and by showing him kindness, that is, refraining from killing Yvain and taking him to a nearby abbey, Gawain's fault is lessened.

As has been explained above, the episode between Gawain and Yvain is branded a 'misadventure' and can be viewed as an instance of ill fortune. However, while Gawain's chivalric worship remains unaffected and may even increase, his honour, which is connected to his soul's well-being, suffers. Maddern notes that in the fifteenth century non-chivalric honour encompassed 'the protection and help given to friends, family and servants'.<sup>49</sup> Maddern continues: 'the soul's well-being came to be linked with temporal honour, sometimes even against the worldly profit and prudence with which chivalric honour was so closely associated'.<sup>50</sup> In the episode which involves the conflict between Lionel on the one hand and Bors and Calogrenant on the other, the problem of honour and spiritual well-being is even more complex. Lionel's actions clearly disqualify him from being counted a member of the Round Table, but Bors's failure to help his fellow Calogrenant is also problematized. The conflict of affiliations is virtually unsolvable to Bors, who has obligations towards both his brother and his fellow. Calogrenant, a victim of the conflict, displays behaviour, in contrast to Bors's and Lionel's actions, that is unambiguously praiseworthy.

The themes of brotherhood and conflict between family members would have been important to Malory and his audience. In fifteenth-century England, civil war often drew members of the nobility and the gentry to opposing sides, and in the *Morte* itself the feud between family members gradually leads to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. For Malory and his audience, the possibility that Bors would finally have to confront Lionel creates a moment of high tension. Bors is unwilling to fight even to save his life, and one of Malory's most noticeable alterations in the

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<sup>49</sup> Maddern, 'Honour', p. 360.

<sup>50</sup> Maddern, 'Honour', p. 368.

episode occurs when Bors addresses his brother, explaining why he finally decides to oppose him.<sup>51</sup>

Another change appears at the beginning of the episode, as Malory explains Bors's desire to be reconciled with his brother:

[w]han sir Bors sye that he must fyght with his brothir othir ellis to dye, he wyst nat what to do; so hys herte counceyled hym nat thereto, inasmuch as sir Lyonell was hys elder brothir, wherefore he oughte to bere hym reverence. (970)

During the fight between Lionel and Calogrenant, Malory draws attention to the fact that Calogrenant 'fought with his brother for his quarrel' (972). It would seem that, according to Maddern's definition of honour, which means protecting one's friends, relatives and household,<sup>52</sup> Bors's honour would depend on helping Calogrenant. Bors recognizes that 'if hys brothir slew sir Collgrevaunce, "the same shame sholde ever be myne"' (972). Against this public and private shame stands the personal reason that, if his brother had been slain, 'he sholde never have joy' (972). Remarkably, although Calogrenant 'cryed offtyn uppon sir Bors' (972) during the fight, none of these cries contains a rebuke. It is possible that Malory's Calogrenant understands the moral impasse in which Bors is placed or that he simply refuses to judge the man who is so much better. Calogrenant's unswerving loyalty to his fellow would have been regarded as particularly praiseworthy by Malory's contemporaries.<sup>53</sup> By addressing Bors, Calogrenant dismisses Lionel from the scene: '[i]f hit please you that I shall dy, the deth shall please me the bettir, for to save a worthyer man myght I never ressayve the death' (973). As it appears from Calogrenant's words, the responsibility for his death is on Bors, but Calogrenant also explains that he does not blame his

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<sup>51</sup> Ihle comments that 'Bors' concern in Malory is not only that God forgive him but also that Lionel understand that Bors does not wish to fight him' (*Malory's Grail Quest*, p. 140).

<sup>52</sup> Maddern, 'Honour', p. 360.

<sup>53</sup> Felicity Riddy lists the characteristics 'appropriate to the fighting man of high birth: honour, loyalty, and that fineness, both of feeling and of conduct, which includes courtesy, magnanimity and open-handedness' (*Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), p. 63).

companion.

Calogrenant dies on the battlefield and without the last rites, and while Malory previously omitted the description of Yvain's confession and prayers, Malory translates Calogrenant's prayer. Dying in a good cause but without receiving the last rites is a frequent occurrence among fighting men, but it was a problematic concept for Malory's contemporaries. Because there is no priest to confess and absolve him of his sin, Calogrenant can rely only on God's mercy. Malory's translation omits some of Calogrenant's expression of humility, but is very detailed in giving reasons why his soul should be saved. In the *Queste*, Calogrenant exclaims:

[h]a! biau peres Jhesucrist, qui soffristes que je me meisse en vostre servise, non mie si dignement come je deusse, aiez merci de m'ame en tel maniere que ceste dolor, que mes cors sostendra por bien et por aumolne que je voloie fere, me soit penitance et assoagement a l'ame de moi. (192)

[(d)ear Father, Jesus Christ, who allowed me to enter into Your service, though I was not as worthy as I should have been, take pity on my soul so that this pain, which my body must endure because of the good and kind deed I attempted, may be counted as penance and relief to my soul. (119)]

The major characteristic of Calogrenant's words is his humility and appeal to God's mercy:

Calogrenant prays God to take his good intentions and his sufferings in place of the good works and penance he would like to do. Calogrenant also refers to his service in the ranks of Christ's army, although he dismisses his service as insufficient. Nonetheless, Calogrenant appears to imply that his physical pain in some way matches the penance he should have otherwise performed for his sins.

Death on the battlefield without confession was a risk that all knights ran, but because Calogrenant

dies to protect a worthy knight, he seems to be justified in asking for forgiveness.

Malory truncates the part in which Calogrenant expresses his contrition for not having served God well enough and replaces bodily suffering with affliction of the heart:

[f]ayre swete Jesu Cryste, that I have myssedo, have mercy upon my soule! For such sorow that my harte suffirthe for goodnes and for almes-dede that I wolde have done here, be to me alygemente of penaunce unto my sowle helthe! (973).

Malory's Calogrenant asks for mercy on different grounds than in the *Queste*: his heart-felt sorrow rather than bodily pain underwrites the prayer. The reasons for his sorrow may include not only the realisation of how little good he has done but, more importantly, the sight of brotherly strife he has just witnessed. In the 'Sankgreal', Calogrenant deserves forgiveness not because of the physical hardship he undergoes, but because of his readiness to die 'for [the] sake' (973) and 'for [...] quarell' (972) of his companion.

It has already been mentioned that in late medieval England sudden death, unprecedented by confession and communion, was a daunting prospect. Moreover, the wills of late medieval English gentry and merchants usually contain a long list of provisions that were supposed to ensure the soul's well-being and quick progress through Purgatory, and, according to Carpenter, these provisions usually include giving alms or performing other good works on behalf of the deceased.<sup>54</sup> However, Calogrenant has no time for the last sacraments or for drawing a will and appointing executors. He can only rely on God's mercy, and, in the late Middle Ages, heartfelt repentance rather than good works was commonly believed to be the only means of salvation. Duffy notes that, in some cases, even the mediation of the Church representatives was not necessary for the dying person to be saved: '[s]uch was God's mercy that even deathbed repentance or repentance based

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<sup>54</sup> Carpenter, 'Religion', p. 61.

merely on fear, if accompanied in fact or in desire by resort to the Sacraments, would save from damnation'.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, resort to the last sacraments in fact rather than in desire was usually deemed essential. Unlike the *Queste* Calogrenant, Malory's Calogrenant does not refer to his chivalric service which would guarantee a good knight a special relation to the Creator. Instead, the 'Sankgreal' Calogrenant foregrounds his heartfelt repentance and his supplication to Christ's mercy. In this respect, the English Calogrenant would have been more appealing to Malory's readers than the French Calogrenant. The early audiences of both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' would have found reassurance for their fears of sudden death in the episode, but the grounds for reassurance would have been different. For the French Calogrenant, forgiveness is possible because he dies as *miles Christi* and suffers bodily penance. By contrast, for Malory's Calogrenant, salvation is possible only as a result of God's mercy and the man's sincere repentance. What the two Calogrenants share and what the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' audiences were expected to recognize is the fact that, without divine mercy, a man's personal merits and achievements are insufficient to ensure him salvation.

The social and religious implications of chivalry differed, of course, in early thirteenth-century France, when the *Queste* was written, and in late fifteenth-century England, where the *Morte* was composed. The *Queste* author disapproves of Bagdemagus's rashness in taking the adventure from which he, a sinful man, should have refrained. In the 'Sankgreal', however, Bagdemagus does what all Arthurian knights are supposed to do as part of their duty in maintaining peace and justice in the realm: he investigates an adventure which has already resulted in the death or wounding of other knights. In a way, Bagdemagus even succeeds, because thanks to his actions Galahad knows for sure that the adventure is meant for him. In the *Queste*, Bagdemagus's misadventure warns other knights against taking adventures which are too demanding for them. In the 'Sankgreal', Bagdemagus's actions are not reprov'd, and the outcome of his adventure furthers

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<sup>55</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of Altars*, p. 341.

the achievement of the Grail quest and increases the worship of Galahad, and, by implication, of the Round Table fellowship.

On the other hand, the Yvain episode serves as warning to Arthurian chivalry in both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Gawain's killing of his fellow stands as a precursor of the civil war that breaks out after the Grail quest is accomplished. Paradoxically, in this episode, the unity of the chivalric community is emphasised as well, because Yvain's last words remind the audience of the bond between the living and the dead. Likewise, in the *Queste*, the last words of Calogrenant, where the knight mentions his service to Christ, imply a special mission that chivalry bears in the world and suggest that a unique bond exists between a knight and the Creator. In conclusion, the adventures of non-elect knights provide a vivid illustration of the different social and religious obligations on the chivalric community, envisaged by the *Queste* author and Malory and which they expected their projected audiences would uphold. While the questing knights provide models of behaviour that should be followed or avoided by noble and gentry audiences, the theoretical underpinnings for these behaviours are given by religious people, such as recluses, in the two episodes that are examined in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Lessons of Chivalry and Gender Dynamics in the Knights' Encounters with Recluses

In medieval society, recluses and hermits usually occupied liminal spaces, living in the 'wilderness', even though the wilderness was often metaphorical rather than real: there is evidence that many recluses lived in towns and that hermits repaired roads, bridges and performed other services for the community.<sup>1</sup> Although hermits and anchorites occupied liminal spaces, they were by no means 'marginal' members of medieval society. In romances, hermits are often former knights and teach younger questing knights the basics of chivalric behaviour, including piety and respect for the Church, showing mercy to the defeated and succouring the weak; Perceval's uncle in Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* is a hermit of this type. The same motif appears in Lull's *Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, where an old hermit, who is a former knight, instructs a squire who is about to become a knight.<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses on two episodes in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' where the questing knights Perceval and Lancelot have prolonged conversations with female recluses. The analysis of these episodes is intended to explore the problem of spiritual authority possessed by female recluses and their message.

In both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' the recluses voice messages that are of singular importance, because the recluses' teachings touch on such important themes as the history and nature of true, 'celestial' chivalry, the interaction between the individual knight and his family in the widest sense of the word, and characteristics that determine a knight's success in the Grail quest.

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence for the involvement of hermits in 'public good works' is cited by E. A. Jones, 'Hermits and Anchorites in Historical Context', in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. by Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 3-18 (p. 13).

<sup>2</sup> See reference to Lull's treatise above, Chapter 1, pp. 26 and 28-29, where I discuss other aspects of chivalric ideology in the treatise.



The recluses' teachings border at certain points on sermons and prophecies, which is problematic, since medieval women were prohibited from preaching. In the episodes, the recluses advise Perceval and Lancelot how to behave in order to avoid sin and damnation, and the analysis of their words in the present chapter will contribute to the discussion of death above (Chapter 2). The present chapter will also comment on the way in which the recluses' gender affects the delivery and content of their teachings, as this is pertinent to the discussion of women's authority. This chapter will thus further our understanding of the role of female characters in the Grail quest, a theme that is continued in the next chapter (4).

While hermits often appear in chivalric romances, female recluses are rarer on the literary scene. The two recluses the French author introduces into the Grail quest perform the same function as the more numerous hermits: like the hermits, they teach errant knights about chivalric ethics. However, it seems that the recluses' lessons are meant for the audience as much as for the knights. The recluses' teachings are longer and more coherent in the *Queste*, while they appear curtailed and slightly less coherent in the *Morte*. Yet in both texts the recluses highlight the issues that were topical to their implied audiences. The French author caters for the religious needs of his projected audience, raising such issues as spiritual and physical purity and the Christian foundation of chivalry. In the 'Sankgreal', the emphasis is shifted from religious to social values: there is no discussion of virginity, and Malory appears to be principally concerned with praising the Round Table as a chivalric institution and defining true chivalry. The religious aspects of chivalry are important in the 'Sankgreal', but they appear secondary to its social implications, as a comparison between the recluses' speeches in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' in the following pages will suggest.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of an easily recognisable model for female recluses in chivalric literature, the

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<sup>3</sup> On the religious and social aspects of chivalry in the *Morte*, see Radulescu, "Now I take upon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges": Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood?, in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 285-96.

*Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' audiences could have drawn on their ideas or experiences of actual recluses when reading about recluses in the romances. The chapter begins by considering material on historical recluses in France and England and comparing this information with the depiction of recluses in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Next, it is possible to analyse the recluses' teachings in detail and discuss Malory's adaptation of these teachings (initially destined for the thirteenth-century French nobility), for his late fifteenth-century English audience. At this point, it is also necessary to consider the relative positions of the recluses and the knights, Perceval and Lancelot, whom the recluses address. It appears that the knights, who are otherwise among the main characters in the quest, become passive, learning religious lessons from the recluses' words and lifestyles.

Much of the information about anchorites' expected behaviour comes from literature that was written for recluses, whether male or female, and not meant for a lay audience. Even when lay readers came in the possession of advice literature for recluses, they read it in a different way from the religious people for whom this literature was meant, and, moreover, there was an inevitable gap between the theory and the practice of the recluses' lived experience. In order to assess how the teachings of the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' recluses would have been read by their intended audiences and what kind of authority these recluses possessed, it is necessary to consider ideas about religious life current in thirteenth-century French and fifteenth-century English societies. In particular, I will briefly discuss the current discourses on the active and the passive life, the concept of enclosure as a particularly suitable way of life for religious women and the position of female recluses in medieval society. Furthermore, considering the etymology of words 'anchorite' and 'recluse' and the associated vocabulary of 'withdrawal' into the 'wilderness' is useful to understand how the cultural image of a recluse was constructed and to what extent historical anchorites, most of whom were urban dwellers, contributed to the literary image of a recluse living in a remote, uninhabited place. Knowing how recluses, especially female recluses, were viewed in medieval

society will help us to understand the specifics of the moral lessons or ‘sermons’ they deliver to questing knights.

The division of society into three orders, as discussed at the beginning of Chapter 1 above (p. 27), meant that religious people were expected, at least in theory, to lead contemplative rather than active lives. Indeed, the contemplative life was regarded as preferable to the active. E. A. Jones notes that ‘[b]y the Middle Ages, [...] there was a well-established and comprehensive theory of the relation of the ascetic to the rest of Christian society, of the contemplative life to the active, of Rachel to Leah and Mary to Martha’.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Gilchrist suggests that in the later Middle Ages alternative religious vocations, such as hospitals and beguinages, would have been available to women who favoured the active life over contemplation: ‘[t]he enclosed, contemplative life of the nunnery is in contrast to the active charity of the beguinages and hospitals. The opportunity – or choice – of vocation in Leah over Rachel, or Martha over Mary, created an alternative religious role for women’.<sup>5</sup> By the fifteenth century, the active life was already an accepted and valued means to salvation, and this is likely to have influenced the ‘Sankgreal’ audience’s reading of the episodes where recluses and hermits appear.

The ways in which recluses and hermits could be involved in the active life differed. Unlike hermits, who were relatively free to move, recluses were supposed to stay within the physical space of their anchorholds, with very few exceptions. They could not, therefore, participate in ‘public good works’ in the same way as hermits did. Meanwhile, recluses were frequently engaged in the life of their community and could provide advice, instruction and even patronage to secular and religious people. Authors of anchoritic literature disapproved of recluses’ active involvement in the communal life, which may indicate that anchorites indeed took too strong an interest in the life of their society. In the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, the recluses are well informed about the Round Table knights, their exploits and the Grail quest, and they address Perceval and Lancelot to explain

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, ‘Hermits’, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Medieval Woman* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 186-87.

for them the spiritual values of chivalry, speaking with authority. The recluses' actions highlight the fact that the outcome of the Grail quest is of universal significance, that it is important not only for the knights themselves, but also for their families, both living and dead, and for all Christians.<sup>6</sup>

In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the significance of the knights' adventures is explained by religious people, who could be monks, priests, hermits or recluses, and it is remarkable that in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' recluses are female and hermits are male, a distinction representative of the general tendency to associate women with more restrictive kinds of enclosure. Later in the chapter, I will consider the extent to which the recluse's gender and the fact that they are enclosed influences their teachings. It is also interesting to note that, at least from the twelfth century onwards, historical recluses were more often women than men in both France and England. Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq observes that, after the eleventh century, when information about recluses becomes more detailed, there were 'markedly more women than men' among anchorites.<sup>7</sup> She cites an example of a female recluse who lived c. 1100 at the church of Saint-Père at Melun and whose life she regards as 'typical': the recluse was a former widow, who had extensive social connections and decided to become an anchorite after her husband's death.<sup>8</sup>

In England, the gender ratio of anchorites indicates that there were more female than male recluses in the late Middle Ages, while hermits were almost exclusively male. According to data collected by Ann Warren, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century most of the English anchorites were female.<sup>9</sup> Gilchrist cites a ratio of 4:1, 5:2 and 5:3 in the respective centuries, which is somewhat problematic, because a high number of sites were inhabited by solitaries of undetermined

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<sup>6</sup> The idea that the achievement of the Grail quest will have an impact on the community of the dead contributes to the discussion of death in the previous chapter. The link between Galahad's achievement and his family history is further discussed in Chapter 4, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'Anchorites in Medieval France', in *Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, ed. by L. H. McAvoy (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), pp. 112-30 (p. 122).

<sup>8</sup> L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'Anchorites', p. 122. The example is from *Récit des miracles* of St Liesne (BnF, MS Latin 12690, fol. 224<sup>r-v</sup>), an unedited manuscript dated 1136, written by a Benedictine monk from Saint-Père de Melun.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 20. Warren's data is based on Roberta Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914).

sex: for instance, in the fourteenth century, there were 96 female anchorites, 41 male anchorites and 77 anchorites of unknown gender.<sup>10</sup> Some texts designed for anchorites presuppose a female audience, and others a male one, although texts for anchoresses are more numerous. The prevalence of texts addressing a female recluse could indicate that there were more women than men among anchorites. On the other hand, religious men may have felt that female recluses needed more supervision and advice than male recluses. Although it seems that female anchorites were more common, especially in the fifteenth century, male anchorites also played an important part in what Jones describes as ‘the spiritual landscape of late-medieval England’.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Margery Kempe refers to meeting ‘bothen ankrys and reclusys’, and her confessor was a Lynn anchorite.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, most of the historical evidence on hermits applies only to men. In her analysis of alternative religious vocations for women, Gilchrist discusses female involvement in hermitages, but notes the difficulty of analysing them due to the ‘private, elusive nature’ of eremitic sites in later medieval England.<sup>13</sup> References to women solitaries define them as recluses or anchorites and only rarely as hermits, although there is an exceptional reference to Alice Hermyte, who lived in late fourteenth-century Norwich.<sup>14</sup>

One of the reasons why eremitic life was almost exclusively a male prerogative while anchoritic life was predominantly associated with women may be found in the definitions of the words ‘hermit’, ‘anchorite’ and ‘recluse’. The word ‘hermit’ is linked to *heremum*, the desert, and

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<sup>10</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 177. For precise figures from the twelfth century to 1539, see Warren, *Anchorites*, p.20.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, ‘Hermits’, p. 4. In the fifteenth century, Warren registers 110 female anchorites, 66 male and 28 anchorites of unknown sex (Warren, p. 20), so that female anchorites were more numerous in that period.

<sup>12</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 90. De Worde’s 1501 edition connects Margery Kempe with the contemplative tradition that forms part of the anchoritic routine and the 1521 edition of Henry Pepwell calls Margery a ‘deuoute ancris’, placing her alongside Richard of St Victor, Walter Hilton and Catherine of Siena (*EEBO*. <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>> [accessed 15 June 2013]). It goes without saying that thirteenth-century French ideas about recluses differed from their reception in the early sixteenth century. However, it appears that, in early sixteenth-century England, there was a market for devotional literature within both the contemplative and active traditions among the pious lay readers from the gentry or wealthy and educated townspeople.

<sup>13</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> The reference is from Norman Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), p. 220. Jones points out that it is ‘the only known reference to a woman hermit in medieval English sources’ (‘Anchoritic Aspects’, p. 79).

the word *heremum* reappears in the Anglo-Saxon texts about hermits.<sup>15</sup> L’Hermite-Leclercq maintains that the fundamental difference between hermits and anchorites is that hermits withdraw from society, impersonating ‘*salutem in fuga* [salvation in flight]’, while anchorites continue to live in symbiosis with society.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of the ‘desert’ or ‘wilderness’ remained prominent in the anchoritic tradition, where it was often treated metaphorically, as many anchorites lived in an urban rather than rural environment. According to Kim Phillips, ‘[w]omen recluses rarely lived in the wilderness. Their “desert” was a state of mind and their cell was most probably attached to a church in a bustling suburb or a monastic house on the edge of a town’.<sup>17</sup> Warren documents the constant flux of anchorites from the rural area to towns, but, as Gilchrist and Jones warn, medieval towns are generally better documented than the countryside, so the number of rural recluses could have been underestimated.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Gilchrist suggests another interpretation for the symbolism of wilderness in the anchoritic life: ‘[a]nchorites chose to live on the margins of society – in emulation of the desert tradition. Thus their cells were positioned in liminal places. Many chose cemeteries, or the north sides of churches’.<sup>19</sup> Even in towns recluses occupied the spaces that highlighted their alterity, but, as explained at the beginning of the chapter, the recluses’ life ‘on the margins of society’ does not mean that their status was compromised or that they were viewed as ‘marginals’. In written French and English sources, anchorites of both genders often appear as advisors, providing, in L’Hermite-Leclercq’s words, ‘advice, comfort and reproof’ for lay individuals.<sup>20</sup> The same is true of recluses in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, who are well informed

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<sup>15</sup> Jones, ‘Hermits’, pp. 5-6. See also Mary Clayton, ‘Hermits and the Contemplative Life in Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints’ Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. by Paul Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 147-75.

<sup>16</sup> L’Hermite-Leclercq, ‘Anchorites’, p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Phillips, ‘Femininities and the Gentry in Late Medieval East Anglia: Ways of Being’, in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. by McAvoy, pp. 19-31 (p. 29). Likewise, see Dee Dyas, ‘“Wildernesse in Anlich lif of Ancre Wunung”: The Wilderness and Medieval Anchoritic Spirituality’, in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. by McAvoy, pp. 19-33 (p. 20).

<sup>18</sup> Warren, *Anchorites*, p. 37; Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 178; Jones, ‘Hermits’, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> L’Hermite-Leclercq, ‘Anchorites’, p. 125.

about the Grail quest and who address Lancelot and Perceval with authority, advising, admonishing and encouraging them in their quests, as the analysis of the episodes further in the chapter will show.

Indeed, the situation in which lay people, often members of the nobility, would consult a recluse on practical or spiritual matters, seems to have been common in France and England from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, and lay people often turned to anchorites for advice. Anneke Mulder-Bakker cites the example of Guibert of Nogent's mother (d. after 1104) to illustrate 'the role of recluses in the oral circuit of the Middle Ages and the contribution of wise old women to the transmission of knowledge and religious instruction in the community of believers'.<sup>21</sup> Guibert of Nogent's mother was probably never officially enclosed, but Mulder-Bakker discusses this woman alongside four other urban anchoresses, summarizing her career as follows:

[p]ortrayed by her son as an energetic and self-confident, even dominating woman, she withdrew as a widow into an anchorhold at what seems to have been a family monastery. She took half of her family and household with her: two sons, both of her chaplains, her resident tutor, and other household staff were urged to enter the contemplative life in the nearby abbey itself. Clearly, this was not an attempt to find total solitude. Nor was she ever, as far as we know, formally enclosed. In her cell she was visited by men and women from her previous circle, the higher nobility of northern France, who now came to speak with her about matters of faith.<sup>22</sup>

Female anchorites continued to be influential in fifteenth-century France; L'Hermite-Leclercq

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<sup>21</sup> Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. by Myra Scholz (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Mulder-Bakker, *Lives*, p. 8.

mentions that a 'female anchorite from Avignon told the Franciscan Henri de la Baume that he should do something for a female mystic at Corbie [...] and Henri went off to Picardy instead of setting sail for the Holy Land'.<sup>23</sup> The female mystic was St Colette (d. 1447), who spent four years as a recluse at Corbie before she had a revelation that she should go and reform the Poor Clares. Similarly, in England, it was common for people from different social classes to ask anchorites for spiritual or practical advice: for instance, Margaret Kempe visited Julian of Norwich at the end of Julian's life, in 1413.<sup>24</sup> There are other documented cases of people from all social strata coming to anchorites and hermits for advice, arbitration or prophecy. Richard Beauchamp paid a visit to Emma Raughton in the 1420s for advice on the problem of inheritance: his deceased wife had left him only daughters, and the anchoress counselled him to remarry.<sup>25</sup> Thus, a situation in which a knight would turn to a recluse for advice on secular or spiritual matters would have been familiar for medieval readers, and, what is more, recluses' advice must have been recognised as valid and authoritative, because it was sought by people from different social strata, from the nobility to wealthy merchants.

As I have mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, in romances, knights usually turn to hermits for advice or instruction, but it seems that, in reality, people came to recluses when they needed advice. The fact that most historical recluses in France and England from the twelfth century onwards were female may be partially explained by the prominence of enclosure in the anchoritic tradition. Jones provides two possible explanations for the predominance of female anchorites: for one thing, 'bodily enclosure was considered particularly appropriate for women (whom medieval culture associated so closely with the body and its appetites)' and, moreover, 'the range of religious careers available to women was so much more restricted than that employed by men'.<sup>26</sup> Strict enclosure for religious women seems to be part of theory and practice in medieval ecclesiastical

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<sup>23</sup> L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'Anchorites', p. 126.

<sup>24</sup> According to her book, Kempe stayed with the anchorite several days, engaging in conversation on devotional subjects: '[m]ych was the holy dalyawns that the ankres and this creatur haddyn be comownyng in the lofe of owyr Lord Jhesu Crist many days that thei were togedyr' (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 123).

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Jones, 'Anchoritic Aspects', p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, 'Hermits', p. 8.



discourse in France and England. Penelope Johnson's analysis of data from northern France of the central Middle Ages demonstrates that religious authorities insisted on active and passive enclosure for nuns, while monks were freer in their movement.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, physical enclosure rather than spiritual withdrawal could have been a defining feature of the anchoritic experience. In certain cases, claustration may have been symbolic, and some recluses were allowed to have a garden or to change their place of enclosure, but it was probably uncommon.<sup>28</sup>

Most anchorites mentioned in the extant historical records resided in or near towns and other dwellings, such as monasteries. There were practical reasons for it: unlike hermits, anchorites could not leave their enclosure, and they were supposed to spend their time in prayers, devotional reading and contemplative exercises. Indeed, Phillips maintains that the recluses' 'spiritual reputation would have relied on them staying in the cell most of the time'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, early medieval texts laying out formal rules for anchoresses specify that these women should not spend too much time overseeing their household. An anchorite was to be provided for by her patrons, and before her enclosure a bishop would examine her case to find not only whether the candidate was morally prepared for the new life but also whether there would be funding available to sustain her.<sup>30</sup> Abbot John of Thornton was commissioned by the bishop to examine and, if admissible, perform the ritual of enclosure for Beatrix Franke, a nun of Stainfield, on 21 January 1436. The abbot took care to inquire into the moral character of the nun, her motives and preparation for the solitary life, but he also mentions that the common people assented to the enclosure.<sup>31</sup> As a nun, Beatrix would have

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<sup>27</sup> Penelope Johnson, 'The Cloistering of Medieval Nuns: Release or Repression, Reality or Fantasy?' in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, ed. by Dorothy Helly and Susan Reverby (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 27-39.

<sup>28</sup> Jones mentions several cases; for instance, the early fifteenth-century anchorite Emma Scherman was granted permission to move to a quieter cell, to have a garden and to go on annual pilgrimages ('Hermits', p. 13). Also see the case of Guibert de Nogent's mother above.

<sup>29</sup> Phillips, 'Femininities', p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Jones lists the patrons who left bequests for Julian of Norwich as follows: '[a] chantry priest, a merchant, an aristocrat and a career cleric' ('Anchoritic Aspects', p. 77). The aristocrat is Isabel Ufford, widow of the Earl of Suffolk and sister of Richard Beauchamp.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in P. J. P. Goldberg, ed. and trans., *Women in England c. 1275-1525: Documentary Sources* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 278.

been entitled to financial support from her monastery, but the parish people would probably contribute to her sustenance as well. On the whole, a potential anchorite had to make material and spiritual provisions prior to his or her enclosure. Spiritual provisions included the availability of a confessor and, for female recluses, of a priest to celebrate the Eucharist. In some cases, potential anchorites would have had support from their monastic institutions, while in others they would have made arrangements themselves.<sup>32</sup> In both cases, anchorites would have retained a link with the surrounding community: for Beatrix's enclosure, the consent of the parish people was required. Likewise, the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' recluses remain in contact with the world beyond their cell, being aware of the Grail quest and acting as advisors to errant knights.

The *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' recluses live away from Camelot and other castles, but they are at the crossroads of the errant knights' itineraries. Perceval and Lancelot encounter Galahad without recognizing him in front of a recluse's cell at the edge of Forest Gaste, and Perceval finds his way back to the hermitage when he needs it.<sup>33</sup> The French author treats 'Forest Gaste' (56) [Waste Forest (36)] as a proper name, whereas it becomes a common noun 'wylde foreyst' (893) in the 'Sankgreal'.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the first recluse lives in what appears to be, at least in Malory's text, literal wilderness. The recluse Lancelot encounters lives next to a roadside chapel, close to a trackless forest: 'as he rode by the hygheway he saw a chapell where was a recluse' (932). At this point, the 'Sankgreal' translates the French: 'il vit a destre del chamin que pres de lui a une archiee avoit une chapele ou il avoit une recluse' (142) [he saw to the right of the path, about a bowshot in front of him, a chapel inhabited by a recluse (89)]. In the *Queste*, the recluse explains that the forest around

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<sup>32</sup> The two alternatives are outlined by L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'Anchorites', p. 119.

<sup>33</sup> Perceval's aunt lives, somewhat confusingly, in a 'hermitage': the *Queste* author mentions 'un hermitage ou une recluse manoit' (56) [a hermitage, the home of a recluse (81)], and Malory translates it faithfully as 'the ermytaye where a recluse dwelled' (893). The reference to a hermitage, usually associated with male hermits, has proved confusing to at least some of the text illuminators. In BnF, MS f. fr. 111, fol. 243<sup>r</sup>, a codex completed c. 1480 at Poitiers, the illuminator depicts Perceval and Lancelot overthrown by Galahad near a white stone house; in front of the hermitage stands its inhabitant – a bearded hermit. Later in the same codex, Perceval comes to what appears to be a different religious house, even though the text says that he 'retorna a la recluse'; the recluse, this time dressed as a nun, is at the window (BnF, MS f. fr. 111, fol. 244<sup>v</sup>). Likewise, BnF, MS f. fr. 122, fol. 229<sup>v</sup> shows Galahad departing from the hermitage and its resident hermit.

<sup>34</sup> The eponym 'Forest Gaste' in the French text does not mean the place is literally wild, or not necessarily.

the chapel is great and devoid of people: ‘ceste forest est mout grant et mout desvoiable; si i puet bien aler uns chevaliers a jornee que ja n’i trovera ne meson ne recet’ (145) [(t)his forest is very large and pathless (...). A knight could easily spend an entire day in here without finding a house or shelter (90)]. The recluses are distant from Camelot, but they do not live in the complete wilderness, and they appear to take a strong interest in the knights’ quest, which is, after all, a spiritual undertaking.

Both Perceval’s and Lancelot’s conversations with the recluses take place at crucial points in their quests, and the recluses help the knights both by their advice and by personal example, teaching the knights to rely on God’s will and to be grateful for whatever God sends them. It is remarkable that Perceval and Lancelot encounter female recluses before undergoing their own trials in the wilderness. Indeed, Perceval’s meeting with his reclusive aunt takes place prior to his trial on a solitary island.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Lancelot meets the second recluse at a turning point in his quest, just before his trial in the wilderness, at the river Marcoise. After departing from the chapel, Lancelot spends the night in prayer on a rock and, the next day, before trying to cross the river, he puts his faith in God: ‘il met si s’esperance en Dieu et sa fiance qu’il s’en oste tout del penser, et dist qu’il passera bien a l’aide de Dieu’ (146) [he put his faith and trust in God, which relieved him of these apprehensions, and he resolved to cross the water safely with God’s help (91)]. Immediately afterwards, ‘une aventure merveilleuse’ (146) [a marvellous adventure]<sup>36</sup> takes place: a black knight slays Lancelot’s horse, and Lancelot is left enclosed on three sides on a cliff, but his trust in God is unwavering. Lancelot lies down ‘et dist qu’il atendra ilec tant que Nostre Sires li envoiera secors’ (146) [resolving to wait there until Our Lord sent him help (91)]. The recluse’s example seems to have inspired Lancelot’s reliance on God rather than on his strength, although this effect is of limited duration as, by the time Lancelot reaches Corbenic and faces two lions guarding the castle

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<sup>35</sup> I will return to the episode and to the different ways in which the recluses’ words and example inspire Perceval’s actions in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’.

<sup>36</sup> Translation mine; translated ‘a wondrous thing’ by Burns (91).

entrance, he is again reproached for trusting in his own prowess rather than in God's mercy (*Queste*, 253). Interestingly, in the 'Sankgreal', Lancelot crosses the river 'in the name of God', instead of spending the night on its bank, and only then the black knight kills Lancelot's horse. Unlike the *Queste* Lancelot, who lies down and waits for God's aid, the 'Sankgreal' Lancelot takes up his shield and helmet and thanks 'God of his adventure', ready to continue on the quest. Thus, both Perceval's adventures on the island and Lancelot's trial on the bank of the Marcoise are characterised by confinement, so, for a short while, they live like recluses. The knights accept their involuntary confinement, trusting in God's help, a lesson they may learn by observing the patience and belief of recluses. Thus, the recluses' spiritual authority is such that they can influence the knights' actions both through their words and through their very presence and example.

The first *Queste* recluse is identified in a number of ways: not only she is an anchorite but also, and perhaps more importantly, she is Perceval's aunt. The way in which Perceval is received by the woman and the content of their conversation is conditioned by his relation to the recluse: the first recluse tells her nephew about the Round Table and gives him advice, while the second recluse mostly admonishes Lancelot for his sins. When Perceval knocks on her window and the recluse asks his name, he replies 'qu'il est de la meson le roi Artus et a non Perceval le Galois' (72) [that he was Perceval the Welshman, from King Arthur's court (46)]. For Perceval, the feudal tie to Arthur's household is the primary identifying feature,<sup>37</sup> but the recluse reacts to his name rather than to his public persona: 'quant cele ot son non, si a mout grant joie, car molt l'amoit, et ele si devoit fere come celui qui ses niés estoit' (72) [(a)t the sound of this name she was filled with joy, for she loved the bearer dearly, as indeed she should, since he was her nephew].<sup>38</sup> Isabelle Vedrenne-Fajolles concludes that the recluse is attached to her nephew because Perceval's progress in the Grail quest will advance the family's reputation: '[e]n tant que futur élu de la quête, Perceval assurera le véritable honneur de son lignage en devenant le chevalier "célesteil"' [(a)s a future elect knight,

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<sup>37</sup> The emphasis is on belonging to Arthur's household rather than to the Round Table (see also Chapter 2, p. 67 above).

<sup>38</sup> Matarasso, *Quest*, p. 95. The reference to Perceval's name is not reflected in Burns's translation (*Quest*, p. 46).

Perceval will ensure the honour of his lineage by becoming the “heavenly” knight].<sup>39</sup> Malory, in turn, states what the French text may or may not imply, that the recluse loves Perceval more than any other knight simply because he is her kinsman: ‘[w]han the recluse herde his name she had grete joy of hym, for mykyll she loved hym tofor passing any other knyght; she ought so to do, for she was hys awnte’ (905).<sup>40</sup> Apart from this change, the beginning of the episode in the ‘Sankgreal’ is a translation of the *Queste* rather than a summary. For Malory and his projected audience the section is important, because it contextualizes the meeting: the warm welcome Perceval receives is followed by an explanation of the Round Table history and precise directions for further travel.

In the ‘Sankgreal’, the emphasis is on the importance of the Round Table, most likely because Malory’s Perceval underestimates the value of chivalric fellowship. In the *Queste*, the recluse tells Perceval the history of the three tables (the Last Supper table, the table of Joseph of Arimathea and the Round Table), when Perceval tries to understand why the knight in red armour could defeat him and Lancelot and who the knight is. Because the *Queste* Perceval does not fully understand the spiritual dimension of chivalry, she explains that the Round Table is a successor of the Last Supper table. Thus, the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ recluses both speak about the Round Table history, but their explanations are elicited by different motivations. The *Queste* Perceval needs to learn that the Grail quest, and chivalry in general, though they are material, worldly phenomena, must be seen as the means to salvation.<sup>41</sup> However, the ‘Sankgreal’ Perceval does not hear about the Last Supper and Joseph of Arimathea; instead, Malory translates only the part where the recluse tells about Merlin’s prophecy and about the reputation of the Round Table among

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<sup>39</sup> Isabelle Vedrenne-Fajolles, ‘A propos des recluses de la *Queste del Saint Graal* (ca 1225-1230)’, *Loxias*, 7 (2004) <<http://revel.unice.fr/loxias/document.html?id=95>> [accessed 10 July 2013].

<sup>40</sup> In the *Queste*, this statement would have made little sense: if the *Queste* recluse had followed the same logic as the ‘Sankgreal’ recluse and loved a knight more than any other on the basis of their family relationship, the *Queste* recluse should have loved her son Dyabiaus. However, Dyabiaus is not mentioned in the ‘Sankgreal’.

<sup>41</sup> The second *Queste* recluse makes the same point when she explains to Lancelot the meaning of the tournament between the black and the white knights: ‘sanz faille quan que vos veistes ne fu fors autresi come senefiance de Jhesucrist. Et neporquant sanz faillance nule et sanz point de decevement estoit li tornoiement de chevaliers terriens’ (143) [(w)ithout a doubt, everything you saw has no meaning other than in Jesus Christ. The tournament was unquestionably an encounter between earthly knights (89)].

Christian and non-Christian knights. In the 'Sankgreal', the Round Table appears as a symbol of unity and a fellowship which overcomes national, religious and family boundaries. Although the recluse expresses her affection and concern for members of her family (Perceval himself, his mother and, in the *Queste*, the recluse's son Dyabiaus), she explains to Perceval that family, both parents and kin, are less important than the fellowship of the Round Table.

In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the recluse not only reveals to Perceval her identity but also tells him about her past and her reasons for choosing to live in a hermitage. After telling Perceval that she is his aunt, she expresses her concern that Perceval would not believe her because she is in a poor place: 'je sui vostre ante et vos mes niez. Ne nel doutez mie por ce se je sui ci en povre leu' (73) [I am your aunt and you are my nephew. Don't let my humble surroundings confuse you (47)]. Malory follows his source, writing: 'I am youre awnte, althoughe I be in a poore place' (905). Both the *Queste* author and Malory thus warn that visible, material signs, such as poverty, can be misleading.<sup>42</sup> For the English gentry, whose income was sometimes lower than the income of wealthy merchants, the idea that lineage, gentility and virtue rather than money define one's status would have been reassuring. According to Field, 'the *Morte Dathur* shows more often than most romances an awareness of financial insecurity and its consequences'.<sup>43</sup> Actually, the view voiced by Malory's recluse that spiritual wealth was more beneficial than worldly gain would have been familiar to the *Morte* gentry audience. Maddern remarks that, for the fifteenth-century English gentry, '[t]he soul's well-being comes to be linked with temporal honour, sometimes even against the worldly profit and prudence with which chivalric honour was so closely associated'.<sup>44</sup>

The recluse's words illustrate the discrepancy between apparent or worldly, and true or spiritual, well-being. She explains that she was called Queen of the Waste Land and was among the

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<sup>42</sup> The poverty of Perceval's aunt may be relative, anyway, because the *Queste* author specifies that she has fled into the wilderness taking many of her possessions: '[s]i pris maintenant grant partie de mon avoir et m'en afoi en si sauvage leu' (80) [I gathered together most of my belongings and fled to this isolated place (51)].

<sup>43</sup> Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 90. See also the episode of Balin in Tale I of the *Morte*.

<sup>44</sup> Maddern, 'Honour', p. 368.

richest ladies in the world, but decided to exchange material wealth for spiritual riches: ‘je estoie une des plus riches dames dou monde. Et neporquant onques cele richesse ne me plot tant ne embeli come fet ceste povretez ou je sui ore’ (73) [I was one of the richest women in the world. However, my wealth never pleased me or suited me as much as the poverty I now experience (47)]. There is a fine, but suggestive difference between the way the recluse introduces herself in the *Queste* and in the ‘Sankgreal’. Malory’s recluse first explains, as does the *Queste* recluse, ‘som men called me somtyme the Quene of the Wast Landis’, and then she continues ‘I was called the quene of moste rychesse in the worlde’ (905). The word ‘called’, repeated by the ‘Sankgreal’ recluse, hints at the metaphor behind the two contradictory modes in which she was described by people, as ‘the Quene of the Wast Landis’ and ‘quene of moste rychesse in the worlde’. The recluse further explains: ‘[a]nd hit pleased me never so much my rychesse as doth my poverté’ (905). The recluse’s words demonstrate a contradiction between appearances and reality: despite her material wealth, her spiritual kingdom consisted of ‘Wast Landis’. The woman’s subsequent flight to what the French author terms ‘la Forest Gaste’ and Malory translates as ‘wylde foreyst’ (893) implies another reversal, this time from spiritual desolation among her worldly wealth to spiritual plenitude. The choice may not have been a voluntary one, because Perceval’s aunt explains that she fled to the wilderness due to her fear of an enemy king. After her husband’s death, her position would have been similar to the position of many widows throughout the Middle Ages: those women who did not want to be forced into marriage would take the vows of chastity. Accordingly, Gilchrist outlines that, although the social backgrounds of most anchorites are problematic, some may have been nuns, while others were ‘vowesses – widows who took vows of chastity upon their husband’s death’.<sup>45</sup> Thus, it is likely that the audiences of the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ would have recognized the recluse as a pious widow who decided to take the vows of reclusion upon her

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<sup>45</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 177.

husband's death and under the pressure of circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

It is not often that one finds extensive information about a recluse's life prior to her taking the vows, be it a historical or a romance recluse, so the amount of information given about Perceval's aunt is unusual. As a rule, little is known about the former life of historical anchorites: most of what is normally known about them is the name and place of enclosure. In this respect, the second recluse met by Lancelot is more typical; neither her name nor her past are revealed, and her identity before entering an anchorhold is less important than her status as an anchoress: the *Queste* author describes her as 'une recluse, que len tenoit a une des meillors dames dou païs' (142) [a recluse, who was considered to be one of the most respected ladies in the land (89)], but these words are not translated by Malory. In the *Queste*, this recluse speaks the same language of religious exegesis as do male religious representatives, such as hermits and monks. Indeed, this recluse speaks with authority, much like the twelfth- and thirteenth-century urban anchorites about whom Mulder-Bakker writes that '[w]ise old women above the age of forty who had opted for the setting of an anchorhold could be assured of attention and respect. Their words carried a prophetic charge'.<sup>47</sup> Her status as a recluse even gives her authority over those religious men whose form of devotional life is less intense, because the priest saying the mass when Lancelot arrives at the chapel plays no role in their subsequent conversation.

People could ask an anchorite's guidance in practical matters, like Richard Beauchamp, or seek spiritual guidance, like Margery Kempe. In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', Perceval and Lancelot address recluses with different concerns: Perceval wants to know the identity and whereabouts of the knight in red armour, while Lancelot asks about the meaning of his adventures. Lancelot recounts his adventures at the tournament and his vision, asking the recluse for advice:

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<sup>46</sup> The examples of highly religious widows, such as Cicely, Duchess of York (1415-90, widowed 1460), would have been well known to Malory's audience. Valerie Edden describes Cicely's routine as 'clearly modeled on the monastic life' ('The Devotional Life of the Laity in the Late Middle Ages', in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. by Dyas, Edden and Ellis, pp. 35-49 (p. 35)). There are no examples of noble anchorites in fifteenth-century England who could be compared to Guibert of Nogent's mother, but pious widows like Cicely would make the choice of Perceval's aunt familiar to Malory's audience.

<sup>47</sup> Mulder-Bakker, *Lives*, p. 46.



‘quant il li a conté tot son estre, si li prie qu’ele le conseut a son pooir’ (143) [(a)fter telling his whole story, Lancelot asked the recluse to advise him as best she could (89)]. The woman’s answer combines consolation with admonition. She begins by praising Lancelot as the most marvellous and adventurous man in the world, when compared with other worldly knights. She further explains that, because he is the best worldly knight, he has encountered wonderful adventures on this spiritual quest. The recluse goes on to outline the difference between earthly and spiritual chivalry and to provide an exegesis of Lancelot’s adventures in much the same way as male hermits do elsewhere in the text. She concludes her monologue with a warning against sin and the everlasting tortures of hell awaiting Lancelot if he fails his Creator: ‘[c]ar a ce que tu as tant erré vers ton Creator saches que se tu vers lui fes chose que tu ne doies, il te laira forvoier de pechié en pechié, si que tu charras en pardurable peine, ce est en enfer’ (145) [I can assure you that since you have sinned against your Creator, if you do anything more against His will, He will let you stumble from sin to sin until you fall into the eternal suffering of hell (90)]. Her warning is harsh, stating that, unless Lancelot mends his ways, God will abandon him, and she finishes her ‘sermon’ on the resonant word ‘enfer’ [hell]. Morse argues that from the twelfth to the fourteenth century and in certain countries up to the fifteenth century ‘writers great and small, preachers, and poets agreed that the justification for their work lay in urging their audiences to repent’;<sup>48</sup> the *Queste* recluse’s teaching to Lancelot is part of the tradition that Morse describes.

In the ‘Sankgreal’, the second recluse’s speech is less elaborate than in the *Queste*, but equally impressive. According to Carpenter, the notion of hell was vivid in the fifteenth-century English gentry’s imagination,<sup>49</sup> and this is confirmed by Malory’s adaptation of the recluse’s teaching in the ‘Sankgreal’. When rendering the recluse’s words, Malory simplifies their exegetical and doctrinal impact, while retaining the key words, such as ‘vayneglory’, ‘pride’, ‘erthly’ and ‘synfull’. These words cluster around the phrase ‘everlastyng payne’ at the end of the recluse’s

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<sup>48</sup> Morse, *Pattern*, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Carpenter, ‘Religion of the Gentry’, p. 55.

speech:

[n]ow have I warned the of thy vayneglory and of thy pryde, that thou haste many tymes arred ayenste thy Maker. Beware of everlastynge payne, for of all erthly knyghtes I have moste pité of the, for I know well thou haste nat thy pere of ony erthly sinfull man. (933)

The words 'everlastynge payne' echo the end of the previous sentence, where the recluse summarizes the meaning of the tournament. The recluse also reminds Lancelot of his vision, warning him: 'thou were of evyll faythe and of poore bylyeve, the which woll make the to falle into the depe pitte of helle, if thou kepe the nat the better' (933). The vocabulary of sin and divine vengeance is repeated throughout the recluse's speech, and the overall effect is strong, but substantially different from the impression given by the original exegesis in the *Queste*. Comparing Malory's translation with the French text, it is difficult to agree with Charles Moorman that Malory 'always preserves the core of the French book's doctrinal statements, no matter how great his deletions'.<sup>50</sup> Malory selects the words that best summarize the essence of the recluse's exegesis, but in this summary not only the elegance of the exegesis and the finer doctrinal points, but some of the content are lost: for instance, Lancelot asks about the meaning of the tournament and his subsequent vision, but the recluse answers only about the tournament.

Field describes as 'sermon-commentaries' the exegesis with which monks and hermits explain the knights' adventures in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'.<sup>51</sup> However, the application of Field's term to the recluses' speeches is problematic, because, even though their speeches do not differ substantially from those of male ecclesiastics, Christian doctrine did not allow women to

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<sup>50</sup> Moorman, *The Book of Kyng Arthur: The Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> Field, 'Malory and the Grail', p. 149.

preach. The delivery of ‘sermons’ by women in otherwise religiously orthodox romances invites commentary on the distinction between preaching and teaching in medieval discourse and on the place of the recluses’ ‘sermons’ within the narrative. The prohibition on women preaching originates from the writings of St Paul, ‘mulieres in ecclesiis taceant non enim permittitur eis loqui sed subditas esse sicut et lex dicit’ [women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says] (I Cor. 14:34). In fourteenth-century England, in particular, accusations of preaching went hand in hand with accusations of heresy for women.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Margery Kempe famously denies accusations in preaching before the Archbishop of Canterbury by saying ‘I preche not, ser; I come in no pulpytt. I use but comownycacyon and good wordys’.<sup>53</sup> Barry Windeatt comments on these words, arguing that a distinction between preaching and teaching similar to Margery Kempe’s is made in the fourteenth-century *Speculum Christiani*.<sup>54</sup> The *Speculum* author bases the distinction on the setting in which the communicative act takes place: ‘[p]rechyng es in a place where es clepyng to-gedyr or foluyng of pepyl in holy days in churches or othe[r] certeyn places and tymes ordened ther-to. And it longeth to hem that been ordeynede ther-to, the which haue iurediccion and auctorite, and to noon othyr’.<sup>55</sup> The *Speculum* author specifies that the person who preaches must be authorized to do so, meaning that only an ordained priest could preach. In fact, religious women would have found voicing their opinion very hard, and yet there is evidence that, in certain circumstances, their teaching was not only acceptable, but welcome. The words of urban anchorites or ‘wise old women’, as Mulder-Bakker calls them, were often regarded as ‘prophetic’.<sup>56</sup> Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that the

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<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, an anti-Lollard tract ‘On whether women are permitted to instruct men assembled in pubic’, in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. by Lesley Smith and J. H. M. Taylor (New York: OUP, 1992), p. 252.

<sup>53</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 253.

<sup>54</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 253. The *Speculum* is a later fourteenth-century compilation, but its parts are of different dates and origins.

<sup>55</sup> *Speculum Christiani: A Middle English Religious Treatise of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Gustaf Holmstedt, EETS o.s. 182 (London: OUP, 1933), p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Mulder-Bakker, *Lives*, p. 20.

recluses could be used to transmit some of the most important messages in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, because they were regarded by the romances’ authors and their projected audiences as wise teachers and prophets rather than preachers.

The amount of time Perceval spends with his aunt is different in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, most likely because the lessons he needs to learn are not the same for the French author and for Malory. For Malory’s knights, action is important, but the *Queste* Perceval has to master, among other things, patience, and he stays with the recluse for two days. When he arrives at the hermitage, he is welcomed and entertained generously, but is allowed to see the recluse only the next morning. Perceval is eager to go after the knight who has unhorsed him, but the recluse bids him stay and explains why Perceval should not fight against the other knight: ‘[a]vez vos talent de morir ausi come vostre frere, qui sont mort et ocis par lor outrage? Et certes, se vos morez en tel maniere, ce sera damages granz et vostre parenté en abessera mout’ (72-73) [(d)o you want to die like your brothers, who were killed by their own rage? It would be such a pity for you to die as they did, and such a great loss to your family (46)]. In explaining why Perceval should take care lest he be killed ‘par [...] outrage’, the recluse refers to the family’s well-being. In this episode, the family appears as a primary value that a knight must take into consideration. However, later the recluse makes a claim that seems to undermine the importance of family; she says that the Round Table companionship is worth abandoning one’s closest relatives, namely parents, wife and children:

de toutes terres ou chevalerie repere, soit de crestienté ou de paiennie, viennent a la Table Reonde li chevalier. Et quant Dieux lor en done tel grace qu’il en sont compaignon, il s’en tienent a plus boneuré que s’il avoient tout le monde gaangnié, et bien voit len que il en lessent lor peres et lor meres et lor fames et lor enfanz. (76-77)

[knights come to the Round Table from any country where chivalry exists, whether Christian or pagan. If God grants them the privilege of becoming a member of the Round Table, they consider themselves more fortunate than if they controlled the whole world. They abandon their fathers, mothers, wives, and children for it. (49)]

For the thirteenth-century French nobility and the fifteenth-century English gentry and nobility, the notion of abandoning one's family to take up a place at the king's court and thus promote the reputation of the lineage would have been natural. When the recluse speaks about 'parenté', she implies not only Perceval's parents and close relatives, but all members of his lineage, including his ancestors and successors. This broader understanding of family requires that the knight forego his attachment to individual family members in order to increase or preserve the honour of the lineage. Perceval must leave his mother to become a worshipful knight, just as Bors feels that his first duty is to help a maiden in distress rather than his brother Lyonel.<sup>57</sup> Unlike Lyonel, who thinks that Bors acted as a traitor, Perceval seems to understand that the exercise of chivalry requires sacrificing his ties with individual family members. Even before hearing the recluse's explanations about the Round Table, he is ready to accept the news of his mother's death: '[o]r ait Dieu merci de s'ame, fet il. Car certes ce poise moi mout; mes puis einsint est avenu, a soffrir le me covient, car a ce repairerons nos tuit' (74) ['(m)ay God have mercy on her soul,' said Perceval. 'This truly weighs heavily on me. But since it has happened, I'll have to endure it, for death comes to us all eventually' (47)].

After explanations about Galahad's identity, the history of the Round Table and the place of family concerns in a knight's life, the recluse tells Perceval how to find Galahad. However, she makes her nephew stay yet another night, despite Perceval's eagerness to depart. Thus the recluse

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<sup>57</sup> The consequences of Bors's controversial decision are discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 62-75.

and Perceval ‘parlerent entr’ax deus dou Chevalier et de maintes choses’ (79) [talked about many things, including the Knight (51)], until she embarks on what appears to be reason for delaying his departure. The recluse prays her nephew to guard his virginity, both his physical innocence and his spiritual integrity. The audience learns that virginity is a precondition for achieving the Grail: ‘por ce vos pri je que vos gardez vostre cors si net come Nostre Sires vos mist en chevalerie, si que vos puissiez venir virges et nez devant le Saint Graal et sans tache de luxure’ (80) [(f)or this reason I ask you that you keep your body as pure as the day Our Lord knighted you, so that you can come before the Holy Grail virginal and pure, without the blemish of debauchery (51)]. The first part of the sentence is reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 7:20, where Paul advises that every man should ‘unusquisque in qua vocatione vocatus est in ea permanea’ [abide in the same calling in which he was called]. The recluse’s admonition to guard virginity may be founded on the authority of St Paul, yet it is also practical, because an unmarried knight can serve his lord better than one tied up by family obligations.

In translating the episode, Malory omits much of the recluse’s explanations and shortens the duration of Perceval’s visit to the length of their conversation. Perceval enquires about ‘that knyght with the whyght shyldes’ and explains that he needs to fight the knight ‘for I have the shame as yette’ (905). As already mentioned, honour or worship and their antonym shame are important categories in the Arthurian world of the *Morte*, just as they were in Malory’s society.<sup>58</sup> For the fifteenth-century gentry, the concept of honour was not a male prerogative: Maddern contends that ‘[w]omen were [...] intimately involved in the practice of honour, and their acknowledged expertise gained them power and status in the system’.<sup>59</sup> Malory’s recluse, who is a former queen and thus well-versed in the theory and practice of honour, immediately rejects Perceval’s reasons for fighting the white knight: ‘wolde ye fyght with hym? I se well ye have grete wyll to be slayne, as youre fadir was thorow outrageousnes slayne’ (905). Unlike the *Queste* recluse, she does not explain how she

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 70-71.

<sup>59</sup> Maddern, ‘Honour’, p. 365.

knows that Perceval would be killed if he fights the other knight. In answer to Perceval's insistent interrogations 'what ys that knight?' the recluse explains that 'he worchith all by myracle' (906). Then, without further preliminaries, Perceval's aunt embarks on a lecture about the Round Table history from the moment it was made by Merlin till the arrival of Galahad.

The 'Sankgreal' recluse does not promise to elucidate the 'senefiance' or mystery of the white knight. For all that the 'Sankgreal' audience might know, the explanation about the Round Table history could as well be prompted by Perceval's inadvertent use of the word 'felyship' at the beginning of the conversation: 'I shall never be well at ease tyll that I know of that knyghtes felyship and that I may fyght with hym' (905). The fellowship that Perceval initially seeks is synonymous with fighting, but in the *Morte* the word fellowship is primarily associated with the Round Table and the bonds of friendship between individual knights.<sup>60</sup> After the recluse's lecture on the Round Table fellowship Perceval changes his mind and uses the word 'felyship' to mean friendship:

so much have I herde of you that be my good wyll I woll never have ado with sir  
Galahad but by wey of goodnesse. And for Goddis love, fayre awnte, can ye teche  
me where I myght fynde hym? For much I wolde love the felyship of hym. (907)

In fact, Perceval's aunt has not said much about Galahad, but her explanation about the nature of the Round Table fellowship and the fellowship's role in achieving the Grail must have been enough for Perceval to understand the true meaning of fellowship. At first, Perceval uses the word 'felyship' in the meaning of 'presence', which, according to Archibald, is rare in the *Morte*. When Perceval uses the word for the second time, it means not only 'presence' or 'companionship', but also belonging

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<sup>60</sup> Archibald argues that "'felyshyp" in its double sense of the bond between members of the Round Table as well as the friendship between individual knights assumes greater importance in Malory than "compaignie" in his French sources, and that the use of the single word for both idea(l)s means that it acquires an increasing resonance, especially in the last three tales' ('Ideal', p. 317).

to a chivalric association or what Archibald describes as ‘smaller fellowships within the larger Round Table group’.<sup>61</sup> As soon as Perceval is ready to create the bond of fellowship with Galahad, the recluse quickly despatches her nephew in search of the knight.

The recluse seems to have no time to caution Perceval about keeping his virginity intact. However, the idea of maidenhood appears in Merlin’s famous prophecy: ‘[t]here sholde be three whyght bullis sholde encheve hit [the Sankgreal], and the two sholde be maydyns and the thirde sholde be chaste’ (906). In contrast to the *Queste*, the recluse in the ‘Sankgreal’ does not say that Perceval is destined to achieve the Grail or even that he could do it because of his rare virtue, virginity. Whereas in the *Queste* virginity (or, in the case of Bors, chastity) in the sense of physical and spiritual integrity is a precondition for achieving the quest, in the ‘Sankgreal’, the values of chivalric fellowship are more important. The second recluse reprimands Lancelot as one of the earthly knights who did not choose either ‘virginité’ or ‘chastité’ (933). In this case, a chaste recluse advising Lancelot to live chastely rather than being distracted by the game of courtly love is entirely in agreement with other places in the *Morte* where Malory underplays the importance of courtly love.<sup>62</sup> It is possible that Lancelot’s failure to stay chaste would have been viewed by Malory and his audience as a serious offence against the Round Table fellowship because its consequences are public rather than private. Lancelot’s affair with Guinevere endangers not only Lancelot’s spiritual well-being, but the harmony of the Arthurian kingdom.

In contrast to the *Queste*, where virginity and chastity determine a knight’s ability to accomplish spiritual adventures, virginity in the ‘Sankgreal’ is only part of the chivalric ideal. Malory’s chivalric ideal seems to be less reliant on devotional discourse or courtly love, unlike the chivalric ideal of the French romances. Instead, chivalry in the ‘Sankgreal’ is sometimes closer to what Barber describes as ‘military chivalry’, where ‘the chief loyalty is that of knight to knight, and

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<sup>61</sup> Archibald, ‘Ideal’, p. 316.

<sup>62</sup> Discussing Malory’s *Book of Sir Tristram* as compared to Malory’s sources, Helen Cooper contends that ‘Malory shifts the emphasis of his own version [...] to stress models of male companionship rather than heterosexual love’ (‘The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones’, in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Archibald and Edwards, pp. 183-201 (p. 185)).



of knight to lord'. Meanwhile, Barber argues that 'military chivalry, courtly love, and spiritual chivalry' are all essential for our understanding of the *Morte* concept of chivalry.<sup>63</sup> Although references to the Last Supper table and Joseph of Arimathea's table are not in the account of the Round Table history that Perceval's aunt tells in the 'Sankgreal', Galahad's belonging to the Round Table fellowship implies that the fellowship is more than a secular institution. The parallel with religious orders of knights, particularly, the Hospitallers, is highly useful. According to Field, Malory's family connections with the order of Knights Hospitallers, whose prior was, for a time, Sir Richard Malory (Thomas Malory's kinsman, possibly his uncle), influenced Malory's representation of the Round Table as more similar to military orders than it is in French romances. Field contends that

[t]he political seriousness of Sir Thomas's romance, compared with the amorous frivolities frequent in French and Italian writing in that genre, might only be a matter of personal or national character. Many men hoped that chivalry would redeem the time, but not all of them pinned their hopes on the kind of chivalry professed or practised by the military orders. Sir Thomas himself in the *Morte* presents King Arthur's Round Table as resembling less a military religious order than a secular order of chivalry such as the Order of the Garter.<sup>64</sup>

The 'political seriousness' of Malory's chivalry, a characteristic noted by Field, is prominent in the recluses' teachings, which at times border on prophecy, warning the knights of the sins that endanger the integrity of the Round Table fellowship.

The second recluse's teaching bears prophetic overtones because she enumerates the sins that, according to David Benson, are connected to the downfall of Malory's Round Table: pride, 'worldly

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<sup>63</sup> Barber, 'Chivalry', p. 26.

<sup>64</sup> Field, *Life*, p. 81.

pomp' and 'sexual desire'.<sup>65</sup> The second recluse begins her explanation to Lancelot by outlining the distinction between 'erthely knyghtes', who symbolically appear dressed in black at the tournament, and 'they with the coverynge of whyght' (933). She specifies the difference between the black and the white knights: the black armour that 'erthely knyghtes' wear 'betokenyth the synnes whereof they be nat confessed', while the white armour of the other party 'betokenyth virginité, and they that hath chosyn chastité' (933). As in the *Queste*, virginity and chastity in the 'Sankgreal' appear to stand for virtue in general rather than for sexual innocence or abstinence. The black knights' sins are apparently 'bobbaunce and pryde of the worlde' or 'vayne glory', but Lancelot's own shortcomings include being 'fyeble of good beleve and fayth' (933-34). Thus, the black knights' pride is contrasted not with humility but with virginity and chastity. However, because the 'sermon' is addressed to Lancelot, it is also a warning against adultery.<sup>66</sup>

The sins and virtues outlined in the recluse's 'sermon' in the 'Sankgreal' may be regarded as especially pertinent to religious chivalric orders, which would require chastity or virginity from its members and would emphasize humility. Virginity and chastity acquire the overtones of purity from or resistance to worldly temptation, while pride becomes linked to the ostentatious ceremony of courtly love. The recluse's 'sermon' is also prophetic, since both pride and sexual desire are among the reasons for the downfall of the Round Table. Unlike the *Queste* recluse, the 'Sankgreal' recluse does not interpret Lancelot's vision or at least does not do it in the same systematic way as the *Queste* recluse does. However, she warns Lancelot that his pride, which identifies him as a bad Christian ('of evyll faythe and of poore bylyeve', 934) will lead him to hell unless he amends his behaviour.

The speeches of both recluses oscillate between teaching, preaching and prophesying, so it is appropriate that they demonstrate learning and understanding of biblical exegesis that elsewhere is

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<sup>65</sup> David Benson, 'The Ending of the *Morte D'Arthur*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Archibald and Edwards, pp. 221-38 (pp. 234-35).

<sup>66</sup> At this point, Lancelot may or may not have already had carnal intercourse with Guinevere in the *Morte*, although the French romances are unambiguous about Lancelot's relation with Guinevere.

the prerogative of the clergy, monks and hermits. Perceval's aunt reveals her knowledge of the early history of the Round Table, including details from the Gospels and the apocrypha about the last supper, and she also cites the prophet David describing the table in his book:

[a] cele table sistrent li frere qui estoient une meisme chose en cuer et en ame;  
dout David li prophetes dist en son livre une mout merueilleuse parole: 'Mout est,  
fist il, bonne chose quant frere habitent ensemble en une volenté et en une  
huevre'. (74)

[those who sat around (the table) were brothers in body and soul. In his book the prophet David said a wonderful thing that pertains to these men: 'It is a good thing when brothers live together, united in one will and one work.' (48)]

This knowledge would hardly have been available to most medieval women, even though, as Alcuin Blamires notes, aristocratic women probably had wider access to knowledge than women from the lower social strata.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the second recluse explains the significance of Lancelot's adventures and visions as an exegete (in the *Queste*) or as a very passionate preacher (in the 'Sankgreal').

Meanwhile, if the recluses' teachings are regarded as prophecies, their close involvement in the knights' affairs at the crucial points of the knights' careers and the seriousness of issues about which the recluses speak becomes understandable. The sins of which the second recluse accuses 'earthly' knights are the same faults that, according to Benson, lead to the destruction of the Round

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<sup>67</sup> Alcuin Blamires asserts that 'even among a laity whose access to scripture was restricted, women were peculiarly "disenscriptured", 'but concedes that '[r]oyal and aristocratic women were the most persistent exceptions to the rule' ('The Limits of Bible Study for Medieval Women', in *Women, the Book and the Godly*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 1-12 (p. 3)). Perceval's aunt is a former queen, so her scriptural education would have been more extensive than the education of other women, both lay and religious, in the late Middle Ages.

Table: pride, self-display and lust.<sup>68</sup> What the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ recluses teach the questing knights about spiritual chivalry bears the overtones of both prophecy and preaching. The recluses warn knights about their weaknesses and the virtues they should cultivate, and, indeed, the knights are very soon put to the test that requires them to show the very qualities the recluses mentioned. Thus, Perceval is warned in the *Queste* that he should remain a virgin, and, when he stays on a deserted island, he is nearly seduced by the devil disguised as a pretty damsel. The second recluse tells Lancelot that true knights rely on God rather than on chivalric prowess, and, on the bank of the River Marcoise, Lancelot’s horse is killed and he has to wait for God’s help. Moreover, the recluses reinforce their moral lessons by personal example: as enclosed women, they have to be patient, rely on divine providence and constantly fight against temptations of flesh. Moreover, these recluses seem to be able to act as spiritual guides to the knights precisely because they are enclosed, symbolically dead to the world and its temptations. At the same time, the recluses appear to be personally interested in the knights’ quest and in their spiritual well-being: for example, the second recluse tells Lancelot she sympathizes with him more than with any of the other non-elect knights. The first recluse also tells Perceval that his achievement is important for their family in this and the next worlds, and, indeed, the idea that the achievement of the Grail quest will benefit the quester’s family in the past and future, and, more generally, the entire mankind, is further developed in the ship of Solomon episode considered in the following chapter.

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<sup>68</sup> Benson, ‘Ending’, pp. 234-35.

## Chapter 4

### Christian and Family History in the Ship of Solomon Episode

In the previous chapters, I considered the themes of death and gender dynamics in the Grail quest, and the issue that is consistently surfacing in this discussion is the relation between family and Christian history. Indeed, the relations between the living and the dead in medieval society were developed mostly on the levels of family and community. In Malory's *Morte*, the demands of family may become a source of conflict when they clash with the obligations of the Round Table, as the episode of Calogrenant's death examined in Chapter 1 confirms. In Chapter 2, the considerations of family honour are among the incentives that the first recluse, Perceval's aunt, offers for her nephew's attention, reminding him that if he attacks the White Knight and is killed, he will not contribute to his family's glory in this life and the next. Thus, the family is an important concern in both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', as it is in other Grail quest romances. Moreover, the family in these romances is often understood in a very wide sense, as the family determines not only the individual quester's progress but also can be related to the destiny of humankind, because the elect trace their genealogy to biblical characters.

In the other versions of the Grail quest where Perceval is the hero, such as Chrétien's *Conte de Graal*, its continuations and the anonymous *Perlesvaus*, the quest is a family affair: among other things, the hero seeks the Grail to heal his uncle. Likewise, the *Queste* author highlights that the Grail champion, Galahad, should be of the right bloodline, related to Joseph of Arimathea. This way, the French author combines the Christian and the family dimensions so as to underscore the relevance of the Grail quest to Christian history in general and to the life of an individual Christian in particular. Likewise, Jill Mann emphasizes the importance of family relations in the 'Sankgreal':

‘[t]he knightly stress on lineage unites with biblical genealogy to give a religious sanction to chivalry. The quest for the Grail reveals kin relationships: Perceval finds an aunt and a sister, Lancelot a son’.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the episode on Solomon’s ship reveals to the questers and the audience a direct relation between the fallen couple of Adam and Eve, the tainted couple of Solomon and his unnamed wife and the perfect couple of Galahad and Perceval’s sister.

According to Dhira Mahoney, the figurative approach to history, which ‘interprets an event by projecting it vertically onto the plane of providential design’, establishes a narrative where the virgin Galahad, a type of Christ, is related to Adam as the virgin sister of Perceval is related to Eve.<sup>2</sup> The account of the ship construction introduces another couple, King Solomon and his wife, whose family life reflects the state of the world between the fall (exemplified by the story of Adam and Eve) and redemption (suggested by the relationship between Galahad and Perceval’s sister). Mahoney argues that the miraculous bed serves as a reminder of the triads formed by Adam, Solomon and Galahad on the one hand and Eve, Solomon’s wife and Perceval’s sister on the other hand.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I will examine the second link of the triads, King Solomon and his wife, keeping in mind their relation to Adam and Eve on the one hand and to Galahad and Perceval’s sister on the other hand. As I will explain in this chapter, Solomon’s wife has a particular role to play in the narrative: she prophesies the coming of a maiden to the ship and the arrival of news to the king, and thus she participates in the discourse on the opposition between knowledge and ignorance. Both the *Queste* author and Malory seem to suggest that the extent and quality of knowledge is predicated on the speaker’s gender and his or her social position. Unlike in the case of the recluses discussed in the previous chapter, the knowledge of Solomon’s wife is not corroborated by her status: the recluses are chaste and religious women, so they are more virtuous and, by implication, more knowledgeable than a wife can be.

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<sup>1</sup> Mann, ‘Malory and the Grail Legend’, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Mahoney, ‘The Truest and Holiest Tale’, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Mahoney, ‘The Truest and Holiest Tale’, p. 115.

In the previous chapters, the effects of the Grail quest on the individual's and the Arthurian community's lives have been discussed. The ship of Solomon episode illustrates a more general preoccupation with eschatological history and engages, once again, with an individual's salvation, treating Christian history through the prism of family history. The aim of this chapter is to study the interplay of individual, family and eschatological histories in the ship of Solomon episode and the function of this episode within the narrative that moves towards the revelation of Galahad's messianic role in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. It is argued in the chapter that, in both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the discourses of individual, family and universal Christian history, essential for the thirteenth-century French nobility and the fifteenth-century English nobility and gentry, are interwoven in the episode. Because the issues of history and lineage were paramount in the societies where the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' were written, their audiences could have read the ship of Solomon episode in light of the above-mentioned issues. Therefore, a preliminary discussion of genealogy and gender roles within a family in thirteenth-century French and fifteenth-century English writings is necessary. I will also comment on the possible apocryphal sources for the ship of Solomon story and the place of the episode in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' narratives. After these background considerations, I will examine the episode in view of the discourses on genealogy and family in the societies where the romances were written and read.

The preoccupation with history, evident in romance, makes the genre somewhat akin to chronicle; according to Matthew Giancarlo, both genres 'are about, and *are*, genealogy, family and individual histories'.<sup>4</sup> Radulescu and Edward Kennedy argue that

Anglo-Norman, English, and Scottish chronicles, prophecies, ancestral romances, and the narratives tracing the history of religious houses as well as of their noble and gentle patrons were, like the chronicles of Saint Denis, a means of

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Giancarlo, 'Speculative Genealogies', in *Middle English: Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 352-68 (p. 355).

legitimizing a unified view of the historical past of a nation as well as individuals.<sup>5</sup>

These observations are particularly relevant to the discussion of the Solomon's ship episode, in which considerations of genealogy are represented in a manner reminiscent of both romance and chronicle, because family and world histories are equally prominent. The intermingling of the chronicle and romance genres in the ship of Solomon episode is facilitated by the fact that the episode is taken up and reinterpreted in the *Queste* prequel, *L'Estoire del Saint Graal*. Different scholars have commented on the late date of composition and the inferior literary quality of the *Estoire*.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, it is useful to consider how the repetition of the same episode in the *Estoire* and in the *Queste* may have influenced its readings. In some manuscripts, such as BL, MS Royal 14 E III mentioned in Chapter 1 (p. 35), the *Estoire* immediately precedes the *Queste*. The *Estoire* and the *Queste* are lengthy narratives, so even if they had been read consecutively, the audience was unlikely to remark the small factual divergences in the building of the ship. The *Estoire*, more than other texts of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, resembles a chronicle by virtue of its title and the manner in which the narrative is presented. Gillette Labory comments that throughout the twelfth century, the word 'estoire', often as part of the phrase 'verai estoire', was used to designate a vernacular chronicle as trustworthy.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Zink questions the possibility that the audiences of Grail romances regarded them as historically true:

[t]he dates [of these romances] mentioned were mixed with those of History, but

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<sup>5</sup> Radulescu and Edward Kennedy, 'Introduction', in *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Medieval Britain and France*, ed. by Radulescu and Kennedy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 1-5 (p. 3).

<sup>6</sup> According to Jean Frappier, the first part of *Lancelot* was written 1215-20, the rest 1220-25, the *Queste* 1225-30, the *Mort* 1230-35, and the *Estoire* and *Merlin* were written at a later date (*Étude sur 'La mort le roi Artu', roman du XIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), pp. 123 and 138).

<sup>7</sup> Gillette Labory, 'Les debuts de la chronique en français (XIIe et XIIIe siècles)', in *The Medieval Chronicle III: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, Doorn/Utrecht 12-17 July 2002*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 1-25 (p. 10).



they created a parallel and different chronology. More than the chronology of history, it was the true chronology of mankind since it did not just settle for starting at Christ's birth but drew meaning from it.<sup>8</sup>

As Zink explains, chronology and genealogy have a prominent role in the Grail quest literature, particularly the *Queste*, but the audience probably interpreted the narratives as being true in the figurative rather than literal sense. Indeed, the narratives of genealogy, family history and chronicle were popular with the French and English nobility of the thirteenth and later centuries, who were reading the *Queste* and other romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle. Through the medium of these familiar narratives, which were also pertinent to the immediate, worldly concerns of his lay audience, the *Queste* author communicates a message of salvation in a way that would have been appealing and understandable. The history of mankind, its fall and salvation become, in the ship of Solomon episode, a history of matrimony, family and heritage.

The concept of lineage, or what Janice Pinder terms 'dynastic concerns' or '*pensée lignagère*' was so important in medieval culture that it was usually taken for granted, especially by the lay people.<sup>9</sup> This concept, however, is voiced in genealogical literature, which serves two main functions, namely, providing justification for power structures and sustaining the memory of a lineage, the latter helping to soothe anxieties about death.<sup>10</sup> The representation of a lineage assured the individual about the past and future of his or her family, showing that it had survived past calamities and was going to be remembered after his or her lifetime. At the same time, having proof of a family's illustrious past was a means of ensuring that one's claims of lordship and ownership would be taken seriously. Depending on the social strata and historical context, a particular aspect

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<sup>8</sup> Zink, *Invention*, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Janice Pinder, 'Transformations of a Theme: Marriage and Sanctity in the Old French St Alexis Poems', in *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy*, ed. by Karen Pratt (Cambridge: Rochester, 1994), pp. 71-88 (pp. 78-79).

<sup>10</sup> See Jon Denton, 'Genealogy and Gentility: Social Status in Provincial England', in *Broken Lines*, ed. by Radulescu and Kennedy, pp. 143-58.

of genealogical writing was highlighted by those who created or used genealogies. Therefore, it can be expected that the thirteenth-century French nobility and the fifteenth-century English gentry and nobility perceived genealogical literature and presence of genealogical themes in other texts differently. Thus, it would be useful to know what the primary functions of genealogical writings were for the intended audiences of the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' in order to consider how the ship of Solomon episode in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' illustrates the issues of universal and family history.

The form and function of genealogy, as well as its popularity across the social strata, varied throughout the Middle Ages. Duby observes that the first French genealogies were composed for influential, high-ranking nobles, though never for kings, because the latter presumably did not need additional evidence of their right to rule. Gradually, the nobles whose authority was circumscribed by the borders of their castles adopted the genre to set down their illustrious history and justify their claims to lordship. According to Duby, by the second half of the twelfth century, genealogy became popular among the lower ranks of nobility.<sup>11</sup> However, legitimate descent remained an issue of concern among the aristocracy and new genealogies, in the form of diagrams or text, continued to be produced throughout the thirteenth century and later. Marigold Norbye affirms that,

from the thirteenth century onwards, increasing stress was laid in official circles on the bloodline of the French kings, with ingenious links being made between the three royal dynasties so as to show that the current incumbent of the throne was related by blood all the way back to his Merovingian predecessors, and hence back to their mythical Trojan forebears.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, pp. 151-52.

<sup>12</sup> Marigold Norbye, 'Genealogies in Medieval France', in *Broken Lines*, ed. by Radulescu and Kennedy, pp. 80-101 (p. 81).

In England, royal genealogies were as important ideological weapons as they were in France. Following a process according to which the lower social classes internalized the customs of their nobler contemporaries, genealogy and family history gradually became valued by the English lower nobility and gentry. However, Jon Denton observes that, up to the early sixteenth century, the English gentry left physical evidence of their genealogical awareness only in those cases where there were special circumstances: when the lineage faced extinction, when its members needed to validate their claims to gentility and property or when the family wanted to stress its illustrious relations.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, according to Denton, different media were used by families, depending on the circumstances that prompted the construction of a genealogy:

[a] lineage facing imminent failure was likely to create a genealogy in stone or brass, as tombs were designed to be perpetual and serve as guardians of memory until the Day of Judgement. By contrast, where living family remained, the more serviceable medium of paper or parchment was preferred.<sup>14</sup>

As will be explained later in this chapter, the genealogy involved in the ship of Solomon episode combines visual and written media, possibly because its construction is prompted by a variety of circumstances, including both Galahad's position as the last in Solomon's line and the need to communicate to Galahad, but also to the other elect knights and the audience the story of an illustrious lineage.

A peculiarity of genealogy, which makes it a site of tension and is consequently explored in literature, is the fact that genealogical writing normally brings out agnatic, patrilineal descent.

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<sup>13</sup> Denton, 'Genealogy', pp. 153-54. According to Denton, 'genealogy survives as a testament to crises of lineage' (p. 153). He continues that there were 'other circumstances beyond crisis in which a family might choose to create a genealogy; those families who were descended from the nobility might be particularly keen to display their connections' (pp. 153-54).

<sup>14</sup> Denton, 'Genealogy', p. 153.

Patrilinearity is equally favoured by the early aristocratic genealogies and late medieval gentry writing. Peter Coss indicates that women rarely appear in the Paston genealogy and are mostly unnamed; Coss describes the Pastons' genealogy as '[o]stensibly at least, [...] a very male-centred account, stressing lordship, lineage and heraldry'.<sup>15</sup> The genealogy of Christ, which would have been memorable to the clerics, who, as Duby notes, composed the aristocratic genealogies of the twelfth century, also goes from son to father. However, according to Duby, women appear in genealogies at what seem to be crucial junctions, namely, when the family is linked to the more prestigious lineage through the mother.<sup>16</sup> A similar tendency is noticeable in romances: in the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, women are concerned with increasing the worship of a family, but the knights' lineages are traced mostly through men. Carol Chase points out that the lineages of Lancelot, Gawain, Yvain and the Fisher Kings are traced from the founding couple in direct line from father to son in the fashion reminiscent of the Bible and of the contemporary genealogies.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Yvain is descended from Joseph and Elyab, Gawain from Perron (Joseph of Arimathea's relative) and Camille (King Orcant-Lamet's daughter) and Galahad from Bron, another relative of Joseph of Arimathea. Meanwhile, Chase states that the converted Saracen women who marry illustrious Christians in the *Estoire* have an essential socio-historical impact: 'en tant que mères, elles aident à implanter la chevalerie dans le temps des chrétiens nouveaux juste après la Passion; en plus, leur naissance royale rehausse l'éclat de leur lignage' [as mothers, they help to establish chivalry in the new Christian time after the Passion; moreover, their royal birth intensifies the exaltation of the lineage].<sup>18</sup> These remarks about the place and function of women in medieval genealogies help us understand the positioning of Solomon's wife in relation to her illustrious husband in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. King Solomon's unnamed wife in the *Queste* and the

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England 1000-1500* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> Carol Chase, 'La conversion des païennes dans l'*Estoire del Saint Graal*', in *Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the XVIIth International Arthurian Congress*, ed. by Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 251-64 (p. 257).

<sup>18</sup> Chase, 'La conversion', p. 262.

‘Sankgreal’ is part of a long-standing genealogical tradition: because she cannot increase the prestige of the family, her name is obliterated. Meanwhile, her ingeniousness enables Solomon to pass down to his distant heir, the last of his line, knowledge about the family’s history and genealogy.

The *Queste* author and Malory present the relationship between Solomon and his wife differently, and these differences are grounded in the context of contemporary attitudes towards marriage and gender roles in the family. It has already been mentioned in Chapter 1 (p. 37) that, following the Fourth Lateran Council, the Church encouraged the instruction of the laypeople in the current ecclesiastical doctrine and practice, and one of the most prominent topics in this instruction was matrimonial relations. Already in the twelfth century, the ecclesiastical discourse on marriage was characterized by a shift towards representing it as a positive phenomenon. Gabriel Le Bras demonstrates that while the earlier Church advocated the ideal of celibacy, revaluation of marriage as a means of avoiding sin and achieving salvation occurred following the denial of marriage by the eleventh-century heretical movements.<sup>19</sup> However, already in the twelfth century, Honorius of Autun preached in his sermons that husbands and wives should cherish mutual love and ‘keep faith’ with each other.<sup>20</sup> In theological works, pastoral manuals and penitentials appearing after the Fourth Lateran Council, marriage is treated at length, and their authors often speak on the spouses’ equality and their mutual obligations. Furthermore, in the thirteenth century, the Franciscan Guibert de Tournai spoke about love ‘founded on partnership’ and equality.<sup>21</sup> However, such sermons were

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<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Le Bras, ‘Le Mariage dans la théologie et le droit de l’Eglise du XIe au XIIIe siècle’, *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 11 (1968), 191-202. Likewise, Jacqueline Murray maintains that ‘in the twelfth century, influenced by thinkers like Abelard, the Church had developed a theology that focused on individual salvation rather than on corporate redemption. Within this conceptual framework, marriage was a union that could help or hinder the individual’s quest for salvation’ (‘Individualism and Consensual Marriage: Some Evidence from Medieval England’, in *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. by Michael Sheehan, Constance Rousseau and Joel Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1998), pp. 121-52 (p. 146)). On the earlier attitudes towards marriage in Christian church, see P. L. Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church. The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in David d’Avray and M. Tausche, ‘Marriage Sermons in *Ad status* Collections of the Central Middle Ages’, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littérature du moyen âge*, 47 (1980), 71-119 (p. 77).

<sup>21</sup> Guibert states that spouses ‘pares sunt et socii’ [equal and partners], BnF, MS f. Lat. 15943, fol. 144<sup>va</sup>, quoted in d’Avray ‘Marriage Sermons’, p. 114.

probably stimulated by the fact that married life was not universally viewed in terms of partnership and equality. Duby believes that ‘an ideology which gained ground amongst the nobility during the twelfth century and coincided, at certain critical points, with the ideology of the clergy’ presented marriage as a ‘relationship of inequality, [an] exchange of love and of respect’.<sup>22</sup> Duby’s view of marriage relations in terms of inequality is, to an extent, applicable to the ship of Solomon episode, as the analysis of the episode later in the chapter will suggest. Thus, husband and wife would have had different kinds of presence in family genealogies, though they would have collaborated to ensure the future of their lineage.

Indeed, there was a change in clerical discourse on marriage, which seems to be reflected in the *Queste* and the *Estoire* treatment of King Solomon’s relations with his wife, as I will explain further on. From the thirteenth century and possibly even earlier, French and English priests tried to promote among their congregations the ideal of marital love, as evidenced by certain types of religious literature, such as penitential manuals. P. P. A. Biller provides examples from the French and English texts characterized by ‘a continuous reference to a high ideal of married love’: references to married love are found, for instance, in Thomas of Chobham’s *Summa Confessorum* (c. 1216) and the anonymous *Sacerdos igitur* (c. 1300).<sup>23</sup> Chobham exhorts the wife to preach to her husband and urges the husband to take care of his wife and correct her, whenever necessary. However, Chobham specifies that the wife should exhort her husband gently and respectfully and in non-public circumstances, for instance, when they are in their private chamber at the end of the day.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Coss contrasts the invisibility of the Paston women in their fabricated genealogy to the prominent role the ladies play in the Paston correspondence, noting that the letters ‘reveal [...] a surprising degree of mutuality in the marriage relationship, with lord and lady both giving and

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<sup>22</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Jane Dunnett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> P. P. A. Biller, ‘Marriage Patterns and Women’s Lives: A Sketch of Pastoral Geography’, in *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200-1500*, ed. by P. J. P. Goldberg (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992), pp. 60-107 (p. 70).

<sup>24</sup> See Michael Sheehan, ‘*Maritalis Affectio* Revisited’, in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe*, ed. by James Farge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 262-77 (pp. 109-10).

receiving respect from each other'.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it appears that, from the thirteenth century onwards, the idea of affection and mutuality in marriage was gaining popularity, though it was probably not universally accepted.<sup>26</sup>

However, one of the problems in analysing the discourse on marriage is the ambiguity of vocabulary used in different contexts: accordingly, Biller notes that the term 'marital' or 'conjugal affection' is rooted in 'canon-legal vocabulary'.<sup>27</sup> Initially, in Roman and canon law, marital affection as a term signified the wish to be bound by marriage with material property consequences. Frederik Pedersen, having examined eighty-eight fourteenth-century cause papers from the York court records, concluded that only in two cases witnesses used the phrase *affectio maritalis* to refer exclusively to 'the internal psychological quality of marriage'.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, in the context of penitential manuals, the term could have implied the emotional engagement of the spouses. The phrase *affectio maritalis* or *conjugalis* seems to have had two distinct meanings in the fourteenth century, implying property transaction in a legal context and 'a loving state of mind' in religious writings.<sup>29</sup> Although religious writers stressed the emotional dimension of marriage and most lay people were aware of this dimension, practical concerns often dominated over emotional considerations. At the same time, comments on the emotional dimension of marriage and the influence of the spouses' feelings on the family's honour and spiritual well-being are present in the

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<sup>25</sup> Coss, *Lady*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Further on the subject of marriage in medieval romance, see Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) and Conor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature, and Practice* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Biller, 'Marriage Patterns', p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> Frederik Pedersen, "'Maritalis Affectio': Marital Affection and Property in Fourteenth-Century York Cause Papers", in *Women, Marriage, and Family*, ed. by Sheehan, Rousseau and Rosenthal, pp. 175-209 (p. 207). In one of the cases, however, the phrase refers unambiguously to emotional involvement rather than property arrangements. William Raynald reports the words of his friend, the litigant William Aungier, concerning his wife: '[d]isplicet michi quod unquam novi dictam Johannam, eo quod me non diligit affectione qua tenetur' [(i)t displeases me that I ever knew her for she does not love me with an affection that holds good] (quoted in Pedersen, 'Marital Affection', p. 179). In this case, William Aungier expects marriage to be based on a lasting emotional attachment, and he refuses to accept Johanna as his wife or to live with her.

<sup>29</sup> John Noonan, 'Marital Affection in the Canonists', *Studia Gratiana*, 12 (1967), 479-509 (p. 509). Pedersen suggests that the semantic ambiguity of the phrase already existed in the thirteenth century and continued into the fifteenth century. Pedersen also contends that the witnesses who chose to use the term to indicate property relations were aware of its other meaning as well ('*Maritalis Affectio*', pp. 184 and 207).

ship of Solomon episode, an issue I will address after tackling the structural place of the episode in the narrative.

Considering the place of the Solomon's ship episode in the Grail quest narrative, it is possible to see how the idea of winning spiritual and earthly worship for the individual and the family builds on the previous examples of winning worship and salvation for the knight and chivalric community by means of virtue and prowess. In the *Queste*, the story of Solomon and his wife is placed so as to recall a transition between the fall, presented in the section about Adam and Eve, and redemption, which is to come as the result of Galahad's achieving the Grail. The account about King Solomon and his wife is also a point of transition between biblical history (the story of Adam and Eve), and the *Queste* fictional Grail history. Albert Pauphilet identifies the source of the story of Adam and Eve as a variation of the apocryphal *Vita Adae et Evae*.<sup>30</sup> However, according to Emmanuèle Baumgartner, the *Queste* author altered the focus of the legend so as to replace Solomon's Temple, build around the Tree of Life, by the ship of Solomon.<sup>31</sup> Baumgartner maintains that the ship symbolizes both the Church and the concept of transition between stages of initiation, the latter being highlighted through the presence of a bed.<sup>32</sup> The account of Solomon's ship's construction immediately precedes the decisive proof of Galahad's messianic role, and this proof is Galahad's ability to take David's sword, left for him on the ship. Moreover, the consecutive narratives about, first, Adam and Eve and, next, Solomon and his wife bridge the Old Testament of the Grail history and the New Testament of Galahad's arrival.<sup>33</sup> Frederick Locke contends that 'the

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<sup>30</sup> See Pauphilet, pp. 146-51, for a discussion of this apocryphal legend and its adaptation in the *Queste*. *Vita Adae et Evae*, which sometimes appears as the *Penitence of Adam* or as an introduction to the *Golden Legend*, was a popular medieval apocryphal legend. The evolution of the Adam and Eve legend in medieval Europe is described by Brian Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of Vita Adae et Evae* (Oxford: OUP: 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *L'Arbre et le Pain, Essai sur la Queste del Saint Graal* (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1981), p. 136. Baumgartner notes that what is usually described as 'Solomon's ship' is in fact Solomon's wife's ship. For ease of reference, the term 'Solomon's ship' is used in the thesis.

<sup>32</sup> Baumgartner, *L'Arbre*, pp. 136-37.

<sup>33</sup> Allusions to the Old and New Law are made in the *Queste*, for instance, in Perceval's vision on the island. Matarasso argues the usefulness of seeing the *Queste* in terms of the Old and New Testament, because '[i]f the *Queste* is seen as the New Testament fulfilling the Old Testament typified in the Josephus sections it gains immensely in literary unity'



*Eve la pecheresse* episode and the building of the ship of Solomon are necessary to the progressive unfolding of the book, and indeed lead to the central action of the *Queste*, the uncovering of the mysteries on board that strange vessel'.<sup>34</sup> Although the account of Solomon and his wife does not advance the narrative action, it becomes essential for the correct interpretation of events, and the *Queste* author describes the relations between Solomon and his wife in detail. As explained above (Chapters 2, p. 68), Malory often omits descriptions of the characters' emotions present in his French sources. However, there are points at which Malory's omissions obscure the relation of events and characters' actions: for instance, it is not clear in the 'Sankgreal' why Solomon's wife comes up with the idea of building a ship. On the other hand, Malory's omissions are meaningful in that he is likely to leave out the details that would have been obvious to his intended audience. Malory makes no attempt at explaining the complexity of Solomon's relationship with his wife or rationalizing Solomon's need to communicate knowledge about their lineage to his remote heir, Galahad. It seems that Malory relies on his audience sharing his opinion on family and genealogy, in this case, how a wife should behave and why a noble person must strive to leave a memento to his descendants, as well as on the fact that his audience might know the story already.

Throughout the ship of Solomon episode in both the *Queste* and, despite Malory's omissions, the 'Sankgreal' (as well as, to an extent, in the *Estoire*), the issues of family, history and genealogy are prominent. In particular, the question of gender roles in sustaining a family's worldly and spiritual worship is approached, and the solution seems to be different in the *Queste*, the *Estoire* and the 'Sankgreal', which may be related to the authors' agendas and socio-historical contexts. In particular, the emotional dimension of Solomon's family life is represented differently in these three texts, with only the *Queste* author mentioning that Solomon's wife loved her husband. Unlike the *Queste* author, the *Estoire* author does not mention the love of Solomon's wife for her husband.

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(Matarasso, *Redemption*, p. 242). The *Estoire*, which was written after the *Queste*, functions as the Old Testament to the New Testament *Queste* account of redemption.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Locke, *The Quest for the Holy Grail: A Literary Study of a Thirteenth-Century French Romance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 35.

Instead, the *Estoire* author emphasizes, with certain disapproval, Solomon's indulgence with his wife, and criticizes the woman's deceptiveness. The *Estoire* author deplores Solomon's infatuation, inspired by the woman's physical beauty, which leads the king to sin and dishonour.<sup>35</sup> In the place where the *Queste* author states that Solomon's wife loved him well, the *Estoire* author alters the entire motivation behind the woman's desire to know the cause of Solomon's concern:

[L]onguement penssa Salemons a ceste chose, et tant que la feme qe il amoit s'aperçut bien que il estoit chaoiz en tel pensé dont il ne pooit son cuer oster; si en fu trop a malese, car ele ot maintenant peur qe il n'eüst pensé a li malfaire.

[Solomon thought for a long time about this, so much that his wife noticed that he was thinking about something he could not get out of his mind. She was very troubled, for she feared right away that he wanted to hurt her.]<sup>36</sup>

In this sentence, the *Estoire* author brings out a contrast between Solomon's love and his wife's fear.

In the *Queste* and the *Estoire*, Solomon's wife waits for a convenient moment to ask her husband what grieves him, approaching him one evening when he appears to be more cheerful than usual.<sup>37</sup>

It seems that she follows the instructions given in contemporary pastoral manuals, such as Chobham's *Summa* (mentioned above, p. 115), to the effect that wives should address their

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, the *Estoire* author comments: 'par biauté de feme fu il si surpris et deceüz qu'il en fist tant de choses contre Deu que a honte li pot l'en atoner' (*L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, ed. by Jean-Paul Ponceau (Paris: Champion, 1997), ii, p. 281) [he was so overcome and deceived by a woman's beauty that he did many things against God, which could lead him to shame] (translation mine).

<sup>36</sup> *L'Estoire*, ii, p. 283; *The History of the Holy Grail*, trans. by Carol Chase (Cambridge; D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 153.

<sup>37</sup> In the *Queste*, the conversation takes place in the evening: '[s]i ne li volt pas tantost demander, ainz atendi tant qu'ele vit son point et qu'ele vit un soir qu'il estoit liez et joianz et qu'il estoit bien de lui' (221) [(s)he did not want to ask him immediately, but waited for the right occasion, until one evening she saw he was happy and joyful and in a good mood (136)]. In the *Estoire*, there is a hint at even greater intimacy between the spouses: '[u]ne nuit qu'il estoient ensemble avint qu'il fu un pou plus haitiez et plus envoisiez que il ne selt' (*Estoire*, ii, p. 283) [(o)ne night when they were together, it happened that he was slightly more spirited and well-disposed than usual] (translation mine). In the *Sankgreal*, the circumstances of the conversation are not specified, but Malory notes that 'she wayted hir tyme' (992).

husbands at convenient time. However, the *Queste* and, especially, the *Estoire* authors appear to be suspicious about her motivation: the *Estoire* author states that the woman feared lest Solomon might do something against her. The preceding narrative would remind the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ audiences that mankind was condemned through a woman’s (Eve’s) sin and the redemption was mediated through an exceptional, virginal wife, Mary. As has been explained, the twelfth-century clerical discourse described marriage as an unequal relationship in which *affectio* [affection] and *dilectio* [pleasure] was expected on the husband’s part, while the wife was supposed to demonstrate respect.<sup>38</sup> The *Estoire* and the *Queste* were written in the first half of the thirteenth century, when the attitudes described by Duby were probably giving ground to a somewhat more egalitarian relationship. Thus, the *Estoire* author may be looking back to the model of hierarchical marriage, while the *Queste* author appears to support the ideal of mutual love expressed by clerical authors in the thirteenth century and later.

Solomon’s wife might be expected to take an active role in resolving the problem that concerns Solomon, because, as has already been noted, spouses collaborated on furthering the family honour and on transmitting genealogical information to posterity. Although Solomon can be reasonably sure about the immediate future of his lineage, the building of the ship is stimulated by the distance between him and the perfect knight who is to be the last of his blood. In the *Estoire*, Solomon is determined to make his descendant aware that Solomon has known of the knight’s coming long before his birth. The *Estoire* author explains Solomon’s desire by the fact that Solomon himself would not be able to see the knight:

[j]e ne le verrai pas, car trop a lonc terme de cestui tens jusq’a celui de lors.

Certes, se je en nule maniere li pooie faire savoir coment, si grant tens devant sa naissance, ai seüe novels de sa venue, je li feïsse savoir, mais je ne voi mie

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<sup>38</sup> See Duby, *Love and Marriage*, pp. 24-25; see also p. 115 above.

coment ce puisse ester, car jusq'a celui terme a dou mile anz ou plus.

[I won't see Him, for it is too far away in time from now until then. Certainly if there were some way to tell him how I knew the truth about Him long before His birth, I would do so. But I don't see how, for the time is two thousand years and more away.]<sup>39</sup>

In the *Queste*, the same idea is expressed less emotionally: '[s]i [Salemons] pensa coment il poïst fere savoir a celui home derreain de son lignage que Salemons, qui si lonc tens avoit devant lui esté, seust la verité de sa venue' (221) [(h)e (Solomon) thought about how he might communicate to the last man in his line that he, Solomon, who had lived so long before him, had known that he was coming (136)]. The *Queste* Solomon is primarily concerned with the transmission of family history, rather than entertaining the desire to see his famous heir. In the 'Sankgreal', the problem of transmitting knowledge about one's descent is not mentioned. Instead, Solomon is concerned with the identity of his heir: 'ever he mervayled and studyed who that sholde be, and what hys name myght be' (992). In the 'Sankgreal', therefore, there is a desire to know the last of the line, similar to Solomon's desire to see Galahad expressed in the *Estoire*, and it is only implied that Solomon may want to make himself known to the heir in his turn. In fact, Solomon's ship is an analogue of visual genealogies constructed by the fifteenth-century English gentry. The ship's grandeur and its marvels are a means of attracting attention, as much as the gentry memorial brasses were. The difference between Solomon's ship and visual genealogies is that the symbolism of Solomon's ship is directed towards a particular onlooker, who is Solomon's heir, unlike the gentry memorials in churches, which invited the attention of all parishioners.

In addition to the visual genealogy of the ship itself, there is a written genealogy contained

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<sup>39</sup> *Estoire*, p. 283; Chase, *History*, p. 153.

on board: while the ship itself, the bed with its furnishings and Solomon's sword are visual reminders of the grandeur of Solomon's lineage, the letter found on the bed provides information about Galahad's forebears up to King Solomon. In the *Queste*, the episode contains clues on how genealogical knowledge was to be transmitted. The 'contes' tells about the ship-building while the companions are gazing at the bed with the three coloured spindles, ostensibly lest anyone should have doubts that the spindles 'estoient naturieux colors sanz peinture, car eles n'i avoient esté mises par home mortel ne par fame' (210) [were natural, not artificial; they had not been painted by human hand, either male or female (130)]. Malory's translation is factual, obscuring the marvellous nature of the spindles: '[o]f these three colowres were thes spyndyls, and of naturall coloure within, and withoute ony payntyng' (990). However, the reference to a woman provides an appropriate introduction for a story throughout which the spindles and the material for them are closely associated with women: Eve plants the tree from which the wood is taken and Solomon's wife orders the spindles to be cut. The *Queste* author claims he wants to suppress disbelief on the part of his audience, which makes him proceed to explanation without delay:

[e]t por ce que maintes genz le porroient oïr qui a mençonge le tendroient, se len ne lor faisoit entendent coment ce poroit avenir, si s'en destorne un poi li contes de sa droite voie et de sa matiere por deviser la maniere des trois fuissiax qui des trois colors estoient. (210)

[since many listeners might find this tale hard to believe if they were not told just how this could have happened, the story here veers away from its straight path and its rightful subject to describe the three colored spindles. (130)]

The companions learn what must be the same story from the letter they find in a purse: '[I]ors

commence Perceval a lire ce qui ert ou brief, et tant qu'il lor devise la maniere des fuissiax et de la nef ainsi come li contes l'a devisee' (226) [Perceval began to read the letter, which described the nature of the ship and its spindles, just as the story has narrated (139)]. The period in which the audience would have read or listened to the lengthy account is constructed as equivalent to the time the companions spend transfixed in front of the bed. The *Queste* author continues at exactly the same place where he had left the companions: '[o]r dit li contes que grant piece regarderent li trois compaignon le lit et les fuissiax, et tant qu'il conurent que li fuissel estoient de naturel color sanz peinture' (226) [(t)he story now says that the three companions stared at the bed for so long that they understood its spindles to be naturally colored rather than painted (139)].

The *Queste* author describes the knights' reaction as wonder, and the long period they spend examining the spindles indicates the strength of their amazement: 'si s'en merveillierent mout, car il ne sorent coment ce pooit avenir' (226) [(t)his amazed them, and they did not know how it was possible (139)]. The word 'merveille' [marvel] and its derivatives are prominent in the account of the ship construction. The word is used by Solomon, his wife and the narrator to describe the ship, David's sword, together with its handle and sheath, and the bed. The ship is 'la plus merveilleuse nef qui onques fust veue' (222) [the most marvellous ship that was ever seen], the sword – 'la plus trenchant et la plus merveilleuse qui onques fust bailliee de main de chevalier' [the sharpest and most marvellous that was ever yielded by a knight], and the bed – 'grant et merveilleux' (223) [huge and marvellous].<sup>40</sup> Solomon's evaluation of his wife's work indicates why these things are marvellous: '[t]u as, fist il, merveilles fetes. Car se tuit cil monde estoient ci, si ne savroient il deviser la senefiance de ceste nef se Nostre Sires ne lor enseignoit, ne tu meesmes, qui l'as fete, ne ses que ele senefie' (224-25) [(y)ou have accomplished something wondrous. If all the world were

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<sup>40</sup> Translations are my own; Burns uses other epithets ('finest', 'most amazing' and 'magnificent' respectively, *Quest*, p. 137) to translate the word 'merveilleux' used by the French author. In her review of the translation, Radulescu comments on Burns's way of rendering the French 'merveille', noting that 'Burns uses "marvel" sparingly, and only where it suits the atmosphere best' (Radulescu, 'Review of Burns, E. Jane. *The Quest for the Holy Grail. The Old French Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 6', *The Medieval Review* (2011) < <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/13321> > [accessed 2 December 2013]).

here, they would not know how to interpret the meaning of this ship unless Our Lord instructed them; even you who had it built don't know what it means (138)]. For Solomon, the ultimate source of wonder is the incomprehensibility of the ship's significance rather than physical characteristics of the objects on it. Nancy Regalado comments that, in the episode, 'the insufficiency of signs renders them unintelligible, not to their readers, but to their makers. [...] Full understanding of such special, prophetic signs calls for "some other help" from the Lord: interpretation requires revelation'.<sup>41</sup> From Solomon's viewpoint, the ultimate source of wonder is the inevitable failure of interpretation by anyone, including his wife, who planned the building of the ship, with the exception of the knight for whom the heirloom is destined.

Earlier in the episode, there are two points at which Solomon's wife teaches the king: she explains that contact between Solomon and his remote descendant Galahad can be established through a ship and that the best present to the knight would be David's sword. However, Solomon declares that neither his wife nor anyone in the world would be able to understand the symbolism of the ship. The spindles' colour and the ship's interpretation are manifestations of divine grace, inspiring wonder and, possibly, even religious adoration in the observers. The *Queste* author inserts lengthy stories about the Tree planted by Eve and about Solomon's ship between the moment when the knights find the bed and the moment they hear the stories. It seems that the ship must be marvellous in order to draw the attention of the onlooker and to make sure that the memory of Solomon's line does not disappear. The ship of Solomon as an object resembles visual genealogies produced by fifteenth-century English gentry that could be seen in a parish church and that were, as a rule, lavishly decorated.

In addition to the visual genealogy of the ship itself and its contents, the ship holds a written genealogy – Solomon's letter to his heir. As Denton maintains, late medieval gentry rarely wrote

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<sup>41</sup> Nancy Regalado, 'The Medieval Construction of the Modern Reader: Solomon's Ship and the Birth of Jean de Meun', *Yale French Studies*, 95 (1999), 81-10 (p. 89).

down their genealogies, and knowledge of family history came primarily from oral sources.<sup>42</sup> This peculiarity of genealogical transmission may account for one difference between the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. In the *Queste*, the audience hears the story of the three spindles before the knights find Solomon's letter. By contrast, in the 'Sankgreal', as soon as the companions discover the spindles, Perceval's sister tells their story. In fact, the questers hear the same story twice, because they also have to listen to Perceval reading the letter they find near the bed. Malory introduces the finding of the letter in a way analogous to his French source: '[n]ow seyth the tale that a grete whylye [the] three felowis behylde the bed and the three spyndyls' (994). Unlike in the *Queste*, the companions in the 'Sankgreal' are listening to Perceval's sister, so that when they are 'at a sertayne that they [spyndyls] were of naturall coloures withoute ony payntyng' (994), their conclusion is based on what they have heard as well as on the evidence before their eyes. What they see serves to prove what they hear, and the story told by Perceval's sister is repeated and confirmed for the companions when Perceval reads Solomon's letter.

The repetition of Adam's and Solomon's stories in the 'Sankgreal' results in the ship story becoming associated with women even more intimately than in the *Queste*, because, unlike in the *Queste*, Perceval's sister in the 'Sankgreal' has access to privileged knowledge not available to the companions. At the same time, her account seems to require verification from the authority of the 'wrytte' (994) read aloud by her brother. The repetition eliminates all doubts about the accuracy of the story as narrated by Perceval's sister in a society where a woman's word, especially on the subject of Christian history, cannot be taken for granted unless mediated or confirmed by a written, male-authored source. Dyan Elliott identifies the pattern, originating in the twelfth century and continuing throughout the Middle Ages, when a woman's spiritual or mystical knowledge is put down by 'a more learned cleric' as 'compulsory hetero-textuality'.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, in the *Queste* and

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<sup>42</sup> Denton, 'Genealogy', pp. 144-45.

<sup>43</sup> Dyan Elliott, 'Dominiae or Dominatae? Female Mysticism and the Trauma of Textuality', in *Women, Marriage, and Family*, ed. by Sheehan, Rousseau and Rosenthal, pp. 47-77 (p. 53).



the ‘Sankgreal’, King Solomon, in difference from his wife, has access to divinely authored and authorized knowledge. Solomon alone can hear the divine voice, and the author does not announce the source of Solomon’s wife’s ideas.

It is possible that in the *Queste* Solomon’s wife is guided by her practical wisdom, which the French author describes as ‘grant engin’ (220) [great resourcefulness] and ‘grant subtilité’ (222) [great cunning]:<sup>44</sup> when she advises Solomon, she builds on the information provided by her husband. Because Malory omits parts of the description and dialogue in his translation, sometimes what Solomon’s wife tells in the ‘Sankgreal’ comes as a revelation. Accordingly, it is not clear how Solomon’s wife knows that the last knight of Solomon’s lineage ‘oughte to passe all knyghtes of chevalry whych hathe bene tofore hym and shall com afftir hym’ (992), when the divine voice said that the knight ‘shall be as good a knyght as deuke Josue, [Solomon’s] brother-in-law’ (991-92). In the *Queste*, the corresponding statement made by Solomon’s wife is substantiated by what the voice has said that Galahad is to surpass all other knights as the Virgin Mary surpasses Solomon’s wife.

At other points, it seems that, both in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, Solomon’s wife has been granted revelations of her own. Thus, the audience is not told how Solomon’s wife knows about the coming of a maiden who will bring a suitable girdle for David’s sword. In the *Queste*, Solomon’s wife assures the king that they should not put a good girdle for the sword: ‘il n’afiert mie a nos que nos les i metons; ainz les i metra une pucele, mes je ne sai quant ce sera, ne a quele hore’ (223) [(i)t’s not up to us to attach the proper belt to this sword. A virgin will do that, though I don’t know when (138)]. As a result, Regalado’s suggestion that the ‘deficient understanding [of Solomon’s wife] is represented by the hemp belt she attaches to the shining sword of David’ requires qualification.<sup>45</sup> In the *Queste*, both King Solomon and his wife are unable to provide suitable hangings for the sword, indicating their incomplete understanding of the ship’s

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<sup>44</sup> Translation mine; Burns translates these phrases as ‘scheming’ and ‘great shrewdness’ respectively (*Quest*, pp. 135 and 136).

<sup>45</sup> Regalado, ‘Medieval Construction’, p. 89.

signification.

On the other hand, Regalado's comment is appropriate for the explanation as it appears in Malory's translation. In the 'Sankgreal', Solomon's wife prophesies the coming of Perceval's sister and questing knights, but does not say what will happen to the girdle: '[s]ir, wyte you welle that I have none so hyghe a thyng which were worthy to susteyne soo hyghe a swerde. And a mayde shall bryng other knyghtes thereto, but I wote not whan hit shall be ne what tyme' (993).

Remarkably, Malory translates precisely the end of the woman's utterance, where she confesses that there are limitations to her knowledge: 'I wote not whan hit shall be ne what tyme' is a literal translation of 'mes je ne sai quant ce sera, ne a quele hore'.

Solomon's wife displays her knowledge of the future and the limits of this knowledge at yet another instance; when Solomon says that no one can know the meaning of the ship, his wife assures him that he will soon hear news about the ship. Her words in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' could stem from knowledge or supposition: 'vos en orroiz par tens autres noveles que vos ne cuidiez' (225) [(i)n time you will discover more about it, things that you cannot now imagine (138)], which Malory translates 'ye shall hyre peradventure tydynges sonner than ye wene' (993). However, Solomon's wife is right, because the king receives his last vision the same night.

As it has been already indicated, Duby and Denton maintain that, for the late twelfth-century French nobility and for the late fifteenth-century English gentry respectively, ensuring a family's future well-being and transmitting the lineage's past achievements through a written genealogy was an ostensibly male prerogative; according to Denton, '[f]amily history was taught by fathers, ancestors, and "old knights and esquires".<sup>46</sup> In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', male characters appear to hold the monopoly on such knowledge; Jennifer Looper argues that

[t]he genealogies in the *Estoire* and the *Queste*, designed to showcase the

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<sup>46</sup> Denton, 'Genealogy', pp. 144-45.

extraordinary nature of their final product, are [...] built on the marginalization of their female members by insisting on a 'realistic' patrilineal family tree that pushes to an extreme the contemporary omission of women from prestigious genealogies.<sup>47</sup>

However, it is likely that, in practice, the female and male family members worked together to ensure that the family's well-being and honour would be sustained through arranged marriages as well as production and education of heirs and that the illustrious past of their family would be remembered in written genealogies. The role which Solomon's wife plays in designing the ship illustrates this co-operation, and, in the *Queste*, the author indicates that Solomon trusts in his wife's resourcefulness. When she asks Solomon about the cause of his concern, Solomon thinks at once that she would be able to help him:

[q]uant Salemons oï ceste parole, si pensa bien que, se cuers mortieux pooit metre conseil en ceste chose, que ele l'i metroit, car il l'avoit trovee de si grant engin qu'il ne cuidast mie qu'il eust ame de si grant engin ou siecle qui le poïst penser.  
(222)

[Solomon considered the offer, thinking that if any human mind could help him solve this matter, it would certainly be his wife. He had found her to be more shrewd than anyone he could think of. (136-37)]

Although in the *Queste* Solomon praises his wife's cleverness, she is criticized by both the *Queste* author and Malory, probably because of her assertive behaviour. Thus, underlying the story of the

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<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Looper, 'Gender, Genealogy, and the "Story of the Three Spindles" in the *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Arthuriana*, 8:1 (1998), 49-66 (p. 52).

ship building, another discourse, on authority and gender roles in family, is visible. It seems that the main difference between bad women, such as Eve and Solomon's wife, and good women, such as Mary and Perceval's sister, is their position in relation to men.

Much has been said about virtue of maidenhood displayed by Perceval's sister, but it seems that the related, and possibly even more important virtue she demonstrates is her respect towards Galahad.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, the principal 'sin' of Solomon's wife is her claim to power, which she exercises not only over Solomon's subjects but also over him. Malory sometimes calls her 'lady' and 'madam' when addressed by the carpenter (992, 993), but just as often she appears as 'wyff' (four times on pp. 991-94). The French author uses the word 'dame' in the cases corresponding to Malory's 'lady' and 'madam', but he also uses the word 'femme' ('wyff' in the 'Sankgreal'). As in the 'Sankgreal', the *Queste* wife is identified as 'dame' when she orders the bed to be brought<sup>49</sup> and when she commands carpenters to make the spindles.<sup>50</sup> She is described as Solomon's wife ('fame') when she explains that a peerless knight would enter the ship and that Solomon should prepare fitting arms for the knight. Remarkably, the word 'lady' is used by for the first time when she is about to to instruct Solomon what to do with King David's sword (992). It is also the only piece of advice that Solomon does not follow, possibly because, as a man, he is supposed to know better how to prepare his sword for it to become a suitable gift for his heir.

In both the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', Solomon's wife's social status is indicated when she discharges administrative functions; her behaviour is not unusual, because, as a woman, she is expected to be in charge of the household. However, when she is mentioned in connection with Solomon, her marital status is specified, for example, when she advises Solomon to leave David's

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<sup>48</sup> Symbolically, Perceval's sister expresses her respect towards Galahad when she offers him the girdles made of her hair.

<sup>49</sup> 'Quant la nef fu fete et mise en mer, la dame i fist metre un lit grant et merueilleux' (223) [Once the ship has been built and launched, Solomon's wife had a huge and magnificent bed put in it (137)].

<sup>50</sup> 'la dame resgarda le lit et dist que encore il failloit il' (224) [the woman felt that the bed lacked something (138)]. Note that, in the translation, the word 'dame' is rendered 'Solomon's wife' in one case (see footnote 49 above) and 'the woman' in this case.

sword for his heir. In this case, she is not supervising the household routine: instead, she is involved in activities that provide for the future of her husband's lineage. Preparing the ship, Solomon's wife ensures that objects symbolizing the masculine and feminine spheres are balanced on the ship: there is David's sword refurbished by Solomon, but there is also a bed prepared by her. Moreover, there are spindles, which supply a link between the first couple, Adam and Eve, and the perfect, chaste couple, Galahad and Perceval's sister.

Throughout the *Queste* narrative about the building of the ship, the French author takes care to specify the characters' motivation: as has already been mentioned, Solomon is moved by the desire to communicate with his heir. However, his wife's motivation is different: while in the *Estoire* she seems to be motivated mainly by fear, in the *Queste*, she is also concerned with her husband's emotional well-being, and the *Queste* author refers specifically to the mutual love and respect between Solomon and his wife. Although she often angers Solomon by her 'grant engin' (220), her motivation in trying to find what makes Solomon uneasy is not entirely reprehensible: 'ele l'amoit asez, non pas tant que maintes fames n'amassent plus lor seignors, si estoit molt viseuse' (221) [(s)he loved him dearly (though many wives love their husbands more) and she was very shrewd (136)]. Accordingly, the French author mitigates the impression left by Solomon's previous bitter observation that he could not find a good woman in all the world and at the same time praises those women who love their husbands better than Solomon's wife does. The quality mentioned last, 'si estoit molt viseuse', is confusing; it may have suggested to Malory the idea that she was an 'evyll wyff'. However, according to the *DMF*, the word 'viseuse' ('voiseux') can mean 'habile', 'avisé', 'sage' [wise] as well as 'rusé' [cunning].

The French author demonstrates the development of relations between Solomon and his wife from Solomon's unease about his wife's cleverness, through her concern about her husband's affairs to Solomon's recognition of the woman's achievement. At the beginning of the story, Solomon's wife bides her time to question the king about his concerns. At the end of the story, Solomon comes

to his wife and recounts to her the last vision he had. Moreover, he publicly commends his wife's intelligence: 'si esveilla sa fame et cels qui o lui estoient, et lor conta l'aventure, et fist a savoir as privez et as estranges coment sa fame avoit mené a chief ce ou il ne savoit metre conseil' (225-26) [he woke his wife and the members of his company and told them of the adventure, explaining to friends and strangers alike how his wife had solved a problem that had baffled him (139)].

Theological writings, marriage sermons and pastoral manuals treating marriage as a means of individual salvation were current in France in the thirteenth century, and it is in this context that the *Queste* author offers to his projected audience a dynamic picture of marriage, which may be at first problem-ridden but which is eventually harmonious. Initially, Solomon distrusts his wife, and she has recourse to ploys to find what her husband is concerned about. Solomon's irritation is caused by his inability to understand how his wife, whose practical intelligence does not resemble his wisdom and bookish learning, can dominate him. When Solomon realizes that his wife does not assert her knowledge, he comes to recognize her merits. As the ship departs, Solomon, whose monopoly over spiritual knowledge has been confirmed by his last vision, comes to his wife and tells her about the ship, praising her resourcefulness.

As in many other episodes in the 'Sankgreal', Malory seems to have little to say about the feelings of his characters. Apart from the above-mentioned description of Solomon's wife as 'evyll', there is no indication of the woman's personality, and nothing to substantiate Malory's evaluation. Malory omits the *Queste* statements about her cunning and her love for Solomon. Similarly, little is said about Solomon's emotions apart from the fact that he is 'ryght angry' (992) when he sees the hemp girdles his wife brought for the magnificent sword. Moreover, at the end of the episode, Solomon makes no public recognition of his wife's achievement. After seeing the ship depart and hearing the prophecy that Galahad would one day sleep in the bed prepared by his wife, Solomon went and 'awaked hys wyff, and tolde her the adventures of thys shipp' (994). The scene between them is private, and Solomon appears as the sole person to know the adventures in which his wife

has no part. Solomon's return to his conjugal bed resembles the return of the knight errant, except that his wife's role in inspiring his actions is not acknowledged.

However, a possible clue to the 'Sankgreal' episode may be found in Malory's use of the word 'lady' to refer to Solomon's wife. The role of the English lady in the later Middle Ages, while not always well documented, appears to have been significant. Rowena Archer argues that the invisibility of ladies in the position of household administrators is due to their activities being taken for granted: '[i]f husbands have left little record of their gratitude to their partners in the administrative enterprise it is perhaps because co-operation was too commonplace to elicit particular comment'.<sup>51</sup> It is possible that Solomon's lack of recognition of his wife's achievement was customary in the fifteenth-century gentry milieu, where husbands would not praise the wives who, like the above-mentioned Paston women, performed their duty in household administration. Unlike Malory, the *Queste* author draws a comparatively sophisticated picture of Solomon's household, and the duties of mutual love and respect are prominent in his discussion. Emphasis on family relations in the *Queste* may result from the fact that it was written when the institution of marriage was being reevaluated in the religious discourse as a means to salvation. Meanwhile, in Malory's circles, where the idea of marriage and family life were no longer as problematic an issue, the behaviour of Solomon and his wife did not require any commentary.

Apart from the duties of mutual affection and respect, there were the questions of instruction and obedience, which are accountable for the different ways in which the relations between Solomon and his wife are treated by Malory and the French author. Malory's decision to denounce Solomon's wife as 'evyll' may have been viewed by his audience as substantiated in the first part of

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<sup>51</sup> Rowena Archer, "'How ladies... who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates': Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages", in *Woman Is a Worthy Wight*, ed. by Goldberg, pp. 149-81 (p. 150). Likewise, Jennifer Ward maintains that '[i]t is important [...] to stress the number of households in the later Middle Ages under the control of women on a temporary or permanent basis, during absences of husbands, or during widowhood. These women had an important part to play in the context of noble and gentry society; through their use of hospitality, the exchange of gifts, and the development of social contacts, they exercised influence on behalf of their families, households and the communities around them' ('English Noblewomen and the Local Community in the Later Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. by Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 186-203 (p. 189)).

the episode, where she purports to ‘lerne’ her husband what to do with David’s sword. In the ‘Sankgreal’, Solomon’s wife thus acts with authority and teaches her husband in the area which is out of her competence. The situation is different in the *Queste*, where Solomon confesses to his wife that he is distressed and in need of advice. In the ‘Sankgreal’ Solomon does not ask for his wife’s advice. Instead, she issues orders as soon as she hears of his distress:

“I shall lette make a shippe of the beste wood and moste durable that ony man may fynde.”

‘So Salamon sente for carpenters, of all the londe the beste.’ (992)

As soon as the ship is finished, she commands her husband as she later commands the carpenter: ‘ye shall go into oure Lordis temple where ys king Davith his swerde [...] Therefore take ye that, and take off the pomelle, and thereto make ye a pomell of precious stonys’ (992). While in the ‘Sankgreal’ the wife’s actions remain unexplained, in the *Queste* her actions are motivated by her love for Solomon and his need for advice.

Bearing in mind the fact that certain kinds of knowledge, including spiritual knowledge, appear as Solomon’s privilege in the episode, it may appear surprising that Solomon needs his wife’s advice at all. However, in the *Queste*, both Solomon and his wife pay mutual respect to their different types of intelligence. Asking her husband what he is concerned about, the woman declares: ‘il n’a ou monde chose de quoi je ne cuidasse venir a chief, au grant sens qui en vos est et a la grant subtilité qui est en moi’ (222) [there’s nothing in the world that I cannot solve with your great wisdom and my great shrewdness (136)]. Solomon acknowledges his wife’s ingenuity, much as it baffles his understanding, and he tells her of his trouble (222). As soon as his wife learns that Solomon is preoccupied with the problem of passing a message to his distant heir, she comes up with a solution and instructs him to build a ship. Likewise, when Solomon cannot think of arms that



will be good enough for the peerless knight who is to enter the ship, she suggests King David's sword. Explaining how to fashion the pommel out of precious stones, Solomon's wife again expresses her respect for Solomon's learning:

vos, qui connoissiez les vertues des pierres et la force des herbes et la maniere de toutes autres choses terrienes, si i fetes un pont de pierres precieuses si soutilment jointes qu'il n'ait après vos regart terrien qui poïst conoistre l'une de l'autre.

(223)

[you, who know the properties of precious stones and herbs and the way of all terrestrial things, should make a handle of precious stones so finely joined together that no one who looks at it in the future will be able to discern one from another. (137)]

Janina Traxler remarks that instructions about the pommel are the only advice Solomon does not follow: he fashions the pommel of a single stone instead of joining multiple stones together.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the pommel is the only part in the design of the ship and its furnishings for which Solomon's wife states that the king possesses the relevant knowledge. Accordingly, in the *Queste*, the husband and wife co-operate to pass on to their remote descendant a matchless sword, his rightful heirloom. In the 'Sankgreal', the actions of Solomon and his wife lead to the same end, but, because Malory omits much of the explanation present in his French source, the quality of their relations is far more difficult to assess.

I have already noted that scholars often view relations between spouses in the Middle Ages as being in some ways unequal or as spouses at least having different areas of responsibility within

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<sup>52</sup> Janina Traxler, 'Dying to Get to Sarras: Perceval's Sister and the Grail Quest', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Mahoney, pp. 261-78 (p. 267).

the marriage.<sup>53</sup> In the *Queste* and in the ‘Sankgreal’, revelations about the coming of Galahad are given only to Solomon. A voice from heaven speaks about the last knight of Solomon’s lineage, which invites the question whether Solomon’s wife is in any way related to that heir. Even the heirloom that Galahad receives, David’s sword, comes from Solomon’s line. Nonetheless, without Solomon’s wife this heirloom would have never reached Galahad. Baumgartner comments on the paradox: ‘[t]ransmettre l’héritage, ce privilège ordinairement réservé à l’homme, ne peut en effet être assuré lorsqu’il s’agit de la vie elle-même, que par la femme’ [(t)ransmitting the heritage, a privilege usually reserved to a man, cannot be accomplished, when it comes to life itself, but by a woman].<sup>54</sup> Bearing in mind that women are often absent from genealogies compiled for the nobility and the gentry, unless they serve as links to other illustrious families, it is not surprising that the relation between Solomon’s wife and Galahad is not voiced in the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’.

In the course of the Grail quest, however, the notion of dynastic concern is modified. It has been mentioned above (Chapter 3, pp. 89-91 and pp. 96-97) that Perceval’s aunt in the *Queste* is so concerned about the spiritual glory and advancement of her lineage as to declare that she loves Perceval more than anyone else, possibly even more than her own son. Moreover, Perceval’s aunt advises her nephew in the *Queste*, though not in the ‘Sankgreal’, to remain a virgin. Her advice requires the extinction of the dynasty for the salvation and spiritual glory of their family as well as Perceval’s own spiritual well-being. Similarly, in both the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’, Solomon rejoices that the last of his lineage will be a peerless virgin knight without worrying that the lineage would come to an end with this knight. This is paradoxical, because the transmission of inheritance to one’s heirs was probably equally important for the thirteenth-century French nobility and the fifteenth-century gentry. This inheritance could consist of physical property, but the continuity of bloodline was equally essential, since an illustrious genealogy constituted the family’s intangible capital, a source of pride and, on occasion, material profit used, for instance, to substantiate a

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<sup>53</sup> Duby, for instance, argues that discourse on marriage stressed the spouses’ inequality, see p. 120 above.

<sup>54</sup> Baumgartner, *Arbre*, p. 140.

family's claim to gentle status or to landed property. The preoccupation of the English gentry with genealogical material resulted in the attempts 'to construct a family history going as far back as possible'.<sup>55</sup> In this respect, Galahad's genealogy is beyond comparison, because it traces the hero's descent to Adam through David and Solomon. Thus, Malory's audience would have probably realized the importance of transmitting a heirloom that would link Galahad with his prestigious ancestors without going into the explanation that the *Queste* author provides.

The story of Solomon and his wife is placed in such a way as to suggest links with universal and individual history simultaneously. The two stories of Adam and Eve and of Solomon and his wife have biblical and apocryphal connotations, linking the episode to the early history before the arrival of Christ, much like royal genealogies, which went back to Trojan heroes and beyond, to the creation of the world. Meanwhile, the story of Solomon and his wife is constructed so that the intended audiences of the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' could recognize the events and the characters' motivations as familiar. Accordingly, the different treatment of the Solomon ship narrative by the French author and Malory reflect, to an extent, changes in the discourse on marriage and family between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries.

In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', Solomon's ship episode comes after the episodes discussed in the previous chapters, and it suggests a resolution to anxieties over death and relations between the individual and the community. Family history as revealed in the episode of Solomon's ship is at once personal and universal. The revelation of Galahad's ancestry confirms his, and other Christian knights' integration into Christian history. Galahad himself is exceptional, and his genealogy underscores his Christ-like nature, because, like Christ, Galahad is descended from Solomon. Nonetheless, there is another connection in Galahad's genealogy, which makes the exceptional knight Galahad a model for all Christian knights: this is his descent from Adam and Eve. Needless to say, Galahad is a peerless knight, but his birth is not unblemished, because,

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<sup>55</sup> Radulescu, 'Literature', in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 100-18 (p. 113).

formally speaking, he is Lancelot's illegitimate son. In much the same way, Galahad's ancestors, even the biblical ones, are not as virtuous as Galahad. In fact, by describing Solomon's problem-ridden marriage, the *Queste* author and Malory make both the biblical king and the story of his lineage more approachable for their audiences. Ultimately, the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' authors reassure their audiences that death, be it the reader's own death or the extinction of his or her lineage, is also the accomplishment of a divine adventure and a step towards the heavenly kingdom of Jerusalem.

Discussing genealogy in insular romance, Radulescu points out that 'romances fulfil the expectations they would tackle the issue of social identity, even though they are not designed to respond to real-life crises but rather provide arenas of discussion where delicate issues may be assessed and debated'.<sup>56</sup> The Grail quest romances, which explain the knights' adventures as spiritual rather than physical combats, relate genealogy not only to social but also to spiritual identity: thus, Galahad is heir both to Solomon's sword and to Solomon's spiritual blunders and sins, and, moreover, Galahad 'inherits' the original sin of Adam and Eve. Through his achievement of the Grail quest, Galahad 'redeems' his ancestors, as Christ's suffering and resurrection redeemed the mankind. The prominence of women, Eve, Solomon's wife and Perceval's sister, in the ship of Solomon episode demonstrates the prominent role of women not only in preserving family history but also in the Grail quest as a whole. Thus, the ship of Solomon episode provides a point of intersection for the issues of chivalry, death and memory, and women's participation in the quest considered in Chapters 1-3.

In the preceding four chapters, I have discussed the representation and meaning of the Grail quest in two medieval romances, the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal* written at the beginning of the thirteenth century in France and the 'Tale of the Sankgreal' written by Malory in late fifteenth-

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<sup>56</sup> Radulescu, 'Genealogy in Insular Romance', in *Broken Lines*, ed. by Radulescu and Kennedy, pp. 7-25 (p. 12)

century England. The analysis of the themes of death, gender relations (in this case, women's ability to instruct men in questions of chivalry and men's willingness to accept women's advice) and the relation between individual, family and universal history as reflected in the experiences of minor characters have shown the importance of these themes for the questers' progress. It has also been suggested that, although Malory follows his French source with considerable fidelity, his version includes a number of omissions and alterations that change the focus and meaning of the episodes. For instance, the issue of love in marriage and of spouses' equality, which was debated in the thirteenth-century France, no longer presented a problem to Malory and his audience, with the result that Malory omits references to the feelings of Solomon and his wife in the episode considered above.

Given the chronological and cultural gap between medieval Grail quest romances and modern literature, it is only to be expected that the Grail quest in modern novels, examined in the following chapters will have a very different form and meaning. Therefore, it is worth re-iterating the rationale for proceeding directly from medieval to modern Grail quest literature rather than considering the Grail quest, if not in early modern literature, where it does not have a prominent part, then at least in Victorian literature. As I have already explained in the Introduction (pp. 14-16), the Grail quest in Victorian literature has a very different meaning from the medieval and modern Grail quest: for Victorian authors, this quest is directed towards the achievement of a local and moral aim rather than towards the spiritual redemption of a particular group of people. However, in both medieval romances and the novels considered in Chapters 5-7, the quest is aimed at the redemption of a particular group, if not of all mankind. In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the questers' achievement constitutes a kind of redemption of chivalry, despite the fact that the earthly Round Table fellowship is destroyed in the succeeding narratives (the French *Mort* and the last book of Malory's *Morte*). Likewise, in Walker Percy's *Lancelot*, the main characters, Lancelot and Percival, strive for the moral and spiritual redemption of contemporary America. In David Lodge's

*Small World* (1984), Persse MacGarrigle ‘saves’ the discipline of literary criticism from the aridity and stagnation that would overtake it if a single literary theory triumphed, and, as I will argue further in Chapter 6, Lodge’s academic novel presents, in microcosm, the more general concerns of modern society. Michel Zink’s protagonist, Déodat, in the eponymous novel *Déodat, ou la transparence* (2002) not only realises that spiritual transparency and charity can bring the individual closer to God, but also tries to share his revelation with the people he meets, Yvain the Knight of the Lion and the girl at the well. Thus, in a sense, the modern questers, like Galahad, strive, and occasionally succeed, in ‘redeeming’ the modern post-religious world from the loss of meaning associated with the denial of belief in spiritual reality.

## Chapter 5

### Walker Percy's *Lancelot*: Seeking the Unholy Grail in 1970s America

*Lancelot* (1977), the fourth of the American Southern writer Walker Percy's published novels, deals with the social and psychological problems of America in the 1970s. On the surface at least, the novel does not resemble the medieval romance to which its title alludes. Although the protagonist, Lancelot, draws numerous parallels between his past experience and the Grail quest, his attempts are retrospective and unsystematic. In the medieval Arthurian tradition, the Grail quest is the privilege of the most virtuous individuals, and its accomplishment is rewarded by a vision of divine mysteries. On the contrary, Percy's Lancelot aspires to a vision of pure evil taking place in this world. The function of this chapter is to consider if, apart from Lancelot's superficial comparisons, there are more fundamental affinities between the treatment of social and moral issues in *Lancelot* and the medieval Grail quest romances, particularly the *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal'.

Walker Percy's fiction, *Lancelot* included, has been the subject of numerous studies, some of which consider the presence of Arthurian tradition in the novel.<sup>1</sup> However, most critics concentrate on Percy's treatment of current social and psychological issues, such as the alienated position of the individual in contemporary society (Glenn Utter) or gender relations (Maria Hebert).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, few attempts have been made at uniting both approaches in order to compare the representation of key social and moral issues in *Lancelot* with that of the medieval romances,

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of these studies, see W. R. Allen, 'Putting Out the Lanterns on the Levee', in *Walker Percy: A Southern Wayfarer* (University Press of Mississippi, 1986), pp. 102-33 (p. 108).

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Utter, 'The Individual in Technological Society: Walker Percy's *Lancelot*', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 16 (1982), 116-27; Maria Hebert, 'Between Men: Homosocial Desire in Walker Percy's *Lancelot*', *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures*, 56 (2002), 125-45.

which is the aim of this chapter. In order to accomplish this goal, the same topics are addressed as in the chapters on medieval literature, namely, the place of the Arthurian tradition in the society where the text was written, the attitude towards death, the role of women in the quest and the relation between individual, family and universal histories.

In discussing the socio-psychological problems encountered by the novel's central character, the protagonist-narrator Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, and the friend he addresses, Percival (Father John), it is useful to make recourse to the writings of German psychologist Erich Fromm. Given Percy's Christian background, some of Fromm's statements should be taken with caution when reading Percy's novels because of Fromm's secularist viewpoint.<sup>3</sup> Percy was not only aware of Fromm's research, but reviewed Fromm's *The Sane Society* in 1957, noting that, although Fromm's position is valid and in many ways revealing, his socio-economic solution is inadequate.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in *The Sane Society* (1955), Fromm makes a number of points that are very similar to Lancelot's observations. It seems preferable to use the socio-psychological writings of Fromm rather than the philosophical and existentialist works of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers or Marcel, whose influence on Percy's work has been indicated, for two reasons<sup>5</sup>. First, Fromm as Percy's contemporary reflects on the same social situation that is depicted in *Lancelot* and Percy's other novels. Second, it can be argued that writings with which Percy partially disagreed have influenced his own fictional and philosophical works as much as those theories which he more fully

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<sup>3</sup> Percy comes from a Protestant family, but he was not a practising Christian until his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Percy associates his decision to become Catholic with his reading of Søren Kierkegaard's works, particularly 'The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle': '[i]f I had to single out one piece of writing which was more responsible than anything else for my becoming a Catholic, it would be that essay of Kierkegaard's' (Bradley Dewey, 'Walker Percy', p. 110).

<sup>4</sup> Percy, 'The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry', in *Signposts in a Strange Land* (London: Bellew, 1991), pp. 251-62 (first publ. in *America*, 96 (5 January 1957), 391-93, and (12 January 1957), 415-18).

<sup>5</sup> Percy mentions reading the above existentialists, noting that Kierkegaard's influence on his novels was the most far-reaching (Dewey, pp. 101-28). Lewis Lawson discusses the writers who influenced Percy's fictional and non-fictional works, noting that, apart from the existentialist philosophers, Percy's work was influenced by Russian and modern French novelists, such as Dostoevsky and Camus ('Walker Percy's Indirect Communications', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 11 (1969), 867-900 (p. 867)). A parallel can be drawn between Dostoevsky's alienated characters, especially the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, and Lancelot, but this parallel would lack immediacy, because Dostoevsky's works refer to a social context which was essentially different, particularly in terms of morality, from the social context of *Lancelot*. The connection between Camus's *The Fall* and *Lancelot* has been analysed in detail by John Desmond, 'Revisioning *The Fall*: Walker Percy and *Lancelot*', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 47:4 (1994), 619-31.



endorsed.

## 5.1 Arthurian Tradition in American Culture and in *Lancelot*

Walker Percy's *Lancelot* is set in the Southern states of America of the 1970s, yet there are numerous medieval allusions, particularly to the Grail quest, the Round Table and King Arthur's knights. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the continuities and divergences between the medieval Arthurian tradition and Percy's reinterpretation of this tradition as well as the uses to which Percy puts the Grail quest and chivalry in the novel. The present section begins with remarks on the Arthurian tradition in American culture in general and continues with the analysis of the connection between Arthurian chivalry and the Southern aristocracy, which is at the centre of Percy's mythology. This discussion will help to put in perspective Percy's use of Arthurian tradition in order to comment on the issues considered further in the chapter: the culture of death, relations between sexes and attaining a sense of belonging by reference to family and world history.

The Arthurian tradition has had an enduring hold on the American imagination, both in literature and popular culture. The Lupacks remark that '[s]ome of the most important and influential American authors as well as many minor figures turned to the Arthurian legends for their sources and inspiration', listing instances of Arthurian literature dating from the nineteenth century, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'The Antique Ring' and James Russell Lowell's *The Vision of Sir Launfal*.<sup>6</sup> In popular culture, Arthurian romances have also been put to didactic, though sometimes questionable, employment, by William Forbush in his system of fraternities and sororities, institutions which pre-date the Boys' and Girls' Scout organisations.<sup>7</sup> More recently, apart from the

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<sup>6</sup> Lupack, *King Arthur*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Lupacks, Forbush wanted to cultivate the 'notion of moral knighthood' (*King Arthur*, p. 2). However, Forbush appears to have struggled over designing a programme for girls which would teach them appropriate moral values and be as exciting as the boys' routine, a point argued by Laurie Finke and Susan Aronstein in 'The Queens of

constant stream of Arthurian popular, adolescent and juvenile fiction, Arthurian motifs have made a more disturbing appearance in esoteric and sectarian milieu, such as the so-called ‘purity balls’. The balls, initiated by the Biblical Family Patriarchal Movement in 1989, are occasions where girls pledge virginity to their fathers, so that the father can later present the girl, her virginity intact, to the husband. As Amy Kaufman demonstrates, Arthurian imagery is widely used in the movement’s propaganda, with the girls’ virginity conceptualized as a kind of ‘Grail’.<sup>8</sup> Kaufman acknowledges that the popularity of purity balls, even among non-members of the movement, is connected to the notions of Southern chastity, chivalry and courtesy, although the balls are currently taking place in most American states as well as in Canada. The importance of female chastity and its dependence on male protection is an idea that would have appealed to Percy’s Lancelot. Moreover, the mixture of Arthurian and Christian imagery in the movement’s lexicon conforms to some of Lancelot’s ravings:

[t]here is only one way and we could have had it if you Catholics hadn’t blown it: the old Catholic way. I Lancelot and you Percival, the only two to see the Grail if you recall. Did you find the Grail? You don’t look like it. Then we knew what a woman should be like, your Lady, and what a man should be like, your Lord. I’d have fought for your Lady, because Christ had the broadsword. Now you’ve gotten rid of your Lady and taken the sword from Christ. (189)

We’ll take the Grail you didn’t find but we’ll keep the broadsword and the great warrior Archangel of Mont-Saint-Michel and our Christ will be the stern Christ of the Sistine. (190)

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Avalon: William Forbush’s Arthurian Antidote’, *Arthuriana*, 22:3 (2012), 21-40.

<sup>8</sup> Amy Kaufman, “‘His Princess’: An Arthurian Drama’, *Arthuriana*, 22:3 (2012), 41-56.

The best of women will be what we used to call ladies, like your Virgin. Our  
Lady. (192)

It appears from this declamation, and several like it, that, apart from his obsession with chivalric, military ideals, Lancelot's interest in Arthurian tradition is stimulated primarily by the Grail, and indeed by matters of gender. The narrative is built around Lancelot's quest for what he calls the 'Unholy Grail', and Percy's use of the Grail quest metaphor for his characters' spiritual wanderings is typical of American literature.<sup>9</sup>

In his letter of February 14, 1987 to Alan Lupack, Walker Percy wonders: '[d]id I dream or is there not in fact a legend which holds that only Lancelot and Percival saw the Grail?' As a result, the Lupacks contend that 'Percy's use of Lancelot and Percival as co-equal achievers of the Grail is quite intentional', indicating that 'the quest for the contemporary Grail requires a different type of quester'.<sup>10</sup> Percy's presentation of Lancelot as the Grail champion alongside Percival is crucial in conveying the novel's message. Percy suggests to the reader that there is no single way to attaining the Grail and that the Grail can be achieved even by failed, flawed individuals, as long as they persist in their efforts. At the end of the novel, Lancelot tells his friend, receiving an affirmative 'Yes' to both of his statements: '[i]t will be your way or it will be my way' and '[a]ll we can agree on is that it will not be their way. Out there' (278). The final words of the novel indicate that there is hope for Lancelot, despite his previous failure. This conclusion is consistent with Malory's *Morte Darthur*, where Sir Lancelot fails in the Grail quest ('Tale of the Sankgreal'), but at the *Morte's* end dies as a saint, having apparently received a redeeming vision.

In fact, *Lancelot* contains allusions to both medieval and post-medieval Arthurian literature. Very few authors or their works are named, but the choice of authors whom Percy's

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<sup>9</sup> Percival is also engaged in a quest, but because Percival remains silent throughout the novel, apart from the last pages, the reader cannot ascertain if Percival conceptualizes his spiritual search as the Grail quest.

<sup>10</sup> Lupack, *King Arthur*, p. 230

Lancelot does mention is suggestive. Interestingly, Lancelot is a faithful reader of Raymond Chandler's crime novels, especially *The Big Sleep* (1939), which, though not exactly Arthurian, uses some Arthurian motifs.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Lancelot remembers the first meeting with his friend Percival, whom he saw 'drinking and reading Verlaine' (12). Lancelot judges that Percival's behaviour is an 'act', a show designed to make an impression, but Paul Verlaine's name may have been intended by Percy to invoke what Ellis Hanson deems to be 'one of Verlaine's best poems', the sonnet 'Parsifal'. The sonnet was written for an issue of *La Revue Wagnérienne*, and Hanson describes the poem as 'a work of decadent Wagnerism'.<sup>12</sup> Verlaine's poem is introduced with an epigraph from Tennyson's 'Sir Percivale', describing its hero as one whom 'Arthur and his Knighthood call'd the Pure'. In the poem, Verlaine celebrates the young knight's successful resistance to the sexual temptations of women; thus, in line with the tendency of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Arthurian literature, Parsifal's achievement is of moral and largely local character, having little impact on the world. In fact, if Percy indeed had Verlaine's 'Parsifal' in mind as the poem Percival was reading, the allusion is highly ironic: as Lancelot recollects, he and Percival used to frequent prostitutes together and would even sleep with one prostitute between them (100). Later, when Perceval decides to become a priest and changes his name to Fr. John, his aim seems to be apostolic – reforming the entire world, rather than merely fighting his own passions. Thus, Percy appears to reject Verlaine's, and, implicitly, also Wagner's and Tennyson's versions of Perceval to create his own hero, Perceval/Father John, who is far from pure but who wants to save not only himself but also other people through his service as priest.<sup>13</sup>

If one considers Percy's non-fictional writings, it is evident that medieval chivalric culture is associated in Percy's imagination with the Old South. In describing 'the upper-class white

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<sup>11</sup> On the Arthurian elements in Raymond Chandler's novels, see, for instance, Andrew Mathis, *The King Arthur Myth in Modern American Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), pp. 43-59.

<sup>12</sup> Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 80-81.

<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the medieval Perceval as presented by Malory and the *Queste* author decides to become a hermit. In another medieval romance, the anonymous French *Perlesvaus*, the hero not only achieves the Grail but also embarks on a mission to convert the pagans.

Southerner', Percy remarks that 'he was raised on the Christian chivalry of Walter Scott, but it was a Christianity which was aestheticized by medieval trappings and a chivalry which was abstracted from its sacramental setting'.<sup>14</sup> In the novel, Christianity acquires, for Lancelot, the overtones of Southern chivalry, as he speaks about 'the stern Christ of the Sistine' (190). By contrast, Percival continuously reminds his friend that Christianity and chivalry are founded on *caritas*, selfless charity, a view which Lancelot immediately rejects: '[d]on't talk to me of love until we shovel out the shit' (192).<sup>15</sup> Whereas Percival views his mission as apostolic, and the very choice of his name, John, indicates it, for Lancelot, the intersection of chivalry and Christianity is the Crusade:

[w]hat we are is the last of the West. What we are is the best of you, Percival, and the best of me, Lancelot, and of Lee and Richard and Saladin and Leonidas and Charlemagne and Clovis and Martel. (190)

In fact, Lancelot's actual military record is far from heroic, 'discharged from the army not bloody and victorious and battered by Sir Turquine but with persistent diarrhea' (29). Likewise, Percival, although 'belligerent when drunk', is 'built like Pope Pius XII, six feet and about 120 pounds', and Lancelot recollects that 'many was the time I had to save your ass from being whipped' (14). Neither Lancelot nor Percival qualify as great chivalric heroes, yet to Lancelot it seems that their names are bound to bestow them with their namesakes' glory.

Lancelot makes an association between ancient and medieval warrior heroes and the Civil War hero General Robert E. Lee which is characteristic of the way Lee was regarded in the Old South; relatedly, Percy frequently mentions Richard Coeur de Lion and his crusading activities when describing Southern culture.<sup>16</sup> In the preface to his uncle William Percy's *Lanterns on the*

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<sup>14</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>15</sup> As explained in Chapter 7, charity is an essential quality for achieving the Grail quest in modern literature.

<sup>16</sup> On Richard and the Crusades, see also 'Stoicism in the South' and 'Why Are You Catholic?' in *Signposts*, pp. 85 and 148

*Levee*, Walker Percy compares Uncle Will to Richard and Saladin simultaneously.<sup>17</sup> As the Lupacks demonstrate, from the late nineteenth century onwards, the thrust of American Arthuriana was to democratize chivalry, emphasizing its moral aspects rather than nobility of birth or physical prowess, the high point of this democratization being Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889). Nevertheless, the Lupacks indicate that one of the most influential texts advocating moral chivalry is Sydney Lanier's adaptation of Malory, *The Boy's King Arthur*, and in one of his letters, Percy points to Lanier's book and its illustrations by N.C. Wyeth (1917 edition) as the principal source of inspiration for *Lancelot*.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Percy's Lancelot values both aristocratic descent and physical strength. He is preoccupied with his family's noble history, as will be further discussed below (5.4), and obsessed with trying to find out whether both he and his daughter Siobhan are bastards. W. R. Allen asserts that '[i]n his desperate attempts to identify with his antebellum ancestors, [Lance] exhibits an intensely southern obsession with blood relationships'.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, waking from his 'sleep', Lancelot first checks his physical condition by doing push-ups and with the Bowie knife test (69). As a result, Lancelot's Southern heritage, with its glorification of ancestral nobility and physical accomplishment, aligns Lancelot more with Malory and with Southern chivalry than with the Northern States' emphasis on moral, democratic knighthood.

For Percy, there seems to be a dichotomy between the Stoic culture of the Old South, which embraces the secular values of Arthurian chivalry, and the Catholic culture, which perpetuates the spiritual aspects of the Arthurian world.<sup>20</sup> The dichotomy is presented in *Lancelot* through the views of Lancelot and Percival: whereas Lancelot advocates chivalry as a stern, manly

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<sup>17</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Lupack, *King Arthur*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>19</sup> Allen, 'Putting Out the Lanterns', p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> Percy writes that '[t]he greatness of the South, like the greatness of the English squierarchy, had always a stronger Greek flavor than it ever had a Christian' (*Signposts*, p. 84). Percy's description of the Old South reflects Lancelot's vision of his new, purified society, which is examined in more detail later in the chapter: '[t]he South's virtues were the broadsword virtues of the clan, as were her vices, too – the hubris of *noblesse gone arrogant*' (*Signposts*, p. 84).

affair, Percival's view of chivalry builds on Christian charity. The two notions of Arthurian chivalry, secular and spiritual, which Percy employs in the novel, can be traced back to the Arthurian romances as they were rendered in the French *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Moreover, in the parts of the *Morte* and the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle which describe the Grail quest, secular chivalry is pitched, unsuccessfully, against spiritual chivalry, just as in Percy's *Lancelot*. A characteristic example of the opposition between secular and spiritual chivalry in the medieval romances is the symbolic battle between the black (secular, sinful) and the white (spiritual, virtuous) knights, where Lancelot takes the side of the black knights and is defeated.<sup>21</sup> In both Percy's novel and in the medieval romances *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal', Lancelot initially acts from the premises of secular chivalry, whereas Percival, save for an occasional failure, upholds the values of spiritual chivalry.

The most prominent difference between medieval Grail romances and Percy's *Lancelot* is the appearance of the Grail itself. In medieval romances, the Grail may be a cup, a dish or a stone, as in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, but it is invariably a physical object associated with the Last Supper and containing the blood of Christ. The medieval Grail is a sacred relic, which can be approached only by the virtuous. Percy's Grail differs from its medieval prototypes, being a concept or state of self rather than a material object. This Grail may also be 'unholy', as Lancelot declares that '[s]exual sin was the unholy grail [he] thought' (147). Moreover, as in the two other novels considered in the thesis, Lodge's *Small World* and Zink's *Déodat*, there is more than one Grail in *Lancelot*, although probably only one of the Grails is true. Apart from Lancelot's unholy Grail, there is Percival's Grail and the film-makers' Grail. Lancelot's unholy Grail constitutes an attempt to find God, or absolute good, by looking for His opposite, absolute evil. Lancelot fails in this quest, ending up with 'the feeling of numbness and coldness' or 'a lack of feeling' (274). The reason for Lancelot's failure is that he applies scientific methods and approaches to a spiritual search: the same

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<sup>21</sup> The episode, a turning point in medieval Lancelot's quest for the Grail, is mentioned in Chapter 3, p. 103 above.

mistake as Binx Bolling, protagonist of *The Moviegoer* (1961), makes trying to grasp the world through science in ‘horizontal search’ instead of conducting a ‘vertical search’ towards God.<sup>22</sup> Very little is known about Percival’s Grail, apart from the fact that Percival has been on a quest, but it is likely that Percival’s Grail is closer to the true Grail than Lancelot’s unholy Grail.

The third Grail is never mentioned directly in the novel, but the film shot at Belle Isle is structured like a version of the Grail quest. The film, presumably, reflects the ideals of its makers and of contemporary American society: alarmingly, redemption and freedom are achieved through sex with the ‘the new sunlit god’ (159) or ‘Christlike hippy’ (27), a stranger played by the shallowest actor among the film crew, Troy Dana. The film setting, a Southern plantation and its environs, is an incongruous amalgamation of stereotypes about the South (decadent planters, sharecroppers, a sheriff, a swamp girl). This incongruity suggests that the film’s message – ‘the erotic, in any form at all, is always life-enhancing’ (120) – is equally confused. Moreover, the film crew is bent on putting their credo into practice, so that Lancelot’s wife Margot and his elder daughter Lucy become involved in sexual intercourse with different members of the crew. Understandably, Lancelot rejects the ideology of sexual liberation and comes to regard violence as his way to freedom (166). However, though he does not realise it, Lancelot’s quest takes him very close to the ideology of the film crew: at the novel’s end, he asserts that sex, particularly rape, is the secret of life, a sort of unholy Grail.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Percy appears to introduce the film quest as a parody of contemporary esoteric philosophy, including contemporary theories about the Grail origins presented in Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* and its successors.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Percy’s Grail is a spiritual or existential entity, and Percival’s quest is to approaching the divine, rather than finding pseudo-scientific ‘proofs’ of God’s existence, pursued by Lancelot, or achieving personal

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<sup>22</sup> Percy, *The Moviegoer* (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Lancelot’s theory is examined below, 5.4, pp. 174-77.

<sup>24</sup> Percy expresses his contempt of current fashionable esoteric and Oriental movements, which he calls ‘savoring of experience for experiences’ sake’ (Dewey, ‘Walker Percy’, p. 118). In *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1972), the protagonist Thomas More speaks contemptuously of a certain fraudulent Oriental ‘guru’.



fulfilment through sex, advocated by the film crew.

Percy uses the Grail quest to hint at the need for spiritual development inherent in every individual, believers as well as unbelievers. Hence, like medieval Arthurian romances, particularly romances about the Grail quest, Percy's *Lancelot* has a didactic function. It has been explained in Chapter 1 (pp. 40-41) that, in medieval society, literary genres were fluid, and romances were meant not only to entertain but also to edify. Like the medieval authors of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and Thomas Malory, Percy intended his novels for the audience's spiritual edification. Indeed, critics have remarked on Percy's tendency to offer his readers a religious message through protagonists who themselves have little or no use for God. Kieran Quinlan describes Percy as 'the last Catholic novelist'.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Lewis Lawson claims that Percy's 'fiction tended toward (veiled) confession [...] while the non-fiction tempted him toward (veiled) evangelization'.<sup>26</sup> Percy asserts his intention to edify through writing in his correspondence with Caroline Gordon,<sup>27</sup> but he is far less outspoken in his works: he never 'tells' the readers what 'they must believe'. Dewey suggests that Percy adopts Kierkegaard's strategy of 'using an indirect method of persuasion on his readers'. According to Dewey, Kierkegaard's corpus contains 'a description of [the] three life-styles [the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious] which, presumably, could move the reader from stage to stage until he chooses the highest religious stage'. Dewey concludes that 'Percy's novels are inhabited by paradigms of each Kierkegaardian life-style as well as those en route from one stage to another'.<sup>28</sup> In *Lancelot*, both main characters seem to be progressing from one stage to another, although Percival's progress is perhaps more obvious than Lancelot's.

Lancelot's and Percival's progress constitutes their Grail quest, because it is only on the

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<sup>25</sup> Kieran Quinlan, *Walker Percy: The Last Catholic Novelist* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1996). Quinlan argues that 'not only was Walker Percy the most self-consciously Roman Catholic novelist in America during the past several decades, but that, more important, his version of Catholicism continued right up to the end to bear much though certainly not all of the ambiance of the era in which he was converted, the 1940s' (p. 218).

<sup>26</sup> Lawson, 'Neurobiology and Psychoanalysis in the Work of Walker Percy,' in *Still Following Percy*, ed. by Lawson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), pp. 3-13 (p. 7).

<sup>27</sup> In Tolson, *Pilgrim*, p. 300.

<sup>28</sup> Dewey, 'Walker Percy', p. 126.

highest, religious plane of existence that the hero can look into the Grail and see its mysteries rather than be 'scalded' by its 'flames'. The latter happens with Lancelot in the medieval romances, the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', as well as in Percy's novel. In the romances, Lancelot enters the room where a priest is celebrating the Grail mass. Although Lancelot is motivated not by curiosity, but by the desire to help the priest, he knows that he should not enter the room. The moment he comes in, he is attacked by fire and lies unconscious for weeks, administered to by King Pelleas's household. In *Lancelot*, the hero is thrown from his mansion Belle Isle by the explosion of methane after he has watched his unfaithful wife Margot and Jacoby make love, trying to discern in their love-making the unholy Grail of sexual sin. Unlike the medieval Sir Lancelot, the novel's hero remains in control of his body after the shock, but seems to have partially lost his memory and spends a year in a mental hospital. The difference between Lancelot in the romances and in the novel is that the contemporary Lancelot, after his recovery, does not return to his previous life, but plans to make a new beginning in Virginia. The reader, however, cannot be certain that Lancelot's new life will be radically different from his previous experience. Lancelot expresses the same doubt when, remembering his treatment by his wife, Margot, he questions the intentions of Anna, another patient, with whom he initially plans to start a new life: 'Christ, do you think this is another woman trying to fix me up in a pigeonier?' (273). However, the novel ends on an optimistic note, as Percival assures his friend that Lancelot, Anna and Siobhan will have a new life in Virginia and that 'something' is going to change, no matter whether the change will actually reflect Lancelot's or Percival's vision of a new life (278-79).

The point of convergence for Kierkegaardian philosophy, medieval romance and Percy's fiction is the notion of a spiritual journey or quest, rooted in Christianity. Remarkably, Percy contends that the novel is an inherently Christian genre: 't]here is a special kinship between the novel as an art form and Christianity as an ethos, Catholicism in particular'.<sup>29</sup> It seems that, to

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<sup>29</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, p. 365.

Percy, the purpose of a novel is to present a spiritual quest akin to the Grail quest undertaken by Arthurian knights. Accordingly, he explains that ‘Judeo-Christianity is about pilgrims who have something wrong with them and are embarked on a search to find a way out. This is also what novels are about’.<sup>30</sup> However idiosyncratic theoretically, Percy’s description of the novel is pertinent to the motif of the Grail quest in medieval romance and in contemporary literature: not only in Percy’s *Lancelot*, but also in Lodge’s *Small World* and Zink’s *Déodat*, the protagonist embarks on a pilgrimage or quest which should reveal a higher order of truth about themselves and the world in which they live.

## 5.2 Encountering Death: Curiosity, Denial, Acceptance

Much of Percy’s writing, both fictional and non-fictional, is informed by what scholars have described as ‘the culture of life’ and ‘the culture of death’.<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, Donald Crowley and S. M. Crowley define *Lancelot* as a novel about death.<sup>32</sup> Their statement finds support early in the novel, because Lancelot’s room in the hospital overlooks ‘a corner of Lafayette Cemetery’ (2) and, on Percival’s second visit, Lancelot describes the activities in progress at the cemetery on All Souls’ Day, as ‘a pretty scene’ (8). For a year, Lancelot has been observing the cemetery daily, and, when he is to leave the hospital, he turns to the cemetery again, remarking that ‘the cemeteries here [in New Orleans] are more cheerful than the hotels and the French Quarter’ (270). Percy sets *Lancelot* in a culture which has distinctive rituals about death, a complex of Catholic and Creole rituals, and the effect of these rituals resembles the effect of medieval rituals connected with death. Funerals and All Souls’ Days provide an occasion for the family to get together and engage with the

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<sup>30</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, p. 366.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Zapatka, ‘Sentiment, Science and Thanatos in the Work of Walker Percy’, *Life and Learning*, 10 (2000), 321-36 (p. 321). See also Marion Montgomery, ‘Walker Percy and the Christian Scandal’, *First Things* (April 1993), 38-44.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Crowley and S. M. Crowley, ‘Walker Percy’s Grail’, in *King Arthur Through the Ages*, ed. by Valerie Lagorio and M. L. Day (New York: Garland, 1990), ii, pp. 255-77 (p. 274).

memories of the past or with their family history. Cleaning the tombstones and adorning the place with flowers is such a mundane activity that it tempers the atmosphere of the sublime. Death is domesticated and, to an extent, divested of its mystery; the effect is different from the one produced when the awareness of death is repressed, as often happens in modern society.<sup>33</sup> Lancelot notes that in New Orleans young people are so unconcerned with death that ‘s]ome of them even sleep in the oven crypts, shove the bones aside and unroll their sleeping bags, a perfect fit’ (270). This irreverent behaviour signals that the process of familiarization may have gone too far and that the young generation may discard the values and morals of their parents as easily as their ancestors’ bones. Moreover, physical death, represented by the cemetery and the activities therein, is for Lancelot emblematic of the spiritual and imaginative ‘deadliness’ which he sees in the society around him. He asks, for instance, looking at the activities in the cemetery: ‘[t]ell me why that should be, why two thousand dead Creoles should be more alive than two thousand Buick dealers?’ (270). At this moment, Lancelot forgets that a year ago he himself was ‘dead’ and only the discovery of Margot’s infidelity put an end to his lethargy.

Meanwhile, despite being ‘alive’, neither Lancelot nor Percival have a way of coping with death at the beginning of the novel. Whereas the women whom Lancelot sees from his window have a set of rituals rendering death bearable, such as scrubbing the tombs and praying on All Souls’ Day, both Percival and Lancelot are incapable of this easy, habitual way of dealing with the phenomenon. Lancelot tells his friend how he has noticed earlier the same day a woman ask Percival what could have been ‘[o]nly one thing under the circumstances. To say a prayer for the dead’ (9). Percival’s refusal prompts Lancelot to conclude: ‘[s]o something went wrong with you too’ (9). Lancelot thinks that Percival is having a vocational crisis, being in love with a woman. Another possibility, which does not occur to Lancelot, is that Percival may be having the same problems coping with reality as Lancelot is experiencing. It is an indicator of Percival’s overcoming

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<sup>33</sup> On the attitude towards death in contemporary society, see Utter, ‘Individual’, p. 120.

his crisis that, at the novel's end, he kneels at a tomb to pray.

Lancelot meets references to death not with refusal, but with morbid curiosity. He conceptualizes death in much the same way as love, as a physical occurrence which can be explained by scientific methods.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, to Lancelot, death is merely a natural phenomenon, which can be grasped by scientific observation.<sup>35</sup> Gary Ciuba points out that Lancelot 'continuously applies the methods and reasoning of science to areas like sex and the sacred, which by his own admission are ineffable'.<sup>36</sup> Death is another ineffable phenomenon which Lancelot fails to grasp with his materialistic methodology. Imitating scientific practice, he observes death drily, keeping his distance even when the dying person is his wife (Lucy, Margot) or when he is killing another man (Jacoby).

Lancelot's confusion of the physical and the metaphysical, manifested in his curiosity about death, can be seen as being characteristic of contemporary society. Indeed, it has been remarked that twentieth-century society has no understanding and no way of dealing with the experience of death other than repressing it or relegating it to the purely physical realm, and Lewis Lawson demonstrates that Percy defies the latter 'neurobiological scenario'.<sup>37</sup> The general social attitude towards death is marked by an attempt to deny its sense of tragedy and to somehow forget the existence of death as such, which with the advance of medicine seems to be easier than ever. However, in his novels and essays, Percy continuously reminds the readers that there are incurable illnesses and that society should not hide the sufferings of the dying by means of euphemistic terms and institutions, such as euthanasia or termination of a life which is considered to be without

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<sup>34</sup> Lancelot confuses love with a purely physical, sexual act, as we will see later in the chapter, and he evinces the same lack of emotion about death.

<sup>35</sup> Percy himself studied medicine at the University of Columbia and worked as a pathologist as part of his practice; he contracted tuberculosis from a body, which put an end to his medical career. During the recovery, he became interested in existentialist philosophy, which ultimately influenced his conversion to Catholicism (Dewey, 'Walker Percy', pp. 101-02).

<sup>36</sup> Gary Ciuba, 'The Omega Factor: Apocalyptic Visions in Walker Percy's *Lancelot*', *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, 57:1 (1985), 98-112 (p. 107).

<sup>37</sup> Lawson, 'Neurobiology', 5.

value.<sup>38</sup>

Lancelot describes his former wife Lucy's death from leukaemia with a surprising lack of emotion: '[h]ow curious that she should grow pale, thin, weak, and die in a few months! Her blood turned to milk – the white cells replaced the red cells' (88).<sup>39</sup> Utter maintains that Lancelot's response to Lucy's death is that of a scientist confronted with an unfamiliar phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> In a sense, Lancelot's reaction is characteristic of contemporary technological and materialist society. According to John Desmond, Lancelot realizes the flaws of scientific reasoning, discerning that 'modern culture [...] has tried to reduce evil to an empirical datum', yet he makes the mistake of trying to investigate metaphysical realities, such as death, evil and love with scientific techniques.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Robert Brinkmeyer states that 'Lance wants to see evil much as a scientist wants to see a chemical reaction in a test tube, and his experience reduces persons to objects'.<sup>42</sup>

Lancelot's dry account of his wife's disease is characteristic of all other instances in which he mentions death. The account, however, is not realistic or even scientific: scientific description of the illness ('the white cells replaced the red cells') is juxtaposed with a metaphor ('[h]er blood turned to milk'). Again, speaking about his murder of Jacoby, Lancelot conceals the *moral* significance of the act behind such pseudo-rationalizations as 'steel molecules entering skin molecules, artery molecules, blood cells' (275). His only feeling on the occasion is 'a certain coldness' (274), which is appropriate to a scientist conducting an experiment, but hardly to a human being taking the life of another human being. Seeing moral corruption in the society around him and disgusted by the display of sexuality appropriate only to 'white trash', he feels justified in purging

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<sup>38</sup> Criticism of euthanasia is voiced in *Love in the Ruins* and, even more eloquently, in *The Thanatos Syndrome* (New York: Ivy Books, 1987).

<sup>39</sup> For a very different description of leukaemia, see Percy's *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 1966).

<sup>40</sup> Utter, 'Individual', p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> John Desmond, 'Love, Sex and Knowledge in Walker Percy's *Lancelot*: A Metaphysical View', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 39:2 (1986), 103-09 (p. 104).

<sup>42</sup> Robert Brinkmeyer, 'Walker Percy's *Lancelot*: Discovery through Dialogue', *Renascence*, 40:1 (1987), 30-42 (p. 37).

the society of ‘whoremongers’ and whores.<sup>43</sup> Lancelot attempts to act as a diagnostician and physician of the society’s malaise, but his unsuitability to these roles is highlighted by the fact that he is himself undergoing psychiatric treatment.

Neither genocide nor euthanasia is mentioned in *Lancelot*, yet Lancelot’s vision of a new society has features identifying it with totalitarian regimes, where genocide and euthanasia can easily become acceptable. Lancelot himself realises there is certain resemblance between his new society and Nazi Germany, so he is eager to reassure Percival and the reader that his new order ‘will not be based on Catholicism or Communism or fascism or liberalism or capitalism or any -ism at all’ (168). Lancelot’s refusal to identify his society by a particular term or theory may stem from his conviction that language is irreparably corrupt and that a new society will need to invent a new language.<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, Lancelot may perceive that connecting his new society with the old world through old-world theories would mean bringing corruption into it. Meanwhile, Lancelot’s further promise that ‘[k]illings will not be necessary’ (169) sounds ironic, coming from a man who, as Percival and the readers may already suspect by this point, has killed his wife, her lover and other people in blowing up Belle Isle.

The detached, scientific tone in which Lancelot invokes death is particularly alarming because of the ‘third revolution’ that he envisages. Speaking of his third revolution, just before claiming that there will be no need for killing anyone, Lancelot ‘prophesies’ that ‘[the] country is going to turn into a desert and it won’t be a bad thing’ (168). He explains that ‘[d]eserts are clean places. Corpses turn quickly into simple pure chemicals’ (168). Lancelot is probably referring to the results of the country’s moral degradation rather than the result of some kind of unspecified war. At the same time, his words indicate that, for him, death is an abstraction in spite, or because, of the

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<sup>43</sup> Lancelot recalls how his passion for Margot made him behave the way he ‘used to abhor in others’, ‘like white trash’ (94-95). In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Colonel Pelham denounces the American morality of the 1980s as that of the ‘white trash’: ‘[t]hat’s not the way people should talk or act. [...] That’s no way to talk if you’re a man or a woman’ (Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos* (London: Arrow Books, 1984), p. 53).

<sup>44</sup> Lancelot’s vision of a new society is discussed further in 5.4.

fact that he has had a very immediate experience of it. Lancelot probably feels that he can function as a sane being only if he refuses to recognize death as a tragedy, so that the murders he committed remain abstract, cushioned in the language of science and metaphor.

If American society is corrupt and dying, as Lancelot thinks it is, he himself is not fully alive, either, as long as he remains so insensitive to death and suffering. Lancelot's dismissal of suffering betrays his psychological malaise, though in this respect he is no different from the so-called 'normal' people outside the asylum. Fromm contends that freedom from anxiety, a condition associated with mental health by such psychologists as H. S. Sullivan, is symptomatic of alienation in contemporary society.<sup>45</sup> According to Fromm, freedom from anxiety as understood by Sullivan entails 'complete submission to powers which are supposed to be strong and enduring', which means the abandonment of freedom to make decisions or take risks and accept responsibilities.<sup>46</sup> The result is denial of individual freedom in a society where people are supposed to obey rules unthinkingly, which perhaps resembles the new anxiety-free society of which Lancelot dreams and where, for instance, '[c]hildren will be merry because they will know what they are to do' (169). However, Lancelot's world, informed by 'tight-lipped courtesy' (169), does not leave space for such sentiments as grief, compassion or affection, which Lancelot acknowledges by saying that in his dream about the new world '[t]here was no thought of "romance" or "sex" but only of making a new life' (39).

Nevertheless, Lancelot's 'new life' does not resemble, contrary to his claims, the life of 'survivors', but the existence of 'the living dead' (38-39). Indeed, Fromm explains that sensitivity is essential for a sane, unalienated person, because '[t]he effort to avoid [pain and sorrow] is only possible if we reduce our sensitivity, responsiveness and love, if we harden our hearts and withdraw

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<sup>45</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 194. See also the three criteria of mental health in H. S. Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: Norton & Company, 1953), p. 264. Interestingly, Dr Janet Rioch, a psychoanalyst whom Percy was seeing regularly for three years while studying, had been recommended by Sullivan, a friend of Percy's Uncle William. Neither Sullivan nor Rioch could diagnose Percy's malaise (Lawson, 'Walker Percy's Physicians and Patients', *Literature and Medicine*, 3 (1984), 130-41 (p. 133); see also Robert Coles, *Walker Percy: An American Search* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), p. 63).

<sup>46</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 196.



our attention and our feeling from others, as well as from ourselves'.<sup>47</sup> When Lancelot distances himself from the pain of Margot's infidelity, he ceases to function as a healthy individual. As he forgets or, to use his own words, 'does not want to remember' the night when Belle Isle exploded, he stays in a mental hospital for a year without getting better. Only when he is able to speak to Percival and relate his experience, is Lancelot healed, at least apparently, as he announces: 'I'm leaving today. They're discharging me. Psychiatrically fit and legally innocent' (270). Lancelot's words sound ironic: although the reader may for a moment believe that Lancelot is 'fit' to function in society and is even saner than his psychiatrist (270), the second part of the statement, 'legally innocent', is manifestly untrue. Lancelot's discharge follows on his telling Percival about Jacoby's murder; as a result, the reader's impression is that, in the world of *Lancelot*, the concepts of innocence and sanity are distorted.

The person who can recognise and diagnose Lancelot's sickness is Percival. As a priest and psychiatrist, Percival would know that his friend is psychologically and spiritually sick. According to Lawson, Percy learned from experience that 'there are several different aspects to illness, not merely a physical, not merely a physical *and* a mental, but a physical *and* a mental *and* a spiritual'.<sup>48</sup> In his ability to perceive Lancelot's sickness holistically, as a combination of mental and spiritual aspects, Percival becomes very similar to Percy the author, who believed that a novelist should be the diagnostician of social malaise.<sup>49</sup> One symptom of Lancelot's sickness, characteristic of modern society as a whole, is that he still perceives death as an abstract category. He has observed Percival recognizing and accepting death in its relation to the individual, when the priest prayed for the dead at the cemetery. However, death remains associated with mythology for Lancelot, as he alludes to Sodom, the Assyrians and the Spartans in describing contemporary American society: '[h]ow many Spartans would be needed to take these 200 million Athenians? Ten

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<sup>47</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> Lawson, 'Physicians', p. 131.

<sup>49</sup> For Percy's identification of writing novels with medical research, see Lawson, 'Walker Percy: The Physician as Novelist', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 37 (1972), 58-63.

thousand? A thousand? A hundred? Twelve? One?’ (277). Despite his earlier assertions that there will be no need to kill, Lancelot does not appear to balk at the thought of manslaughter.

Nevertheless, he needs the vocabulary of myth and ancient history (Assyrians and Jews, Sparta and Athens), abstract terminology (‘destroy’ instead of ‘kill’) and pejorative words ‘Russkies’ and ‘Chinks’ to justify his intentions (277). Human life for him is quantifiable, because he does not perceive the 200 million people he proposes to ‘destroy’ or ‘take’ (277) as human beings.

For Percy, Lancelot’s insensitivity to individual suffering is characteristic of our age, as Percy observes in his essay ‘A View of Abortion, with Something to Offend Everybody’: ‘[p]eople get desensitized. Who wants to go about his business being reminded of the six million dead in the Holocaust, the fifteen million in the Ukraine? Atrocities become banal’. In the same essay, Percy contends that a novelist’s task is to draw people’s attention to the atrocities around them: ‘a twentieth-century novelist should be a nag, an advertiser, a collector, a proclaimer of banal atrocities’.<sup>50</sup> Whereas in *The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman* and *Love in the Ruins* Percy uses vivid descriptions of dying children to awake readers to tragedy, in *Lancelot*, the shock comes from listening to the narrator who remarks, when telling how he killed Jacoby, that ‘[d]eath’s banal, but fiberglass in the neck is serious business’ (247). Happily, an alternative vision can be glimpsed in the actions of Percival, who, at the novel’s end, prays for another member of his community. By means of prayer, the dead and the living are joined as one community, which is an important notion in medieval Christianity generally and in the Arthurian romances in particular.<sup>51</sup>

In turn, Lancelot’s inability to show any feeling for the dead, including his wives, is an acute manifestation of his alienation. Whereas in the Arthurian romances characters give vent to their emotions by crying over knights’ and ladies’ deaths, Percy’s Lancelot does not shed a single tear and denies feeling anything but curiosity. Moreover, he ascribes the same set of emotions to

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<sup>50</sup> Percy, *Singposts*, p. 340.

<sup>51</sup> In the episode discussed in Chapter 2, the dying Sir Yvain asks that he be remembered and prayed for at King Arthur’s court (quoted on pp. 62-63 above).

other people, such as witnesses of death on a street:

[h]ave you ever watched onlookers at the scene of violence, an accident, a killing, a dead or dying body in the street? Their eyes shift to and fro ever so slightly, scanning, trying to take it all in. There is no end to the feast. (42)

Lancelot describes the same phenomenon which Fromm notes in 1970's American society:

if there is a fire, or a car collision in a big city, scores of people will gather and watch. All this fascination with competitive sports, crime and passion, shows the need for breaking through the routine surface, but the way of its satisfaction shows the extreme poverty of our solution.<sup>52</sup>

While Fromm recognizes the inadequacy of the solution, Lancelot falls prey to the attraction of violence when he sets out on his quest for sin. In fact, Fromm concludes that 'modern man exhibits an amazing lack of realism for all that matters. For the meaning of life and death, for happiness and suffering, for feeling and serious thought'.<sup>53</sup> This lack of realism is a main symptom of alienation. In extreme form, alienation, manifested in one's inability to engage with external phenomena and with other people, leads to mental illness: 'the insane person is the one who has completely failed to establish any kind of union [with his fellow man], and is imprisoned, even if he is not behind barred windows'.<sup>54</sup> Fromm's diagnosis of alienation is manifestly applicable to Lancelot, who, partially aware of the aberrations in contemporary society, fails to perceive that he, too, is sick. At the novel's beginning, Lancelot reflects on his unwillingness to speak to anyone: 'I've refused all

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<sup>52</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, pp. 170-71.

<sup>54</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 30.

psychiatrists, ministers, priests, group therapy, and whatnot. After all, what is there to talk about? I've nothing to say and am certainly not interested in what they say' (3). Ironically, Lancelot not only fails 'to establish union' with other people, but is physically confined. His convalescence begins as he talks to Percival, but by the novel's end Lancelot is not yet completely cured: throughout the novel, he speaks about himself and the world as he sees it, but up to the very end he is not interested in what Percival says. One of the implications of Percival's affirmative answer to his friend's final question '[i]s there anything you wish to tell me before I leave?' (279) is that Lancelot must learn to listen as well as to talk.

### 5.3 Women and the Quest

Percy's *Lancelot* presents a peculiar view of women and sexuality: all women are categorized into 'ladies' and 'whores'. This view originates in the Southern chivalric tradition and, ultimately, is akin to certain medieval concepts of women and sexuality. However, the representation of women in *Lancelot* is not a faithful reflection of Southern chivalry, because the reader has access mainly, if not exclusively, to Lancelot's view. Moreover, Lancelot's declarations about feminine nature and gender relations are based on the traumatic experience of his second marriage, which ended in disappointment, adultery and murder. The discovery of Margot's infidelity makes Lancelot awake from his 'sleep'. It is, therefore, hardly an exaggeration to suggest that Lancelot's stance in the novel is conditioned by personal experience of sexual corruption, and this vision of corruption is manifested in his theories of theology and universal history.<sup>55</sup>

The novel contains numerous instances demonstrating that Lancelot understands the corruption of American society primarily in sexual terms, for instance, when he declares that '[t]he

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<sup>55</sup> These theories are discussed below, 5.4, pp. 164-65 and pp. 174-77.

Northerner is at heart a pornographer. He is an abstract mind with a genital attached' (235-36).

Lancelot's view of contemporary society, with its devaluation of sexuality, is initiated by his discovery that he cannot be the biological father of his daughter, Siobhan, which means that Margot had been unfaithful to him at least once during the last seven years. Distorted as Lancelot's vision is, it is not entirely groundless. Percy seems to have shared, at least partially, Lancelot's assumption that sexual promiscuity is a sign of this age's malaise, for he pays much attention to sexuality in *Lost in the Cosmos* (1983). Noting the rise of pornography, Percy invites the reader to consider whether pornography is

rather a salient and prime property of modern consciousness [...] and is symptomatic of a radical disorder in the relation of the self to other selves which generally manifests itself in the abstracted state of one self (male) and the degradation of another self (female) to an abstract object of satisfaction.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy mentions the same instances of sexual corruption (homosexuality, pornography, adultery and teenage sex) against which Lancelot rails as symptomatic of disorder in the modern self. Unlike Lancelot, however, Percy invites the reader to consider possible explanations for these patterns of sexual behaviour without stating a single, definitive answer. While Lancelot insists that a new social system is necessary to end corruption, Percy suggests that people should come to terms with their selves individually, without rushing to change the world. In *Lost in the Cosmos* and his other writings, Percy indicates that, to be cured, one must recognize one's disease. Lancelot assumes that he is already sane, but the language he uses to speak of corruption, sexuality and women reveals that he is alienated (or, to use Percy's

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<sup>56</sup> Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*, p. 10.

terminology, 'abstracted') and sees women as abstractions rather than as individuals.<sup>57</sup>

When Lancelot speaks about love and sexuality, he tends to use metonymy: '[a] generation stoned and pussy free and devalued, pricks after pussy, pricks after pricks, pussy after pussy' (189). Likewise, Lancelot describes contemporary women as 'cunts', observing that the female population of America represents '100 million voracious cunts' (189). Not only are these appellations vulgar and degrading, they also objectify the people to whom they refer. The tendency to objectify women is manifest in Lancelot's description of Margot. Accordingly, Lawson comments that, throughout their married life, Lancelot has 'ignored the totality of [Margot's] humanness, in order to view her simply as an object'.<sup>58</sup> Lancelot frequently uses generalizations, in which Margot becomes not an individual, but the essence of womanhood, an object to satisfy Lancelot's sexual desire. In this respect, Lancelot's objectification of women resembles that of a pornographer.

Lancelot's approach to love and sexuality is similar to his tendency to avoid death by objectifying it, using deliberately scientific, matter-of-fact, language, as has been argued above (5.2, pp. 155-56). However, Lancelot's heightened sensitivity to sexuality differs from his apparent insensitivity to death. He claims that he was little disturbed by the death of Lucy, his first wife, and that he would have found the thought of Margot incurably ill or dying more tolerable than the thought of Margot in another man's arms: '[t]he thought of Margot dead was painful but not intolerable. But Margot under another man...' (16). Paradoxically, in dealing with women and love, as in speaking about death, Lancelot has recourse to the vocabulary and methodology of science or, rather, 'scientism', because his discoveries lead to a certain world-view.<sup>59</sup> He visualizes Margot's adultery as '[c]ells touching cells' (16), in much the same way as the murder of Jacoby becomes for

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<sup>57</sup> The word 'abstraction' and its derivatives are used throughout the novel to describe the behaviour of several characters, Lancelot included.

<sup>58</sup> Lawson, 'Walker Percy's Silent Character', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 33:2 (1980), 123-40 (p. 131).

<sup>59</sup> According to Percy, 'scientism' is characterized by 'a willingness [of laymen] to believe [...] that the scientific method by virtue of its spectacular triumphs and the near magic of its technology can be extrapolated to a quasi-religious all-construing worldview'. By contrast, scientific practice cannot lead to a world-view, because 'natural science [...] is [...] a method of arriving at truths of a certain order about natural phenomena' (Percy, *Signposts*, p. 297).

Lancelot ‘steel molecules entering skin molecules, artery molecules, blood cells’ (275). By using detached, scientific language, Lancelot tries to mitigate the pain of Margot’s betrayal. The news of his wife’s adultery shakes Lancelot to such an extent that his entire world-view becomes distorted, so that he perceives American society as morally corrupt and creates improbable theories to explain this corruption.

Looking out of his cell window, Lancelot sees the poster of a film, *The 69ers*, on which a man and a woman embrace. The post-sexual revolution poster is, for Lancelot, symbolic of society’s corruption, and removing the poster is high on his agenda for the new society. Lancelot believes that contemporary devaluation of love results from sexual freedom, and he contrasts his own appreciation of love and sex to his son’s craving for a new guitar (16). For Lancelot, sex is ‘communion’, a religious experience, so that Margot’s infidelity becomes a graver offence than idolatry (16). Hence, Ciuba contends that ‘Lancelot’s removal of sexuality from all categories and classifications is an attempt to restore its sacredness’.<sup>60</sup> Later, Lancelot creates a theory, which he entitles, with gusto, ‘THE GREAT SECRET OF LIFE’ (241). The theory purports to substitute a new theology, ‘violence and rape’, and a new gospel, ‘pornography’, for what Lancelot deems to be a decadent gospel of divine love that Percival advocates (241). Lancelot’s theology degrades men, women and God, as Lancelot claims that love is essentially copulation and that pleasure is derived from violent copulation for the parties concerned. In Lancelot’s distorted and obsessive vision, men delight in raping women, women in submitting to rape and God in contemplating them: ‘God’s secret design for man is that man’s happiness lies for men in men practicing violence upon women and that woman’s happiness lies in submitting to it’ (241).

Lancelot’s wild theories about the nature of women and sexuality have some tentative parallels in medieval discourse, especially in medieval Christian theology, and, at the same time, they are rooted in the tradition of the American South. Generated as a result of Margot’s betrayal,

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<sup>60</sup> Ciuba, ‘Omega Factor’, p. 102.

Lancelot's vision is a distorted, extreme version of the medieval and Southern stereotypes about women. To understand the context in which Lancelot creates his theories and their relation to the previous literary and cultural tradition, it is necessary to discuss the medieval and Southern gender stereotypes to which Lancelot alludes in the novel. Remarkably, Lancelot supports his theory that rape is a source of pleasure for women by reference to theological writings. All he can see in St Augustine's *The City of God*, is '[t]he good saint devoting page after page soothing the consciences of nuns, virgins who had been raped by Visigoths and enjoyed it despite themselves. No doubt howled with delight' (272). Meanwhile, when Lancelot suggests to Anna that the catastrophes he and Anna have survived are comparable, Anna rejects the idea that, as a person, she 'can be violated by a *man*' (272). Like Margot earlier in the novel ('I've found something more important than the almighty penis', 186), Anna denies the importance of sex: '[d]on't you know there are more important things in this world?' (272). In turn, Lancelot, who has been deceived by Margot's offhand statement that she does not 'mess with anybody' (186), finds it hard to believe Anna. Imagining that the writings of early Christian theologians, such as St Augustine, confirm his theory of sexuality, Lancelot concludes that 'in her heart [Anna] knows the secret as well as [Lancelot] but she can't bear to admit it' (273). Lancelot does not consider the possibility that his theory may be wrong and that Anna, or even Margot, may be telling him the truth. In his attitude towards sex and his bias towards women, Lancelot comes very close to the misogynist assumptions expressed in certain early Christian and medieval theological texts as well as in some *Lancelot-Graal* romances, particularly the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and, to an extent, in Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal'.<sup>61</sup> Announcing that '[w]omen must be saved from the whoredom they've chosen' (169), Lancelot argues from a position that is very similar to those medieval authors who advocated that, unlike men, women could not control their desires and appetites.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The different representations of Solomon's wife in the *Queste*, the *Estoire* and the 'Sankgreal' are discussed above, Chapter 4, pp. 129-32.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Jones, 'Hermits', p. 8, quoted above, Chapter 3, p. 85.



The stereotype of women's inferiority, blended with quasi-religious worship of 'pure' women, appears to have been current in nineteenth-century America, especially in the South. Lancelot's polarised view of women as either extremely virtuous or utterly sinful is reiterated in Percy's other novels, particularly *The Last Gentleman* and *The Second Coming*, and seems rooted in Southern codes of chivalry. In *The Last Gentleman*, as in *Lancelot*, the reasons for this polarization are found in Southern culture: the protagonist, Will Barrett, remembers his father postulating 'don't treat a lady like a whore or a whore like a lady'.<sup>63</sup> Will constantly vacillates between the desire to make passionate love to Kitty and to admire her from a distance. Like Will, Lancelot fails to recognize that women cannot be subsumed under the categories 'lady' and 'whore'. Meanwhile, in *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy articulates the following credo of Southern chivalry through Colonel John Pelham, 'the beau ideal of the South': '[a] gentleman knows how to treat women. He knows because he knows himself, who he is, what his obligations are. And he discharges them'.<sup>64</sup> Although Pelham's words resemble Lancelot's declarations about chivalry towards women (169), Percy's point is that only a man who knows himself would know how to treat women. It is arguable whether real Southern gentlemen knew themselves, that is, were unalienated, but neither Will Barrett nor Lancelot have come to terms with their selves, and their problem in understanding women is 'a symptom of a more important disorder'.<sup>65</sup>

The Southern lady myth in Percy's novels is inherited from the Southern chivalric tradition. W. J. Cash notes that the Southern exaltation of women amounted to 'downright gyneolatry' before the Civil War, citing a toast pronounced at the celebration of Georgia's one-hundredth anniversary in the 1830s: '[w]oman!!! The centre and circumference, diameter and periphery, sine, tangent and secant of all our affections!'<sup>66</sup> The exclamation summarizes the Southern feelings at that historical

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<sup>63</sup> Percy, *The Last Gentleman*, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*, pp. 50 and 53.

<sup>65</sup> Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*, p. 54.

<sup>66</sup> W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1973), pp. 105-06.

moment, but it also resembles Lancelot's declarations about the significance of womankind: 'a woman? She is your omega point' (240). Both Cash's quotation and Lancelot's words objectify women, placing them 'on a pedestal', but deny them an active role.<sup>67</sup> Such a reverent, chivalric stance towards women can be easily used to limit women's freedom of action and punish them for improper behaviour. Lancelot subscribes to such a code when he states that women 'are not strong enough' and 'don't care enough', and he alludes directly to the Arthurian tradition: 'Guinevere didn't think twice about adultery. It was Lancelot, poor bastard, who went off and brooded in the woods' (192).<sup>68</sup> Moreover, he believes that a lady who does not behave like a lady deserves punishment: knowing that Margot acted as a whore towards him, he does not display any remorse over murdering her. Neither does he regret Jacoby's murder and the deaths of actors Raine Robinette and Troy Dana in the explosion: their murders are justified for Lancelot by contemporary social corruption.

Lancelot's distorted attitude towards women as an ideal is reflected in his relations with real women, especially the women he loves. He categorizes Lucy, Margot and Anna as lady, whore and the new woman, respectively, in correspondence with his theory of history.<sup>69</sup> This view of women reflects Lancelot's personal history: he believed in the existence of virtuous ladies before discovering Margot's betrayal. Having learnt that Siobhan cannot be his daughter and that Margot has betrayed him, Lancelot becomes convinced that all women are secret whores, and his 'Great Secret of Life' theology reflects this grim conclusion. On the other hand, his belief in 'the new woman' indicates that he seeks a way to live and to build relationships with women, albeit on the basis of an equally distorted view. Moreover, his category of 'new woman' is as artificial and restricting as those of lady and whore, and the only woman to whom Lancelot expounds his theory,

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<sup>67</sup> See Gayle Rogers, 'The Changing Image of the Southern Woman: A Performer on a Pedestal', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 16 (1982), 60-67.

<sup>68</sup> In the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Guinevere, not Lancelot, takes the decisive step towards their separation after Arthur's death by entering a nunnery.

<sup>69</sup> For Lancelot's theory of history, see below, Chapter 5.4, pp. 176-77.

Anna, violently rejects it. At the novel's end, Lancelot has not articulated a view of women that would allow him to build relations on the basis of equality, rather than putting a woman on a pedestal or denigrating her as inferior creature. Percival's last enigmatic words suggest that Lancelot *may* build stable relations with Anna in Virginia – a place 'where it all began in the beginning' (235), somewhat like the medieval Sarras, where knights retire at the end of their adventures. However, to fully understand the development of Lancelot's views on women and its analogies with both Southern and medieval chivalries, it is necessary to discuss separately what he says about Lucy, Margot and Anna.

Different as these three women are, each of them becomes an illustration of Lancelot's theory of women, that all women are ladies or whores. Just before Belle Isle explodes, Lancelot's flawed wife Margot points to the core of Lancelot's problem, although he does not appear to take it in: '[w]ith you I had to be either – or – but never a – uh – woman' (265). Margot's words imply that Lancelot pushed her to adultery, because she could not be constantly playing the role of either the Southern lady, in public, or of whore, in Lancelot's arms. Brinkmeyer summarizes the situation pointing out that 'Lance cannot see a woman as anything but a lady or a whore – cannot, in other words, see her as a woman, as another consciousness possessing views as significant as his own and whose insights might affect him in some decisive way'.<sup>70</sup> At the novel's beginning, Lancelot tries to introduce a clear categorization of the women he loved, so that his relations with Lucy amount to 'romance', with Margot to 'sex' and with Anna, a former 'whore' and present lady-in-making or 'New Woman' to 'making a new life' (39). He ignores the fact that these women are individuals and may want more than either 'sex' or dispassionate, impersonal creation of new life.

Indeed, Lancelot does not appear interested in the women's personalities. When speaking of his wives, he compares not so much the women as his feelings for them: 'I wanted Margot's sweet Texas ass and I wanted Lucy's opaque Georgia eyes' (90). Lucy is rendered a perfect lady not

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<sup>70</sup> Brinkmeyer, 'Discovery', p. 38.

by her actions but by Lancelot's treatment of her: 'Lucy was a virgin! and I did not want her otherwise' (89). Margot, by contrast, arouses Lancelot's passion, so she cannot but be a whore. In describing Margot, Lancelot pays much attention to Margot's body and its desirability. His love for Margot borders on religious worship, or what Cash terms 'gyneolatry'.<sup>71</sup> In other words, love, including sexuality, takes for Lancelot the place of religion: for him, woman, in this case, Margot, is '[n]ot a category, not a sex, not one of two sexes, a human female creature, but an infinity' (137). Lancelot's love for Margot is idolatrous in the sense Fromm employs, contending that '[w]hat is frequently called "love" is often nothing but this idolatrous phenomenon of alienation; only that not God or an idol, but another person is worshipped in this way'.<sup>72</sup> Lancelot admits that his love for Margot 'was almost religious', her things becoming for him 'like saints' relics' and her house 'a Taj Mahal' (181). Fromm explains that such an attitude arises, when the 'loving person [...] projects all his or her love, strength, thought, into the other person, and experiences the loved person as a superior being'.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, the actual beloved person can only come short of the worshipping person's expectations, in Lancelot's case, with learning about Margot's adultery. Lancelot notes a link between the discoveries of Margot's infidelity and his freedom, although he cannot explain the connection (112). However, the discovery makes him disillusioned with all women. Describing Margot and the consequences her earlier restorative efforts brought into his life, Lancelot creates an entire class of women he calls 'demonic':

[d]id you know that the South and for all I know the entire U.S.A. is full of demonic women who, driven by as yet unnamed furies, are desperately restoring and preserving *places, buildings?* women married to fond indulgent easygoing somewhat lapsed men like me, who would as soon do one thing as another as long

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<sup>71</sup> Cash, *Mind*, p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 123.

as they can go fishing, hunting, drink a bit, horse around, watch the Dolphins and Jack Nicklaus on TV. (128)

Having been thwarted by Margot, Lancelot no longer believes there are clear boundaries between ladies and whores. He demonises women, and comes to think that ‘women are so evil by nature [...] that they are fated to tempt men into sexual frenzy’.<sup>74</sup> He also imagines a foil to the demonic women like Margot; this foil will be the new woman, who would become the true lady, a post-Christian Virgin Mary: ‘[t]he best of women will be what we used to call ladies, like your Virgin. Our Lady’ (192). Lancelot’s identification of the true lady with the Virgin Mary appears to be part of the Southern tradition. Gayle Rogers notes that in one of the most influential works shaping the Southern lady stereotype, Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett confuses her mother, Ellen Robillard O’Hara, with the Virgin Mary.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, Cash describes the Southern woman image as a complex one, consisting of Arthurian, Greek and Christian aspects: ‘[s]he was the lily-pure maid of Astolat and the hunting goddess of the Boeotian hill. And – she was the pitiful Mother of God’.<sup>76</sup> With the latter image in mind, Lancelot finds a real woman whom he dubs ‘the New Virgin’: a ‘gang-raped social worker’ and his fellow patient, Anna (169).

Lancelot’s love for Anna begins in a completely different way from his affair with Margot. He falls in love with Anna before he meets her, learning that there is a mute girl in the next room. Anna appears to attract Lancelot because she is totally undesirable in the conventional sense of the word, having been mutilated both physically and psychologically. Lancelot muses that Anna has ‘endured the worst of the age and survived it, undergone the ultimate violation and come out of it not only intact but somehow purged, innocent’ (169). In a world where girls are corrupted as teenagers (Lancelot’s daughter Lucy) and even before they reach adolescence (Siobhan, whom

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<sup>74</sup> Lawson, ‘Silent Character’, p. 131.

<sup>75</sup> Rogers, ‘Performer’, pp. 60-61.

<sup>76</sup> Cash, *Mind*, pp. 105-06.

Lancelot suspects to be molested by her grandfather Tex), the suffering associated with rape can paradoxically restore a woman to innocence and dignity, or so Lancelot believes. Anna's ultimate violation is, to Lancelot, commensurable with his own wound – adultery, the ultimate violation of his manly dignity. Apparently, he falls in love with Anna because she symbolises for him violated femininity, in much the same way as Lucy represented for him the idea of a lovely Georgian girl and Margot of a promiscuous Texan enchantress.

In a sense, by loving Anna, Lancelot seeks to return to his own innocent youth, and Lauren Coulter asserts that Lancelot establishes Anna 'as a surrogate Lucy'.<sup>77</sup> When Lancelot compares Anna to Lucy, he remembers that she 'comes, like Lucy, from Georgia' (90). However, there is a difference between Lucy and Anna, which Lancelot does not fail to remark: Anna is not a virgin and has probably lost her virginity before she was raped, having left 'Agnes Scott, a fine-ladies' school, to live in an artists' community in La Jolla' (90). Because of her supposed promiscuity, Anna combines Lucy's and Margot's characteristics, falling in between the categories of lady and whore. The reason why she can be 'the Lucy of the new world' (90) is Lancelot's feelings towards her. Unlike Margot, Anna does not arouse him sexually: with Anna, as with Lucy, he wants 'to come close but keep a little distance' (90). Hebert remarks that Lancelot's difficulty in dealing with women arises from his fear of women.<sup>78</sup> It seems that Lancelot is afraid of the power that a woman can wield through her sexual attraction: a whore for him is a woman whose sexuality is threatening, while his new woman is chaste and desirable at once.

Throughout the novel, Lancelot emphasizes the newness of everything in the future world, a recapitulation in the sense of the American impulse towards a second chance: there will be a new society, ruled by a different kind of men, new Adams, who will cherish their new Eves. He establishes Anna as his 'New Woman' (39), 'new Virgin' (169) and 'new [...] Eve' (272) rather than

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<sup>77</sup> Lauren Coulter, 'The Problem of Merlin's Pardon in Walker Percy's *Lancelot*', *Southern Literary Journal*. 33:2 (2001), 99-107 (p. 106).

<sup>78</sup> Hebert, 'Between Men', p. 128.

simply a 'lady', because he thinks that the so-called ladies of the past were just as promiscuous as modern women. To support his assumption, Lancelot tells about three such ladies: the mother of his distant ancestor, his mother Lily and the lady of camellias. With the first woman, adultery is never proved: the only clue to adultery is that a 'very white Creole lady' gave birth to a 'swarthy' son, presumably fathered by a Negro (164). The accusation comes from a poker player, who had lost money to Lancelot's great-great-grandfather, and the insult is washed away with blood, as the ancestor fights his opponent with a Bowie knife, kills and dismembers him. Although Lancelot disapproves of 'men butcher[ing] each other like animals', he sees it as 'a way to live' (164), seeming to regret that he cannot defend Lily's honour likewise.

From the very beginning, Lancelot believes his mother Lily has been deceiving his father with Uncle Harry Wills (102). His suspicions are confirmed by the mysterious lady of the camellias, more likely than not a creation of Lancelot's drugged mind, who says placidly that Lily and Uncle Harry had been lovers '[f]or years. Everybody knew. So romantic! They were like Camille and Robert Taylor' (228). Lancelot does not visualize his mother's adultery as romantic but endows it with every material detail: he imagines the lovers 'entering a tourist cabin on False River of a sunny winter afternoon [...] the sheets slick-cold and sour' (231). The location, False River, indicates the false romanticism of the entire situation, with the knowing husband daydreaming at Belle Isle and the lovers 'in the linoleum-cold gas-heat-hot tourist cabin' (232). Lancelot further trivializes the affair between his uncle and mother by remembering his uncle in the locker room after a costumed ball, naked '[e]xcept for his green satin helmet, sword sash, and red leatherette hip boots', Lancelot's eye dwelling on the man's genitals (229). The uncle is a far cry from a romantic knight, and Lily, Lancelot recollects, later becomes an alcoholic. When younger, though, she had been 'thin-boned, quick, and sporty' (230), and this description could fit Lancelot's wife Lucy as much as his mother. Relatedly, '[a]fter years of secret drinking', Lily's eyes grow 'opaque' (230), and the same epithet is used to describe Lucy's eyes (90). The knowledge of Lily's and Margot's adulteries

could suggest to Lancelot that, had Lucy lived, she might have deceived him as well. Stephen Yarborough contends that ‘at the very least [...] Lance cannot distinguish clearly the individual women in his life’.<sup>79</sup> After learning about Margot’s adultery, his attitude towards all women is split between desire and contempt.

The mixture of desire and contempt Lancelot feels towards women is explicit in ‘Our Lady of the Camellias’ episode. The lady of the camellias, created by Lancelot’s imagination, combines features of lady, whore and supernatural guide, and Ciuba argues that the lady of the camellias ‘is Lancelot’s vision of woman as secret whore’.<sup>80</sup> The lady appears first as a certain type of Southern women, who are ‘neither old nor young’, ‘dark-complexioned, have full figures and a certain reputation from the past’ (225). The camellia pinned at her shoulder serves as a metaphor for her triumphant sexuality: ‘a large open flesh-colored bloom with a sheaf of stalks sprouting from the center bearing stamens, pistils, pollen, pods, ovules’ (227). Later, the lady appears for a second like Lancelot’s mother from an old photograph and offers Lancelot the sword. The scene sets the woman as the Lady of the Lake giving Arthur his Excalibur.<sup>81</sup> However, Lancelot is aware that the symbolism may be misleading: ‘[t]he sword? Ha ha. It was the Bowie knife’ (243). With his knife-sword, Lancelot cuts the branches of an oak which blocks the door, like a prince cutting his way to the Briar Rose. The cutting of an oak ‘limb’ (243) foreshadows Lancelot’s murder of Jacoby, which he enacts in imitation of his ancestor carving an opponent ‘limb from limb’ with a Bowie knife (18). Though he notices the falseness of presenting Lily and Uncle Harry’s relation as romantic, Lancelot does not see that his revenge on Jacoby, Troy and Raine is anything but heroic.

In fact, the lady of the camellias tells Lancelot what he wants to hear and already knows about his parents, glossing over the fact that his mother might have developed a passion first for Uncle Harry and then for alcohol simply because she was an ‘unhappy Southern lady’ (230). In

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen Yarborough, ‘Walker Percy’s *Lancelot* and the Critic’s Original Sin’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 30:2 (1988), 272-94 (p. 284).

<sup>80</sup> Ciuba, ‘Omega Factor’, p. 108.

<sup>81</sup> In the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, the Lady of the Lake is also Lancelot’s foster-mother.



other words, again, rather than seeing women as individuals, Lancelot endows them with certain mythical qualities, so that they appear as ladies, whores or enchantresses. In common with medieval romances, many women in *Lancelot* seem to be bearers of supernatural knowledge, guides or messengers: for instance, Lancelot sees the lady of the camellias or his mother proffer him the Excalibur sword of revenge, suggesting to him the course of actions he is only too willing to undertake. On the other hand, he ignores Margot's and Anna's warnings that sexuality as he understands it does not play a paramount role for women. Moreover, Lancelot perceives Margot as a malicious fairy, a 'magician' (85), who transforms him into a gentleman of her design and imprisons him in the pigeonier. As a result, he does not realise that Margot herself is, to use Percy's description, an individual 'lost in the Cosmos', not a magician or deity to fear and worship.<sup>82</sup>

#### 5.4 The Fusion of Individual and World Histories

Lancelot's theory of world history and his plan for a new society are inspired by his marriage experience and his family history, as well as other models: biblical, medieval and American histories. According to Michael Kobre, Lancelot's

consciousness is steeped in the narratives that he has consumed over his lifetime: the Arthurian legends he loved as a boy, the Raymond Chandler novels he reads for entertainment as an adult, and the apocryphal stories that have been passed

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<sup>82</sup> Percy's suggests the inability to settle on a single 'self' as a symptom of being lost (*Lost in the Cosmos*, pp. 23-26). Margot, a product of her age, asserts that old selves can go obsolete as unfashionable clothes, explaining to Lancelot: 'I love you as I've always loved you, with the old me. But there are other me's. One grows' (222).

down from one generation to another in his family.<sup>83</sup>

Lancelot's attempt to interpret his life by reference to literary, historical and family history models is alarming, because he uses these models to justify the murders of Jacoby and other people at Belle Isle. Furthermore, Lancelot employs these models to explain his plan for a new society, giving a not inaccurate account of contemporary social ills and appealing to the nostalgia for an age when women were virtuous and men heroic. In presenting family history as replicating universal history in some way, Percy comes very close to medieval versions of the Grail quest, particularly as it is narrated in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Accordingly, in both medieval romances, history contains a series of parallel events within one lineage: first Adam and Eve, then Solomon and his wife prepare the way for Galahad, a messianic knight, and Perceval's sister.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, Lancelot invents a theory of three historical periods: a 'Romantic Period', a 'sexual period' and 'catastrophe' (38). After the catastrophe, Lancelot, a survivor, dreams of going to the desert to create 'a new life' with the 'New Woman', 'another survivor of the catastrophe and the death of old worlds' (39). At the novel's end, Lancelot announces to Anna his conviction that they 'were qualified as the new Adam and Eve of the new world' (272).<sup>85</sup>

During the hurricane, which marks the apocalyptic culmination of Percy's Lancelot's quest, the analogy between Galahad's and Lance's quests is sustained but subsequently destroyed. Before receiving the Grail, Galahad has to go through the trial of Solomon's ship and the ancestral bed. In much same way, Lance's journey to the Grail takes place at Belle Isle, which is compared to a ship in the novel, at the side of a 'great Calhoun bed', which Lancelot likens to a 'cathedral, a Gothic bed, posts as thick as trees' (256). The bed becomes, in turns, a cathedral (256), a confessional (257)

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Kobre, 'The Teller and the Tale: Walker Percy's *Lancelot* as Metafiction', *Critique*, 41:1 (1999), 71-77 (p. 72).

<sup>84</sup> These three couples are discussed above, Chapter 4, p. 107.

<sup>85</sup> Lancelot's viewing himself as a new Adam and Anna as a new Eve has parallels with the Grail history narrated in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal': in the Ship of Solomon episode, it is revealed that Galahad is destined to find the Grail because, like Christ, he is descended from Adam through Solomon.

and the altar on which the liturgy is served. However, the pursuit of his 'Unholy Grail' entails for Lancelot not discovery but disillusionment, making him conclude that '[t]here is no unholy grail just as there was no Holy Grail' (275).

Lancelot's quest fails because he had been looking in the wrong place: his ship and bed are as false as the hurricane created for the film which is being made in the background of events in Lancelot's narrative, so that both Lancelot's and the film crew's quests are not for the genuine Grail. Moreover, Lancelot's theories about freedom and the discovery of God through evil are proved to be as hollow as the theory of 'sexual liberation' which is supposed to animate the film (155). Trying to find the Grail in sexual sin, Lancelot makes a mistake similar to the mistake of the townspeople, who see the actor Troy Dana as 'the new sunlit god come to save this sad town' (159), free and 'able to free others' (156). Brinkmeyer suggests that the townspeople as well as Margot and Lucy are fascinated by the film crew, because the latter offer 'simplistic dreams of freedom, rooted in an individualism that so often ends up seeking fulfilment through sensual gratification rather than through dialogue and commitment'.<sup>86</sup> Lancelot's view of freedom is very different but equally flawed, because total denial of intimate relationships and the assertion of self-sufficiency informs his vision of future society. Again, Brinkmeyer describes Lancelot's new society as 'based on staunchly stoic ideals – an outlook of life that pits one's inner strength and honour against the rest of the world'.<sup>87</sup> This new world, centred on man and his strength, resembles both the biblical patriarchy and the Old South chivalry, with the difference that religion is absent from it.

The most immediate parallel to Lancelot's theory can be found in biblical history. Each of Lancelot's periods is defined by gender relations or, more precisely, by men's treatment of women, because Lancelot does not believe in women being able to govern their behaviour (192). The first, 'romantic' period is analogous to the condition before the Fall (38): before Adam and Eve are evicted from Paradise, Adam does not 'know' Eve sexually. Lancelot associates the period with

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<sup>86</sup> Brinkmeyer, 'Discovery', p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Brinkmeyer, 'Discovery', p. 32.

falling in love and living with his first wife Lucy. Lucy dies, and sexual sin, unavoidable in the second period, is projected onto Lancelot's second wife Margot. Lancelot describes the period as 'a baboon colony', 'a soap opera' (38) or the biblical Sodom (276-77). In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', these periods are associated with women, too: Eve caused the Fall, and Solomon's wife is the typical woman of the fallen world, who vexes her husband. However, in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', there is promise of a new, pure woman, the Virgin Mary, and a similar virgin, Percival's sister, plays an important role in the quest. In Percy's novel, Lancelot dreams about a new woman, Anna, with whom he would build a new society in a post-apocalyptic desert.

Lancelot claims that his 'sexual theory of history' 'applies to both the individual and mankind' (38). In his monologues, he continues to suggest parallels between his own life, his family history and universal history. Having realized that he is a cuckold, he remembers that his mother used to go on joy rides with Uncle Harry and suspects that, like Siobhan, he might be a bastard. Moreover, he recollects that his great-great-grandfather was insulted as being son of a Negro and fought with a Bowie knife against the insulter. In setting out to avenge his honour, Lancelot acts in imitation of this ancestor. Kobre notes that Lancelot changes the ancestral legend the second time he mentions it: 'instead of being a secondary figure in Jim Bowie's duel, Manson Maury Lamar is a principal in one of his own'. Kobre believes that the alteration 'suggests both the apocryphal nature of the story and Lancelot's need, as a storyteller himself, to reassemble its basic components to provide the right example for his own actions'.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Lancelot compares the progress the Lamar men made between the Civil War and the present day, from the Civil War heroes through Lance's own inglorious dispensation with diarrhoea to his son's avoiding the Vietnam War (233), and concludes that the tendency towards emasculation is characteristic of America in general. The decline of military prowess in the Lamar family coincides with sexual decline: Lancelot's ancestor could fight for his mother's honour without a flicker of doubt; Lancelot's father was an

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<sup>88</sup> Kobre, 'Teller', p. 74.

hypochondriac and a knowing cuckold; Lancelot himself is an impotent alcoholic; and Lancelot's son becomes a homosexual. As a result, Lancelot sees the only remedy for this loss of honour in violence, which would restore chastity to women and manliness to men.

Meanwhile, although Lancelot's analysis of the *reasons* for contemporary social malaise and the possible remedies is wrong, his observations about the situation as such are not far from truth. In fact, Lancelot's social criticism resembles the remarks Percy's characters make in other novels and the observations of contemporary social writers. Lancelot notes that the people outside the mental hospital seem to be more depressed than the inmates. Similarly, Thomas More in *Love in the Ruins* reflects that he can stay sane and happy only in a hospital.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, *The Second Coming* opens with the observation that Will Barrett's depression may be a sign of the age, citing the fact that '[a]t last count, the symptom of depression outnumbered all other symptoms put together'.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, Fromm uses the same argument as the narrator in *The Second Coming* to make a case for 'the pathology of normalcy' in contemporary society.<sup>91</sup>

In his writings, *Lancelot* included, Percy often considers the problem of boredom, or what he calls in his self-interview 'Questions They Never Asked Me' the 'four-o'clock-in-the-afternoon devaluation'.<sup>92</sup> Percy's solution, however, is individual rather than social change: a person must realize his or her predicament, ask for help and accept the help when it arrives.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, while acknowledging that Fromm's diagnosis in *The Sane Society* is revealing, Percy finds Fromm's social theory unsatisfactory: '[i]t is indeed hardly credible that the alienation of Western man is due to capitalism, as Fromm suggests, or that tinkering with economics will cure the disease'.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Lancelot's new order, although it would not, ostensibly, be based on any social theory, is

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<sup>89</sup> Percy, *Love in the Ruins*, p. 100.

<sup>90</sup> Percy, *The Second Coming*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> Fromm, *Sane Society*, pp. 14-20.

<sup>92</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, p. 400.

<sup>93</sup> This course of action is sketched in *Lost in the Cosmos*, pp. 201-18.

<sup>94</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, p. 258.

not likely to make peoples' lives meaningful. Percy's own response to social malaise is voiced, according to Desmond, through Percival, who stands against Lancelot's accusations that 'Christianity is degraded, powerless, and irrelevant in a modern world saturated with corruption'.<sup>95</sup> Percy's solution to the problems of alienation and corruption is a spiritual quest conducted by an individual, in line with the medieval Grail quest romances, where a knight travels, for most of the journey, alone. Like their medieval namesakes, Percy's Lancelot and Percival progress independently in their different quests, Lancelot's outspokenness about his quest and his destiny as a New Adam contrasting with Percival's silence. Their approach to questing differs in that Lancelot, the 'Knight of the Unholy Grail' (144), acts as if he had been self-sufficient, while Percival relies on God, similar to the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' knights.

Meanwhile, Lancelot's styling himself as new Adam is rooted in the American Dream tradition. According to the Lupacks, the Grail quest is attractive to American authors because it is 'like the quest for Edenic perfection that is such a common metaphor for the American Dream'.<sup>96</sup> In the novel, Lancelot has two dreams about his new world. In the first dream, he and the new woman live a simple life 'in an abandoned house in a desert place, a ghost town' (38). The vision is post-apocalyptic, suggesting that the catastrophe after which the new world comes into existence is the World War III.<sup>97</sup> Lancelot's second dream is about the Third Revolution, which will begin in the Shenandoah Valley, a historically-charged place in American imagination. He sees a young man with a rifle, who has been living like a pioneer, in the forest; the man vanishes, but other young men come marching and singing 'Oh Shenandoah' (238). The first dream is about family; the second dream, narrated immediately after the story of Lily's adultery, presents a homosocial world, from which women are absent.

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<sup>95</sup> Desmond, 'Revisioning *The Fall*', p. 628.

<sup>96</sup> Lupack, *King Arthur*, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> In his other novels and non-fictional writings, Percy pays much attention to the world wars, with their escalating death toll, and *Lost in the Cosmos* presents WW III as inevitable. Lancelot's dream also partially resembles the post-apocalyptic world of Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which Percy reviewed in 'Rediscovering "A Canticle for Leibowitz"', in *Signposts*, pp. 227-33.

In fact, Lancelot expects that his actions will enlist him an army to bring about the Third Revolution: '[o]ne man will act. Another man will act' (166). In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the members of Arthur's court could recognize a knight even in a boy ('Tale of Sir Gareth') or a madman (Lancelot during his spell of insanity). Similarly, Percy's Lancelot claims that the Third Revolution agents would 'know each other as gentlemen used to know each other' (166): 'in this generation of vipers they would recognize each other instantly' (167). As in referring to death, in talking about the Third Revolution, Lancelot fuses the language of science, in this case, history, and biblical exegesis. He alludes to the Civil War hero General Lee and envisions himself as the follower of Archangel Michel 'with the flaming sword', the Crusader Richard Coeur de Lion or even Christ as a knight, 'a God who said he came not to bring peace but the sword' (167). In his imagination, Lancelot becomes a new messiah, stating that '[i]f God does not exist, [...] I will start a new world single-handedly' (277). Like Galahad in medieval romances, Percy's Lancelot does not betray any doubt about the rightness of his actions: he is convinced that he is the 'sober, reasonable, and honorable man', who by acting 'with perfect sobriety, reason, and honor' will begin 'a new age' (166).

Lancelot's vision of the future is thus framed in terms of Paradise-Apocalypse, which, as Lawson contends, is present in all Percy's novels.<sup>98</sup> Ciuba also believes that Lancelot's social vision is apocalyptic.<sup>99</sup> When Lancelot speaks of the imminent catastrophe, he makes frequent allusions to the desert or wilderness (38, 39, 168, 236), which evoke, at the same time, contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction and medieval eremitic tradition. It seems that, for Percy, the desert suggests both catastrophe and flight from the world.<sup>100</sup> Desmond contrasts Lancelot's escapism with John Percival's willingness to face the spiritual desert of contemporary society: 'Percy's Father John is a

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<sup>98</sup> Lawson, 'Neurobiology', p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ciuba, 'Omega Factor', p. 98.

<sup>100</sup> Description of a flight to the desert in Percy's novels may be inspired by personal experience. According to Percy's friend Shelby Foote, during Percy's illness (tuberculosis), he was 'living the life of a hermit' (quoted in Coles, *Walker Percy*, p. 66). According to Lawson, it was the time of 'as much an existential as a biological crisis' ('Physicians', p. 134).

true avatar of his namesakes [John the Baptist and John the Evangelist], the precursor of Christ and the apostle of love, a genuine prophet who comes forth to live with hope in the modern wilderness'.<sup>101</sup> In Percy's *Lancelot*, the possibilities for Lancelot and Percival remain open: in his self-interview, Percy explains that 'there is a prospect of a new world in the Shenandoah Valley' for Lancelot or any other survivor of a spiritual catastrophe. According to Percy, the ending of *Lancelot* represents transition between Kierkegaardian stages of life (aesthetic, ethical and religious): '[i]t is the dawn of the aesthetic stage, the emergence of life from death'.<sup>102</sup> The concepts of individual and universal histories being interconnected and of the Grail quest representing a passage from one stage of being to the next are essential for the *Queste*, the 'Sankgreal' and *Lancelot*. In *Lancelot*, these ideas are expressed in Lancelot's incoherent, yet touching monologues in which he deplores the sunken condition of modern society and in Percival's silences. Moreover, the underlying Kierkegaardian philosophy, which explains how Lancelot and Percival spiritually mature in the course of their respective quests, is used by Percy as substitute for religious exegesis in post-Christian society.

In conclusion, it seems that, although there is little evidence of Percy's borrowing directly from a particular Arthurian text, some recurrent analogies appear between *Lancelot* and medieval Grail quest romances. Such issues as death, the treatment of women and their role as spiritual guides as well as the link between family and world histories echo the world of medieval romances. Many Arthurian allusions in *Lancelot* are common to both medieval and American Arthuriana: for instance, Lancelot's self-imposed messianism reminds of Sir Galahad's Christ-like qualities in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal'. Likewise, Lancelot's calling himself a new Adam, presumably because he is supposed to accomplish the Grail quest, has parallels in medieval and American Grail quest literature. Lancelot's comparison of the true lady to the Virgin Mary has analogies in certain medieval writings, including the *Queste*, and in the Old South culture. Moreover, Lancelot finds

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<sup>101</sup> Desmond, 'Revisioning *The Fall*', p. 629.

<sup>102</sup> Percy, *Signposts*, p. 423. The use of Kierkegaardian stages of life in Percy's novels is considered above, 5.1.



support for his view that women are either ladies or whores (mostly the latter in this fallen world) in the writings of early Christian authors and in the medieval tradition of demonizing women. However, in Arthurian romances, women frequently serve as spiritual guides to knights errant, and many female characters in *Lancelot* perform the same role. Additionally, women in *Lancelot* often have a supernatural, fairylike appearance, such as the lady of the camellias whom Lancelot sees in his hallucination, so that the reader is reminded of the fairies aiding questing knights in medieval and post-medieval, particularly American Arthuriana (for example, in Lowell's *The Vision of Sir Launfal*). Meanwhile, when Lancelot speaks about women, he objectifies them, or treats them as a category, without noticing individual women. This approach alienates him from women, but it also minimizes the pain of Margot's adultery. Another issue which appears to be problematic for Lancelot is death, and his strategy, once again, is to present the phenomenon as purely physical, to be investigated by scientific methods. Lancelot's inability to cope with the issue of death is typical of post-Christian, technological society. In difference from Lancelot, Percival becomes able to face death by the novel's end, and his willingness to pray for the dead reunites, symbolically, the dead and the living into one community, an approach that was common in the Middle Ages and is part of the Christian culture. Analogies between *Lancelot* and medieval Grail quest romances are generally found in the treatment of sensitive moral issues, as Percy employs medievalist tropes to comment on contemporary psychological and existential problems, particularly the loss of meaning and alienation in contemporary post-religious culture.

## Chapter 6

### David Lodge's *Small World*: The Grail Quest and 1980s Academe

David Lodge's *Small World* (1984) contains, like many of his other novels, numerous literary allusions.<sup>1</sup> In *Small World*, the most notable allusions are to the Grail quest, with particular references to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920).<sup>2</sup> This chapter will discuss Lodge's employment of medieval topoi, especially of the quest, in portraying the academic community of *Small World*. In the first section, the themes of genre, community and the quest are considered as a preliminary to discussing the problems of death, gender relations and the individual's role in history. The discussion focuses on selected episodes which are important in the characters' individual 'quests'. This approach will help us to see the similarities and differences between the medieval Grail quest as it appears, for instance, in the *Queste* and in Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal', and the contemporary quests of the *Small World* characters.

#### 6.1 The Academic Community and Arthurian Chivalry: Parallels and Allusions

David Lodge explains that he decided to add the subtitle 'An Academic Romance' to *Small World* in

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<sup>1</sup> David Lodge answers the question about his use of literary allusions in the 1989 interview with Raymond Thompson: 'I write to communicate, but like most literary writers I don't display all my goods on the counter. The books are written in a layered style so that they have coherence and comprehensibility on the surface' (Thompson, 'Interview').

<sup>2</sup> Lodge asserts that he 'concentrated upon the Grail legend seen through the lens of Jessie Weston and T. S. Eliot' (Thompson, 'Interview'). For Eliot's *The Waste Land*, references are to *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

order to prepare the reader for the (occasionally) unrealistic development of its plot.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, he states that *Small World* is ‘a novel that consciously imitates the interlacing plots of chivalric romances, so there is an intertextual justification, too, for the multiplicity of coincidences in the story’.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, *Small World* is not only a romance but also a campus novel, usually classified, alongside *Changing Places* (1975) and *Nice Work* (1989), as part of Lodge’s ‘campus trilogy’. The reasons for grouping the three novels together include continuity of setting (Rummidge, a fictional place based on Birmingham, where Lodge used to teach)<sup>5</sup> and characters (most notably Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow). However, none of these novels is set on a single campus. *Changing Places* is subtitled ‘Tale of Two Campuses’, and the action takes place simultaneously not only on two different campuses, but on two continents, at Rummidge in Britain and at Euphoria in the United States. In turn, *Nice Work* is built on the conflict between the factory and the university, between two cultures, industry and academe, with its main characters Vic Wilcox and Dr Robyn Penrose representing the respective milieus.

*Small World* can be called a campus novel in the sense that it is set in the world-wide space of a ‘global campus’. Lodge draws attention to the global nature of contemporary academic life in the conversation between Morris Zapp and Hilary Swallow, Zapp highlighting that

“The day of the single, static campus is over.”

“And the single, static campus novel with it, I suppose?”

“Exactly! Even two campuses wouldn’t be enough.” (63)

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<sup>3</sup> Lodge comments on the subtitle in the interview ‘Art Must Entertain, or Give Delight’ (in *Desperado Essay-Interviews*, ed. by Lidia Vianu (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2006), pp. 224-30 (p. 226). Lodge explains his understanding and employment of romance techniques in some of his critical writings (*The Art of Fiction* (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1992, repr. London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 152) and interviews (Thompson, ‘Interview’; John Haffenden, ‘David Lodge’, in *Novelists in Interview* (Bungay: Chaucer Press, 1985), pp. 145-67 (pp. 154-55)). Lodge’s concept of romance is also discussed in reviews (see Merle Rubin, ‘Lodge’s *Small World*: a comedy of scholarship and romance in the jet age’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 March 1985, p. 23).

<sup>4</sup> Lodge, *Art of Fiction*, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> See Lodge, *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (Secker & Warburg, 1975; repr. London: Penguin, 1979), p. 6 and ‘Author’s Note’, in *Nice Work* (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1988; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1989).

Zapp also remarks '[t]he world is a global campus' (64). Earlier in the novel, Zapp explains to the 'conference virgin' (18) Persse McGarrigle that '[a]s long as you have access to a telephone, a Xerox machine, and a conference grant fund, you're OK, you're plugged into the only university that really matters – the global campus' (44).

In fact, somewhat qualifying Zapp's claim that the old-fashioned campus novel is no longer possible to write, *Small World* contains many features that relate it to classic representatives of the genre. Early in the text, Zapp quotes from one of the first campus narratives, F. M. Cornford's 1908 pamphlet on university politics, *Microcosmographia Academica* (42).<sup>6</sup> In his 'Introduction' to Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, Lodge cites the main themes of 'most campus novels, British and American' as being 'academic politics in the broader sense, intellectual competition and intrigue, taboo sexual relations between staff and students, and the social and educational dynamics of the seminar and tutorial'.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Lodge notes that the narrative interest of the campus novel derives either from the struggle for power or from amorous intrigue: '[i]nside, as outside, the academy, the principal determinants of action are sex and the will to power, and a typology of campus fiction might be based on a consideration of the relative dominance of these two drives in the story'.<sup>8</sup> In *Small World*, the two topics are present, so that individual characters are engaged in the pursuit of power, women or both: Persse's quest is for a girl, Angelica, and, later, Cheryl, while most of the other academics' quest is for the prestigious UNESCO chair of literary criticism. When Zapp quotes Cornford's *Microcosmographia*, he chooses a passage about 'young [men] in a hurry' (44), a class of men who seem to be the academic counterparts of the medieval 'young', that is,

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<sup>6</sup> Lodge describes *Lucky Jim* as 'the first British campus novel', as different from the Varsity novel about the life of Oxford dons, to which genre Cornford's *Microcosmographia* belongs. Lodge acknowledges the indebtedness of his campus novels to *Lucky Jim* ('Introduction', in Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. v-xvii (pp. vii-viii)). See also Bernard Bergonzi's summary on the campus novel tradition prior to Lodge (*David Lodge* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), p. 14).

<sup>7</sup> Lodge, 'Introduction', p. viii.

<sup>8</sup> Lodge, *Write On*, p. 170.

unmarried knights: '[i]n modern academic society they [young men in a hurry] take away your research grants. And your women, too, of course' (42). Lodge's explanation for the popularity of literary theory in American academic society is enlightening in respect of Zapp's mode of thinking:

[t]here is surely a hidden link between the professionalism of the American academic world and the eagerness with which it has devoured, domesticated and developed European theory. The very difficulty and esotericism of theory make it all the more effective for purposes of professional identification, apprenticeship and assessment. It sorts out the men from the boys or, to put it another way, speeds the tribal process by which boys become young men and push out the old men.<sup>9</sup>

As Lodge notes in his review of Imre Saluzinsky's book of interviews *Criticism in Society* (1987), '[t]he world of American academic criticism is a small, insulated one, but it mirrors the macro-society in being highly competitive. In both worlds it is possible to succeed spectacularly, because it is also possible to fail'.<sup>10</sup> In another essay, Lodge argues that the campus novel represents society in miniature, so that the situations described in *Small World*, the struggles for power and success, apply not only to the 1980s academic community, but to the entire western society of the 1980s.<sup>11</sup>

The world Lodge describes is dominated by the struggle for power in professional and erotic spheres. This struggle for power is one of the reasons for associating the *Small World* academic community with medieval chivalry, especially with King Arthur's Round Table. Lodge explains that he uses the motif of knights errant as a unifying metaphor for the novel and that he first conceived

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<sup>9</sup> Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 181.

<sup>10</sup> Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 176.

<sup>11</sup> Lodge, *Write On*, p. 169.

of the idea after watching the film *Excalibur*.<sup>12</sup> In fact, that film presents a stereotypic world of medieval violence, which does not correspond exactly to the tone of medieval romances, even to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the violence of which has been remarked by scholars.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, however, Lodge's *Grail* owes more to Eliot's *The Waste Land* than to the film, and Lodge mentions that he reread Jessie Weston and decided to incorporate information on her and Eliot in the novel.<sup>14</sup> Only the comic medieval banquet episode, with 'lasses' in low-cut garments and obscene songs performed by a jester, reflects the popular stereotype of medieval England, stretched to the extreme:

[i]t was no great sacrifice to be on the margins of this particular feast. The mead tasted like tepid sugar-water, the medieval fare consisted of fried chicken and jacket potatoes eaten without the convenience of knives and forks, and the wenches were the usual Martineau Hall waitresses who had been bribed or bullied into wearing long dresses with plunging necklines. (53)

The academic community is compared to Arthurian knighthood on two levels: comically, the academics in this scene become part of Arthur's retinue when they attend this down-market pastiche of a banquet and, on a more serious note, when they become engaged in their various quests.

The quest that most academics, except Persse, enter is for the UNESCO chair of literary criticism. This quest, remote as it may seem from the spiritual quest of the French *Queste* and Malory's 'Sankgreal', brings to mind these medieval texts, as well as Zink's novel *Déodat* (discussed in the next chapter), because the quest of Lodge's academics is instigated by discontent and by desire to gain fame in this world. Accordingly, as the UNESCO representative, Jacques Textel, observes, 'top academics are the least contented people in the world. They always think the

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<sup>12</sup> Thompson, 'Interview' and Lodge, *Write On*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>13</sup> For references to studies on violence in Malory's romance, see above, Chapter 2.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, 'Interview'.

grass is greener in the next field' (163). His remark echoes the dream seen by one of the more worldly knights in the *Queste*, Sir Hector, in which bulls depart to seek richer pastures; the dream is interpreted by a hermit, who explains that the bulls represent Arthur's knights, dissatisfied with the glory available at the court and aspiring, vainly, to witness the Grail mysteries.<sup>15</sup> The quest of medieval worldly knights in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' is doomed to failure, because they are bent on increasing their social glory rather than on seeking salvation and the revelation of divine mysteries. Likewise, the efforts of such high-profile academics as Morris Zapp, Rudyard Parkinson, Fulvia Morgana, Siegfried von Turpitz, Michel Tardieu and Philip Swallow come to nothing, because they want professional, worldly fame for themselves, rather than being concerned with the quest for truth. Presumably, the 'truth' of literary texts can never be established once and for all – not because, as Zapp intimates, 'it would have eventually put [them] all out of business' or because 'every decoding is another encoding' (25), but because, if all the meanings of all literary texts *could* be explained, literature, as well as literary criticism, would be 'dead'. When Persse asks his apparently naïve question at the MLA conference, about what will happen if scholars agreed on a single theory of literary criticism, he strikes at the heart of the problem: no single theory can explain all possible implications of all literary texts. For Zapp, deconstruction is the theory most likely to bring about the débâcle of literary studies: '[i]t's kind of exciting – the last intellectual thrill left. Like sawing through the branch you're sitting on' (118). However, Zapp becomes disillusioned with deconstruction after experiencing the threat of being 'deconstructed' by kidnapers.<sup>16</sup> The question of literary theory is not resolved in a satisfactory way by the end of *Small World* – it manifestly cannot be – and in this respect the novel resembles the medieval Grail quest romances, where the Grail is taken from this world after the quest is accomplished, so that the reader remains ignorant of the mysteries the Grail contains.

As in the case of Percy's *Lancelot*, there is more than one Grail in Lodge's *Small World*.

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<sup>15</sup> See the *Queste*, p. 149 (dream) and pp. 155-57 (interpretation of the dream).

<sup>16</sup> Zapp's experience of 'deconstruction' examined in more detail later in the chapter (6.2, p. 197).

Different quests conducted by the characters in *Small World* indicate the complex nature of Lodge's body of academic 'chivalry', because the Grail each character pursues depends on his or her ambitions. Lodge himself stated in an interview that he uses the Arthurian framework as a metaphor for academic activity because of the similarity between contemporary academics venturing tirelessly to conferences, the modern equivalent of pilgrimages and quests, and medieval knights errant.<sup>17</sup> The parallel is introduced overtly in the first part of the book by Morris Zapp in conversation with Hilary Swallow: '[s]cholars these days are like the errant knights of old, wandering the ways of the world in search of adventure and glory' (63), and Hilary comments bitterly on these knights leaving their wives at home. Though Lodge does not make the connection, the problem of wives being left behind while knights depart on their chivalric pursuits is a topic present already in medieval romance. The *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' knights leaving Arthur's court to look for the Grail are warned that, if they are accompanied by any of the court ladies, their mission would never be accomplished. However, Zapp reassures Hilary that 'a lot of the knights are women, these days. There's positive discrimination at the Round Table' (63). In fact, Zapp's remark is not supported by the novel: the only female scholars in *Small World* are Fulvia Morgana, Angelica Pabst, who is in search of a post, and the retired Miss Maiden. *Small World's* female characters ultimately resemble not knights but female character types that are common in medieval Grail quest romances: they combine features of guides, ladies in distress, scheming witches, demonic temptresses and benevolent fairies.<sup>18</sup>

Morris Zapp's reference to chivalry in fact harks back to the use of medieval and Arthurian allusions in an earlier campus novel, *Changing Places*, in which Morris Zapp, his wife Desirée as well as Philip and Hilary Swallow appear for the first time. There are a few Arthurian references in *Changing Places*, for instance, Morris and Hilary listening to 'a so-so folk-blues group called

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson, 'Interview'. As a spiritual search, the Grail quest is of course similar to a pilgrimage.

<sup>18</sup> Lodge's women characters are examined further in the present chapter (6.3).



Morte D'Arthur'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in his other novels set on campuses or dealing with aspects of academic life, Lodge also employs the quest theme. The protagonist of *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), Adam, imagines himself to be on 'a dangerous quest' leading to a 'Castle Perilous'.<sup>20</sup> In *Nice Work*, Dr Robyn Penrose, who lectures at the University of Rummidge, has a dream reminiscent of revivifying the Waste Land, as she imagines factory workers coming to the campus grounds on a sunny day, welcomed by the students and academic staff, resulting in a more harmonious society.<sup>21</sup>

*Small World*, however, differs from Lodge's other campus novels in that the metaphors of errant chivalry and redemption of the Waste Land are sustained throughout the novel. Moreover, there are in this text further similarities between Arthurian knights of medieval romances and Lodge's academics. Both chivalry and academe are supranational communities, united despite their national differences; John Mullan argues that *Small World* presents an assemblage of national stereotypes – for instance, the Aryan German Turpitz with his leather glove, the passionate and sexually devious Italian Fulvia Morgana – where representatives of different nations and schools of academic tradition are treated with consistent irony.<sup>22</sup> The ease with which these disparate individuals meet at conferences around the world and, finally, assemble for the MLA conference, an equivalent of Arthur's Pentecost, is reminiscent of the recluse's words in the *Queste*, which Malory reproduced in the 'Sankgreal': '[f]or all the worlde, crystenyd and hethyn, repayryth unto the Rounde Table' (906).<sup>23</sup>

In addition to Zapp's early reference to contemporary academics as knights errant, *Small World* includes comments which bring the Grail quest to the fore explicitly. In two conversations

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<sup>19</sup> Lodge, *Changing Places*, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup> Lodge, *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (Mac Gibbon & Key, 1965; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, p. 347.

<sup>22</sup> John Mullan, 'Small World by David Lodge. Week One: National Stereotypes', *The Guardian*, 7 November 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Malory's words faithfully translate the *Queste* 'de toutes terres ou chevalerie repere, soit de crestienté ou de paiennie, viennent a la Table Reonde li chevalier' (76); the theme is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, pp. 97-98.

with Miss Maiden, Persse mentions his quest for Angelica, which establishes a link between contemporary ‘knights’ and their various Grails – professional, personal and spiritual. Of all the *Small World* academics, Persse is the only one for whom the private Grail, his beloved Angelica, is more important than his professional career. Although Persse’s attachment to the enigmatic and elusive Angelica is rash and immature, he makes a significant point when remarking in conversation with Miss Maiden that the Grail is different for everyone: ‘[f]or Eliot it was religious faith, but for another it might be fame, or the love of a good woman’ (12). It is argued at the end of the present chapter (6.4) that Persse’s ability to seek the private Grail of affection enables the attainment of the public Grail and restores the Waste Land of literary theory to productivity.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, Miss Maiden urges Persse to see himself as a questing knight *and* a courtly lover wooing his lady. When Persse misses Angelica at a conference in Hawaii, he meets instead Miss Maiden, who reassures the Irishman that ‘a young woman likes to be wooed before she is won’, and that Angelica is ‘putting [him] to the test’ (286). When Persse confesses that he was on the point of abandoning the quest, Miss Maiden urges him:

“Never give up.”

“Like the Grail knights?”

“Oh, but they were such boobies,” says Miss Maiden. “All they had to do was to ask a question at the right moment, and they generally muffed it.” (286)

Thus encouraged, Persse once again sets on his quest, at the end of which he does not achieve his personal ambition, Angelica, but, like his namesake Percival on his second visit to the Grail castle, manages instead ‘to ask a question at the right moment’. The open ending of *Small World*, which

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick Holmes maintains that to the two different quests within the fictional framework of *Small World*, there can be added a third quest, the quest of the reader trying to discover the novel’s unifying principle (“The Reader as Discoverer in David Lodge’s *Small World*”, *Critique*, 32 (1990), 47-57).

leaves Persse in search of yet another maiden, Cheryl Summerbee, echoes both the troubadour tradition of courtly love, which is never consummated, and, more generally, romance as a genre. Lodge's novel is in many instances self-reflexive. The novel's ending illustrates the definition of romance as 'a multiple orgasm', proposed by Angelica in her MLA paper:

[t]he narrative questions open and close, open and close, like the contractions of the vaginal muscles in intercourse, and this process is in principle endless. The greatest and most characteristic romances are often unfinished – they end only with the author's exhaustion... (323)

The notion of romance's theoretical open-endedness is embraced by Lodge, who leaves his protagonist in front of an airport timetable, ready to depart in another round-the-world quest for a maiden. Lodge remarks that the ending was influenced by Northrop Frye's notion that 'in its most primitive form romance doesn't end: a character has one adventure after another until the author dies of exhaustion'.<sup>25</sup> However, medieval romances, including the Grail quest romances, are more often than not finished in such a way as to exclude the possibility of continuation. With the exception of Chrétien's unfinished *Le Roman de Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal*, which was continued by several authors and finally brought to an end, the Grail quest romances usually end with the Grail being taken to heaven, thus excluding the possibility of any further Grail adventures.

## 6.2 Reality Clashes with Literary Theory: Death and Deconstruction

Lodge has described his later novel, *Paradise News*, as 'post-Christian' novel, stressing that it is

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<sup>25</sup> Haffenden, 'Lodge', p. 162.

essentially different from being a 'non-Christian or anti-Christian'.<sup>26</sup> The same definition can be applied to *Small World*, evident from its treatment of such moral problems as death and bereavement. Being, in Lodge's own words 'a comedy as well as romance', *Small World* contains few references to death, and in the instances when the issues of death and bereavement are introduced, they are treated less seriously than in some other of Lodge's novels, for example, *How Far Can You Go?* (1980), *Paradise News* (1991), *Therapy* (1995), *Thinks...* (2001) and *A Man of Parts (H. G. Wells)* (2008).<sup>27</sup> However, in some episodes, the characters of *Small World* are directly confronted with the possibility of death, revealing the bafflement and fear that contrasts with the more composed attitude of medieval romances. For these characters, the experience of death is not mitigated by belief in a future life nor, relatedly, by any rituals of passage, such as the Last Communion, Christian funeral services or prayers for the dead, and it seems that, for some of them at least, the absence of an adequate frame of reference for understanding death makes the prospect of death all the more terrifying. There are three such episodes: Philip Swallow's recounting of the plane crash in which he could have died several years before, Morris Zapp's threatened assassination by Italian radicals, and Persse McGarrigle's reaction to an emergency landing of the plane on which he returns after a disappointment in his quest for Angelica.

For Swallow, proximity to death increases intensity of experience, though he appreciates it only when the actual danger to his life is removed: '[i]ntensity of experience is what we're looking for, I think. [...] I found it in America in '69 [...] the mixture of pleasure and danger and freedom – and the sun' (66).<sup>28</sup> Following the mock medieval banquet, he returns home dejected at the failure of his conference, and Zapp wonders if Swallow is 'always like this after a medieval banquet' (66).

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<sup>26</sup> Vianu, 'Art Must Entertain', p. 227.

<sup>27</sup> Lodge, *Write On*, p. 74. Lodge describes *Changing Places* and *Small World* as 'comic novels' and comments on the difference in handling 'emotions associated with love and death' between the former two and his subsequent novels (Vianu, 'Art Must Entertain', pp. 224-25).

<sup>28</sup> Swallow has experienced this intensity in *Changing Places*, in which he spends a term at the University of Euphoric State, coming to enjoy the American way of life, the atmosphere of upheaval at the university and the company of Zapp's wife, Desirée.

It is possible that the evocation of King Arthur's Round Table and the contrast between genuine medieval romance and its clownish re-enactment by 'Ye Merrie Olde Round Table' team contributes to Swallow's depression. This contrast may remind him that his own life, the life of an obscure professor at a redbrick university, is closer to the farce of the cheapened inauthentic medieval banquet rather than to the glory of medieval romance, whereas earlier he *had* experienced adventures. These adventures, though not exactly heroic, were occasions which seemed briefly to approach the intensity of experience associated with chivalry, such as successive encounters with death on battle-field and with love in castles.

Thus, Swallow tells Zapp a story which happened to him years ago, when he was only beginning to travel as a visiting lecturer on British Council tours. Flying back home, he and his neighbour notice that one of the plane's engines is on fire. The plane returns to the airport it left at Genoa and makes an emergency landing. Swallow telephones the British Council representative Simpson, who takes Swallow to his house for the night. Swallow dines with Simpson and his wife, Joy, and, after Simpson leaves later on a work trip, Swallow makes fervent love to Joy. The next morning he departs without having an opportunity to speak privately to Joy. Later, Swallow learns that the Simpsons themselves died in a plane crash. The story is narrated in a rather literary manner, commented on by Zapp, and Swallow acknowledges that he once wrote it down for his 'own satisfaction' (72). Thus, the reader is aware that Swallow's story within the story lacks immediacy, because Swallow must have put much consideration into selecting and wording the relevant details, for instance, when he speaks of 'taking an irrevocable leap into moral space, pulling on the zip-tab at her throat like a parachute ripcord, and falling with her to the floor' (72). In other words, the story renders not simply Swallow's experience but his understanding of this adventure and the way he wants to see himself within it. Indeed, the narrative is saturated with a flavour of medieval romance in its structure and in separate details. Like the romance knights errant, who enjoy the favours of a lady or damsel after a violent battle, Swallow feels an urge to make love to 'any

woman' after his narrow escape (72): '[i]t was as if, having passed through the shadow of death, I had suddenly recovered an appetite for life I thought I had lost for ever' (71). Later, he explains that, by making love to Joy, '[he] felt [he] was defying death, fucking [his] way out of the grave' (74). The episode can be explained, alternatively, in a more modern way, so that Swallow would appear not like a knight but like the hero of an adventure story, an academic James Bond, who survives mortal danger and seduces his attractive hostess.

Early in his narrative, Swallow sees himself as a bold, self-possessed man, making a point of his English 'sangfroid' as opposed to the emotional response of the Italian passengers (70). However, the impression of Swallow as a brave knight is undermined, when he confesses to feeling a double unfairness in the episode of the emergency landing: it is unfair that he should die, and it is unfair that he is one of the last passengers to leave the plane (69, 70). When he comes to Simpson's flat, Swallow notices that his sensations have been exacerbated by the proximity of death. He feasts on Parma ham, cake and tea, as medieval knights feasted in a castle, prior to making love to his beautiful 'chatelaine': '[t]he food pierced me with its exquisite flavours, the tea was fragrant as ambrosia, and the woman sitting opposite to me seemed unbearably beautiful, all the more because she was totally unconscious of her attractions for me' (71). Indeed, Swallow's description of Joy echoes both medieval romance and its interpretation from James Frazer and Jessie Weston onwards as a fertility myth. Swallow explicitly associates Joy's long gown with a medieval dress (72) and Joy herself with a feminine deity, a life-giving principle: 'I was moaning and raving into her ear [...] how I felt reconnected to the earth and the life force and all kinds of romantic nonsense' (73). Her name, too, is of course symbolic, as, according to Swallow, she teaches him to enjoy life once more.

When Swallow meets Joy again, he tries to recreate the experience, despite Zapp's warning that habit would eventually kill the excitement he felt. Swallow now has, less romantically, to choose between, on the one hand, breaking the rules of propriety by abandoning his wife and, on

the other, succumbing to the ordinariness of his family routine, which would drag on to his eventual death. Before meeting Joy again, he muses on the sadness of finishing his life in retirement and impotence:

[w]as it, perhaps, time to call a halt to his travels, abandon the quest for intensity of experience he had bumbled on about to Morris Zapp, [...] settle for routine and domesticity, for safe sex with Hilary and the familiar round of the Rummidge academic year, [...] until it was time to retire, retire from both sex and work?

Followed in due course by retirement from life. (212)

Like Arthur Kingfisher, whose belief in the connection between sexual and intellectual powers is commented later on in the present chapter (6.4), Swallow associates sex and career. Eventually, he acknowledges that he is not equal to the challenge of acting as a dashing knight and tireless lover, so he leaves Joy and returns to Hilary.

Commenting on Swallow's experience, Zapp suggests that the action of breaking away from habit is accountable for Swallow's 'intensity of experience'. Zapp quotes the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky on the detrimental effects of habitualization: '*[h]abit devours objects, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war... Art exists to help us recover the sensation of life*' (77).<sup>29</sup> Habitualization drives Swallow and, possibly, other academics like Zapp, to their round-the-world errantry of conference-hopping and foreign lectures. Conference-going is supposedly an escape from the more dreary routine of teaching and administration, as conferences are associated with pleasure. However, conferences become a habit in themselves for Swallow, and, as he sets out for Turkey, he longs for the warmth of Hilary's embrace.

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<sup>29</sup> Lodge uses the same quote to comment on the use of defamiliarization for describing execution in *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 13. Zapp misquotes Shklovsky, because the first word of the quotation as it appears in Lodge's article is 'habitualization' rather than 'habit'.

Ironically, Lodge's scholars of literature, a subject which, like all art, should 'help us recover the sensation of life', are unaffected by the subject of their study.<sup>30</sup> Swallow himself notes that the application of contemporary theory, structuralism and deconstruction in particular, destroys the enjoyment of great literary works and, hence, annihilates their value, an argument with which Lodge appears to sympathise. Literary theory as such may result in imaginative death when elaboration of theory hides from the critic and the reader art and life themselves, as structuralism and deconstruction or, indeed, any theory, might do when taken to an extreme.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, Morris Zapp becomes disillusioned with literary theory after his own encounter with death. His disillusionment grows in the course of his confinement when kidnapped, which makes him reconsider his priorities. As the days go on, Zapp is less and less concerned with mundane cares, professional ambitions and the need to preserve his dignity:

[m]ost of the time he spends lying on the bunk bed, racked by a monotonous cycle of rage, self-pity and fear. As the days have passed, his anxieties have become more basic. At first he was chiefly concerned about the arrangements for the Jerusalem conference. Later, about staying alive. (275)

Significantly, in this and later passages referring to his kidnapping, one of the most prominent words is 'life' and its derivatives.

Moreover, Zapp abandons his belief in contemporary literary theory, including deconstruction. Given his situation, the very term 'deconstruction' is a euphemism for the concept of death or decomposition, an academic counterpart of psychobabble, another discourse that tends

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<sup>30</sup> Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Lodge cites one of the most radical exponents of structuralism, Roland Barthes, for whom the critic's task 'lies not in the ability to *discover* the work under consideration but, on the contrary, to cover it as completely as possible with one's own language' ('Criticism as Language', *The Critical Moment* (1964), quoted in Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 62).



to disguise or evade the inevitability of death.<sup>32</sup> Zapp realises that the structuralist world-view, in which there is no objective truth and any theory can be applied to any literary text or any life situation as long as it can yield a satisfactory explanation, is at fault. Certainly, in matters of life and death, a certain point of anchorage, some objective truth, must be established. In the part of the quotation Zapp omits when speaking to Swallow, Shklovsky cites Tolstoy: '[i]f all complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never existed'.<sup>33</sup> Lodge's implication in *Small World* seems to be that recent developments in criticism lead to non-existence, to death in life, a condition that also appears in Walker Percy's writing.<sup>34</sup> In both *Small World* and *Lancelot*, failure to live authentically leads to stagnation and spiritual death. In *Déodat*, the argument appears at first to be reversed: Sir Lancelot and, afterwards, the protagonist long for non-existence. However, as is explained in the next chapter (7.4), what *they* understand by non-existence is the condition expressed in the title, transparency in the eyes of other people and freedom to live in the here and now.

Religion, and Christianity in particular, with its claims to a single truth, may provide such anchorage, but turning to religion is not a possibility that either Swallow or Zapp, representatives of post-Christian society, contemplate. However, the Christian view of death can appear as a viable alternative, provided that the character embraces Church teaching whole-heartedly, as does Persse MacGarrigle. In this respect, *Small World* resembles some of the other novels written by Lodge, in which the capacity of religious ritual to mitigate the experiences of death and bereavement is tested, as in *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962), with its thorough explanation of the significance of Christian preparation for death and of burial rites.<sup>35</sup> Two of Lodge's later novels foreground the correlation

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<sup>32</sup> Lodge comments on the tendency to avoid the concept of death by the employment of psychobabble in *Working with Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 195.

<sup>33</sup> Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 62. Lodge stresses that structuralist philosophy is opposed to humanism, denying the existence of the individual 'subject' and the 'single Truth about the world' (*Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 62).

<sup>34</sup> Percy's Lancelot observes that the people buried on the New Orleans cemetery his window overlooks are more alive than the city's living inhabitants, see Chapter 5.1, p. 153.

<sup>35</sup> Lodge, *Ginger, You're Barmy* (Mac Gibbon & Key, 1962; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 100-01.

between the effect of ritual and the participant's faith. In *Therapy* (1988), a bereaved mother undertakes a strenuous pilgrimage on foot to Santiago de Compostella.<sup>36</sup> In *Thinks...* (2001), the heroine Helen, who has lost her faith in Christ but not her fear of sin and death, finds that her husband Martin's funeral ceremony and the subsequent memorial service do nothing to assuage her grief.<sup>37</sup> Remarkably, Lodge's characters who embrace the letter and, even more significantly, the spirit of Christian teaching, as does Persse in *Small World*, tend to cope with death and bereavement better than those who practise a half-hearted, 'liberal' version of religion or who, like Zapp, have no religion at all.

In *Small World*, when the characters of Christian background are contemplating the possibility of death, their response is in direct proportion to their faith. After watching a pornographic film in preparation for his rendez-vous with Angelica, Persse realises that, if death struck him there and then, he would die in a state of mortal sin, and he responds like a medieval knight wounded on the battle-field. Like Sir Yvain, who has received a mortal blow and thinks only about being taken to an abbey for confession and absolution, Persse hurries to confession.<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, he, like his medieval namesake Sir Perceval, is able to face fearlessly any danger, including the dreaded possibility of a plane crash. Flying home from Amsterdam, where he comes to believe, erroneously, that Angelica was a prostitute, Persse is completely dejected and does not feel anything when he learns that the plane is about to make an emergency landing. The situation is to an extent similar to Swallow's and, like Swallow, Persse regains 'an appetite for life' after the plane lands safely (207). However, Persse's apathy at hearing about the danger contrasts with Swallow's self-pity, fear and pathetic attempts at keeping face. Whereas Swallow is only superficially more composed than the emotional Italian passengers, Persse is truly untroubled by the thought his life might end: '[i]ndifferent to life himself, Persse observed the conduct of those

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<sup>36</sup> Lodge, *Therapy* (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1988, repr. London: Penguin Books, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Lodge, *Thinks...* (Secker and Warburg, 2001; repr. London: Penguin Books, 2002), pp. 109-11.

<sup>38</sup> The *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' episodes are examined above, Chapter 2, see p. 47.

around him with detached curiosity' (206). What helps him out of depression is the comic sight of two Irish stewardesses, who, unable to remember the 'Act of Contrition', recite '[f]or what we are about to receive [...] may the Lord make us truly thankful' (207). Thanksgiving is an appropriate Christian response to any life situation, but it is incongruously out of place in the panic-stricken plane. Persse's lack of emotion throughout the episode may be explained by his youth: he takes life for granted, so that the possibility of death does not occur to him seriously. At the same time, Persse's 'naïve' Irish Catholicism and his clear conscience contribute to his ability to remain calm throughout the emergency and to survive his disappointment with Angelica.

Although Lodge was inspired by Eliot's *The Waste Land* and uses the Grail quest as a unifying motif for his novel, he presents the theme of death very differently from the way Eliot does. Eliot's poem is set in the chaotic and dreary post-war society, where moral ideals have been shattered and human existence is rendered to an extent purposeless by the shock of war. The tone of the poem is set early on in the 'Unreal City', where commuters are likened to the lost souls of Dante's *Inferno*: 'A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many'.<sup>39</sup> Eliot's poem is centred on the death and rebirth theme, fusing the reality of post-World War I London and the Grail myth. In *Small World*, the only direct reference to the theme of death in *The Waste Land* occurs in the course of the street-theatre at Lausanne:

"Stetson!"

Persse looked up [...] to see a man dressed in the uniform of an officer in the First World War, Sam Browne and puttees, bearing down upon him, swagger-stick raised. "You were with me in the ships at Mylae! That corpse you planted last year in your garden, has it begun to sprout?" Persse backed away in alarm. (262)

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<sup>39</sup> Lodge remarks on the analogy of Eliot's lines to Dante's *Inferno* in *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 103.

In the context of street-theatre, the effect is either bewildering, if the reader, like Persse, fails to recognise the allusion at once, or comically absurd.

Generally, the academic universe Lodge describes is impervious to the neuroses and anxieties manifested in *The Waste Land*, albeit the spiritual and creative landscape of the academic community is arid and in need of a refreshing rain to ‘stir’ its ‘dull roots’,<sup>40</sup> an event which occurs at the MLA conference following Persse’s enlightened question. Meanwhile, the physical reality of the academic world is peaceful and relatively comfortable, with the single exception of Turkey, and even there the visiting Swallow does not encounter actual danger or discomfort. It is not that the world has become a better place since the writing of the *The Waste Land*; it is just that the academics of *Small World*, immersed in their pursuit of literary studies, are largely sheltered from external disturbances, unless the latter penetrate their lives directly, as with Zapp’s kidnapping. In this respect, Lodge’s academics resemble the people at the beginning of *The Waste Land*, who do not want to be stirred.<sup>41</sup> Ironically, Zapp’s kidnapping takes place as he is enjoying his stay at the Rockefeller villa and after he has been musing on his comfort on board a plane. Reading about the disasters and disturbances in the world, Zapp literally soars above them, and these items of bad news add to his comfort:

Morris Zapp basks in the sun [...] and reads in his copy of *The Times* of clashes between police and protesters against the National Front in Southall; of earthquakes in Yugoslavia, fighting in Lebanon, political murders in Turkey, meat shortages in Poland, car bombs in Belfast, and of many other tragedies, afflictions, outrages, at various points of the globe. But up here, in the sun, above the clouds, all is calm, if not quiet. [...] As the newspaper informs him, there are

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<sup>40</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*, ll. 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> The idea that such people are ‘living a partly living’ is expressed in Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).

many worse places to be. (107)

Zapp's feelings are not unique; as has already been mentioned in relation to Percy's *Lancelot* in the previous chapter (5.2, p. 160), in the contemporary world, people are often vicariously drawn to death and disaster that happens to others, whether it is an accident witnessed on a street or a news report. Such events penetrate only occasionally – and then enlighteningly – into the humdrum, privileged and ultimately rootless world of the academics.

### 6.3 Women as Initiators

Lodge's portrayal of female characters in *Small World* has parallels not only with Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but, even more significantly, with medieval and early modern Arthurian literature. In *The Waste Land*, women often appear as victims, which is rarely the case in *Small World*.<sup>42</sup> The names and descriptions of several characters, notably Miss Maiden, Lily, Angelica and Fulvia Morgana, are symbolic, referring the reader to the *The Waste Land* or to other medieval and early modern romances, such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and *Orlando Furioso*.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, many of the women, especially the ones associated with Persse, present features of one or several types found in medieval romance: they are saints, demons, guides, fairies or ladies in distress. This way, Lodge follows the pattern of medieval and early modern romance in *Small World*, a fact he acknowledges in respect of Angelica, explaining that her 'tendency to disappear at crucial moments derives from

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<sup>42</sup> For instance, Bernadette, who has been seduced and abandoned with a child, refuses Persse's help.

<sup>43</sup> According to Lodge, the character of Fulvia Morgana was influenced by the demand to create a representative of a national school of literary criticism, so only her name is Arthurian: '[s]he corresponds to Morgan le Fay only in being a seductive witch, I suppose. The analogy there is not very elaborate' (Thompson, 'Interview'). Bergonzi identifies Fulvia as 'a latter-day version of Morgan le Fay of the Arthurian cycles, mentioned in Ariosto as Morgana' (Bergonzi, *Lodge*, p. 21).

the figure of Angelica in *Orlando Furioso*'.<sup>44</sup>

While Lodge's men are presented as questers, each of his women characters can perform several of the roles referred to above. Although Zapp argues that women are as numerous as men in academe and, as a consequence, can be viewed as female 'knights' (63), it is hardly the case in *Small World*. The only female academics are Angelica, Miss Maiden and Fulvia; in fact, Fulvia, portrayed from the very beginning as a temptress, is actually the only female competitor for the Chapel Perilous of the UNESCO literary chair. Angelica is a 'young knight' in search of fame and patronage or, in other words, in search of a permanent academic post, but in *Small World* she is seen primarily through Persse's eyes as an object of his love and of other men's desire. Miss Maiden, in turn, is retired, so, strictly speaking, she is not 'in' the academic game: she does not present papers at conferences, and her function in the narrative is mainly that of guiding Persse in his quest. On the other hand, according to Lodge, Miss Maiden and Angelica Pabst are 'the only two characters in the novel who [seem] to know what [is] really happening'.<sup>45</sup> They are not surprised by any of the coincidences occurring in the romance, until Persse reveals their family secret, the fact that Angelica and Lily are the children of Miss Maiden and Arthur Kingfisher. Thus, the women characters in *Small World* are better understood within the framework of female types encountered in medieval romances rather than as contemporary 'knights'.

To some extent, the female characters in *Small World* and their relations with male characters have continuities with Lodge's other novels; although Lodge's novels abound with sexual adventures, adultery included, the orientation is ultimately towards conventional, Christian morality rather than complete sexual freedom. Peter Widdowson argues that '[i]n Lodge's novels, there is always a crucial return (or *nostos*) for the main characters from the wide-open spaces, the fleshpots, the global campus, to a marriage which has to be remade'.<sup>46</sup> Lodge's novels are less

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<sup>44</sup> Thompson, 'Interview'.

<sup>45</sup> Mullan, 'Small World by David Lodge. Week four'.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Widdowson, 'The Anti-History Men: Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge', *Critical Quarterly*, 26:4 (1984), 5-

morally challenging than they may appear at first sight, because many of them end with the lovers married or planning to marry or with the restitution of a marriage previously threatened by adultery.<sup>47</sup> In *Changing Places*, Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow exchange not only universities, but also wives. The ending is open, though the academics' decision to return home may suggest a return to their traditional households. The expectation is partially confirmed in *Small World*: although Morris and Desirée have divorced, Hilary and Philip continue with what appears to be an unsatisfactory marriage. In the course of *Small World*, Swallow plans to divorce Hilary and marry Joy, but panics and decides to stay with Hilary. Hilary, in turn, seems to become content with her marriage once she finds, somewhat ironically, the job of marriage counsellor. Moreover, just prior to his meeting Joy again in Turkey, there is a hint that Swallow may be able to rediscover passion with Hilary: the problem in the Swallow marriage may – again – be habit rather than incompatibility. Indeed, only the Ringbaums' marriage breaks at the end of *Small World*, with Thelma about to marry Morris Zapp.

The discourse of gender relations and sexuality in *Small World* is on the whole bolder than the characters' actual practice, with the exception of the comically immoral couple Fulvia and Ernesto. Zapp, despite his bold lecture on 'Textuality as Striptease' (20), leads a life of self-imposed chastity and is scared by Fulvia's bold advances. His theory of sexuality is the reversal of Freud's assumption about the primacy of sex: 'I came to the conclusion that sex is a sublimation of the work instinct. [...] What we really lust for is power, which we achieve by work' (59). Zapp's statement is similar to the position taken by Rudyard Kipling, whose writings reveal close familiarity with the sexual metaphor. However, his knowledge is hardly first-hand, because he is

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32 (p. 22).

<sup>47</sup> Restitution of marriage also occurs in one of Lodge's latest novels *Thinks...* Lodge's earlier novel *Therapy* ends with a puzzling menage-à-trois, which brings the protagonist, Tubby, to his first love, a woman he initially planned to marry and, it appears, should have married. In *Ginger*, the protagonist marries the girl he had 'stolen' from his friend and seduced, though he seems to regret his actions at the end.

a bachelor, a celibate, a virgin. Not that you would guess that from the evidence of his innumerable books, articles and reviews, which are full of knowing and sometimes risqué references to the variations and vagaries of human sexual behaviour. But it is all sex in the head – or on the page. Rudyard Parkinson was never in love, nor wished to be, observing with amused disdain the disastrous effects of that condition on the work-rate of his peers and rivals. (98)

Persse's belief in 'premarital chastity' is startling in the context, a mark of his being an inexperienced Irish Catholic youth. Such avowals are unfashionable in the general atmosphere of the sexually-liberated academic community, where embracing sexual experimentation and deviance is a sign of supposed maturity.

As has been suggested above, the presentation of women in *Small World* is not always completely realistic, as the image of many female characters and the use of sexual symbolism in *Small World* is influenced by Eliot's *The Waste Land* and its source of inspiration, Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. Accordingly, Swallow feels 'reconnected to the earth and the life force' when he makes love to Joy for the first time (73). As Joy herself tells him on the Turkish train, she, too, was awakened by the experience. Joy is described by Swallow in terms that liken her to the earth principle, so that she becomes the equivalent of Eliot's 'hyacinth girl'.<sup>48</sup> The parallel between Joy and the hyacinth girl is never stated explicitly, and it is Angelica who plays the hyacinth girl in the street-theatre performance. Indeed, the Pabst sisters, Angelica and Lily, and their mother, Miss Maiden, assist in Persse's initiation to sexual, moral and social maturity. The culmination takes place at the MLA conference, where Persse gains sexual experience with Lily and understands that his love for Angelica was imagined rather than real. On the other hand, Angelica, Lily and Miss

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<sup>48</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*, l. 36, ll. 39-40. Moorman comments that Eliot's 'hyacinth girl, "arms full and hair wet," obviously a symbol of sexual fertility, is greeted by her lover [...], who, neither "living nor dead," cannot in any way partake of her sexuality and is stunned by her vibrant life' ('T. S. Eliot', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Mahoney, pp. 505-23 (p. 513)).



Maiden, whose presence is instrumental to Persse's quest, and the women of the medieval Grail quest romances often perform the same or similar functions: many, if not all of these women, act as 'saints', like the virginal 'pricktease' Angelica, or as seductresses, like Lily and Fulvia. Some women also act as fairies or guides endowed with special knowledge about the Grail, such as female recluses of medieval romances or Lodge's Miss Maiden.

Thus, the female characters who play a significant role in Persse's life, namely, Miss Maiden, Angelica, Lily and Cheryl, can perform one or several of the functions fulfilled by female characters in medieval romances. For instance, Angelica, as long as Persse believes her to be a prostitute, and Persse's cousin Bernadette perform the narrative function of damsels in distress. However, unlike damsels in medieval romance, Lodge's 'damsels in distress' do not appeal to Persse for help. On the contrary, Bernadette firmly rejects Persse's advice, and Persse discovers that Angelica is not a prostitute. In fact, Angelica combines saintly and demonic features, as well as retaining likeness to a fairy and guide. Her success at evading men, a trait for which Lily calls her 'the archetypal pricktease' (326), contrasts with the bold sexual metaphor she uses in her speech on romance. Angelica also acts as guide to Persse: she explains what structuralism is at the beginning of *Small World*, and, towards the end of the novel, she instructs Cheryl in the theory of romance, both medieval and contemporary. Interestingly, Angelica leaves Cheryl a 'reading list' of source texts, which include *Orlando Furioso* and *The Faerie Queene*.

Lily, in turn, appears to Persse as an archetypal whore, and she admits to being 'a slut at heart' (326). In medieval Grail quest romances, such as the *Queste* or the 'Sankgreal', this type of woman would have been a demon sent to tempt the hero rather than a real woman. She manages to seduce Persse, but, in effecting his sexual initiation and making him realize he does not love Angelica, Lily plays the beneficial function of a guide. Angelica and Lily echo the twin maidens of *The Faerie Queene*, and they represent two opposites of femininity – absolute chastity and absolute licentiousness. Moreover, given the present discussion, they resemble the contrasting female

characters in the *Queste*: Angelica is not unlike Percival's virginal sister, while Lily resembles a demonic temptress, such as the one who nearly seduces Percival in the romance.<sup>49</sup> The somewhat unreal, allegoric qualities of Angelica and Lily are emphasised through their physical description, with the birthmarks shaped as quotation marks on their thighs: as Lily put it, '[w]hen we stand together hip to hip in our bikinis, it looks like we're inside quotation marks' (325).

In the types of women and the roles they play in the male characters' quest, there appears to be a certain similarity between Walker Percy's *Lancelot* and David Lodge's *Small World*. Like Percy's Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, Lodge's Persse McGarrigle enters an amorous relationship with three women, Angelica, Lily and Cheryl Summerbee. Persse's attachment to Angelica corresponds to Lancelot's 'romantic' period, whereas Persse's seduction by Lily represents a sexual period in his personal history. *Small World* ends with the promise of a new quest, at the end of which the protagonist seems likely to enter a more mature relationship, as Persse realises that he is in love with Cheryl, who combines the features of Angelica (innocence) and Lily (passion). Moreover, it is possible to view Cheryl as a benevolent fairy, who falls in love with a knight, a figure such as Nimue, who frees Sir Pelleas from his attachment to Etard in Malory's *Morte Darthur*. The relations of Persse, Angelica and Cheryl in *Small World* are also similar to the triangle of Yvain, Laudine and Lunete in Chrétien's *Yvain, or the Lady of the Fountain*: in Chrétien's poem, Lunete helps Yvain win Laudine's favour, while in *Small World* Cheryl inadvertently furthers Persse's quest for Angelica.<sup>50</sup>

Cheryl's resemblance to a fairy is sustained by her power over the destinies of the British Airways passengers. Her allocation of seats plays an important role in the destinies of the *Small*

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<sup>49</sup> Another archetypal temptress is Fulvia Morgana, who seduces Morris Zapp.

<sup>50</sup> Lunete's love for Yvain is not explicit in Chrétien's romance. However, Zink argues that in its source text there was a triangle of a proud lady, a knight in love with the lady and the lady's maid who offers the knight her love (*La poésie comme récit (suite)*. *Des nouvelles de l'amour*. Collège de France <<http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/michel-zink/#|m=course|q=/site/michel-zink/course-2007-2008.htm>> [accessed 6 June 2013]). In *Déodat*, the eponymous hero guesses the nature of Lunete's attachment to Yvain, even as the knight is unaware of it, just as Persse does not realise Cheryl loves him until the very end of the novel (see Chapter 7.3, p. 246). Like Zink's Lunete for Yvain, Cheryl is initially 'transparent' to Persse's eyes, a helpful and pretty British Airways employee, but not a personality who may have wishes and anxieties of her own.

*World* characters, though the outcome is not always the one that Cheryl intends. Accordingly, as a result of being seated next to Fulvia Morgana, Morris Zapp not only has a very demanding sexual affair with the Italian professor, but is kidnapped. Likewise, by detaining Rudyard Parkinson, Cheryl changes the course of the MLA conference debates, where Philip Swallow becomes the spokesman of the English school of criticism instead of Parkinson. In playing the trick on Parkinson, however, Cheryl exceeds her powers and is dismissed from her post. Furthermore, despite her quasi-supernatural powers over the passengers' destinies, she is unable to secure for herself the man with whom she falls in love, Persse. In contrast to Angelica, Cheryl appears at first as an unsophisticated reader of popular romances, but, on their second meeting, she surprises Persse by producing from under the counter a copy of *The Faerie Queene*. She impresses Persse not only with her choice of literature, but also with her knowledge of romance theory, stating, for instance, that '... in psychoanalytic terms, romance is the quest of a libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality' (259). In elaborating the theory of romance, Cheryl must be repeating Angelica's words, so that she becomes, in a sense, Angelica's pupil. Furthermore, by the end of *Small World*, Cheryl seems to have acquired another fairy-like trait which distinguishes Angelica, the power of disappearance.

Another female character who plays a significant role in Persse's initiation is Miss Maiden, an elegant elderly lady not unlike, in certain respects, the lady of the camellias in *Lancelot*. Like the lady of the camellias, Miss Maiden acts as a guide for Persse, because she tells the hero what he wants to hear: in the case of *Small World*, that Persse should continue to woo Angelica and that Angelica wants to marry him. The obvious difference between Lodge's Miss Maiden and Percy's Lady is that the latter is created by Lancelot's imagination. Moreover, Lodge's Miss Maiden, unlike Percy's lady, is a gently comic character. In suggesting that Angelica wants to marry Persse, Miss Maiden is mistaken, because Angelica wants to marry a different young man with the surname McGarrigle, the very man who was to be offered the post at Limerick instead of Persse. Thus,

Lodge presents Miss Sybil Maiden as a guide endowed with visionary powers, making sure to indicate that these powers are limited. Her portrayal is influenced by the Sybil in Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Eliot's source for the Grail motif, Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Miss Maiden is an academic disciple of Weston's, and her treatment of art invariably includes references to male and female symbolism, which she sees everywhere, from the Christmas pantomime *Puss in Boots* (36) to Van Gogh's paintings (196).

The message that Angelica, Lily, Cheryl and Miss Maiden communicate to Persse in their different ways is concerned with the true nature of sexuality and gender roles. Angelica's elaborate theory of romance, partly voiced by her and partly reported by Cheryl, Lily's casual adaptation of the Andromeda myth into striptease performance and Miss Maiden's explanation of art through sex contribute to Persse's education about gender roles, a development which appears timely, because Persse's Irish Catholic views are not only naïve, but also immature. His sexual attraction to Angelica approaches religious worship, even fetishism. In Lausanne, he takes the hotel room Angelica has just vacated and adores the traces of her presence, including a bunch of crushed hyacinths (Angelica actually performs the part of Eliot's 'hyacinth girl' in the street theatre), a damp towel and laddered tights: '[h]e swallowed the dregs of water at the bottom of a glass tumbler as reverently as if it were communion wine' (268). Persse's attitude resembles Lancelot's love for Margot at its early stage, where her things become for him like sacred relics. Moreover, the initiation Persse receives from Lily leads to maturity rather than corruption, because Lily frees the young man from unnatural inhibitions associated with his Irish Catholic upbringing. Whereas in medieval romance Perceval emerges as a more mature man after overcoming his longing for the woman who is actually the devil in disguise, Lodge's Persse, paradoxically, needs to succumb to temptation in order to emerge as a winner in battle with his flesh.

On the surface, it may appear that the message of sexual liberation communicated to

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<sup>51</sup> In her fallibility, Miss Maiden echoes Eliot's Mme Sosostriis, the 'famous clairvoyante', who gives erroneous advice 'Fear death by water' (*The Waste Land*, ll. 43 and 55).

Lodge's Persse is at odds with what the *Queste Perceval* hears from his reclusive aunt, who insists that the young knight should preserve his virginity at all costs. Miss Maiden's standpoint seems to be exactly the opposite, when she teaches Persse to see sexual symbolism in literature, art and popular culture. However, she never pushes the young Irishman to promiscuity. Not, we discover, a maiden herself, she apparently had only one affair in her life, like Galahad's mother Elaine, and only in order to ensure the continuity of line for a great academic, Arthur Kingfisher.<sup>52</sup> As a result, there are similarities between what Perceval's aunt teaches the young knight and what Miss Maiden teaches Persse, because both women speak about divine love: Perceval's aunt teaches her nephew about the transcendent love of God, who can be approached through impeccable performance of chivalric tasks, from which casual love affairs can only detract. Miss Maiden teaches Persse to discern and admire the presence of male and female principles in the world around him, a myth which, in post-Christian society, is the equivalent of the medieval doctrine of divine love.

All these women, Angelica, Lily, Miss Maiden and Cheryl, wield some power over the inexperienced and naïve Persse, so to an extent they all can be viewed as female guides to the quester, a character type frequent in chivalric romance. Their power over Persse seems to derive from their femininity rather than from superior intellectual or spiritual knowledge.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the saintly or supernatural guides of medieval romances, Lodge's female characters are neither omniscient nor omnipotent. By the end of *Small World*, Persse learns the secret of Angelica's and Lily's parentage, which makes him triumph momentarily over the two girls and their mother, Miss Maiden. Persse employs his knowledge to introduce Angelica and Lily to their distinguished father, Arthur Kingfisher.

Persse's Grail being wordplay on 'girl', it is unsurprising that women play a paramount role in his quest. These women assume, for Persse, some mythical, fairy-like qualities, retaining, as

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<sup>52</sup> The episode of abandoned children and their restoration years later to a maidenly mother is a direct allusion to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*, which explores the conventions of romance to a comic effect.

<sup>53</sup> The virgin protagonist of *Ginger* emphasizes the influence of this elusive quality, 'femininity', on his life (p. 134).

characters, enough of human limitations on their knowledge and power to appear real. Moreover, Persse's quest seems to be, initially, not for a real girl, Angelica, about whom he knows very little, as her sister Lily aptly proves. He seeks the essential quality of all women, their 'femininity', so that his quest resembles the quests of inexperienced young men in other Lodge's novels, such as *Ginger*, *The Picturegoers*, *Out of the Shelter* and *How Far Can You Go?* It may be a result of his spiritual immaturity and his lack of experience in communicating with women as beings of the opposite gender which initially draws Persse to the beautiful and enigmatic Angelica and makes him believe he wants to marry her when in fact he merely wants to make love to her.

#### 6.4 Family History as a Means for Reviving the Waste Land and Attaining the Grail

On the most general level, *Small World* is about the redemption of humanity through art, in this case through literature and its critical reception and appreciation. This redemption is achieved through the offices of a particular family. Thus, *Small World* is comparable to the late medieval family romances, such as *King Horn*, which, among other themes, engage the issue of redemption.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, which is concerned with a particular lineage and its history, going from King Arthur's time back to the time of Christ and beyond, to King David and Solomon, presents an even closer parallel to the interplay between universal redemption and the fortunes of a particular family in *Small World*.<sup>55</sup> In the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', Galahad heals the ailing king, who dies afterwards. In *Small World*, Persse's question at the MLA conference restores life and fertility simultaneously to Kingfisher and the entire critical and creative literary community gathered in New York, some of whose members (Arthur Kingfisher, Desirée Zapp and

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<sup>54</sup> Lodge cites *King Horn* among the romances with which he was familiar at the time of writing *Small World* (Thompson, 'Interview').

<sup>55</sup> The link between Solomon and Galahad is examined above, Chapter 4.

Raymond Frobisher) have been blocked creatively and made imaginatively sterile. Kingfisher's creative and physical impotence is a motif that could have been suggested to Lodge by the film *Excalibur*. However, the motif has roots in medieval Arthurian romance, such as Chrétien's *Conte* and the anonymous French *Perlesvaus*. In the latter, it is King Arthur who suffers from a condition known as *acedia* or 'volonté délayante', sloth, which paralyses the life of Logres.<sup>56</sup>

In an interview, Lodge explains that Arthur Kingfisher represents the Fisher King.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, his full name suggests that Kingfisher blends the characters of the Fisher King *and* King Arthur, both of whom suffer from an illness that impedes their creativity and their community's productive functioning. Indeed, Zapp reminds Fulvia Morgana that Kingfisher is the man who personifies in some way the academic community, to which Fulvia replies, with justice, that the discipline must be 'in a very un'healthy condition' (119). As will be argued later in this chapter, Lodge fully shares Fulvia's view about the problems that literary criticism experienced at the time. The similarity between Kingfisher and medieval Arthur is further emphasised by the fact that Kingfisher is not only impotent (which is characteristic of the medieval Fisher King suffering from a thigh wound) but also, so it initially seems, childless.

By the time of the MLA conference, Persse, the quester, knows already the truth of Angelica's birth, though he reveals this mystery only at the end of the conference. Accordingly, there is a link between Persse's ability to ask the right question at the conference and his prior knowledge of Angelica's identity and origins. In other words, like Galahad and other Grail questers, both medieval and post-medieval, Lodge's Persse is free to act *only* after he learns a secret family history. The story of foundling children, Angelica and Lily, whose parents are, we ultimately discover, literary scholars, ultimately aligns with the principle of medieval Arthurian romances that children inherit their parents' vocation and place in society. In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Sir Torre is

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<sup>56</sup> Arthur's condition is introduced graphically at the beginning of Zink's *Déodat*, which uses motifs from *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste*, for which see Chapter 7.1, p. 228 and pp. 23-32.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, 'Interview'. See also Bergonzi, *Lodge*, p. 21.

engendered by a king on a peasant woman and, when the boy grows up, his foster father takes him to King Arthur's court, complaining that this son would not work in the field with his other children. Likewise, Angelica and Lily's foster father confides to Persse that his daughters have rebelled against the values of their adopted family, Angelica by becoming an academic and Lily by running away from home to act in a pornographic film. Their rebellion exemplifies the principle according to which a child of noble origin is bound to have the qualities of a knight, with a gifted academic 'knight' or 'lady' born from bright academics.

The mystery of Angelica's birth is introduced early in the novel: at the Rummidge conference, Angelica mentions that she is a 'foundling', a word which takes the reader back to the discourse of fairy tale and romance (10). As Persse follows Angelica around the globe, he keeps coming across her twin sister Lily, first in a pornographic film which he sees at Rummidge, an identification which he attributes to his disturbed senses, and later on a Soho poster as a striptease model. On the continent, Persse glimpses her in a window as a Red Light District prostitute, but then is led to think that the girl is a babysitter and striptease dancer. When he comes to the club where the girl is to perform, the show turns out to include real sexual intercourse, which Persse watches as a nightmarish replay of the pornographic film at Rummidge. He pins a prayer for her amendment to a board at the Heathrow chapel and, coming to London later, he sees the prayer answered in Angelica's hand with a mysterious '*[a]ppearances can be misleading*' and a reference to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (256). The reference makes Persse understand that Angelica has a twin sister, who is engaged in the striptease business. Lodge explains that the 'identical twins' motif is a common romance device, about which he learned from Frye's study on romance.<sup>58</sup> The juxtaposition of two sisters, both talented but in different areas, is a motif common to romance and folk tale. Remarkably, although Angelica seems to resemble her academic parents more than Lily, the latter is shown as a creative girl familiar with mythology, as Persse observes when watching a

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<sup>58</sup>Thompson, 'Interview'.



Soho striptease show that travesties the Andromeda myth (189).

The difference between Angelica and Lily reflects to an extent the difference between their parents. Arthur Kingfisher is a man whose life epitomizes the course of contemporary literary theory, and he is concerned with the quest for a theory that will explain all literary texts. Like him, Angelica is trying to formulate a theory that would encompass the vast corpus of data on romance (24). By contrast, Miss Maiden resents contemporary literary criticism, persuaded that it is 'a lot of tosh' (196). She is inclined to view Jessie Weston's myth theory as explaining all cultural phenomena. Lily, who is by no means an unsophisticated striptease dancer, since she composes the carnivalesque show scenario witnessed by Persse in Soho and enters a summer school at the end of *Small World*, does not seem interested in theory. In general, Angelica might be viewed as a critic or theoretician and Lily as a creative author, so that the pair represents the critical and creative aspects of the individual. Because he himself is scholar and poet, Persse may possibly be attracted to both Angelica and Lily, though he acknowledges only his passion for the virginal Angelica.

Lodge applies the metaphor of the Waste Land being restored to fertility by the Grail knight (Jessie Weston's theory) to Persse's question at the MLA conference, which 'saves' the universe of academic research from being taken over by a single critical theory, be it structuralism, deconstruction or Marxism. According to Lodge, the novel is about overcoming sterility, either intellectual or creative, an idea inspired by Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Weston's study rather than medieval Grail quest romances.<sup>59</sup> The impasse at which literary theory has arrived is metaphorically rendered as the desolation of Logres in Arthurian romance at the time of the Grail quest. It is treated humorously in relation to several characters, notably the Australian scholar Rodney Wainwright who becomes creatively blocked, unable to answer his own question 'how can literary criticism maintain its Arnoldian function of identifying the best which has been thought and said, when literary discourse itself has been decentred by deconstructing the traditional concept of

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<sup>59</sup>Thompson, 'Interview'.

the author, of authority?’ (84). The question, with which he struggles throughout the novel, remains unanswered, possibly because Lodge saw no succinct answer to it at the time.

In order to understand the myth of redemption presented by Lodge in *Small World*, it is instructive to consider his writings on the history of literature and criticism before and after the novel’s publication. In 1977, Lodge published *The Modes of Modern Writing*, where, in the ‘Preface’, he confessed to be ‘sufficiently conditioned by the Arnoldian tradition in English studies to feel that any critical method should be able to explain why literature is valued (in other words, what is special about it) as well as how it works’.<sup>60</sup> This way, Lodge embraces both the more innovative strands of criticism, which study the mechanics by which a text works, and more traditional criticism, which leads to the establishment of literary canon. *The Modes of Modern Writing* begins, appropriately, with a chapter seeking to define literature, at the end of which Lodge concludes that any text can ‘become literature by responding to a literary reading’. Lodge maintains that only literary texts, with ‘the kind of internal foregrounding which makes all [their] components aesthetically relevant’ can and should be subject to critical study.<sup>61</sup> Later in the book, in the section ‘Problems and Executions’, Lodge describes the controversy of competing literary schools, which draw into its orbit authors and critics. Hence, Lodge suggests the need to find ‘a single way of talking about novels, a critical methodology, a poetics or aesthetics of fiction, which can embrace descriptively all the varieties of this kind of writing’, which may not be the same as using a single theory to explain all literary texts.<sup>62</sup> In *Small World*, the same conflict is presented in fictional terms and, at the end of the novel, an answer to this controversy is promised, but never made explicit, as an answer to Persse’s naïve question. In his collection of critical essays *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (1990), published after *The Modes of Modern Writing*, Lodge appears to have found a theory that would enable the critic to consider the text *as* a heterogeneous construct. In the

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<sup>60</sup> Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. xii.

<sup>61</sup> Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, ‘What is Literature?’, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 52.

‘Introduction’, Lodge explains that Bakhtin’s theory is more adequate for the analysis of fiction, showing that ‘there is no such thing as *the* style, *the* language of a novel, because a novel is a medley of many styles, many languages – or, if you like, voices’.<sup>63</sup> The plurality of voices highlighted by Bakhtin’s theory ensures the flexibility of critical approach, implying that there would be no single, rigid methodology with which everyone should agree – a problem raised by Persse’s question ‘[w]hat follows if everybody agrees with you?’ (319).

In Logres, war makes the land barren; similarly, in *Small World*, various critical theories are in conflict, and the result of this conflict is a shift of interest from the writing of literature, the object of literary study, to the sterility of literary theory barely comprehensible not only to the lay reader but to the majority of academics themselves. In his critical works, Lodge frequently comments on the trouble of literary theory becoming an elite intellectual game. In his essay ‘The Novel Now: Theories and Practices’, written three years after *Small World*, Lodge deplores the breakdown of communication between literary scholars and the ‘practising writers, literary journalists and the educated common reader’.<sup>64</sup> The words might have been uttered by Philip Swallow, who in conversation with his publisher, Felix Skinner, comments bitterly on the non-academic media’s sagging interest in ‘lit. crit.’:

“I’m afraid the Sundays and weeklies don’t pay as much attention to lit. crit. as they used to.”

“That’s because so much of it is unreadable,” said Philip Swallow. “*I* can’t understand it, so how can you expect ordinary people to? I mean, that’s what my book is *saying*. That’s why I *wrote* it.” (51)

In his critical writing, Lodge acknowledges his own difficulty, similar to Swallow’s, in

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<sup>63</sup> Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, pp. 11-24.

comprehending some of contemporary literary theory: for instance, he admits to finding Roland Barthes's *Elements of Semiology* 'almost incomprehensible'.<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere, Lodge reports Frank Kermode's confession of 'having read Derrida's *Grammatologie* with total bafflement only to discover some time later that his copy had many crucial pages missing'.<sup>66</sup>

For Lodge, the exclusive, elitist discourse of literary studies, which is barely comprehensible to academics themselves, is erroneous and sterile, because it excludes the 'common educated reader', whom the writer, in theory, is supposed to address and whom literary criticism should help to understand the writer's work.<sup>67</sup> Lodge's attack on the elitism of literary studies reverses the traditional message of medieval Grail quest romances, where the Grail is available only to a restricted, hereditary group. In this respect, *Small World* bears the same democratic message as *Déodat*, where the protagonist and Yvain the Knight of the Lion question the doctrine according to which the Grail and its adventures are reserved to a 'small elite'.<sup>68</sup> The difference between *Déodat* and *Small World* lies in their interpretation of the Grail: in *Déodat*, the Grail is viewed, by the protagonist, in the traditional terms, familiar from medieval Grail romances, as the Eucharistic cup, though, in a wider sense, the Grail is linked with transcendence and transparency, becoming present in the here and now yet invisible, like God. In *Small World*, the idea of the Grail as a mystical union with God is never seriously invoked, and the word is used symbolically to signify one's aspirations. However, on the more general level, the Grail constitutes a redemptive force, which includes creativity and intensity of experience that can be achieved, among other things, through literature. This intensity of experience, which Swallow unsuccessfully seeks,

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<sup>65</sup> Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, p. x.

<sup>66</sup> Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 183.

<sup>67</sup> In an article for *The Observer*, 'Structural Defects' [1980], Lodge wryly comments that '[t]he exponents of post-structuralism do not even try to be lucid or intelligible. There seem to be two motives for this. The respectable reason is that these writers believe there is no single, simple "meaning" to be grasped anywhere, at any time, and the experience of reading their books is designed to teach that uncomfortable lesson. The less respectable reason is that their command of a prestigious but impenetrable jargon constitutes power – the power to intimidate their professional peers' (in *Write On*, p. 114).

<sup>68</sup> Zink, *Déodat*, p. 84; see also Chapter 7, pp. 226-28.

constitutes one's ability to view things freshly, to appreciate the present moment and to live authentically, which is cognate to the aspiration towards transparency in *Déodat* and to the 'search' in all Walker Percy's novels, *Lancelot* included.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, Swallow unexpectedly becomes a potential contender for the UNESCO chair, following a review where Rudyard Parkinson pitches Swallow's traditional and inclusive approach to criticism against Zapp's fashionable and elitist post-structuralism. Parkinson's scheme to present himself as the main proponent of the 'English school' fails, as the UNESCO representative, Jacques Textel, prefers to see the unknown Professor Swallow as a candidate for the chair.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Lodge seems to consider Swallow's approach to criticism in *Hazlitt and the Amateur Reader*, which proceeds in the spirit of T. S. Eliot's 'The Function of Criticism' (1923) and I. A. Richards's *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), to have the merit of being reader-oriented.<sup>71</sup> Lodge concludes his overview of contemporary literary criticism with the observation that 'criticism loses its *raison d'être* when it loses contact with an audience, and in its inherited grasp of this principle, English criticism has much to contribute in the increasingly cosmopolitan and collaborative enterprise of criticism'.<sup>72</sup>

Swallow's fortunes rise simultaneously on professional and amorous planes. As his book is being favourably reviewed and he becomes a contender for the UNESCO chair, he, unaware as yet about these developments on the British scene, meets Joy in Istanbul. Coming to her house in

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<sup>69</sup> When Percy's *Lancelot* awakes from his long 'sleep', discovering his wife's adultery, he becomes for the first time truly aware of people and things around him and is startled at seeing his own reflection in the mirror (*Lancelot*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 67-68). Likewise, on the first pages of *The Second Coming*, Percy's protagonist Will Barrett has a 'revelation' that '[a]ll too often these days they [people] were two percent themselves, specters who hardly occupied a place at all' (*The Second Coming*, (London: Panther, 1980), p. 19). Swallow's 'quest' for intensity of experience is considered above, Chapter 6.2, pp. 193-96.

<sup>70</sup> Incidentally, there is a similar turn of plot in *Déodat*, as King Arthur chooses to distinguish the obscure squire Cahus rather than Yvain l'Avoutre, who seeks to accompany Arthur to St Augustine's chapel.

<sup>71</sup> Lodge's summary of Richards's argument resembles Swallow's views: quoting Richards that 'the best life is that in which as much as possible personality is engaged [...] without confusion', Lodge explains that, according to Richards, '[l]iterature can educate us in this process, through its special way of using language' (Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 260).

<sup>72</sup> Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, p. 286. According to Lodge, the English critical tradition, although hardly innovative, has the advantage of being 'readable' (p. 284).

Ankara, Swallow is introduced to Joy's daughter Miranda and learns that the girl is his daughter, which justifies his decision to divorce Hilary and marry Joy. In Jerusalem, Joy and Swallow chance upon Miss Maiden, who goes into a trance-like state and prophesies that the UNESCO chair will be allocated to the most unlikely contender. At this point, the reader would be inclined to believe, together with Joy, that Swallow is destined to win the chair. However, Swallow is not up to the challenge and, when he falls ill, he decides to call Hilary from Britain rather than remain with Joy. At the MLA conference, having presented his position on criticism in a rather unimpressive manner and witnessed Arthur Kingfisher's reunion with his daughters, Swallow reflects on his experience: 'I found I had a daughter like that. Then I lost her again' (336). He confesses to Persse it was his own fault: '[b]asically I failed in the role of romantic hero. I thought I wasn't too old for it, but I was. My nerve failed me at a crucial moment' (336). Swallow's example shows a link between intellectual and sexual adventurousness: there is a contrast between Kingfisher, who gains creativity, sexual powers and children whose existence he ignored, and Swallow, who loses everything he had found with Joy.

It has been mentioned earlier in the chapter (6.2, pp. 193-96) that, for Swallow, intensity of experience is often associated with sexual novelty, as in his sojourn at Euphoria with Desirée or his night in Genoa with Joy. As a result, it may appear that the revival of the Waste Land in *Small World* is connected primarily with sexuality. The sexual preferences and activities of the characters are candidly described, and Arthur Kingfisher himself conceives of intellectual productivity as being directly proportionate to sexual prowess. Nonetheless, as indicated earlier in this chapter (6.3, pp. 203-05), the morality of *Small World* is more conventionally Christian and closer to the morality of medieval romance than the flamboyant, carnivalesque picture of sexual promiscuity it initially presents, demonstrating a striking contrast between unabashed reference to sexuality by academics and their innate shyness.

There is a contradiction between the ideology of sexual liberation professed in the academic

world and its practice. The only character with integral moral convictions, discourse and practice is Persse, and he is genuinely shocked by the boldness of academic discourse. Persse's naïvety in matters of both literary theory and sexual practice enable him to act as a quester, because innocence is crucial in the Grail quest. Therefore, the redemption of the Waste Land is connected primarily not with sexual, but with emotional and imaginative fertility. By asking the innocent question '[w]hat happens if everyone agrees with you?', Persse challenges the sterile authority of various academic theories. He humanizes literary study, making it inclusive, open to those scholars who do not adhere to a particular theory and to non-academics, rather than exclusive and elitist. The asking of the question restores creative capacity to the increasingly sterile academic community, and the change is signalled by a miraculous spell of warm weather in the middle of the bleak American winter, which Kingfisher calls 'halcyon days' (321): '[t]he icy wind that had been blowing straight from the Arctic down the skyscraper canyons, numbing the faces and freezing the fingers of pedestrians and streetvendors, suddenly dropped, and turned round into the gentlest warm southern breeze' (320). A number of people at the MLA conference who had been rendered creatively sterile regain their powers to write. Accordingly, Desirée realizes that the book she is writing is not as bad as she feared, so she regains confidence in her creative capacity. Likewise, Frobisher discovers he can begin a novel, which he had been unable to do for years. Both associate their inspiration with the 'extraordinary spell of fine weather' (330): for instance, Frobisher tells Persse how he 'was sitting in Washington Square [...] and basking in this extraordinary sunshine, when suddenly the first sentence of a novel came into [his] head' (330). Most importantly, Arthur Kingfisher, the leading authority in literary study, who had been unable to conceive a new, original idea, realizes he can work again and decides to take the UNESCO chair himself.

It seems that Persse's ability to experience and express innocent, somewhat naïve but genuine affection restores vitality to the academic community, and the subsequent sexual activities

at the MLA conference are distinguished by their emotional dimension.<sup>73</sup> for instance, Arthur Kingfisher not only regains his sexual prowess, but also becomes engaged to his assistant. The conference ends on a note of reconnection, openness and inclusiveness, while the quester himself, Persse, is about to continue with another quest, this time for Cheryl. As has already been mentioned, Lodge's novel is open-ended, in accordance with Angelica's theory about the romance being 'in principle endless' (322): '[n]o sooner is one crisis in the fortunes of the hero averted than a new one presents itself; no sooner has one mystery been solved than another is raised; no sooner has one adventure been concluded than another begins' (322-23). According to this theory, a true quest can never achieve its goal, because achievement of the quest's object would remove the pleasure and vitality of life or, in Angelica's words, 'the satisfaction of [the reader's] need [to 'know'] brings pleasure to an end, just as in psychosexual life the possession of the Other kills Desire' (322). Accordingly, medieval Grail quest romances, if they are finished, usually end with the quester and the Grail being taken to heaven: at the end of the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', the Grail is seized by angelic hands, Galahad and, eventually, also Perceval die, while Bors returns to King Arthur's court with news about the adventures. Such an ending would have hardly satisfied Lodge's modern readers and, in *Small World*, there is a very modern sense that the value of the quest is in the spiritual search itself.

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<sup>73</sup> Persse's naïvety and lack of experience in matters of love and sex derives from his prototype, the Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes. Persse's identity as a modern Sir Perceval was noted already by the novel's reviewers (John Gross, 'Review of David Lodge's *Small World*' in *Books of the Times* (March 8, 1985) <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/08/books/books-of-the-times-by-john-gross.html?pagewanted=print> [accessed 8 June 2013]). For a comparison between Lodge's Grail quest and the early medieval versions of the quest by Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, see Doreen Bärwolf's electronic seminar paper, *Elements of the Holy Grail Quest in David Lodge's Small World* (Grin, 2010). It seems that Persse's ability to redeem the Waste Land depends on his ability to experience affection and compassion for other people, a quality that also distinguishes the protagonist of Michel Zink's *Déodat*.



## Chapter 7

### Michel Zink's *Déodat, ou la transparence*: the Timeless Quest for Oneself

*Déodat* (2002) is the third work of fiction by Michel Zink, a distinguished scholar of medieval French literature.<sup>1</sup> Like *Small World*, and like a number of medieval romances, *Déodat* is a *Bildungsroman*, portraying the adventures of a marginal young hero in an elitist, competitive society, though *Déodat* is considerably younger than Lodge's *Persse*. However, whereas *Small World* is based on a modern retelling of the Grail quest myth, especially as interpreted by T. S. Eliot, and set in the modern world, *Déodat*, similar to Michel Zink's other fictional works, such as *Le Tiers d'Amour* (1998) and *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame* (1999), is directly inspired by medieval literature and is set in the High Middle Ages. In *Déodat*, Zink uses as his departure point the anonymous *Perlesvaus, or the High Book of the Grail*, from which he borrows motifs and episodes, such as King Arthur's illness and Perlesvaus's (a variant spelling of Perceval) brutal revenge on his mother's attackers.<sup>2</sup> Among other prose Arthurian romances, Zink

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to *Déodat*, Zink wrote *Le Tiers d'amour. Un roman des troubadours* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1998) and *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame. Contes chrétiens du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999). These works of fiction explore the source texts and ideas used by Zink in his academic publications, such as *Le Moyen Âge et ses chansons ou un passé en trompe-l'oeil* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1996), translated into English as *The Enchantment of the Middle Ages*, trans. by J. M. Todd (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) and *Poésie et conversion au Moyen Âge*. Since then, Zink has published, apart from scholarly works, other novels, among them *Un portefeuille toulousain* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 2007), and an autobiographical essay *Seuls les enfants savent lire* (Paris: Éditions Tallandier, 2009). A complete bibliography of Zink's academic and fictional publications is available at the Collège de France website <<http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/en-michel-zink/#|p=/site/en-michel-zink/biography.htm>> [accessed 22 May 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Zink appends a note to *Déodat*, where he explains that '[I]e lecteur quelque peu familier de la littérature médiévale aura relevé de lui-même dans le récit qui précède les allusions aux romans de Chrétien de Troyes, aux lais bretons, aux romans arthuriens en prose, et particulièrement au *Haut Livre du Graal* ou *Perlesvaus*, auquel sont empruntées la langueur du roi Arthur et la mort de Cahus, qui en constituent le prologue, ainsi que la vengeance sanglante de Perceval et la mort de Guenièvre, veillée par Lancelot' (153) [(a) reader who is somewhat familiar with medieval literature will have noticed in the preceding narrative allusions to Chrétien de Troyes's romances, Breton lays and Arthurian prose romances, particularly *The High Book of the Grail* or *Perlesvaus*, from which are borrowed King Arthur's listlessness and Cahus's death in the prologue, Perceval's bloody vengeance and Guinevere's death mourned by Lancelot]. Translations of this and other French texts in the chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

probably used the *Queste*, where Galahad is introduced for the first time: in *Déodat*, Perceval and Galahad are the only questers destined to find the Grail, which constitutes a difference from both *Perlesvaus*, where Perceval is the sole Grail champion, and the *Queste*, where Bors is included among the elect knights alongside Galahad and Perceval.

The novel begins with a description of King Arthur's illness, *acedia*, which is a kind of depression or *ennui*, provoked by Perceval's failure to ask the crucial question at the Fisher King's castle and the consequent failure of his quest. King Arthur is advised to go on pilgrimage to St Augustine's chapel accompanied by a single squire, Cahus, whose mysterious death on the morning when the pilgrimage is to take place provides a focal point for the novel. On the eve of the planned pilgrimage, Cahus dreams about going to the chapel, taking a silver candlestick from it and being struck for the theft by a black knight. The squire wakes up with the candlestick in his boot and a mortal wound in his breast. The rest of the novel's narrative is rendered mostly from the perspective of Cahus's younger brother, Déodat, one of the few characters invented by Zink. Déodat witnesses his father, Yvain l'Avoutre (Yvain the Bastard, Arthur's knight who also appears in the *Queste* and in Malory's *Morte*), leave the court, ostensibly because of Cahus's death. Déodat decides to investigate and avenge his brother's murder, so he, too, departs from Camelot. In the course of his peregrinations, Déodat meets Yvain the Knight with the Lion, his spouse Laudine and her maid Lunete, as well as Lancelot, Galahad, Perceval, Brehus Sans Pitié and various hermits and monks, a cast which would be familiar to the reader of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and Malory's *Morte*. Déodat also encounters a nameless girl at a well with whom he seems to fall in love and who is, like Déodat himself, a character of Zink's invention.

Throughout the novel, Déodat's quest (*quête*) or enquiry (*enquête*) is contrasted with the Grail quest pursued by the rest of Arthur's knights. To Déodat, who considers the Grail quest with the lucid logic of a child, their endeavour is meaningless: there is little sense in searching

for a cup filled with Christ's blood, when every Christian is destined to partake of the same blood at Communion. Trying to find Cahus's murderer, who might be threatening Déodat himself, makes more sense to him in the circumstances, but Déodat is devastated by the truth he eventually uncovers. In the final pages of the novel, it is revealed that Déodat's supposed grandmother had a two-stage affair with Yvain's father, Urien, so that Yvain l'Avoutre (born in the first stage of the affair), Cahus and Déodat (born after Urien had married and produced a legitimate heir, also called Yvain) are all half-brothers to Yvain the Knight with the Lion. Déodat discovers that Cahus was in fact killed by Yvain l'Avoutre, his supposed father but actually his elder brother, who was jealous at seeing the young squire being distinguished by Arthur. The novel finishes as Déodat is reunited with the girl at the well, whom he tells that he does not care about family mysteries and dark secrets any longer, but wants to live in the here and now, even if it would entail 'transparency' in terms of social recognition, because he would never be transparent to God's eyes.

In the present chapter, I will examine Zink's version of the medieval Grail quest as it appears from the perspective of a marginal character. I will argue that the Grail quest in *Déodat* is associated not with chivalric adventure but with a psychological and spiritual search for identity and for God: in this respect, the novel resembles the *Queste*, where the Grail quest is primarily a spiritual adventure. However, the Grail quest in *Déodat* is presented differently from Zink's medieval sources. There is considerable scepticism about the basic fact of knights wandering through the forest and fighting each other; the genuine quest takes place in the characters' souls. I will suggest in section 7.1 that Zink's novel aims at producing the same effect as the medieval Grail quest romances did on their initial audiences and which is no longer available to modern readers unfamiliar with medieval culture.<sup>3</sup> To explore the above argument, the following themes are considered in the chapter: the protagonist's experience of

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<sup>3</sup> I have already mentioned in the Introduction, pp. 9-10, that Zink creates his version of the Grail quest in a way that resembles the work of medieval authors of Grail quest romances.

death, his relation with women, especially in their function of spiritual guides, and the role of family lineage in Déodat's search. The transparency motif, central to this modern interpretation of the Grail quest, is discussed towards the end of the present chapter, as part of the message Déodat learns through his contact with women characters.

## 7.1 The Grail Quest from the Perspective of an Alienated Character

In the introduction to his short-story collection *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame*, Zink explains that he is inspired by elements of medieval literature that ring true for contemporary readers, even if the effect is different from that intended by their medieval author or experienced by the original audience.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in a note to *Déodat*, Zink emphasizes that 'le ton et l'esprit de mon récit sont éloignés de ceux des romans médiévaux' (153) [the tone and atmosphere of my story are different from those of medieval romances]. Zink's narrative style in *Déodat* is indeed distinct from that of his medieval sources, because the narrative is presented from the perspectives of socially-alienated characters, such as the stable boy, Déodat, as well as, on occasion, that of Yvain the Knight of the Lion, seeking his wife Laudine's pardon, and of the ailing King Arthur. This treatment produces the effect of estrangement, a stylistic device usually associated with twentieth-century literature, which is particularly concerned with the theme of alienation.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, in *Déodat*, Zink rewrites episodes from *Perlesvaus* and other medieval Arthurian romances in a way that questions the conventions of the medieval romance genre, but he preserves the theme which he defines as the single pre-occupation of

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<sup>4</sup> Zink, *Le Jongleur*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> See the commentary in Chapter 6, pp. 196-98, on estrangement and its effect on the reader as discussed by Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp in Lodge's *Small World*.

medieval literature: the quest for salvation.<sup>6</sup> In explaining the title of *Poésie et conversion*, Zink affirms that conversion, understood in the sense of a soul turning towards God, was to be the aspiration of one's entire life in the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> Relatedly, the quest in *Déodat* is to arrive at a knowledge of oneself and to achieve awareness of one's existence in God's eyes; in other words, salvation in the novel is both spiritual and psychological.<sup>8</sup> This quest for self-knowledge is pursued not only by Déodat, but also by other characters, such as Yvain and Lancelot, but it takes different forms, and in the end only Déodat appears to accomplish it.

Zink's protagonist, Déodat, who is too young to be even a squire, is an outsider at Arthur's court, on account both of his age and of the fact he does not know who his father is. It is this marginal position which results in his viewing chivalry and the Grail quest with increasing scepticism. However, as he realises during his stay at the village, he is equally alienated from those who are his social inferiors, the peasants. Trapped between the court and the village, unable to be a part of either, his experience of the quest is that of a spy, a voyeur, and the psychological tension this marginal position creates is communicated through Déodat's perception of the world.<sup>9</sup> The society from which Déodat is alienated is hierarchical, hereditary and aristocratic, but it possesses some distinctively modern characteristics, notably in its viewing the Grail as an avatar of some esoteric lore carefully preserved from outsiders, a version of modern culture's concern, even fascination, with plots and conspiracy theories. The approach is justified only in part by medieval literature about the Grail quest: in romances,

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<sup>6</sup> Zink argues that the study of medieval literature should take into account 'le plus grand enjeu, le seul enjeu, celui du salut' (*Poésie*, p. 2) [the greatest, the single pre-occupation, that of salvation].

<sup>7</sup> 'Pourquoi la conversion? Parce que c'est au Moyen Âge ce vers quoi doit tendre toute vie. Non pas bien entendu, la conversion d'une religion à une autre, mais le mouvement par lequel l'âme se tourne vers Dieu' (*Poésie*, p. 5) [Why conversion? Because, in the Middle Ages, one's entire life was to be directed to this end. It was not, of course, conversion from one religion to another but the movement by which the soul turns towards God].

<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, *Déodat* corresponds to the definition of a 'religious' novel given by Walker Percy in 'Notes for a Novel about the End of the World': 'I use the word "religious" in its root sense as signifying a radical *bond*, as the writer sees it, which connects man with reality – or the failure of such a bond – and so confers meaning to his life – or the absence of meaning' (*Message in the Bottle*, pp. 102-03).

<sup>9</sup> Yvain the Knight of the Lion, who seeks the pardon of his wife Laudine, and King Arthur (during his depression) are in their different ways also alienated.

allusions to the Grail mysteries are ubiquitous, but the knowledge that these mysteries exist is commonplace. There is no conspiracy to ‘hide’ the existence of the Grail: every knight and, more generally, every Christian is encouraged to seek the Grail, because through knowing the Grail mysteries one comes to the knowledge of God and to salvation.

In *Déodat*, there are several references to the secret lore of the Grail which can be discovered only by the elect few, even though all knights are urged to look for the Grail. When Yvain the Knight of the Lion asks Galahad how fighting other knights could bring one nearer the Grail and why approaching the Grail means moving closer to God, Galahad has a ready answer, in which he underlines the importance of election. Galahad alludes to the secret words (‘paroles secrètes’, 83) which Christ entrusted to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. The words ‘disent comment l’être de Dieu rayonne dans les créatures célestes, à travers les cercles du cosmos, jusque dans le monde sublunaire, et [...] permettent à des rares élus d’êtres régénérés par sa lumière’ (83-4) [describe how God’s presence radiates in celestial, beings through cosmic circles, reaching the earthly world, and (...) allows a very small élite to be regenerated by its light]. As in medieval romances, the Grail in *Déodat* is a sacred vessel containing Christ’s blood, guarded by the men of Joseph’s lineage. Galahad emphasizes the exclusivity of this guardianship, its hereditary character and the fact that Joseph’s heirs have the power to single out those worthy of the secret. Thus, Galahad’s vision of salvation is insistently hierarchical, with only the elect few being initiated into the Grail lore on earth, and this hierarchy is to be perpetuated in heaven:

[L]orsque la quête du saint Graal serait menée jusqu’à son terme, lorsque le jugement de Dieu aurait séparé les bons chevaliers des mauvais, lorsqu’un tout petit nombre d’entre eux auraient directement contemplé le rayonnement divin émanant de la coupe précieuse, alors l’ordre de la chevalerie réunirait

pour toujours les initiés à cet indicible mystère. (83-84)

[(w)hen the Grail quest had been achieved, when God's judgement had separated the good knights from the bad ones, when a very small number of them had witnessed directly the divine radiance emanating from the precious cup, then the initiates would be forever united as members of the chivalric order to partake of this unutterable mystery.]

The ideas of a sacred lineage and of elect knights being destined to attain the Grail appears in the medieval Grail quest romances, including the *Queste*. Moreover, the association of earthly and heavenly chivalry can be found, outside romance, in medieval chivalric treatises.<sup>10</sup>

However, Galahad's cool assurance that he is among the elect and his indifference to other characters' troubles is disturbing. The presentation of Galahad invites the reader to reject the idea of election, together with Yvain, who wonders 'pourquoi l'idée d'une élection réservée aux membres d'un lignage et celle d'un salut attaché à une connaissance secrète le rebutaient' (84) [why he felt aversion at the ideas of election set aside for members of a specific lineage and of salvation based on secret lore].

At the beginning of the novel, the ailing King Arthur claims that the Grail quest is just another adventure, futile and vapid like all such activities ('[c]ette aventure [...] est insipide et futile, comme toutes les autres', 12). Arthur's disillusionment with the quest may be caused by his depression, but it also indicates the problem inherent in the quest as presented by Galahad and embraced uncritically by all characters except such alienated individuals as Déodat, Yvain the Knight of the Lion and Lancelot (after Guinevere's death). For these characters, who are dissatisfied with the existing social values and norms, the possibility of a different 'search' is

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 25-28.

open.<sup>11</sup> The quest which Déodat himself follows is for his brother's murderer and, as Gerald Seaman suggests in his review of the novel, '[t]his personal quest is layered with another quest for the father and self-identity'.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Déodat's search for the father is not a conscious one, because he believes Yvain l'Avoutre to be his father, though from the outset he feels more attracted to Yvain the Knight of the Lion as a potential father figure. Moreover, the boy repeatedly expresses the need to know his ancestry, and he seems to suffer more from the lack of stability which would be provided by ancestral models than from the social stigma attached to bastardy.<sup>13</sup> As Seaman notes, however, Déodat's quest for identity 'is further overlaid by the ultimate Arthurian quest for the Holy Grail'.<sup>14</sup> Déodat participates in the latter quest following the hermit's admonishment to seek the Grail, even though he may never achieve it because of his sinful birth (125). Once again, according to the hermit, election and belonging to the right lineage is requisite for achieving the Grail and for salvation. However, earlier in the novel, Déodat has witnessed the manifest cruelty of Galahad and Perceval, the so-called 'perfect', 'elect' knights, a fact that undermines the value of the Grail quest as described by this hermit and by Galahad. Salvation must be possible for the individual by means of some other route than the physical journey with its attendant fighting.

The alienation experienced by Déodat and other characters is reflected in the landscape through which they move. Zink's Logres is described differently from the Logres of medieval romance; it is defamiliarized, creating a sense of the uncanny. According to Royle, '[t]he uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself (of one's so-called "personality" or

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<sup>11</sup> There is a similarity between Zink's alienated characters and Walker Percy's characters, such as Lancelot, who enter a quest or 'search' when they realise that their life is intolerable, see Chapter 5, p. 169 above.

<sup>12</sup> Gerald Seaman, 'Déodat ou la transparence: un roman du Graal by Michel Zink', *The French Review*, 77:5 (2004), 1022-23 (p. 1022).

<sup>13</sup> The importance of family and lineage in *Déodat* is discussed later in the chapter, 7.4.

<sup>14</sup> Seaman, 'Déodat', p. 1022.



“sexuality”, for example) seems strangely questionable’.<sup>15</sup> Déodat’s search for his own identity and his attempts to dissociate himself from his ‘double’, Cahus, are symptomatic of his ‘uncanny’ experiences. However, the ‘uncanny’ atmosphere is not associated exclusively or even particularly with the protagonist: the departure scene visualized through Arthur’s consciousness at the beginning of the novel reveals the same uncertainty about the world through which the character moves, in marked contrast with similar scenes in medieval romances. *Déodat*’s world is thus a very modern phenomenon, familiar to twentieth-century readers, whom, as Olderman contends, ‘the growth of mass society, the increased discoveries about the world of the unconscious, and the supremacy of scientific relativism make [...] no longer sure that [their] own idea of reality will be recognizable to anyone else’.<sup>16</sup> This contrasts the medieval romance, where the description of settings, atmosphere and nature are to an extent stereotyped; they are stable and communally shared. For instance, the morning when the Round Table knights depart in the *Queste* is bright and clear:

...li jors fu biax et clers et li soulax ot ja auques abatue la rosee et li palés  
 comença a emplir des barons dou roiaume. [...] Et lors sont monté li baron et  
 li chevalier. Si s’en issent de la cort li un et li autre et vont tant contreval la  
 ville qu’il sont fors.’ (22-25)

[the sun was high and had begun to disperse the dew and the barons of the  
 realm began to gather at court. (...) The knights and barons mounted their  
 horses, left court and were soon outside the city walls]<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Olderman, *Beyond the Waste Land*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Burns, *Quest*, pp. 16-18; further references given parenthetically in the text. Between dawn and departure, the knights have armed, attended the mass, and there have been conversations between the king and his knights, between Lancelot and the queen and between the king and Galahad.

The description is typical of the *Queste*; indeed, its author usually writes laconically ‘quant li jorz fu clers’ (72; at daybreak, literally ‘when the day was fair’) to designate the arrival of a new day. There are instances when the *Queste* author describes nature to set a contrast between the character’s situation and his surroundings; for example, Lancelot wakes from his sinful sleep and finds his horse and arms taken by the knight whom the Grail has healed (62), but even in these cases the description of the world into which he awakens is similar to the above quotation.

In contrast to the medieval Grail quest romances, the description of setting in *Déodat* is used to emphasize the characters’ psychological and spiritual experiences. The beginning of the quest in *Déodat* is very much unlike the departure of King Arthur in *Perlesvaus* or of the Round Table knights in the *Queste*. But the scene is presented from the perspective of Arthur, who is suffering from *ennui*, and it is thus saturated with connotations of greyness, futility and travail:

[t]out est effort. Se lever dans le gris de l’aube. Entendre la messe dans le froid du matin. S’armer. Pour être, tout au long du jour, agile et fort, il faut d’abord renoncer à son corps, renoncer à le sentir dispos et proche, il faut l’engoncer, l’alourdir, l’épaissir, et enfin le hisser, raide et bizarrement harnaché, au milieu des autres restés semblables à eux-mêmes, sur le cheval qui s’ébroue. Il faut partir. Il faut quitter le château qui s’éveille, laisser derrière soi dames et demoiselles, renoncer à partager leur journée au fil des heures lentes. (7)

[(e)verything takes an effort. Getting up at grey dawn. Attending mass in the

cold morning. Putting on armour. To be strong and agile throughout the day one must first renounce the body, deny it the sensations of freshness and imminence, restrict it, make it heavy and broad; finally, one should hoist it, stiff and eerily harnessed, onto a snorting horse, and do so in the middle of others, who have remained similar to themselves. One must depart. One must leave the awakening castle with its ladies and damsels, refusing to spend with them a leisurely day.]

The description of Arthur's departure is followed by meditation on the word 'journée', which in modern French means 'day', but which, according to *DMF*, originally meant distance covered in a day, as in the expression 'à demi-journee des ennemis' [at the distance of a half-day march from the enemy];<sup>18</sup> the narrator suggests that the word may also denote the 'journey' of one's life. As a result, Arthur is presented as *homo viator*, introducing at once a spiritual dimension to the quest, a feature implicit in such medieval romances as the *Queste*, but absent from much modern Arthurian literature.<sup>19</sup> However, as we can see, the emphasis is on the *effort* needed for the journey, the grey world and the setting forth, coloured by Arthur's psychological and spiritual state. The description is notably different from the departure of knights in the *Queste*, quoted above, and from King Arthur's departure for St Augustine's chapel in *Perlesvaus*:

[i]n the morning the king armed himself, as I began to relate, for his journey

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<sup>18</sup> *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, version 2012 (DMF 2012). ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine. <<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf>> [accessed 1 September 2013].

<sup>19</sup> In this respect, Arthur is similar both to Lodge's Philip Swallow and to many of Walker Percy's characters. As has been discussed above in Chapter 6, pp. 193-96, conferences and lecture tours are means by which Swallow seeks intensity of experience. Likewise, the concept of man as 'sovereign wayfarer' reappears throughout Percy's essays. Percy describes the importance of rotation (travelling) for evading the despair of routine (*Message in the Bottle*, pp. 83-100). For Percy's Lancelot, taking a different path between the house and the pigeonier is enough to escape from the rut. Arguably, Zink's Arthur may have been healed by the very fact of taking a journey to St Augustine's chapel.

to Saint Augustine's Chapel. [...] His horse was led to the mounting block and he mounted, fully armed. Sir Yvain the Bastard gave him his shield and lance, and when the king was thus equipped he looked indeed a knight of great strength and courage. He set himself so firmly in the stirrups that he made the saddle stretch and the horse bow beneath him, strong and swift though it was. Then he thrust in his spurs and the horse leapt forward. The queen was standing at the windows of the hall, and all twenty-five of Arthur's knights had come to the mounting block.<sup>20</sup>

The *Perlesvaus* description is more detailed than the *Queste* one; the scene presented is the same as in *Déodat*, but it is purely factual and bears no indication of Arthur's spiritual or psychological condition. Whereas the departure scenes in both the *Queste* and *Perlesvaus* are presented from the point of view of an external observer, the narrative in *Déodat* is interiorized, so that the reader sees events as they appear to a character who is alienated from the mainstream, courtly society and from the world itself.

Descriptions of chivalric scenes in *Déodat* are usually visualized through Déodat's consciousness. Because of the boy's disillusionment with courtly life, these descriptions render chivalric adventure (to use again the notion of the uncanny as described by Nicholas Royle) 'unfamiliar'. Accordingly, when he discovers that Yvain the Knight of the Lion has lied about having been away on the day of Cahus's death, and Déodat thinks that Yvain might have killed Cahus, Déodat contemplates the back of Yvain's horse. The boy is shocked and tries, unsuccessfully, to gather his thoughts. He stares at the horse's tail and the view, distorted by close scrutiny, creates the sensation of hyper-reality:

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<sup>20</sup> *The High Book of the Grail. A Translation of the Thirteenth-century Romance Perlesvaus*, trans. by Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978, rev. 2007), p. 6.

[i]l fixe sans la voir cette queue vite retombée avec lassitude, ses crins d'un noir terne, épais, grossis encore par son regard stupidement attentif. Elle se soulève à nouveau. Déodat s'arrête un instant. Trois, quatre boules de crottin ferme. L'odeur en est si chaude et si familière qu'il est près de la trouver plus rassurante que répugnante. (110)

[(h)e stares without seeing at the tail, which falls down lazily, and at its dull thick hairs, which appear even thicker to his thoughtlessly fixed eyes. The tail rises again. Déodat stops for an instant. Three, four balls of solid muck. Their smell is so hot and so familiar that he finds it almost more reassuring than revolting.]

The sight and smell of horse dung, at once homely and familiar, almost comforts Déodat, but his vision of the surroundings does not lose its disturbing sharpness. He perceives the horse disappear behind 'un grand houx aux feuilles débonnaires, dont les piquants s'estompent' (110) [a big holly with bright leaves and prickles that blur away]. As the horse's steps die away, the boy expects that soon the silence will be complete, which is hardly possible in a forest. In the next instant, he is recalled to life by the sound and smell of a muck heap buzzing with flies, and, after an effort, he begins to walk (111). In this scene, Déodat's perception is hypersensitized to the point where the real becomes unreal and distorted, the resulting defamiliarization vividly manifesting Déodat's disturbed, alienated state of mind.

Relatedly, Déodat and other characters from whose point of view the narrative is told, such as Yvain the Knight of the Lion and King Arthur, are able to register the less glorious aspects of knightly experience: the weight and discomfort of armour, the nauseating sight of wounds as well as the dirt and horse excrements that are inevitable for an errant knight. Thus,

when Déodat decides to join Yvain again later in the narrative, the boy witnesses Yvain murder other questing knights, and, kneeling by the corpse of one such knight, Déodat registers that ‘[l]e corps répand une odeur aigre et violente de sueur, de vomissure, d’entrailles éventrées’ (122) [(t)he body spreads a strong, acrid smell of sweat, vomit and disembowelled entrails]. In certain romances, such as *Perlesvaus*, the descriptions of armour, horse trappings, wounds and other material aspects of chivalric life are very detailed, while in others, such as the *Queste*, there are few details. Zink’s world is different: the amount and quality of realistic, familiar detail results in making the world both graphic and at the same time dream-like and unfamiliar for the characters and the reader.

## 7.2 Death in Chivalric Society

There are three kinds of death in the novel, soliciting different responses from the protagonist: natural death from illness or old age, violent death in combat and the mysterious death of Cahus. The first death Déodat faces and by which he seems the least troubled is the death of his grandmother, who is carried away by fever during an epidemic in the village. This death has an important effect on the boy’s life, however, because he is taken to Camelot as a result. Moreover, his grandmother’s death emphasizes the sensation of the uncanny already present in the boy’s life. The night he spends at his grandmother’s bedside, listening to her story, in which fairy tales, delirium and confession blend together, makes him doubt the reality of his and his grandmother’s life. He even imagines that the story might have somehow caused his grandmother’s death, like the dream in which his brother Cahus received a mortal wound: ‘[u]n conte qui n’était pas un conte dans l’ombre de la nuit: Déodat devait souvent y repenser plus tard, après la mort de Cahus. Cette mort, qu’était-ce d’autre?’ (29) [(a) tale that was not a tale,

told in the shadows of the night: Déodat would often think of it later, after Cahus's death. And what else was it, this other death?]. Although Déodat does not appear outwardly disconsolate at his grandmother's death, it makes him feel more alienated and perceive the world as less real.

Whereas the manner of his grandmother's death is relatively peaceful, he learns about the violence of chivalric life soon after coming to Camelot. Déodat's first adventure, which he remembers as the only secret he had kept from everyone, including his brother Cahus, is the adventure he sees after following Brehus Sans Pitié into the forest. There, Déodat hears the sounds of fighting and, arriving on the battle scene, sees a dead knight lying on the ground: 'un chevalier était étendu sur le dos, les bras en croix' (32) [a knight lay on his back, his arms outstretched]. Approaching, the boy notices more details: broken armour and weapons, flies gathering over traces of blood and the body itself, broken and distorted. He faints when he discerns the neck wound, 'une blessure si profonde que les mailles cassées du haubert y plongeaient dans une bouillie de sang, de chair et de fer, tout animée du mouvement des mouches' (33) [a gaping wound, so deep that the broken links of the mail disappeared in the mash of blood, flesh and iron, all covered with the moving mass of flies]. He is struck not only by what he sees but also, arguably, by the discrepancy between chivalric adventures as he and Cahus imagined them and the reality of adventure: '[é]tait-ce cela, l'aventure?' (33) [(w)as that it, adventure?]. The detailed, realistic description has a somewhat nightmarish quality to it, intensifying the contrast between glorious chivalry as Déodat imagined it – and as it is described in medieval romances concerned with the Grail quest – and the graphically portrayed cruelty of armed combat. As he sees more combats involving Yvain, Brehus and Galahad after Cahus's death, and witnesses Perceval's vengeance, the impression that chivalry is irrational, even perverse and grotesque, is strengthened.

The boy feels nauseated by the sight of the corpse and, to an even larger extent, by the coolness of a damsel who comes to the place seeking the victorious knight. Although the girl

confronts the same sight as Déodat, her reaction is totally different:

En découvrant le corps étendu, elle battit des mains:

– Il est mort! Il est mort! Où est celui qui m’a vengée? Pourquoi ne vient-il pas chercher sa récompense? (33)

[Seeing the body, she clapped her hands:

‘He is dead! He is dead! Where is my avenger? Why does he not come to claim his reward?’]

The girl’s reaction is more in line with the convention of chivalric romance, but Déodat’s response to the dead body is more psychologically congruous. The girl’s elation at the sight of a dead body cannot be dismissed as merely confirming the stereotype of ‘dark’ and ‘unenlightened’ Middle Ages: her joy emphasizes Déodat’s alienation.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the girl, Déodat is frightened and repulsed by the body – he perceives it for what it is, the remains of a human being, rather than simply a fragment in the panoply of chivalric life.

Déodat obeys the girl’s order that he should find Brehus and, returning to the place, spies Brehus and the girl embracing on the grass, not far from the dead knight’s bleeding body. The scene firmly places Déodat as observer, voyeur, even spy in relation to courtly and chivalric practices. Zink’s description of the whole episode is very graphic and physical, unlike that in medieval romances, and more akin to that which a modern reader would expect in a realistic novel. An episode in the *Queste* where Sir Bors is deceived by the devil into seeing his brother Lyonel murdered is evocative of the description of the dead knight in the *Déodat*

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<sup>21</sup> The girl’s elation at the accomplished act of vengeance evokes the words of Walker Percy’s Lancelot when he remembers how his ancestor carved his offender ‘limb from limb’ and how he himself cut the throat of his wife’s lover.



episode: ‘il se resgarde: si voit un cors gesir a terre toz estenduz et sanglanz, novelement ocis’ (178) [Bors looked and saw a bloodied corpse stretched out on the ground. It had been killed recently (110)]. Like Déodat, Bors is in the observer position, but the *Queste*’s short description lacks any graphic detail, though it might provoke an imaginative modern reader to draw a scene similar to the one described by Zink. Moreover, like Déodat, who nearly faints at the sight of the body, Bors falls unconscious, though Bors’s reaction is caused by grief at what he believes to be the corpse of his beloved brother, Lyonel. In contrast with Déodat’s impression that knights are merciless and cruel, the *Queste* knights are often given to passionate shows of ‘grant duel’ (178) [great sorrow] on seeing their dead or heavily wounded fellows, though they show little mercy to those knights who are described as sinful or felonious. Unlike the *Queste* knights, Déodat is equally moved by the sight of any wounded knight, be he ‘good’ or ‘bad’: for instance, he cares for Brehus after the knight has been wounded by Galahad, although Déodat knows how cruel Brehus is.<sup>22</sup>

The adventure in which Brehus kills a knight and makes love to the avenged girl next to the dead body is the first occasion on which Déodat is confronted with the cruelty and crudeness of ‘chivalry’. After Cahus’s death, Déodat leaves Camelot and witnesses more adventures similar to the first one, seeing knights wounded or killed by their peers. Most strikingly, Déodat visits Perceval’s manor and watches the terrible vengeance exacted by Perceval on his mother’s offenders, whose lord he literally drowns in a vat filled with the blood of the lord’s followers: ‘[d]evant la porte, des corps étaient entassés: les corps de chevaliers, de sergents et même d’enfants. Tous avaient été égorgés’ (102) [(b)odies were piled up in front of the door – bodies of knights, soldiers and even children. All of them had their throats cut]. The episode itself originates in *Perlesvaus*, but in the medieval text its description is purely factual

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<sup>22</sup> The *Queste* knights may take care of a knight they do not know or do not recognise as their companion but who has behaved chivalrously: in an episode examined above in Chapter 2, p. 47 and pp. 57-63, Gawain carries to an abbey the knight who has challenged him and on whom he has inflicted a mortal wound before recognising the knight as Yvain l’Avoutre. However, none of the knights in *Déodat*, not even Galahad, shows concern for the knights they have killed or wounded.

and non-emphatic. In *Déodat*, the description of unbelievable and gratuitous violence is given power by the fact that everyone seems to approve of Perceval's actions.

Arguably, violent death is an integral part of the code and practice of chivalry, though even in medieval romances there are occasions when knights are faced with the horror and absurdity of gratuitous violence. The *Queste* Grail champions murder all the knights of the Carcelois castle in a massacre that, in its cruelty, resembles Perceval's vengeance: '[s]i les vont ociant et abatant ausi come bestes mues' (230) [(t)hey (the companions) began attacking and slaughtering the knights as if they were dumb beasts (142)]. Having killed all the castle inhabitants, the companions look around and, seeing the corpses, wonder if they have sinned, but a priest appears who explains they have been instruments of divine vengeance.<sup>23</sup> Again, the *Queste* description is nothing like the graphic, nightmarish reality of the scene in *Déodat*: the appearance of bloody corpses is implicit, but the task of sketching in the details is left to the reader or the illuminator.<sup>24</sup>

In *Déodat*, the two knights destined to achieve the Grail, Perceval and Galahad, appear to be just as cruel as Brehus or any non-elect knight. Galahad wounds Brehus, spares his life and continues on his way without considering whether his adversary will survive. Galahad's 'mercy' is thus formal and has nothing to do with Christian charity – or the compassion which *Déodat* shows by staying with Brehus and taking care of the wound. Hearing from the hermit that Galahad and Perceval are destined to achieve the Grail, *Déodat* is so horrified by remembering the deaths inflicted by these and other knights that he has a hallucination, seeing blood everywhere:

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<sup>23</sup> According to the priest, the castle knights were worse than Saracens; if the companions had killed Christian knights, they would have broken the Peace of God, but killing the knights who were not true Christians, they did not commit any sin (the idea of the Peace of God is explained in Chapter 1, p. 28).

<sup>24</sup> The episode is illuminated in several manuscripts, for instance, BL, MS Royal 14 E III fol. 131<sup>r</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 110, fol. 434<sup>r</sup>; BnF, MS f. fr. 112 (3), fol. 170<sup>v</sup>; and BnF, MS f. fr. 343, fol. 56<sup>v</sup>.

[i]l s'était englué dans l'horreur. Il avait vu couler trop de sang. Partout il n'y avait que du sang. Tous versaient le sang parce qu'ils étaient obsédés par le désir de contempler une coupe qui contenait du sang. [...] Que lui avait apporté sa rencontre avec ce Galaad indifférent et glacé? Pourquoi le succès annoncé de ce Perceval, dont il avait vu de ses yeux la cruauté? Y avait-il pire péché que d'être cruel? (127-28).

[(h)e was bogged down in horror. He had seen too much blood flow. Everywhere there was nothing but blood. Everybody spilled blood because they were obsessed with desire to see a cup filled with blood. [...] What had his meeting with indifferent, icy Galahad brought him? Why was Perceval said to succeed one day, when Déodat had seen his cruelty with his own eyes? Was there a worse sin than cruelty?]

The word 'blood' resonates throughout the passage, suggesting a link between the knights' obsession with the blood-containing Grail and their activity of spilling blood. These knights seem to have forgotten Christian doctrine, a doctrine invoking charity: Christ's blood in the Grail is the consequence of God's love and self-sacrifice, but the knights are placing themselves in the position of Christ's prosecutors by attacking their fellow men, for whom Christ died. Déodat perceives the contradiction within medieval chivalric ideology, but he is unable to escape the nightmare of the quest which has turned into massacre.

During his peregrinations, Déodat encounters so many examples of the knights' mercilessness that he thinks there may be no mystery in Cahus's death and that one of the knights might have killed the young squire for no particular reason and without giving the act a second thought. The knights' cruelty is also stressed by the peasants with whom Déodat stays for a while: '[i]ls ont du sang partout. Toujours à saigner de quelque part ou à saigner

quelqu'un' (73) [(t)hey have blood everywhere. They are always bleeding or making others bleed]. Déodat feels that, because he and Cahus had always been together, Cahus's murderer might attack him as well, and he becomes afraid of all knights.

At the same time, Déodat is as much afflicted by the court's inattention to his brother's death, the insufficiency and insincerity of burial rights, as by the danger that might threaten him.<sup>25</sup> Lack of compassion and attention to other human beings distinguishes other characters of Zink's Logres, be they knights, hermits or monks, but Déodat's attention and concern are always engaged. He watches the lady of the manor die, he sees the knight killed by Brehus in the course of his first adventure, and he witnesses other knights being killed by Brehus, Perceval and Yvain the Knight of the Lion. The scenes of murder affect the boy so much that at times he fails to distinguish reality from imagination, growing increasingly alienated from the world of chivalry to which he is supposed to belong. Moreover, Déodat is not present at the death that matters most for him, that of his brother Cahus, though he is haunted by it psychologically. In the story that Cahus tells, dreams are interwoven with reality, so that, hearing the account of Cahus's death, Déodat becomes increasingly confused about the borderline between dreams and reality, between the uncanny and the familiar, as he ponders over his brother's, and his own, fates.

### 7.3 Women who Teach Déodat Transparency and Love

In the two previously-examined novels, Percy's *Lancelot* and Lodge's *Small World*, women

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<sup>25</sup> Cahus is only a squire, not a knight, yet it is notable that, in the *Queste*, the Round Table knights usually are buried with royal ceremony, like Yvain l'Avoutre, whose death is considered above (Chapter 2, pp. 57-63). Likewise, in the *Queste*, when Bors learns about his brother's supposed death, he insists Lyonel should be buried with royal honour: 's'il est morz, si m'en mostrez le cors, si le feré enterrer et fere tele honor come l'en doit fere a filz de roi' (177-78) [if he is dead, show me his body. Then I will give him a burial appropriate for a king's son (110)].

often appear as guides to the protagonist, providing him with insights into the nature of gender relations, just as the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’ recluses instruct Perceval and Lancelot about the nature of knighthood and about the connection between the practice of chivalry and salvation. In *Déodat*, the boy’s progress is closely associated with three women: the lady of the manor (his supposed grandmother, actually his mother), Laudine’s servant, Lunete, and the girl Déodat meets at the well. These women teach him not only about gender roles but also about the link between earthly and divine love. In order to understand Déodat’s relations with these three women, it is necessary to refer to Zink’s view on the concept of love in medieval society as expressed in his fiction and academic works.

Love is, unsurprisingly, at the centre of Zink’s troubadour novel *Le Tiers d’amour*, which is inspired by the troubadour Guiraut de Calanson’s poem ‘Celeis cui am de cor et de saber’ [To the one whom I love with my heart and my soul].<sup>26</sup> The novel’s protagonist, Filhol, is a boy of approximately Déodat’s age, a foundling who had been in love with Marie de Ventadour and realized it only after she died. Having left his home castle, Ussel, Filhol travels around Provence, becomes involved in the highly ritualised games of courtship and is initiated into the art of love by the seductive Louve de Pennautier. He also hears a poem about ‘the smallest third of love’ (‘le plus petit tiers d’amour’) recited by troubadour Guiraut de Calanson.<sup>27</sup> The ‘smallest third of love’ is, indeed, far from unimportant because, like the second kind of love, that between family members, love between man and woman can lead to the ‘greatest’ love, the love of God. The connection between the smallest and the greatest third of love is highlighted in *Le Tiers d’amour* by Peire Vidal, who in one episode is compared to the infirm Fisher King at the Grail Castle: ‘[q]ue peut comprendre au plus petit tiers d’amour celui qui ignore le plus grand?’ [(h)ow can those who do not know the greatest third understand

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<sup>26</sup> See Zink’s commentary on the poem in *Poésie*, pp. 54-58.

<sup>27</sup> Zink, *Le Tiers d’amour*, p. 162-63.

the smallest third of love?].<sup>28</sup>

Zink revisits the connection between the three forms of love in *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*, where medieval tales derived from exempla, saints' lives and accounts of miracles, are given an original interpretation. Accordingly, Zink retells the famous life of St Alexis to suggest, contrary to his source, that it is not the saint but his wife and his mother who are united with God as a result of Alexis's flight from the world.<sup>29</sup> When Alexis dies as a beggar under the stairs of his parents' house and is proclaimed a saint by the pope, Alexis's mother and wife reject this interpretation. His mother reproaches Alexis for believing her incapable of understanding his aspirations: '[c]royais-tu que la sainteté n'est pas l'affaire d'une mère? La sainteté... Si la sainteté, c'est aimer et souffrir, qu'ai-je fait d'autre?' [(d)id you think that holiness is not a mother's business? Holiness... If holiness means loving and suffering, what else have I done?].<sup>30</sup> The mother's response demonstrates how love towards one's child, which is often a source of anxiety and pain, can bring a parent closer to God.<sup>31</sup> Alexis's wife realizes that her love for her husband, whom she did not see but who has lived by her side all these years, was very much like loving the invisible but ever-present God: '[n]'avait-elle pas aimé toute une vie Alexis absent et qui était tout proche, comme on aime dans le noir, comme on aime dans le vide ce Dieu toujours caché, ce Dieu dont on ne connaît que l'absence, ce Dieu si proche et qui ne se découvre jamais?' [(h)adn't she all her life loved Alexis, who was absent but near, as one loves in the dark, as one loves in the emptiness the invisible God, God of whom one knows only His absence, who is near but never reveals Himself?].<sup>32</sup> She compares divine love with the 'smallest' kind of love she feels towards her husband, and her love is all

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<sup>28</sup> Zink, *Le Tiers d'amour*, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> See Zink's commentary on the story in the introduction to his collection (*Le Jongleur*, p. 10).

<sup>30</sup> Zink, 'Saint Alexis' in *Le Jongleur*, pp. 184-90 (p. 189).

<sup>31</sup> Another example of such love is also given elsewhere in *Le Jongleur*; in 'L'enfant Jésus pris en Otage' [Infant Jesus Taken Hostage], where a desperate mother makes the Virgin save her criminal son by literally taking hostage the infant Jesus (pp. 162-66).

<sup>32</sup> Zink, *Le Jongleur*, pp. 189-90.

the more perfect because she loves someone she cannot see.

In *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* and *Le Tiers d'amour*, women deliver lessons in love to the reader and, in the latter novel, also to the main character, Filhol, who, like Déodat, moves from childhood to adolescence in the course of the narrative. Indeed, contemporary novels about the Grail quest are often concerned with transitions from 'innocence' to maturity, and love plays an important role in this transition: for instance, Walker Percy's Lancelot wakes from his 'sleep' as he learns about Margot's infidelity, and David Lodge's *Persse* realises he does not love Angelica after losing his virginity with Lily. Likewise, Déodat grows up with a dream, formed on the basis of his mother's fairy tales, about love as a selfless and noble feeling. By the time Déodat encounters his first adventure at the beginning of the novel, his mother is dead, but he remembers the stories she often told him and Cahus, which they viewed as fairy tales. On the night of her death, she tells Déodat one of these stories in delirium, but in a new way. He realizes that the story of a knight disguised as a bird who comes to a lady locked in the tower by her jealous husband must conceal the mystery of his mother's past, but he is not sure how to interpret it:

cette nuit-là, dans le délire de sa grand-mère, dans ses mots haletants et décousus (et il lui semblait que si seulement il savait une chose, une seule chose qu'il ignorait, ces mots prendraient leur vrai sens), c'était à la fois le même conte et un autre. Ou alors ce n'était pas un conte. (28)

[that night, in his grandmother's delirium, in her panting, rambling speech (it seemed to him that if only he knew one thing, just one thing he did not know, her words would make sense), it was the same and yet a different tale. Or it was not a tale.]

Pre-occupied at this stage with the mystery of Cahus's death, Déodat brushes aside the memory which, at the end of the novel, turns out to be crucial for discovering not only Cahus's murderer but also Déodat's identity and parentage. Moreover, the story of a knight who visits the lady night after night, disregarding the danger of these secret encounters, teaches Déodat about the power of 'le plus petit tiers d'amour', the smallest third of love, that between man and woman. Like Guiraut de Calanson's poem about the 'first third' of love, the story of Déodat's grandmother also comments, implicitly, on the 'second third' of love, between relatives, and on the greatest 'third', divine love.

Hence, Déodat loses his childish naïvety not when Cahus dies but earlier, when he participates in his first adventure, which is actually his sight of Brehus's violence and 'love-making'.<sup>33</sup> Soon after arriving at Camelot, he follows Brehus Sans Pitié to the forest and sees the knight sexually embracing a damsel not far from a newly-slain adversary. As has been mentioned earlier (7.2, pp. 235-36), the boy conceals the adventure from his brother not only because of his own horror and revulsion but also because of his shame: '[d]e retour à Camaalot, il ne dit rien à personne de ce qu'il avait vu, pas même à Cahus. Peut-être à cause de cette honte. Peut-être à cause de la honte d'avoir épié et surpris ce qu'il ne voulait pas voir' (34) [(w)hen he returned to Camelot, he told no one, not even Cahus, what he had seen. Maybe because of shame. Maybe it was the shame of becoming a spy and overseeing something he did not want to see]. It has been argued above that Déodat is ashamed at witnessing the discrepancy between the chivalric ideals they cherished when he and Cahus lived in their remote manor and the reality they confront at Camelot. To the shock of seeing Brehus's cruelty is added the shock of seeing love in its least exalted aspect, as the mere satisfaction of lust: '[i]l eut honte. Non pas lui. Son corps eut honte, comme un tremblement, un frisson dans son

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<sup>33</sup> The episode is summarised above, 7.2.



ventre' (34) [(h)e felt ashamed. Not he. His body felt shame, something like a shiver or trembling in his stomach].<sup>34</sup>

The scenes of a boy's initiation into sexuality, very physical in Zink's fiction, are rarely as visual in medieval romance, where sexual intercourse is usually designated by euphemism: for example, Chrétien de Troyes in *Le Conte du Graal* uses the word 'le surplus' to suggest the kind of behaviour Perceval's mother prohibits to her son as he is about to leave for King Arthur's court.<sup>35</sup> However, what is implicit in medieval romances is often made explicit in the illuminations, and sexual scenes depicted in some manuscripts would place the reader in the position of Zink's Déodat, seeing a noble damsel and knight in a tight embrace: such is the illumination of *Lancelot* in BnF, MS f. fr. 111, fol. 109<sup>r</sup>, where Morgan surprises lovers entwined among flowers and herbs. The illustration is particularly evocative of the scene in *Déodat*, because the lady's dress is drawn up high to reveal her thigh, a discrete way of representing what Déodat sees in the novel: 'Déodat vit les cuisses blanches et nues de la jeune fille, dressées entre les herbes hautes' (34) [Déodat saw through the tall grass the girl's white, naked thighs]. Déodat's voyeuristic experience is, in some respects, similar to Persse's watching a pornographic film in Rummidge and a striptease show with Lily, whom he supposes to be Angelica.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Déodat watches Brehus Sans Pitié make love not only to a damsel in the above-mentioned episode but also, later, at the well, to the girl whom Déodat loves.

Déodat, who sees everything with the eyes of a child, is ignorant about love, but in his

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<sup>34</sup> The shame and fascination of a boy or youth at the sight of sexual encounter is a frequent theme in Zink's fiction: in 'La langue coupée' [The Severed Tongue], a peasant boy witnesses a sexual encounter between a knight and a local damsel, and he is caught and mutilated by the knight (in *Le Jongleur*, pp. 72-77). The boy is miraculously healed by the Virgin after his mother's prayers. Like Déodat at the end of the novel, the boy becomes liberated from his fear and hatred of the knight and discovers divine love.

<sup>35</sup> 'Le surplus' is also the term used by Marie de France, which she borrows from troubadour poetry, see Zink, *La poésie comme récit*.

<sup>36</sup> The experience of Walker Percy's *Lancelot* is similar in that Lancelot, too, spies the woman he loves in bed with another man. However, while Persse and Déodat are not seeking this experience consciously, Lancelot not only does everything to spy on Margot with her lover but is also fascinated by what he sees.

innocence he is also surprisingly perspicacious, as he proves during his first meeting with Lunete. Lunete makes Déodat tell her everything about Cahus's death and Déodat's anxieties, and she suggests that Cahus died of 'transparency'. Déodat's encounter with Lunete shows a change in conversational patterns from Déodat's relations with his mother. In the latter case, Déodat mostly listens to the lady's stories: '[t]ant d'histoires du passé, toutes les histoires du passé, sauf une, celle du passé de la dame, de ses amours et de la naissance de son fils' (26) [(s)he told them so many stories of the past, all the stories of the past but one story, that of herself, of her love affairs and of her son's birth]. However, Lunete urges Déodat to tell his story first, but then, without answering Déodat's questions directly, she responds with her own story. Déodat is more interested in hearing what Lunete might know about Cahus's death than in her story, but he intuitively understands the part Lunete does not tell him better than he understood his mother's fairy tales:

- On peut mourir d'être transparent, d'être traversé par le regard des autres sans jamais le retenir. On peut mourir de n'être jamais regardé. On peut mourir de... comment dirai-je?

- On peut mourir d'amour.

Il avait parlé un peu au hasard: une formule toute faite, souvent entendue, et qui n'avait guère de sens pour l'enfant qu'il était encore. (63)

['You can die because of being transparent, because others always look through you, never taking note of you. You can die because no one ever looks at you. You can die of... how can I say it?'

'You can die of love.'

He had spoken haphazardly – a ready phrase which he had often heard and

which made no sense for a child he still was.]

Déodat guesses that Lunete is in love with Yvain, but he does not know how to relate her story to his own experience, and the notion of transparency remains unclear to him at this stage. He believes that being transparent to the eyes of others is dreadful, because it can entail not simply social anonymity, but death or disappearance; only by the end of the novel does he understand the meanings of transparency and, for Déodat, this revelation is connected with learning his family secrets.

Subsequently, at a forest well Déodat meets a girl of his age who, judging by her clothes, is probably his superior in social standing. The girl listens intently to Déodat's account of his adventures: '[e]lle l'écoutait, les sourcils froncés, sans le quitter des yeux. Comme si elle était là pour cela. Comme si chacun était dans son rôle' (115) [(s)he listened with furrowed brows, her eyes fixed on him. As if she was there to listen to him. As if each had a role to play]. After Déodat tells her everything, Brehus Sans Pitié arrives, driving away the boy and seducing the girl, a scene which, once again, Déodat witnesses with shame and bitterness:

[e]lle était assise, lui étendu, la tête sur ses genoux, et ses mains, ses mains...

Déodat se mit à courir, ivre de honte. (117)

[(s)he was sitting, and he was lying, his head on her knees, and his hands, his hands...

Déodat ran, wild with shame.]

Awareness of the physical dimension of love can actually interfere with an adolescent's enjoyment of love: Déodat regains the closeness he felt towards the girl only after he has

understood the meaning of transparency and progressed to a more mature understanding of love.<sup>37</sup> In his encounter with Lunete, Déodat, who is as yet relatively innocent, despite his having surprised Brehus making love to the avenged damsel, guesses Lunete's love for Yvain. Initially, he cares little about Lunete's feelings, but he becomes more concerned with her suffering on his second visit to St Augustine's chapel, when he has learnt more about transparency. Growing into an adult and shocked by the world he confronts, Déodat initially becomes less perspicacious in his understanding of people and their feelings, and he believes that the girl at the well might betray what he told her about Cahus's death to Brehus. In other words, he totally misjudges the girl's character and her attitude towards him. Déodat needs to regain the immediacy of his relations with the girl, but on a new level, so that they may again communicate as easily as they did on their first meeting.

When Déodat finds the girl in the last chapter, she has been dishonoured and abandoned by Brehus. Déodat, in turn, has learned from Yvain the Knight of the Lion about his parentage and about Cahus's murder. His newly-discovered knowledge makes the boy feel that his entire system of values is destroyed. He and the girl appear like Walker Percy's 'survivors', whose world lies in ruins, and who are free to build a new world together.<sup>38</sup> The destruction of their 'old world' enables Déodat and the girl to talk freely again: Déodat is about to tell the girl what he had learned from the hermit and how this knowledge can liberate them both, the ending of Zink's novel being in this respect similar to the open ending of Percy's *Lancelot*.

It seems that Déodat's revelation, which he wants to share with the girl, concerns the nature of transparency and that transparency in this case means a kind of selfless charity, not social insignificance. According to Zink, the main theme of the medieval Grail quest romances,

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<sup>37</sup> In his essay *Seuls les enfants savent lire*, Zink suggests that, unlike adolescents, children can understand love intuitively (p. 117).

<sup>38</sup> Percy's *Lancelot* applies the word 'survivors' to himself and Anna. In a self-interview 'Questions They Never Asked Me', Percy discusses how after a catastrophe a person becomes free to act, to create and also to love, to form a new relationship (*Signposts*, p. 407).

from Chrétien de Troyes onwards, is charity and attention to other people ('charité, attention à l'autrui').<sup>39</sup> Zink cites Simone Weil, who in her 1942 letter to Joë Bousquet suggests that the Grail quest is about learning to feel compassion and remarks that '[I]’attention est la forme la plus rare et la plus pure de la générosité. Il est donné à très peu d’esprits de découvrir que les choses et les êtres existent [...] Cette découverte fait en somme le sujet de l’histoire du Graal’ [(a)ttention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. Very few souls are able to discover the existence of other things and beings (...) This discovery is, in short, the theme of the Grail story].<sup>40</sup> Zink’s Grail can be achieved only by someone who can pay attention to another person’s suffering and genuinely pose the question ‘quel est ton tourment?’ [what ails you?].<sup>41</sup> Referring to Simone Weil’s words about the importance of attention, Zink explains that ‘l’attention est l’oubli de soi-même’ [attention means forgetting oneself], a quality that none of the questers in *Déodat* exhibit.<sup>42</sup>

As a result of his individual revelation, Déodat approaches God and disappears, together with the girl at the well, from the world of chivalry and courtliness, somewhat as Galahad is taken from this world at the end of the *Queste* and the ‘Sankgreal’: ‘[i]ls étaient assis côte à côte au bord de la source et leurs mains se touchaient. Transparents’ (152) [(t)hey were seated side by side on the side of the well, their hands touching. Transparent]. Transparency in *Déodat* can, thus, be understood at least on two levels: *social* transparency, as that of a servant, a peasant or a child, alluded to by Lunete, and *spiritual* transparency, suggested by the second hermit, which is a kind of union with God. As Déodat explains to the girl: ‘[i]ls croient tous qu’être transparent, c’est ne pas exister. [...] Je crois que c’est tout le contraire. La vraie présence est transparente’ (151) [(t)hey all think that transparency is non-existence. (...) I

<sup>39</sup> Zink, ‘*Non pedum passibus*’ (11 December 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Simone Weil and Joë Bousquet, *Correspondance. Le Bruit du temps* (Lausanne: Éditions l’Age d’Homme, 1982), pp. 18-19. Quoted in Zink, ‘*Non pedum passibus*’ (11 December 2008).

<sup>41</sup> It is the question Perceval has to ask his uncle in Chrétien’s *Conte*, and which Parzival asks in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s romance, quoted by Zink in ‘*Non pedum passibus*’ (11 December 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Zink, ‘*Non pedum passibus*’ (11 December 2008).

think it is the other way round. True presence is transparency]. In the first case, transparency means absence from society and social events and, thus, from the master narrative of history. Accordingly, Déodat is transparent, as his name is not recorded in the annals of Logres. Likewise, Cahus's death is not a personal tragedy for anyone at King Arthur's court except his brother Déodat. In much the same way as Cahus, Lunete is transparent because she is only a secondary character in the master narrative of Yvain and Laudine's dramatic relations: Lunete falls in love with Yvain because he once looked at her with attention and interest. However, Lunete herself confesses that she was not memorable enough for Yvain to recognise her at a subsequent meeting, nor does Yvain pay her sufficient attention to notice her trouble. Thus, Yvain is disqualified from achieving the Grail, because he lacks full attention towards her.

At the beginning of the novel, Déodat himself does not display a degree of charity and attention necessary for achieving the Grail: he is completely pre-occupied with his brother's death and with the effect of this death on his own life. Déodat is transformed after meeting the second hermit, who tells the boy: '[t]ransparent, Dieu ne l'est-il pas plus que personne? Qui est plus transparent que Dieu? Mais qui est plus présent que lui?' (131) [(i)s not God more transparent than any man? Who is more transparent than God? But who is more present than He?]. Afterwards, Déodat sees the Grail castle in the distance, but cannot approach it and is transported instead to St Augustine's chapel. There, he observes Guinivere's funeral attended by Lancelot, the knight who has become as transparent as Déodat himself, because, with the queen dead, Lancelot is no longer moved to great worldly deeds and will leave no further trace in history. As a result, Déodat learns that even the greatest and noblest knights can become invisible and that transparency is a state to be desired and sought, like the Grail. Hence, when Yvain tells Déodat their family mystery, offering the boy the chance to follow him and be publicly recognised as Yvain's brother, Déodat refuses. Life at Arthur's court and a chivalric career hold no attraction to him any longer.

## 7.4 Family history and predestination

Knowing or ignoring one's descent has a profound influence on one's mentality, progress in life and, above all, the sense of one's identity. It is particularly true in *Déodat*, where the protagonist's quest is ultimately for his social and spiritual identity. In some ways, the novel is structured like a detective story, because the protagonist's main concern is unravelling the mystery of his brother's death and avenging the murder: '[t]rouver la vérité cachée sous cette histoire absurde de rêve avéré, dont le bruit emplissait le château. Y parviendrait-il jamais? Venger son frère' (24) [(t)o discover the truth behind an absurd story about a professed dream, the rumour of which filled the castle. Would he ever accomplish this duty? To avenge his brother]. Déodat rejects the goal of seeking the Grail pursued by Arthur's knights in order to conduct his own quest by his own means. Being neither truly noble nor entirely low-born, the boy finds himself in a marginal position, which leads him to a sense of alienation, as argued above (7.1, p. 226). Déodat's marginality is reflected in the means by which he is about to proceed with his quest: '[à] lui le fossé, le talus, la laie forestière, la traverse. Sa quête à lui était dans les marges obscures, obscures parce qu'il était lui-même obscur, obscures parce que les rêves sont obscurs, obscures parce qu'il mettrait au jour de sombres secrets' (39) [(h)is were ditches and banks, crossings and forest tracks. His quest took place on the fringes of obscurity, because he was obscure, as are his dreams, and because this quest would reveal dark secrets]. Part of Déodat's obscurity is due to his position at Arthur's court, too young to be a squire, hence unnoticed or ridiculed by knights. He and Cahus are also known as sons of Yvain l'Avoutre, a man of obscure, unknown descent, whom no father has claimed as his son. At the end, it turns out that Déodat was searching not just for Cahus's murderer but for himself, for

his own identity, and he can accomplish this quest only after he knows the truth about his family and thus his birth; Déodat's quest yields unexpected results, revealing the truth not only about Cahus's murder, but also about their family history.

Early in the novel, a hermit tells Yvain and Déodat that only a person of perfect lineage, unstained by bastardy, can aspire to the Grail. This elitist idea, medieval in inspiration and frequently voiced in the *Queste*, immediately disqualifies Déodat from even trying to find the Grail, although the hermit insists that every Christian must undertake the search: '[ê]tes-vous un chrétien ou un sarrasin? Ne vous importe-t-il pas d'avoir part au corps et au sang du Sauveur?' (56) [(a)re you a Christian or a Saracen? Is it not important for you to have a share in the Saviour's body and blood?]. Meeting Galahad, Déodat compares the young knight to himself, since they are both bastards and of approximately the same age, but he quickly realizes that such a comparison is untenable, because the cold, distant Galahad appears to be not merely superhuman but inhuman. Compassion, which Zink identifies as the principal theme of the Grail quest romances and a quality pre-requisite to attaining the Grail, is alien to Galahad:<sup>43</sup> the knight performs the acts required by Christian charity to the letter without ever *feeling* empathy to the people to whom his charity is directed. Thus, Galahad shares with Déodat half of his bread not because he cares about the hungry boy, but because it is a thing to do in the situation: 'Galaad, il en était certain, ne l'avait rassasié de son pain que pour satisfaire au devoir d'une charité indifférente' (93) [(h)e was sure that Galahad gave him the bread only to perform the duty of universal charity]. Likewise, when Brehus asks for mercy, Galahad grants it, but leaves the heavily wounded man, without a second thought for him: '[q]uand un chevalier vaincu demande grâce, c'est un péché mortel que de le tuer' (94) [(w)hen a vanquished knight asks for mercy, it is a mortal sin to kill him]. Unlike Galahad, Déodat is interested in the people he meets, although initially the boy is more concerned with

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<sup>43</sup> Zink, '*Non Pedum passibus*' (11 December 2008).



what other people can tell him about Cahus's death than with what they want to tell him about themselves, as during his meeting with Lunete.

The encounter with Galahad is one of the first indications that descent is an arbitrary notion and that, far from shaping one's future, it can make the person obsessed with his origins. In Galahad's company, Déodat feels his obscurity and alienation more acutely than ever:

[à] chaque mot qui sortait de sa bouche, Déodat avait l'impression qu'il s'éloignait un peu plus, nimbé d'une clarté céleste où convergeait la gloire de ce monde et celle de l'autre, tandis que lui, Déodat, s'enfonçait, obscur, dans la terre obscure, comme s'il rejoignait son frère dans sa fosse sans nom. (92)

[Déodat thought that with every word the knight was moving a little further away, haloed by celestial light which united the glory of this and the next worlds, while Déodat, obscure, penetrated deeper and deeper into the dark earth, as if to join his brother in a nameless grave.]

Reference to the glory of this world ('la gloire de ce monde'), which envelops Galahad, is disturbing, because it leads Galahad to the conclusion that the next world would be ruled by a kind of celestial elite, a hereditary caste of knights: 'un tout petit nombre d'élus, tous chevaliers, tous issus du même sang' (92) [a very small number of chosen ones, all knights, all of the same blood]. However, the notion of an otherworldly dynasty glorified on earth clashes with certain other Christian concepts, such as humility, the virtue which inspired the Franciscan motto 'suivre nu le Christ nu' ('to follow naked the naked Christ').<sup>44</sup> Accordingly,

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<sup>44</sup> Zink outlines the Franciscan teaching on humility, stressing that the order's founder St Francis daydreams not of glory and fame, which are the usual, mundane dreams, but of humility (*Humbles et humiliés. Récits médiévaux de*

the medieval romances which present Galahad as the Grail champion highlight the tension between Galahad's 'muddied' birth, being Lancelot's illegitimate son, and his destiny to find the Grail, being a descendant of King Solomon and a relative of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>45</sup> Realizing at the end of the novel that ancestry is less important than a person's will, Déodat does not change the future of Arthur's world, but he changes his *own* future, becoming free to live and act.<sup>46</sup> He claims that he will no longer seek the illusions of fame and glory but will be 'simple' (151). Indeed, Zink explains that his novel is about revelation given to the simple spirits who can see things in their transparency.<sup>47</sup> Déodat understands that becoming transparent, then disappearing from the social imperatives of this world, is a way of finding the true life and completing the aim set by all medieval literature and culture, that of attaining salvation through union with God, a kind of *imitatio Christi*, as explained above (Chapter 7.1, pp. 225-26). Déodat wants to share this revelation with others, and he tells Yvain the Knight with the Lion how he came to value oblivion and transparency, which formerly frightened him: '[I]'ermite a dit que personne n'est plus transparent que Dieu et que personne n'est plus présent que lui' (149) [(t)he hermit said no one is more transparent than God and no one is more present than He]. Because God is present always and everywhere without being seen by worldly eyes, rejecting the world and its customs is a way of approaching God, a way that was stressed by the reforming monastic orders and preached, among others, by St Bernard, whose influence on the *Queste* has been remarked by critics.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the Grail champions of medieval romances, with the exception of Bors in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', do not to

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*l'abaissement*, Collège de France (2010-2011) <<http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/michel-zink/>> [accessed 27 May 2013] (26 January 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Galahad is compared by ecclesiastics in the romances to a river muddied at the source and clear as it reaches the sea.

<sup>46</sup> It can be argued that the achievement of the Grail in medieval romances, such as the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal', does not influence the political or material events in Arthur's kingdom, either.

<sup>47</sup> Zink, 'Non Pedum passibus' (11 December 2008).

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 25-26, for the influence of St Bernard's teaching on the doctrine of chivalry as expressed in the *Queste*.

return to Arthur's court, and neither does Déodat, although, as King Urien's bastard son, he can claim a place there.

The theme of family history is equally important both in medieval romances and in the novels discussed in the previous chapters. Accordingly, Percy's Lancelot awakens and becomes able to act only when he discovers that his daughter cannot have been engendered by him. The quest for Margot's lover makes Lancelot aware of his own mother's dubious behaviour, raising, in turn, the question of Lancelot's own descent, though this concern is never explicit in the novel. At the very beginning, Lodge's *Small World* refers to the mystery of Angelica's descent: the fact that she is a 'foundling' fascinates the romantically-minded Persse, and he finds out the truth about Angelica's and Lily's parentage and re-unites the girls with their parents, Arthur Kingfisher and Miss Maiden. Thus, it comes as a surprise when, at the end of the novel, Déodat rejects the importance of one's lineage in shaping one's destiny:

[q]uand je me croyais le fils de l'Avoutre, je me disais que, faute d'un lignage et d'un passé, nous nous raccrochions l'un à l'autre, mon frère et moi, nous étions tout l'un pour l'autre. Voilà que c'est moi qui suis avoutre, et que je suis fils de roi. Vais-je me glorifier d'être un bâtard royal? Vais-je fuir sans fin vers le passé du lignage que je me découvre, de même que les quêteurs du Graal fuient sans fin vers l'après, l'ailleurs, vers une aventure à venir dont ils croient qu'elle sera la dernière? Pourquoi fuir, alors que tout est là! (151-52)

[(w)hen I thought I was Yvain l'Avoutre's son, I told myself that my brother and I clung to each other, because we shared a lineage and a past, that we were everything for each other. Now I myself am a bastard, and a king's son,

too. Should I boast of being a royal bastard? Should I always flee back, to my newly discovered ancestral past, just as the Grail questers are forever fleeing to the afterwards, to the elsewhere, to a future adventure which they think will be the last one? Why flee when everything is here!]

The boy rebels against the notion that family history determines one's life, revalues the role of lineage in his life, breaks free from his position as a spy and his brother's double and accepts his social transparency. Déodat's new understanding that he should live in the here and now rather than in the past or in the future seems to contradict the lesson of the medieval Grail quest romances, where the successful quester belongs to the lineage of the Grail keepers. The quest for lineage reaches its climax in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' when, on the ship of Solomon, Galahad learns about his illustrious ancestor, King Solomon. Meanwhile, the fact that Déodat has to reject the notion of lineage in order to become free from social constraints demonstrates how influential the concept of 'a lineage and a past' is in determining one's actions and shaping one's identity.<sup>49</sup> Déodat realizes that he can be saved only by becoming invisible, transparent to the world in which he had lived, and he shares this revelation with a dishonoured girl, a socially marginalised person like himself, and one who is equally obscure, because she remains nameless. Knowledge of his family history liberates Déodat, so that, when he finds the girl at the well, he is able to see her trouble, lovingly sympathise with her and offer her the promise of a new life.

Zink's novel uses the material of romances in such a way that a modern reader may experience the physical and the spiritual landscapes of medieval literature as something which is both familiar and unfamiliar, presenting the events from the perspectives of socially and psychologically alienated characters. There are references to the less glamorous aspects of

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<sup>49</sup> Thus, Walker Percy's Lancelot, who had been obsessed with the notions of honour and lineage, needs to make a fresh start with a new woman, Anna, a victim of gang rape, in a new world.

chivalry, including the knights' cruelty and their mechanical adherence to the Christian teaching. On the other hand, Déodat's experience at St Augustine's chapel indicates the more positive aspects of medieval spirituality. The contrast between Christianity reduced to a formal ritual and Christianity as the religion of love can be seen in Zink's treatment of such issues as death, love and family history. Déodat is shocked by others' inattention to a person's death, be it the death of his brother or of a knight: for knights, monks and the first hermit, Cahus's death is a sign, but Cahus as a person is insignificant, while the death of a knight is an integral part of chivalric adventure.

Déodat learns compassion and charity by witnessing the deaths of others and by caring for the wounded Brehus. From the women he meets, he also learns to pay attention to what other people say and do. In the beginning, he mostly listens to women, but does not fully take in what they say: for instance, he has little interest in his grandmother's 'fairy tales', which in fact tell him the secrets of love and of his own parentage. With the girl at the well, the relation is reversed: he talks rather than listens, but, on their second meeting, he can guess her trouble without her describing the shame of having been seduced and abandoned by Brehus. In the meantime, Déodat has learned his parentage, a discovery which devastates him and makes him reject the values of chivalric society. Being a royal bastard, Déodat is able to claim a place for himself at Arthur's court, but he prefers to remain socially insignificant, 'transparent'. He has discovered that the tie which bound him to Cahus was not unique, because he had two more brothers, and that one of these brothers, Yvain l'Avoutre, had killed Cahus. However, Déodat realizes that he had always had another companion than Cahus, a Being who was even more 'transparent' than Déodat and his brother. Thus it is that Déodat renounces the prestigious worldly companionship of Arthur's chivalry in favour of remaining 'transparent' and being able to see and feel charity towards the 'small', 'insignificant' people and things.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed the ways in which the Grail quest appears in medieval and modern literature. I have chosen texts that are in a sense representative of the societies in which they were written, portraying the Grail quest as a spiritual search in medieval romances and as an existential search, a search for meaning, in the modern, post-religious context. The themes considered in the chapters – death, gender relations and history – reflect the central pre-occupations of an individual involved in a spiritual or psychological search, as they provide answers to such questions as ‘Who am I?’, ‘What is my place in the world and with respect to other people?’ and ‘What will happen to me after I die?’ In modern, post-religious society, these issues retain their urgency and are possibly even more pressing, because, as I note in the Introduction, quoting Walker Percy’s words in *The Message in the Bottle*, a society that denies the existence of God also denies the existence of meaning in life. According to Percy, the Christian view of man that existed in medieval and early modern society ‘was a viable belief in the sense that it animated the culture and gave life its meaning. It was something men lived by, even when they fell short of it and saw themselves as sinners’.<sup>50</sup> However, as the discussion in Chapters 2-4 on medieval romances has suggested, the issues of death, gender relations and history were far from unproblematic in medieval society, and the Grail quest romances provide the platform for voicing and trying to find solutions to these concerns. The solutions are, unsurprisingly, somewhat different for the thirteenth-century French author of the *Queste del Saint Graal* and for Thomas Malory in fifteenth-century England, despite the fact that Malory follows his French source with considerable fidelity in the ‘Tale of the Sankgreal’. The methodological approaches used for the research, historically informed criticism and, to an

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<sup>50</sup> Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, p. 18.

extent, feminist criticism, help to identify and contextualize the idiosyncrasies in the representation of the Grail quest in medieval and modern texts.

The discussion of death, gender and history in the medieval chapters focuses on the experience of minor, and often, though not always, previously little studied characters of medieval romances, which has turned out to be a fruitful approach for the analysis for two reasons. First, this approach facilitates thematic and methodological continuity with modern literature, which often foregrounds the experiences of marginal and non-heroic characters. Second, it is important to study the minor characters of medieval Grail quest romances, because such a study helps to put the experiences, failures and achievements of major characters and the elect knights into a clearer perspective. In the modern novels considered in Chapters 5-7, the principal characters or ‘questers’ are themselves non-heroic. Thus, the protagonists of Walker Percy’s *Lancelot* (1977), Lancelot Andrewes Lamar and Perceval/Father John are, respectively, a murderer (who is also formerly an alcoholic and presently a patient in a mental institution) and a disappointed priest. In David Lodge’s *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984), the protagonist Persse MacGarrigle is presented as a comic naïve young Irishman, who chases a girl on a round-the-world tour of academic conferences, all the while imagining himself to be in love. The protagonist of Michel Zink’s novel *Déodat, ou la transparence* (2002), is even younger than Persse; he is almost a boy and a socially marginalised boy, too, being the ‘invisible’, socially ‘transparent’ son of a minor knight, Yvain l’Avoutre at the splendid court of King Arthur. The non-heroic, unexceptional appearance of these characters makes them close and approachable for the readers, inspiring readers to enter the Grail quest in the wake of the questers.

At the outset and implicitly throughout the thesis, I have raised the problem of modern medievalism, of why the Middle Ages, and particularly the Grail quest, which in medieval romances is steeped in the Christian discourse of sin and salvation, exercises such an attraction

for modern, post-Christian culture. Having considered the themes of death, gender and the place of the individual in society and history in the Grail quest novels by Walker Percy, David Lodge and Michel Zink (Chapters 5-7), it seems that the use of medievalist tropes in these novels is intended to suggest the relative simplicity with which these issues were treated in medieval society. This simplicity is, of course, more apparent than real; the above-mentioned authors have different degrees of familiarity with medieval culture and history, but they show in their novels that return to our medieval origins cannot provide us with ready-made answers to our questions, primarily because Christianity as such does not provide clear-cut, precise guidelines for action.

Approaching medieval Grail quest romances, a reader has to make some hermeneutic efforts, like the questing knights whose adventures are interpreted in terms of spiritual allegory by wise religious men and women within the romances themselves. However, only the adventures of the most famous knights, the most virtuous and the most sinful ones, are subject to exegesis by hermits, priests and recluses. It is as if, for the less illustrious knights, such as Bagdemagus, Calogrenant and Yvain, whose adventures are examined in Chapter 2, the audience is invited to apply their own judgment, answering for themselves, for instance, whether the non-elect knights who repent their sins before they die on the quest are damned or saved. In other words, the audience has to decide whether by repenting at the last moment Yvain and Calogrenant have managed to avoid complete failure in their quests, whether they have made a sort of achievement, gaining a better understanding of themselves, of their chivalric service and of their relation to God. If so, then Calogrenant's and Yvain's achievements are in parallel with Galahad's achievement of the Grail, in significance if not in greatness, just like Galahad's quest is a chivalric version of the redemption that Christ brought to mankind.

A paradox of the Grail quest as presented in the *Queste* and the 'Sankgreal' is the role



of women in the quest, who are at once banished from participation in the quest and privileged because of their wisdom and ingenuity. Three minor women characters – two recluses and King Solomon’s wife – are discussed in the present thesis. These women occupy different social positions and elicit very dissimilar evaluation from the romances’ authors, but all of them act with authority in relation to the male characters, although the sources of their authority are naturally very different. The recluses are praised as women of holy living, and they advise the knights on the subject of chivalry, a subject which, one would think, should be out of their area of competence. However, the fact that they are women who have chosen a religious vocation does not disqualify them from instructing knights in correct chivalric conduct, because the chivalry of which they speak is spiritual, service to God. Moreover, although preaching was prohibited to medieval women, these women do something very similar to preaching, yet their behaviour is never questioned, as shown in Chapter 3.

The situation is entirely different in respect of another woman character, Solomon’s wife who appears in an interpolated story about the building of Solomon’s Ship, considered in Chapter 4. In this case, she is presented, variously, as an ‘evyll wyff’ by Malory (‘Sankgreal’, 991) or, according to the *Queste* author, as a woman who initially vexes her husband by her ingenuity (*Queste*, 221). However, the actions of Solomon’s wife are aimed at communicating to Solomon’s distant heir, Galahad, information about Galahad’s lineage: by designing the ship, Solomon’s wife furthers the questers’ progress and ensures that Galahad and his companions know exactly Galahad’s relation to his biblical ancestors and, by extension, his place in the history of the Fall and Redemption. Thus, the presentation of Solomon’s wife reveals, on examination, the complex, often contradictory discourses on marriage and the roles of spouses in ensuring the future of the lineage that existed in medieval society. The episode also demonstrates that the Grail quest can only be accomplished after the quester realises that his life, his ‘history’, reflects and in a way repeats the history of his family, his *genus*, and of all

mankind.

For modern authors, such contradictions provide a source of inspiration, showing the Middle Ages as a time of uncertainty, of conflict, of spiritual struggle that echoes, to an extent, the post-modern experience of living in the world where no single truth exists. At the same time, because there are some areas of unquestioned certainty in the Middle Ages, such as the existence of God, the use of medievalist tropes can both allow modern authors and readers to look back nostalgically at the Middle Ages *and* to recognise the moral and psychological anxieties of modern times in medieval literature. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that references to medieval phenomena and attitudes are used by modern authors when treating such important issues as death and bereavement, gender relations and the role of women in the Grail quest and the link between individual, family and the world histories. Chivalry in *Déodat*, for example, is epitomised by the violence and murder inflicted by questing knights, undermining the idea of chivalry as being glorious and exalted, and more akin to modern consciousness of military violence and its consequences, yet entirely in line with medieval reality and with some medieval authors' view on the practice of chivalry in their own time. Meanwhile, the connection between the Middle Ages and modern experience can be used by characters in the novels to make sense of their situation, to console themselves by reference to the past, even if the similarity between their situation and medieval realities is not exact: Percy's protagonist, Lancelot, compares himself to his medieval namesake when in despair. Realising that his wife, Margot, has been cheating on him, Lancelot states that women are inherently immoral. According to Lancelot, it is only his namesake who suffered from his affair with Guinevere, while Guinevere, like his wife Margot, did not care about morality: 'Guinevere didn't think twice about adultery. It was Lancelot, poor bastard, who went off and brooded in the woods' (198). Thus, throughout the novel, Lancelot distorts the Arthurian material to make it suit his situation and explain his experience. In other words, the world of medieval romances, and of

the Grail quest romances especially, is used by modern writers both as a foil and mirror of modern experience, a place where meaning existed, but also as a demonic double, violent, uneducated, yet appealing.

The question of women's authority in the Grail quest with regards to the questers and other male characters merits researching not only in medieval but also in modern literature. In the novels considered in the thesis, the question of women's role in the quest is a problematic one: the first impression is that, to become questers in their own right or at least to be respected by men, women have to shed some of their femininity and to acquire certain masculine features. At the beginning of *Small World*, for instance, Morris Zapp tells Hilary Swallow that many of the modern 'knights of the Round Table', in other words, academics, are women and that in fact there are more women than men in the academic world (63). His words must be vexing for Hilary, who has abandoned her own postgraduate research in order to raise children. However, in *Small World*, male academics are actually more numerous and more prominent than female ones. Moreover, the female academics, with the possible exception of the seductress Fulvia Morgana, are not questers: they are guides, like Miss Maiden, or objects of quest, like Angelica Pabst. In Percy's *Lancelot*, women are presented from the point of view of the main character, Lancelot, whose disappointment with his wife, Margot, influences the way he views all other women: for Lancelot, women are whores. It is remarkable that, describing Margot, Lancelot endows her with certain masculine features, such as her love of horses and her masculine manner of driving a car: '[s]he turned the car like a man, or a Texas girl, not push-pulling with two hands but palming the wheel around with one hand. [...] When she got into a car she hiked up her dress like a man does his pants' (36). Lancelot himself is afraid of horses and in his drives with Margot used to take the passenger's seat. In fact, the gender dynamics in Lancelot's relation with Margot is often reversed, so that he becomes, symbolically, a woman, and Margot a man. Lancelot's violent revenge on Margot and the film

crew is thus a reaction against being relegated to a subordinate position and an attempt to reassert his masculinity. Thus, while much research remains to be done on later and contemporary Grail quest literature, especially in comparing and relating the works written in different historical periods, the present study opens up new ground and, it is to be hoped, demonstrates the ways in which future work might be undertaken.

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