

JOACHIMITE APOCALYPTICISM, CISTERCIAN MYSTICISM
AND THE SENSE OF DISINTEGRATION
IN PERLESVAUS AND THE QUESTE DEL SAINT GRAAL

by

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ABSTRACT

The two early thirteenth-century romances Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal are strongly influenced by particular theological doctrines. The primary influence on Perlesvaus is apocalyptic: not only does it reflect characteristically apocalyptic concepts of justice, moral obligation and redemption, but it also depends on the all-encompassing struggle between good and evil to unify its plot. More specifically, Perlesvaus shows special affinity for the particular apocalyptic views of Joachim of Fiore, whose theory of the three ages of history and whose exegetical principle of concordia litterae are important influences on it.

The theology of the Queste, on the other hand, is mystical, emphasizing the inner life of the soul; yet the mystical Queste is more concerned with knighthood than is Perlesvaus. The ultimate fruit of spiritual enlightenment, moral struggle and growth in grace - all important themes in themselves - is a renewed knighthood drawing its inner strength from holiness and capable of giving the godly knight the kind of meaningful chivalrous adventure that his more worldly fellows cannot achieve.

Underlying these distinct theologies is a common preoccupation with change and dissolution expressed principally through the material imagery of water, representing transition and the threat of destruction, and of fire, evoking the unchangeable absoluteness of the beyond. Further similarities in the less prominent material images of earth and sky and in the choice of colour images confirm that the parallel use of imagery of destructive water and of a fire that is more light than flame is not simple coincidence.

Two very different theological responses have been elicited by a shared longing for the pure and absolute in the midst of profoundly menacing change.

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INTRODUCTION

THE STUDY OF PERLESVAUS AND

THE QUESTE DEL SAINT GRAAL

The study which follows addresses itself to two Christianized Grail romances, the Queste del saint Graal and Perlesvaus, in search of an answer to the simple question: what do these works mean? Very few literary studies ever have to stand entirely on their own, and this one, in that respect, is no exception. The question that concerns us has been asked previously by various scholars, and has been answered in ways that are, at least in some cases, both interesting and useful, and form part of the background to the ideas presented here.

The influence of previous scholarship does not extend to the approach adopted in this thesis. It is assumed here that Perlesvaus and the Queste are similar enough in inspiration and spirit to have part of their meaning in common, and that, at the same time, they are different enough that a study of the relationship between their unique, individual themes and the background they share will be enlightening. This assumption is not made by other students of either Perlesvaus or the Queste: comparisons of the two are rare. Whether the originality of approach is a virtue or a vice can only be judged in the light of the whole study, but it deserves to be noted at the outset.

In the realm of ideas, on the other hand, this paper owes a considerable debt to earlier work, sometimes for insights that are so

clearly valid that they have simply been acknowledged and adopted, sometimes for other theories less obviously true, which nonetheless suggested a line of development or an area of investigation. Not everything written on Perlesvaus or the Queste in the last century is reflected here, but so much of it has entered in one way or another, directly or indirectly, into the thesis that a summary of previous work is likely to prove helpful to the reader.

The organization and classification of studies related to Perlesvaus and the Queste pose some problems. Since the two works are almost never compared, it is easy to make a primary division into studies of Perlesvaus and studies of the Queste. Beyond that though, difficulties arise. Many articles center more on a motif than on the work, and often they consider the motif in several other romances in addition to the one of interest to us. Moreover, the volume of criticism in question is not large enough for distinct schools of thought or traditions of interpretation to emerge, except in very few cases. Organization by approach, theme, or area of interest is thus a potential source of confusion rather than of clarity, and for that reason, a simple chronological scheme, for all its obvious drawbacks, is adopted here, with brief comments on trends and related approaches to follow.

Attention was first called to the Queste del saint Graal in an article in Romania in 1907¹ by Albert Pauphilet, who would subsequently establish himself as one of the leading students of the Queste, as well as its editor. Four years later it was discussed for the first time by another scholar who would devote large portions of her career to it, Myrrha Lot-Borodine.²

Lot-Borodine and Pauphilet both returned to the Queste after the war, the former contributing a long article to Romania in 1921: "Les Deux Conquérants du Graal: Perceval et Galaad",³ and the latter first publishing a full-fledged study, Etudes sur la Queste del saint Graal attribuée à Gautier Map, in 1921,⁴ and then editing the text of the Queste for the Classiques français du moyen âge in 1923.⁵ These two critics both emphasized the theological character of the Queste, though without agreeing on the particulars of doctrine. A third doctrinal variant of their approach was added in 1932, when Etienne Gilson published his essay "La Mystique de la grâce dans la Queste del saint Graal".⁶ Yet another, clearly distinct theological interpretation was offered ten years later by W. E. Hamilton, who argued for the centrality of the Eucharist rather than of grace.⁷

In the decade after the Second World War Albert Pauphilet and Myrrha Lot-Borodine continued to write on the Queste. Pauphilet discussed it in his book Le Legs du moyen-âge,⁸ and Lot-Borodine devoted two articles to it, one on the apparitions of Christ in the Queste and in the Estoire del saint Graal,⁹ the other concerning "Les Grands Secrets du saint Graal dans la Queste du pseudo-Map".¹⁰ The second article appeared in a collection, Lumière du Graal, edited in 1951 by René Nelli,¹¹ which also contained several other studies on the Queste, including Yves Le Hir's analysis of the biblical element,¹² and René Guénon's attempt to associate the Grail with initiatory rites and esoteric knowledge.¹³

Frederick Locke produced, in 1954, both a dissertation on the structure of the Queste and an article for Romanic Review, calling for a new approach in the study of the Queste, based on the principle of

multiple meanings in a single work and on an appreciation of the major importance of questing as an activity.¹⁴ In that same year Jean Frappier adopted an equally new approach by departing from the general tendency to theological interpretation of the Queste and other overtly Christianized Grail romances to emphasize that these remain stories about knights.¹⁵

Theological interpretations and new approaches continued to be offered through the nineteen fifties and sixties. Irénée Valléry-Radot treated the Queste as Cistercian romance,¹⁶ while Locke incorporated his earlier call for a new approach into a monograph, The Quest for the Holy Grail: a Literary Study of a 13th. Century French Romance.¹⁷ In the same year in which Locke's book appeared, 1960, Helen Hennéssy chose to concentrate on the author's technique of combining romance and allegory,¹⁸ but the theological--and specifically Cistercian--character of the Queste continued to be of interest: Jean Charles Payen commented repeatedly on the Queste from that point of view in his several studies of the theme of repentance in mediaeval literature.¹⁹ Other work on the Queste in the nineteen sixties comprised primarily brief articles with very narrow and precise focus. Pierre Jonin wrote on hermits,²⁰ William Boletta on earthly and spiritual nourishment,²¹ and Luc Cornet on three specific episodes.²²

Work in the nineteen seventies was generally broader in scope, though not always devoted exclusively to the Queste. Grace Savage wrote a dissertation on narrative technique in the Queste for Princeton University in 1973,²³ Mary Hynes-Berry produced a dissertation on relation and meaning in the Queste and in Malory's version of the Grail story, the Tale of the Sankgraal, in 1975.²⁴ In

the same year, however, in studying the Queste and Tristan, Esther Quinn returned to the specifically religious elements,²⁵ and Sr. Mary Isabel produced an article on "The Knights of God, Cîteaux and the Quest of the Holy Grail" for the collection The Influence of Saint Bernard only a year later.²⁶ The most recent major study of the Queste, Pauline Matarasso's The Redemption of Chivalry,²⁷ focuses on the religious meaning of the work, but at the same time takes up and develops carefully and fruitfully one of the new avenues of approach of the nineteen fifties by concentrating on the influence, not of Cistercian theology, but of the Bible.

The items contained in this chronological survey do not fall neatly into categories; the majority are so particular in their focus on a certain theme or incident that they stand entirely alone. Other studies may be grouped to some extent. There is certainly a Cistercian school of interpretation of the Queste, and it is included within a wider circle of commentators who view the Queste theologically. Such a partial consensus clearly may not be ignored by any student. At the same time, however, any new attempt to elucidate the meaning of the Queste must take into account the divergent views of the various proponents of a theological interpretation, as well as the evidence cited by more recent critics, pointing to a multiplicity of meanings deriving from Cistercian theology, the Bible, and the social evolution of the knightly class. This present study draws on both the longer established theological interpretations and the more recent calls for a broader focus.

* * * * *

Perlesvaus was edited and published in the nineteenth century,²⁸ but this publication did not inspire widespread study. Sustained critical interest in Perlesvaus began at approximately the same time as comparable interest in the Queste, in the first decade of the twentieth century. William Nitze, who occupies a place in Perlesvaus studies similar to Pauphilet's in respect to the Queste, published a study of the principal sources of Perlesvaus in 1902,²⁹ and then contributed two brief articles on questions of chronology and geography at the end of the First World War.³⁰

In the early nineteen twenties Jessie Weston wrote several short articles on different aspects of Perlesvaus: on its relationship to the Vengeance Raguidel³¹ and to the Cyclic Romances,³² and on the Coward Knight motif.³³ Other commentators in the twenties included James Douglas Bruce, who devoted almost thirty pages of his history of the evolution of the Arthurian romances to Perslesvaus,³⁴ and Helen Muchnic, who wrote a brief study of two characters, the Coward Knight and the Damsel of the Car.³⁵

The nineteen thirties were the period of most sustained research into Perlesvaus. William Nitze and T. A. Jenkins edited the text in two volumes, with commentary,³⁶ and various scholars added studies of widely differing length and scope. Mary Williams published two quite brief articles on the Keepers of the Threshold and on the incident of the Copper Tower.³⁷ Marjorie Williamson analysed the dream of Cahus, also quite briefly.³⁸ In 1935 B. Weinberg contributed ten pages on the magic chessboard,³⁹ and in the following year H. L. Robinson treated the Sword of St. John the Baptist in only three

pages.⁴⁰ Not all the work on Perlesvaus was so cursory, however. In the same two years, 1935-36, William Roach wrote a dissertation on "The Religious Elements in Perlesvaus",⁴¹ and Neale Carman studied Perlesvaus extensively in one of the very few critical attempts to compare it with the Queste: "The Relationship of the Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal".⁴² On the eve of the Second World War Roach made a further substantial contribution to Perlesvaus scholarship in an article "Eucharistic Tradition in the Perlesvaus",⁴³ Mary Williams published another brief article,⁴⁴ and A. H. Krappe investigated the episode of the burning city.⁴⁵

The war caused a hiatus in the study of Perlesvaus as in so many other areas. Neale Carman resumed publication on the subject in 1946 with a lengthy attempt to demonstrate that Perlesvaus was a kind of symbolic New Testament, teaching biblical doctrine by means of contemporary exempla.⁴⁶ Four years later he wrote a much shorter article on the more precise question, "Was Pelles the Fisher King?"⁴⁷

Whereas the nineteen thirties were a period of much greater interest in Perlesvaus than in the Queste, the opposite was true of the fifties, when so many new directions were suggested in the interpretation of the Queste. A passing mention in Lucien Foulet's 1959 article on the chronology and language of thirteenth century works,⁴⁸ a note on sources by Roger Sherman Loomis in 1960⁴⁹ and a consideration of geographical questions by Neale Carman in 1964⁵⁰ comprise Perlesvaus studies in the almost two decades after nineteen fifty.

There has been some renewed interest in Perlesvaus more recently, beginning with three articles published in nineteen seventy. One was written by Frederick Whitehead,⁵¹ a second, on Joseph of

Arimathea, by Loomis,⁵² and the third, on the two incidents of the Grail Castle and the Dolorous Guard, by Neale Carman.⁵³ A slightly more general character study--a psychological and symbolic analysis of the female characters--was published by Jeanne Lods in 1973.⁵⁴ Finally, Thomas Kelly in 1974 published the most complete study of Perlesvaus to date,⁵⁵ and followed this the next year with a brief article on the concept of love in Perlesvaus.⁵⁶

The clearest impression to emerge from this summary of work on Perlesvaus is diffuseness. Perhaps because of a widespread conviction that the work lacks overall coherence and unity, few attempts have been made to understand just what it is about. Neale Carman's theory that Perlesvaus was a retelling of biblical incidents in an updated context was for years the only attempt at a systematic analysis, but it was too improbable to convince other scholars. Thus, there has never been a received interpretation of Perlesvaus comparable to the Cistercian/mystical interpretation of the Queste del saint Graal. Kelly's analysis begins much more plausibly from the structural division of the text--at line 6271--and posits a thematic structure organized around concepts of soteriology and eschatology, yet allowing for far more creative freedom on the author's part than was assumed in Carman's strict and rigorous symbolic interpretation. Whether this apparently very promising approach will acquire the same authoritative status as the Cistercian interpretations of the Queste remains to be seen, since it was only presented in 1974, and a decade is a relatively short period in the study of a minor work like Perlesvaus that is not written about very often.

While the new student of Perlesvaus cannot have recourse to a

received authoritative interpretation, either as a source of help or as an object to be attacked, he can find assistance in the existing literature in dealing with many practical questions and points of detail. That is the other salient feature of Perlesvaus criticism: such problems as dating and sources have been carefully treated by Nitze and Atkinson in their edition, by Carman in his study of Perlesvaus and the Queste and by others, and much light has been shed on individual characters and motifs both in the many articles cited above and in Kelly's book, which analyses a certain number of key incidents and characters in detail. It is in such matters as these, far more than in the realm of general interpretation, that this present study draws upon previous Perlesvaus scholarship.

* * * * *

It was admitted frankly at the beginning of this Introduction that other students of the Queste and Perlesvaus do not share the basic assumption on which this study is based, namely that the two romances have enough in common for a comparative study of them to be a fruitful source of insight into their meaning. At least five scholars have compared the two works: Bruce, Carman, Loomis, Nitze and one not yet mentioned, Jean Marx. Only one of these, Carman, claims to find significant areas of common meaning; the other four all use each text as a foil for the other to bring out with greater clarity the difference between them. The orientation of their work is thus quite different from that of this thesis, which seeks understanding of meaning in the interrelationship of what is distinct and what is common. Even for our purposes, however, a clear understanding of

points of difference is important, and both for that reason and because these are the only previous comparisons of Perlesvaus and the Queste, the principal conclusions of these five scholars merit more detailed attention than does the other work on one text or the other which has already been noted more cursorily.

William Nitze states succinctly the basic difference that is acknowledged generally as distinguishing the Queste from Perlesvaus. The former is above all theological and Cistercian, the latter notably more worldly in its viewpoint and simpler.⁵⁷

In moral doctrine the Queste, like Cîteaux, is predominantly pacifist, taking great pains to avoid homicide. The only killer among the Grail knights is Gawain, and his conduct is roundly condemned. Perlesvaus, on the other hand, is unabashedly homicidal: the New Law is established at sword point, the Grail Castle is conquered by force of arms, the personal enemy of Perceval's mother is put to a barbarous death, the heads of slain enemies are borne about as trophies, and retribution is exacted at times from entire tribes.⁵⁸

As for the concept of salvation, the Queste presents the Grail itself as the receptacle of grace, to be offered to the pure in heart, whose surrender to its influence is the essence of their quest and the measure of their success in finding adventure. Such notions of self-surrender are utterly foreign to Perlesvaus, as is most vividly illustrated in the contrasting attitudes of the two Lancelots toward sin and repentance.⁵⁹

In the image of ecclesiastical life there are also distinctions. Monastic life in the Queste is coenobitic: the religious who rear Galahad and who appear regularly as exegetes are white monks,

Cistercians living a common life. In Perlesvaus, on the other hand, exegetes, confessors, informants, custodians of relics and even knights who have retired from the world are all hermits.⁶⁰

In general orientation, Nitze believes, the Queste unequivocally turns inward, Perlesvaus outward. Where the knights of the Queste are invited to a mystical negation of self and inward purification, those of Perlesvaus are exhorted to struggle and suffer to promote the triumph of the New Law over its enemies. Between the two romances there is a clear opposition of mysticism to the "rugged Christianity of the borderland".⁶¹

Jean Marx is conscious of the same general difference in spirit and atmosphere between Perlesvaus and the Queste, but he is struck particularly by the contrasting role and personality of the principal characters. Perceval in Perlesvaus is a conqueror in God's service, strengthened by the power of God's grace, guided by God's hand on a mysterious voyage, and performing functions parallel to those of Christ; but Galahad goes far beyond that, overcoming his enemies almost without effort and embodying within himself something very close to the power of God itself.⁶²

The militant, crusading spirit of Perlesvaus, which struck Nitze, also impresses Marx, who finds the prominence of obligatory conversion, the reduction of Christian evangelisation to a struggle between the New Law and the Old, and even such details as the use of the Templars' symbol on Joseph of Arimathea's shield to contribute to an ethos markedly different from that of the Queste.⁶³ Like Nitze, too, Marx is aware of a stronger Celtic undertone to Perlesvaus than to the Queste. The voyages of Saint Brendan are evoked by Perceval's

ship, and on the Marvelous Island the Celtic underworld is blended with the hell in which the Just awaited Christ, just as the two are combined in numerous tales.⁶⁴ The hero also joins in a traditional family vendetta to avenge his mother and sister in notably brutal fashion--interrupting his sacred mission to do so. This is also typical of Celtic legend, and is unthinkable in the atmosphere of the Queste.⁶⁵

In composition too Marx finds the two romances different. A symbolic interpretation, reflecting theological doctrines, is placed on the events of Perlesvaus, but that interpretation is an addition ex post facto to a series of adventures inspired by Celtic traditions and crusading values. In this respect Perlesvaus is utterly removed from the Queste, which is carefully worked out according to a plan that is rigorously theological from the beginning.⁶⁶

Bruce and Loomis both concentrate their comparisons of Perlesvaus and the Queste on the differences--and occasionally the similarities--between the kinds of religious spirit animating each. For Bruce the thoroughly Christian, even ecclesiastical character of the Queste is so blatantly obvious as to demand no proof, and similar characteristics are virtually as prominent in Perlesvaus: ascetical tendencies, exclusion of love, veneration of relics, regular Christian worship, and the portrayal of the island kingdom to which the Grail is transferred in the end as a monastic state.⁶⁷ Bruce notes differences, however, largely involving what Perlesvaus includes and the Queste does not. Apart from the actual Grail quest, Perlesvaus is filled with sub-plots and additional incidents, largely of a secular character, and even certain of the Grail motifs themselves have a distinctly secular

cast: the Fisher King dies like any ordinary mortal, for example, and the final achievement of the Grail adventure is simply the capture of a castle by force of arms.⁶⁸ Bruce's conclusions could fairly be couched in Marx's terms: a more chivalrous, crusading, militant and equally more Celtic Perlesvaus contrasted with a mystical and more narrowly theological Queste.

Roger Sherman Loomis shares not only Bruce's view of the differences between the Queste and Perlesvaus, but also his distaste for the latter and for its author, whom he characterizes as schizophrenic. His analysis of the differences between the two texts is laced with value judgments highly unfavourable to Perlesvaus, but it does include the basic facts as well. Perlesvaus is very much concerned with relics, miracles and mass conversions by the sword, and its hero accomplishes his mission by violence that even extends to manslaughter. The Queste, on the other hand, is an allegory of the monastic life, in which external conflicts are interpreted as the inner struggles of the seeker after holiness.⁶⁹

Notwithstanding his strong feelings, Loomis confirms the impression already established by others, of a contrast between the crusading spirit and the mystical, of Christian inspiration as opposed to Celtic, of outward evangelisation compared to inner conversion. In religious doctrine, form and ethos there is a clear and rather easy to describe difference between Perlesvaus and the Queste.

J. Neale Carman acknowledges the obvious differences cited by others. Perceval is the hero of one romance, Galahad of the other. The Grail is different in character and approached by different means. No one in Perlesvaus would dream of calling it the grace of the Holy

Spirit, as happens in the Queste. He attaches great significance, however, to six pairs of analogous episodes in the two texts. These include: the incident of the Grail Knight's shield with the red cross;⁷⁰ Cahus's theft of a candlestick in Perlesvaus, and Meliant's of a crown in the Queste;⁷¹ the duel that the Grail Knight fights near the hermitage of a recluse relative of Perceval's;⁷² two episodes in which Arthur, in Perlesvaus, and Lancelot, in the Queste, attend the sick;⁷³ the two tournaments in which knights of the Round Table champion widow ladies in danger of losing their property;⁷⁴ and the initial appearance of the mysterious ship in each text.⁷⁵

Carman finds similarities in narrative detail, social custom, moral and religious values, and symbolism within the pairs of episodes, similarities for the most part too complex for simple borrowing, but too clear and striking for coincidence. He believes them to be evidence that, despite the superficial differences between them, Perlesvaus and the Queste are inspired, at least in part, by a common spirit and outlook.

To provide further evidence for the existence of that common spirit and to explore its nature will be among the functions of this study, and to express the relationship of that common spirit to the particular themes characteristic of Perlesvaus and of the Queste will be its ultimate aim, but in deference to the widespread view that the two romances are very different, they will first be treated separately, and their distinguishing characteristics will be analysed.

In the case of Perlesvaus these distinctive traits will be found to arise in several different ways out of the concept of apocalypticism. Both externally and internally, in its plot and in

its meaning, Perlesvaus is apocalyptic, and even more specifically, it is Joachimite, marked by the particular apocalyptic theories expounded by Joachim of Fiore. Fundamental to all types of apocalyptic vision is the division of the world into armed camps for the great struggle that will determine the future, and just such a division is characteristic of Perlesvaus. As the story progresses, the various protagonists and antagonists, who begin as rivals, or individuals with grievances, or hereditary enemies, are gradually drawn more and more firmly into the ranks of either one of two parties: the champions of the Old Law or of the New, God's enemies or his friends. Moreover, they come to be associated with others of their party in other ages or in the other world. Visions, ritual actions and relics all help in this process of association across the bounds of time and space. The goal of the heroes in this struggle is a form of collective, material salvation. At a time of crisis, when much of their society and way of life have been destroyed or are under threat, they are striving to pass successfully into a new age and a new kind of life. This particular type of apocalyptic scenario, in which the destruction of the present age is the great menace, and the coming of a new age represents salvation, is characteristic of the Joachimite theory of history, and certain features of the new age in Perlesvaus--notably the pride of place accorded to virgins and to hermits--is equally Joachimite. Joachim of Fiore's scheme of history is an important integrating principle of the plot of Perlesvaus, and Joachimite apocalypticism is a major theme running throughout the action.

The Joachimite character of Perlesvaus is not confined to the action. Joachim's particular concept of meaning is equally crucial to

understanding the significance of that action. Many incidents are explained within the narrative by hermit exegetes provided by the author for that purpose, and their explanations consistently follow the Joachimite technique known as concordia litterae, which is a system of explanation by historical parallel. Even actions not formally explained by exegetes make sense if interpreted by the same principles: as we shall see, for example, the careful preservation of the remains and of the identity of the dead is related to the importance of establishing contact with an individual's historical counterpart. Just as the Joachimite scheme of history integrates the plot, so, too, does the Joachimite concept of meaning provide sense and coherence to the interpretation of that plot. Perlesvaus describes an attempt to save Christendom from its enemies, and it explores the role of individuals in that attempt, and the means by which they might discover that role.

The Queste del saint Graal, on the other hand, is far less concerned with the future of Christendom. Where in Perlesvaus the role of the individual is subordinated to a historical process, in the Queste the life--and more precisely the inner life--of the individual is of primary importance. Life in the Queste is sacramental: external actions are determined by the inner state of one's soul, and all the truly significant battles take place within. The Queste is thus as consistently mystical in its orientation as Perlesvaus is apocalyptic.

The inner, spiritual life of the individuals in the Queste does have a purpose in the external world, however. As in Perlesvaus, a society and a way of life are passing away: chivalry and the principles on which it is founded are dying. Here there is no salvation

for the society, no new age to be entered, but the chivalrous life itself is to be kept alive in certain privileged individuals who will continue to perform noble and valorous deeds in virtue of the strength derived from their inner holiness. The salvation of knighthood through inner virtue is a major and integrating theme of the Queste, comparable to the salvation of Christendom through apocalyptic struggle in Perlesvaus.

Exploring the role of individuals in the process of salvation is also a concern of the Queste, and here, as in Perlesvaus, a particular way of viewing knowledge and meaning is crucial. Knowledge is consistently presented in the Queste as revelation, and the content of that revelation is as consistently banal: it is always readily understandable and easily knowable by more conventional means. The imparting of knowledge is not really concerned with what is known, but rather with who knows: it is a process of election, by which secrets are withheld from the unworthy and revealed to the deserving so that the latter may be further perfected by grace in that inner holiness through which they can perform knightly deeds of valour. Where in Perlesvaus the role of individuals is determined by historical structure, in the Queste it is fixed by will--ultimately by the will of God--operating through a process of revelation and concealment.

In summary, then, the distinguishing characteristics of Perlesvaus, as they will be set out in detail in the course of this study, include Joachimite apocalypticism, the struggle to save Christendom, and the preeminence of historical structures in determining the place and role of individuals. The comparable traits of the Queste are a mystical and sacramental view of life, the preservation of

knighthood as a way of living, and the determinant function of will, exercised through revelation and concealment, in fixing the role of individuals and the significance of their lives.

Present alongside these distinguishing characteristics are certain shared features, the components of that common spirit that Carman was aware of. These include such obvious points as that knights do battle with one another and that the Christian faith is expounded in some form in both romances but they also comprise something more specific. At the same time that they treat general notions of chivalry and Christianity Perlesvaus and the Queste both deal with the more precise theme of transition. In each case a society is breaking up and old values are losing their validity and efficacy. This is not necessarily the principle theme of either work. No doubt the nature of the new age and the war to be waged against the enemies of the New Law are more prominent in Perlesvaus than is the bald fact of transition from age to age, and in the Queste the principle of inner holiness as the basis of knightly prowess is accorded more importance than is the decline of the old values. The notion of transition is present, however, as an abiding concern: if a transition were not in progress, no struggle would have to be waged in Perlesvaus, and no new set of inner, spiritual, sacramental values would be required to preserve knighthood in the Queste. Transition is an important common element in the plot of the two works, and it is even more important in the imagery and symbolism.

A comprehensive understanding of the meaning of Perlesvaus and of the Queste del saint Graal may be derived from the study of the interplay between distinctive orientations toward the apocalyptic and the

mystical, the external and the internal, on the one hand, and an abiding, shared preoccupation with the phenomenon of transition on the other. The term "preoccupation" will not recur frequently in this study, largely because it might so easily suggest the idea of neurosis on the part of an author or of psycho-analysis on the part of the critic, and neither is the concern of this work. It would not be wholly erroneous, however, to think in terms of an interrelationship between a pre-occupying theme and an integrating theme in each romance. The pre-occupying theme is common to both, and is transition. It finds its place in the plot and in the explanations offered by the authors, but it is primarily a vaguer awareness that is best expressed in image and symbol. The integrating theme is more specific, more conscious, and proper to each text. It is the author's conscious response to his vaguer awareness that the structures and values of life are shifting. It is a characteristic way of thinking about what he senses and of articulating its meaning, and is the source of the integrity and consistency of each author's presentation of his material. The consciousness of transition is always present as an undercurrent, in the Queste and in Perlesvaus alike. The terms in which it is understood, expressed and explained are proper to each. The preoccupation and its articulations, the underlying awareness and the overt response are the subject matter of this thesis.

Notes to Introduction

¹Albert Pauphilet, "La Queste del saint Graal du ms. B.N. fr. 343," Romania XXXVI (1907), pp. 591-609.

²Myrrha Lot-Borodine, Trois Essais sur le roman du Lancelot du Lac et la Quête du saint Graal (Paris, 1913).

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CHAPTER I

APOCALYPSE IN ARTHUR'S KINGDOM:

PERLESVAUS

The author of Perlesvaus, like so many other creators of mediaeval romances, is anonymous, and he is not known to have written anything else. There is thus no other source on which to base an understanding of his interpretation of what was happening in his own life or in the lives of those around him. Perlesvaus is all we have. Yet it is enough, just in itself, to tell us much of what we would like to know about the mind that created it.

Perlesvaus is an apocalyptic tale. It presents the world as locked in a fundamental, all-encompassing struggle between forces of good and forces of evil, a struggle being fought out among human men and women through the course of history, as well as among superhuman forces in the other world, a struggle pitting God and all his friends, of every kind, in every age, in every place, against all his enemies, whatever and wherever they may be. For each human being participation in that struggle is the one experience in life of ultimate importance, and the coming definitive climax in which God's foes will do their worst but fail and be defeated by God's faithful followers is the great event in human history to be looked forward to.

Perlesvaus does not tell the story of the end time and the millenium as described in the Book of Revelation of the New Testament

or in other overtly millenarian works inspired by it. It does, however, presuppose the whole background of that story, and incorporates the lives and the adventures of the Arthurian knights into it.

The theory that Perlesvaus expresses an apocalyptic conception of life is not original, though it has not been elaborated into a systematic explanation. Earlier critics, while primarily interested in other aspects of the text, have left some material out of which the beginnings of an apocalyptic interpretation can be constructed. Notable among them are Thomas Kelly,¹ who wrote a structural study of Perlesvaus, Jean-Charles Payen,² who studied the concept of repentance in a number of mediaeval works, and Helen Adolf,³ who investigated the Jewish influence on the Arthurian legend in general. Among them they point to a significant number of incidents with clear parallels in the apocalyptic tradition and even in the canonical Book of Revelation itself.

Among the more blatantly apocalyptic incidents cited by Kelly is the destruction of the Black Hermit, killed by a single blow and thrown directly into the stinking pit,⁴ just as the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone in Revelation 20:9-10. The other place of condemnation, the pool of fire into which are thrown Death and Hades and all those whose names are not written in the book of life, is evoked by the pit which opens up under the chain descending from heaven at the Castle of the Four Horns.⁵ Like those consigned to the pit, those who are to reign with Christ for a thousand years are also brought to mind in Perlesvaus, by the heads sealed in gold, which Perceval takes with him to the Plenteous Island, whereas the heads sealed in silver (the Jews) and those in lead (the Saracens)

are sent to the Poverty-Stricken Island by the Hermit King.⁶

The apocalyptic view of life includes more than just a doctrine of the last things, and Perlesvaus is also reminiscent in places of some of these other aspects. A tendency to rejoice, virtually to gloat over the fate of the unrighteous is characteristic of the Book of Revelation, where that fate is part of the Christian's hope: the great canticle of Revelation 19, in which the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures worship the Lord seated on his throne, and the multitude rejoices in the marriage of the Lamb, begins with the exaltation of divine vengeance: "salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants" ⁷ Pity toward sinners is simply not characteristic of the apocalyptic outlook, and in this respect Perlesvaus runs as true to form as does the Book of Revelation. The knight who would throw an innocent maiden into the Serpents' Ditch is overcome by Perceval and himself thrown into the Ditch to die.⁸ Aristor is decapitated, and the divine will is invoked to justify his death even when he seeks pardon and wishes to be reconciled with Perceval: "De vostre haïne me soferrai je bien, ce m'est avis d'or en avant, fait Perlesvaus, mais la vie ne puet plus demorer en vos, car vos l'avez bien deservi, e Damledex ne le velt sofrir."⁹ More brutally still, the Lord of the Moors is drowned in the blood of his slain followers, and this vengeance is justified by an even more uncompromising declaration of God's vindictive will: "Dex commanda en la Viez Loi et en la Nouvele que l'en feïst justice des omicides et des traïtors, et je

la feré de vos; ja ses commandemenz ne iert trespassez."¹⁰ If Perlesvaus has no exact parallel to the seven bowls of the wrath of God of Revelation 16, it nonetheless breathes the same vengeful spirit.¹¹

Other less absolutely apocalyptic features are nonetheless compatible with an apocalyptic world-view. The phenomenon of waiting belongs in this category. In a typical incident Perceval comes upon a knight lying in a glass barrel, whose identity will be revealed to him only when he returns.¹² He is not necessarily waiting for the end time, but his glass barrel recalls another glass barrel, in which the legendary figure of Alexander the Great passed through his adventure beneath the waves, and Alexander, whether he is building a wall for defence against the tribes of Gog and Magog, or taking a celestial journey, or being recalled after his death to fight the battles of heaven as the Emperor of the End Time, is a recurring character in apocalyptic writings.¹³

This mysterious knight is not, of course, the only or the principal figure waiting for some future event. The Fisher King lies wounded, waiting to be healed, and his situation can also be interpreted apocalyptically, especially if the title "Messios" given to him has the Jewish roots that Helen Adolf would attribute to it.¹⁴ In certain mediaeval Jewish texts¹⁵ there is a pre-existent Messiah lying sick in bed in the fifth compartment of paradise, waiting for his time to come. Apart from Elijah all the inhabitants of this paradise are merely souls, so that it is as much a Castle of Souls as is the Fisher King's castle,¹⁶ though it does not bear that title,

and the title Eden, also given to the castle in Perlesvaus, would not be an unsuitable name for a paradise. It is plausible, then, that the Fisher King waiting for the promised knight to heal him, and bearing the title "Messios", may be a reflection of the Jewish Messiah in paradise waiting for the end time.

There is also a characteristic apocalyptic morality, and the oft-discussed question of Lancelot's repentance, or at least amendment of life, after his long adulterous relationship with Guenevere, seems to have ties to it. Jean-Charles Payen¹⁷ sees the author as drawn in two directions at once: on grounds of Christian morality he condemns courtly love, but as a psychologist of the heart (the term is Payen's) he is reluctant to disparage it, and he does not make his hermit confessor deny Lancelot's assertion that his prowess is inspired by love. He sees Lancelot's willingness to do penance, but his inability to be sorry for what he has done, as raising the question of divine mercy: why should God not forgive those who are incapable of repentance?

If the usual notion of divine grace and mercy is joined to the apocalyptic understanding of redemption, then the answer to Payen's question becomes "God should forgive", and the apparent laxity of Lancelot's confessor becomes quite plausible. In apocalyptic perspective redemption is not primarily the saving of the individual soul, but the overcoming of the powers of evil. It is a collective process in which the individual's role is less to be holy than to be devoted to the cause and effective in defending it. So long as Lancelot suffers anguish and travail in the arduous task of winning the world for Christ, he is faithfully and successfully carrying out his principal

mission in life, and his private behaviour becomes not inconsequential but certainly forgivable.¹⁸

Various apocalyptic motifs are thus a common feature of Perlesvaus, and are widely recognized by critics. Images of the place of final punishment, incidents of divine vengeance, the expectation of the end time and the peculiar morality of collective struggle against the power of evil have all been identified as significant aspects of the work. It draws heavily on apocalypticism for its contents. Less widely recognized, however, is the dependence of Perlesvaus on apocalyptic tradition for its thematic coherence and unity. Quite apart from the individual motifs evocative of the Book of Revelation and of other similar texts, there is a basically apocalyptic pattern to Perlesvaus. Its plot is largely taken up by warfare of different kinds involving a great variety of adversaries, and the apparent fragmentation of feuds, private wars and official campaigns is integrated by the principle of the one apocalyptic struggle of good and evil forces, in which all lesser and partial confrontations participate and from which they derive their meaning and purpose. The many and disparate battles in Perlesvaus form one war, and that war is the ultimate contest pitting all God's friends against all his enemies.

The principal characters of Perlesvaus are knights and their business is fighting; hence there is nothing especially significant in the discovery that a large portion of the plot is taken up with warfare in one form or another. Moreover, the nature of the various engagements, the issues in dispute, and often even the very pairings of adversaries who face one another have a familiar air to them. They

like the fights in Chrétien de Troyes and Wauchier, and they bring together enemies who have already fought in the past over the same matters that continue to set them at odds.

All the principal knights in Perlesvaus have traditional enemies who reappear in the same roles that they or their families have played before. Perceval himself has a running feud with the relatives of the Red Shield Knight whom he killed when he was still a young boy, beginning with that knight's brother Clamados.¹⁹ He is also involved with the Red Shield Knight's son Kahot,²⁰ who seeks vengeance by waging war on Perceval's mother, the Widow Lady, and seizing her castle, La Clef de Galles: Perceval eventually kills him and recaptures the castle.²¹ The Lord of the Moors also fights Perceval: he carries on a campaign of at least seven years' duration perpetuating a feud that dates from before Perceval's birth.²² This enemy, too, is defeated and put to death,²³ but his cause is taken up by his cousin Aristor, the murderer of Perceval's father, who now seeks to hurt the son through a forced marriage with, and ultimate murder of, his sister Dandrane.²⁴

All this is to be expected given the character and traditional role of Perceval "qui onques ne fu sanz travaill e sanz paine en tant com il vesqui chevaliers."²⁵ Other good knights, of different character and role, are also beset by personal enemies, however. Gawain is drawn into a whole series of fights and personal tragedies through the animosity of his traditional enemy Marin the Jealous, and after Marin's death he is as sorely tried by Nabigan of the Rock and by Nabigan's brother Anurez the Bastard.²⁶ Lancelot, too, has his traditional enemies of long standing. Melianz is bent on avenging the death at

Lancelot's hands of his father, and in the already familiar manner he is replaced upon his own death by his uncle Claudas.²⁷

These ongoing feuds all fit into the established pattern of life of the Arthurian knights, and some of the enemies are already familiar from Chrétien de Troyes;²⁸ they and their causes could naturally find a place in any continuation of Chrétien or Wauchier. They are not typical of all the fighting that occurs in Perlesvaus, however; never the rule, they become more and more the exception as the plot progresses. This is especially the case in the latter half of the romance, when the Grail Chapel has been reconquered and the King of Castle Mortal overthrown.²⁹ Prior to this the story is mostly of quests--of Gawain's that succeeds only in part, of Lancelot's that fails completely, and of Perceval's that is ultimately triumphant--in which enemies appear as obstacles, or as distractions, or as simple filler to maintain the basic interlacing of the plot. Here the duels and battles are primarily of the traditional type, and are anything but central to the plot; they may advance the heroes on their quests, but just as likely they will not, and the questing knights don't really expect them to. Gawain fights Marin because he has always fought Marin, not for the sake of the Grail that he happens to be seeking at the time.

Once the Grail has reappeared, however, many things change. The quests are at an end, and with them the casual, intermittent approach to combat. It ceases to be a distraction from the main concern of life, and becomes itself that concern; it becomes more purposeful, more unified and more frequent.

The increased frequency of fighting is the most striking

development in the second half of the text. Of the twenty or so major enemies that the heroes encounter, only five are disposed of before line 6252: Marin the Jealous, Kahot the Red, the Lord of the Moors, Clamados, and the King of Castle Mortal himself.³⁰ The unification of a previously diffuse pattern of fighting is also apparent, however, alliances are formed and campaigns are maintained through successive battles and skirmishes in pursuit of clearly defined strategic and political goals.

In striking contrast to the isolated and sporadic family feuding characteristic of earlier Arthuriana, and even of the first half of Perlesvaus, this process of alliance-forming is carried on on the grandest scale and with great sophistication. Brien of the Isles begins it by advising Arthur to exile Lancelot from his court for one year, thereby securing the good will of Lancelot's enemy Claudas, and preventing the formation of an alliance between Claudas and Madaglan, who is already at war with Arthur over the right to inherit the Round Table.³¹ Brien's real aim, however, is to secure for himself the command in Arbanie, against Madaglan. In this position he offers only feigned resistance to Madaglan, with whom he is secretly allied.³²

A second stage begins when Lancelot is returned to favour, and Brien goes over openly to the side of the very Claudas whose friendship he once urged Arthur to secure at the expense of Lancelot. As the ally of both Claudas and Madaglan, Brien takes the field openly against Arthur.³³ Along with him, as a minor partner in this alliance, Brien brings his nephew Brudan, the murderer of Meliot of Logres.³⁴

In this same stage of its formation the alliance begins to

absorb the old, traditional family feuds. Along with Arthur's former seneschal, the treacherous Kay, Brien's liegeman Melianz had supported him in a much earlier campaign against Arthur which had ended in Brien's capture and in Melianz's death.³⁵ As we noted earlier, Melianz belongs to the family of the Red Shield Knight and plays a role in that family's ongoing feud with Lancelot; when Melianz dies his part in the feud is taken up by his uncle Claudas. This, however, is the same Claudas with whom Brien allies openly and whom Brien brings into alliance with Madaglan against Arthur and Lancelot.³⁶ Henceforth the family feud of the Red Shield Knight's surviving relatives and the political cause of Arthur's enemies become one struggle.

The introduction of this degree of unity into a previously random pattern of feuding, warfare and skirmishing is unquestionably of structural interest: the conquest of the Grail Castle definitely marks a watershed, after which questing gives way to war as the unifying principle, knight errantry gives way to more or less coherent strategy, adventure and happenstance are replaced by plan and intrigue, and there is a general closing of ranks among the characters and a narrowing of the focus of the plot.

This same process is significant thematically as well, however. It certainly implies that the author has something more in mind than merely multiplying Arthurian adventures of traditional type, and it even suggests the nature of that something more. One of the characteristics of the apocalyptic outlook--indeed its salient feature--is the belief in a great, all-encompassing struggle between good and evil, being waged at all times and in all places. A mere political alliance, however broadly based, is a far cry from the great assembly of evil

powers envisaged by apocalypticism, but the replacement of random feuding and duelling by an alliance is a step in that direction. Moreover, certain particular features of the fighting in the second half of Perlesvaus suggest that the alliance is more than political, and is part of a larger phenomenon than itself.

The very first campaign in which the Good Knight takes part after the King of Castle Mortal has been overthrown already points in this direction. Perceval sets out straight from the Grail Castle for the land where the New Law has been neglected, kills all those who will not embrace it, and ensures, by his strength and courage, that our Saviour will be honoured there and adored.³⁷ His labours have a religious purpose, naturally, just as any Grail quest has, but more specifically than that, their religious purpose is itself warlike: to overthrow the Old Law and to establish the New.

Perceval's enemies, on the other hand, and indeed all enemies of the Round Table, are in one degree or other defenders and proponents of the Old Law. This is most obvious in the case of Madaglan, Jandree and the Lady of the Raging Castle. Madaglan initially opposes Arthur only in part because of the court of the Round Table that he claims as his inheritance. His more serious casus belli is the New Law which Arthur holds:

. . . il est vostre enemis en .ij. manieres: por
la Table Roonde que vos avez a tort, e por la Novele
Loi que vos tenez. Mes il vos mande par moi que se
vos voliez gèrpir vostre creance, e prendre la roïne
Gandree sa seror, il vos clamerait quite la Table
Roonde³⁸

His military campaigns against Arthur are moreover missionary endeavours as well: in the lands that he captures he forces the inhabitants to

abandon the New Law for the Old under threat of death.³⁹ For her part, Queen Jandree goes so far as to be blinded so that she will not have to lay eyes on the adherents of the New Law, and she does not wish her sight to be restored until the last of them has been destroyed.⁴⁰ Finally, in the dependencies of the Raging Castle the people worship false gods that are actually devils, and the castle itself harbours three knights who go mad at the very approach of a Christian.⁴¹

The fate of these various proponents of the Old Law further emphasizes the extent to which evangelization and military enterprises become intermingled. Madaglan himself is killed, but many of his subjects, who had embraced the Old Law only out of fear, are now allowed simply to reconvert.⁴² Later, when Perceval conquers the Raging Castle, he combines missionary preaching,⁴³ fighting and the outpouring of divine power⁴⁴ in a single campaign.

Other members of the anti-Arthurian alliance are not so explicitly associated with the cause of the Old Law, but by the support they provide for Madaglan and by their undermining of the power and cohesion of Arthur's court they are its effective proponents, and attention is occasionally drawn to the connection. The departure of knights from Arthur's court through the influence of Brien, for instance, and the apostasy of Arthur's conquered subjects under pressure from Madaglan, come to be viewed as parallel and complementary phenomena, and are treated together.⁴⁵

There is reason, therefore, for viewing the struggle between the Round Table and the alliance of its enemies as religious/moral as well as political, and as part of a larger and more fundamental conflict, the all-encompassing conflict between the New Law and the Old,

between the friends of Christ and his enemies.

This more fundamental struggle certainly comes to the fore primarily after the watershed incident that is the conquest of Castle Mortal, and much of what goes before seems to have a different inspiration, but the distinction between coherent religious warfare and sporadic feuding and questing should not be overdrawn. The watershed incident is, after all, the climax of the questing phase of the plot, and it is a conquest. Perceval seeks the repository of the Grail and eventually reaches it, but he does not quest by seeking out and puzzling over mysterious clues and passing tests and surviving obstacles; he attacks and overcomes the Grail's defenders with the help of divine power. Moreover, the adversary from whom he must seize it, the King of Castle Mortal, behaves just as Madaglan will later: capturing lands and castles, offering his protection to all who will abandon the New Law for the Old, and threatening to destroy the recalcitrant.⁴⁶

There is a second reason, too, for not overemphasizing the line between the warfare of good and evil and ordinary questing and adventure, namely that the participation of knights in the greater conflict is not limited to major characters or to incidents developed at length. The relatively petty quarrels of lesser individuals are also incorporated in the apocalyptic struggle. Thus the Knight of the Galley hangs two knights because of their religious convictions,⁴⁷ and is slain in his turn by Meliot of Logres for having committed an outrage against God.⁴⁸

Further evidence that the emergence of an all-encompassing apocalyptic struggle is not merely a consequence of the formation of a political alliance at a particular point in the plot comes from the

blending of earthly and otherworldly chivalry. Nothing is more characteristic of the apocalyptic view than this total division of creation into armed camps fighting for and against God, and in Perlesvaus it is a phenomenon that emerges at least as early as the first appearance of the Black Hermit, who even in his own person represents the drawing of earthly and otherworldly beings into one and the same ongoing conflict. In him and in his career this world and the otherworld interact continually. The sealed heads that he and his black-armoured followers seize from the Damsel's car⁴⁹ are associated with the good and evil souls imprisoned in hell until the coming of Christ.⁵⁰ The Isle Souffroitose to which most of those heads are later transported has many of the characteristics of hell.⁵¹ So, even more vividly, has the pit into which the Black Hermit's followers throw him after Perceval, in a scene evocative of Christ's harrowing of hell, has conquered his castle.⁵² Finally, and appropriately for one ultimately condemned to hell, the Hermit is himself explicitly identified, from a time long before the watershed conquest of Castle Mortal, with Lucifer.⁵³ His life thus bridges, in time, the period of questing and the period of overtly apocalyptic warfare, and, in space, the earthly world and the other world; and the apocalyptic view of life extends in a third way even into the period before it finds expression in a formal alliance of the enemies of Christ's knights.

It is certainly true that the passage from one world to the next becomes easier and commoner after the watershed.⁵⁴ It does not begin then however. What, then, is the significance of this watershed? It lies in the narrowing of focus and concentration of activity: a

series of private quests, interlaced with personal and family feuds, with some apocalyptic elements present, becomes a regular war, waged on earth and in the other world by angels, demons and men, intent on winning all creation either for the Old Law or for the New. This shift does not represent the displacement of one type of activity by another so much as of one level of activity by another and of one level of awareness by another. What is being portrayed here, from the conquest of Castle Mortal on, is a time of crisis, in which the ultimate significance latent in every encounter between good and evil--a significance only occasionally noticed previously, in ordinary times--comes to the fore. The conquest of the Castle in which the Grail was held does not bring the adventures of Britain to an end: adventures go on for another four thousand lines of text, and are not definitely concluded even then. Family feuds continue, and political conflicts still abound, but their meaning becomes clear and their ultimate consequences become immediate; the participants in them are all aligned on one side or the other of the cosmic struggle, and they all know which side they are on and for what cause they are really fighting.

This process by which the principal characters in Perlesvaus discover the meaning and purpose of their lives is seen most readily in warfare, since warfare figures so prominently in both apocalyptic doctrine and the careers of knights. Its salient characteristic is not combat, however, but unity. These individuals do not discover with increasing clarity that the point of their lives is to fight: this they have known from the beginning, and have practised. They learn, rather, that all their feuds and campaigns are part of a single

greater struggle extending beyond limits of time, space and particular circumstance. In other words, they are not being introduced to a new pattern of behaviour--that continues as it always has--but to a new understanding of their relationship to the rest of creation.

The notion of relationship unveiled through the narrowing of the focus of warfare in the latter half of Perlesvaus is probably best expressed in terms of participation or of contiguity. The earthly battles between knights are not like the otherworldly encounters of angels and demons, nor do they represent, symbolize, or even follow upon them. The two are one and the same thing; they are almost physically joined together as parts of a greater whole; and so, too, are the individuals who participate in them. Human persons and the events of their lives find their place in the universe and in history by being brought into contact with others and being joined with them in the one great enterprise common to all. Contiguity, linkage and participation are more fundamental principles than struggle, and can be seen in other aspects of Perlesvaus besides knightly combat.

One helpful area in which to investigate this notion of relationship by contiguity or simple linkage is sacred ritual. The Christian understanding of sacred rites--more precisely of sacraments--was a controverted question in the thirteenth century, and, while the details of the controversy lie outside the scope of this study, the lines along which the debate was conducted and the agreed assumptions which underlay the various positions provide a useful standard against which to assess the concepts found in Perlesvaus.

Whatever particular position individuals took up in the mediaeval debate on this question, virtually everyone acknowledged a

debt to Augustine, and most owed something to Isidore of Seville's Etymologiae, though they may have been less quick to quote him.

Augustine is responsible for the universal acceptance of the principle that sacraments are signs: he speaks of "sacrament" as the name for a sign applied to divine things.⁵⁵ The elements of the Eucharist, therefore, are sacraments because in them one thing is seen and another is understood: they are signs of something else.⁵⁶ From a slightly different point of view Isidore established that sacraments contain a hidden power: beneath the physical things and actions involved in a sacred rite the divine power effects that aspect of salvation proper to the circumstances.⁵⁷

By the time of Perlesvaus such basic notions of sacred rites as containing unseen power and pointing to something other than the visible sign were commonplace. Hugh of Saint Victor had formulated a definition based on them in the early twelfth century: a sacrament is a corporeal or material element set before the external senses, representing by similitude, signifying by institution, and containing by sanctification some invisible and spiritual grace.⁵⁸ By this time, too, there was a growing consensus limiting the number of the sacraments in consequence of the definitions gaining acceptance, usually to six or seven.⁵⁹

Current controversies notwithstanding, therefore, there was a widely accepted basic understanding of sacred rites by the time of Perlesvaus: the rites were signs, they signified something beyond themselves, a hidden power was exercised through them, and a certain number of them, generally seven, had a power, an authority, and a place in the Christian life that others did not have. Conventional

or orthodox presentation of sacred ritual would likely include these characteristics or some equivalent of them.

Little of this orthodox sacramental theology finds its way into Perlesvaus, and the six or seven official sacraments have almost no role to play at all. Arthur witnesses a miraculous Mass at Saint Augustine's chapel, in which the liturgical actions are paralleled by the actions of Christ, who appears in a vision.⁶⁰ Gawain hears, but does not see, a Mass after the apparition of the Grail.⁶¹ The question of penance and absolution arises several times in regard to Lancelot. The Damsel of the Golden Circlet and Queen Jandree are baptized.⁶² That is all, the whole orthodox sacramental life in Perlesvaus: a few incidents among all the visions, quests of magic objects, and encounters with mysterious and otherworldly objects that occur so regularly.

There are many other sacred rites in Perlesvaus, of course: the Grail ceremonies, the cult of the dead, the prayer and worship of the hermits, pilgrimages, and the veneration of relics, to name just a few. These, however, are not among the seven ecclesiastically recognized sacraments, and have a different character and different effects from those envisaged in Hugh of Saint Victor's definition. In fact, although they are somehow from God, and those who participate in them are God's friends, these rituals are almost indistinguishable, especially in their effects, from the practices of pagans.

To take only one example: Gawain is so overcome by the vision of the Grail that he can think of nothing but God; he is filled with such joy and devotion that every other thought is driven out of his head, and he neglects to speak.⁶³ This is the standard motif of the unasked questions that is regularly found in Grail stories, but it is also

an exact parallel to the experience of the pagan worshippers of the copper bull, who are so intent on their worship that they are conscious of nothing else. So firm is their faith and so intense their devotion that they would let themselves be killed without reacting if some enemy were so minded.⁶⁴ The first of these rites is a favour from God bestowed upon one of his friends, the second is idol worship grounded on a wicked belief in devils,⁶⁵ but each produces the same ecstatic stupor as its principal effect on the worshipper. The holy ritual produces no more of "that aspect of salvation proper to the circumstances" than does the diabolical. Far from pointing and leading to something beyond itself, the holy ritual, as much as the pagan, so fixes the worshipper's attention that even his thoughts cannot move beyond it.

More remarkably still, even those few overtly Christian sacraments that are celebrated in the course of Perlesvaus are sometimes closer in spirit and effect to the Grail ceremony or the worship of the copper bull than to the orthodox definition of a sacrament. The Mass that Arthur witnesses at Saint Augustine's chapel, for instance, bears a striking resemblance, even in detail, to the Grail apparition in Branch VI.⁶⁶ There is a ritual action in each, carried out by ordinary human beings in a physically plausible way: in one case the action of a hermit, in the other of two young women. There is an apparition that seems to parallel the ritual and that might be supposed to be providing insight into its meaning at another level or in another order of being, though this is not stated explicitly. There is a barrier, absolute in its power though purely psychological, preventing the witness from entering into direct contact with either the ritual or the vision. In each witness, finally, there is the same reaction, a

mixture of awe, pity and ecstatic wonder.

Two conclusions emerge from these observations. First, the Mass, which is a formal rite of the Church's liturgy and universally known to be such, is a comparable ritual to the Grail ceremonies, which are certainly holy and even miraculous, but in no way a part of the official life of the Church, and these in turn are comparable to the blatantly pagan, false and diabolical worship of a copper idol. Secondly, none of the three--not even the Mass--conforms to the accepted understanding of a sacrament, either in its form or, especially, in its effects.

This last remark deserves some elaboration, because it is the effect of the sacred rituals in Perlesvaus that most definitively removes them from the realm of traditional, orthodox theology and grounds them in the apocalyptic world-view. None of the rituals in Perlesvaus plays a role in the process of redemption, in the sense of the salvation of the individual; none gives evidence of a spiritual power at work to effect any transformation of the participant. Indeed, so little effect do they have that "participant" is almost a misnomer, and might better be rendered "witness". Arthur, for example, is not changed in any way, let alone saved, by witnessing the Mass at Saint Augustine's Chapel. He is impressed, he marvels at what he sees: "De ce s'esmerveilla molt li rois".⁶⁷ Yet, beyond being moved to feel pity, he is unchanged. A transformation eventually takes place in him, but it comes by other means. A voice in the middle of the forest commands him to hold court, and promises that the harm done by his lethargy and recalcitrance in doing good will now be remedied, but the voice only speaks after Arthur has conquered the Black Knight, escaped successfully

from his troops, and borne off his victim's head to the damsel who requested it.⁶⁸ It is not the sacred rite that produces a change in Arthur; it is the accomplishment of the knightly, military task.

Gawain, like Arthur, is unaltered by the ritual that he witnesses. If anything, indeed, his last state is worse than his first: he goes from the Grail vision to the magic chess game, which he loses,⁶⁹ and then rides to a Joyous Castle where his arms, his horse and his appearance out of the Perilous Forest, abode of discomfited knights, combine to bear witness to his sloth in word and deed.⁷⁰

Elsewhere, too, spiritual transformation follows upon a task successfully completed, not upon a sacrament devoutly received or witnessed. The most striking such transformation results from the reconquest of the Grail, but it is not effected by the Grail's re-appearance. The reappearance, rather, is only part of the transformation, which is brought about by Perceval's overcoming of a long series of obstacles,⁷¹ and which is not completed until he has mounted a further campaign against the enemies of Christ:

Li Sains Graaux se representa la dedenz en la
chapele e la lance de coi la pointe saigne, e
l'espee de coi Saint Johan fu decolez, que Misire
Gavains conquist. Li hermite r'alerent en lor
hermitaje, e servirent Nostre Saignor ainssi com
il soloient. Joseus demora avec Perlesvaus eu
chastel tant com li plot, mais li Bons Chevalier
recercha la terre la o la Novele Loi estoit delaïe
a maintenir. Il toli les vies a toz ceaus qui ne
la voudrent croire. Li païs fu maintenus par lui
e gardez, e la loi Nostre Seignor essauchie par
sa force e par sa valor.⁷²

There are also minor examples of similar transformations, brought about by the same means. The bald damsel and her companion who is forbidden to ride on a cart can be delivered from their respective afflictions only if Gawain finds the Grail and asks the requisite

questions.⁷³ A ritual is involved here, but it is the accomplishment of the task of finding and asking--a task that Gawain in the event proves unequal to--that will provide deliverance.

The healing miracle in which the winding sheet from the Graveyard Perilous is applied to Meliot of Logres is also the result of a task accomplished by Lancelot at the cost of great exertion and no little danger.⁷⁴

The sacred rituals in Perlesvaus do not, therefore, have a sacramental effect, as the sacraments were then understood, nor do they have a redemptive effect, in the sense of saving individuals. They are not impotent, however; they do bring about something, and that something is very like the kind of relationship by contiguity that characterizes the participants in the apocalyptic struggle. In the celebration of the Mass at Saint Augustine's Chapel the actions of the priest are paralleled by the lady and child who appear as soon as he has begun his confession of sin.⁷⁵ Their actions are not signified by the ritual he performs as some heavenly reality might be signified by a sacramental rite: they are present to be seen in themselves. His ritual does not contain or confer an inward and spiritual gift: the gift is the vision, which is external and material. It does, however, cause the vision to appear, and that, though utterly insignificant in the context of orthodox sacramentality, is an important function in the apocalyptic world-view. Just as the earthly battles fought by human knights are not like the otherworldly encounters of angels and demons, but are rather the same struggle, so, too, the ritual actions of earthly beings--of holy hermits--do not represent or signify the sacred rituals performed by

the Lord, his mother, the angels and the saints: they are the same ritual, and their supreme importance is precisely to be the same, to bring beings from this world and the other, from this age and the past and future, together. If there is only one struggle, in which all creatures of every time and realm are involved, and if salvation consists in victory in that struggle, then there can be no task--save the fight itself--as important as establishing contiguity. That is the role of ritual. It is essentially an apocalyptic role, and it is exactly the same in nature and in importance for God's friends and for his enemies, and, within the ranks of God's friends, for ecclesiastics and for knights.

It is precisely because the establishment of contact, the bringing together of all the participants in the apocalyptic struggle, is equally important for friends and enemies, for churchmen and for warriors, that sacramental rites, Grail ceremonies, and pagan superstition can, and even must, function in the same way. It is inevitable that the arrival of earthly individuals carrying the Grail should provoke the appearance of two angels bearing candlesticks, that the figure of a child should be seen in the midst of the Grail, followed by the appearance of the Grail itself, then the King, crowned, nailed to a cross, impaled by a spear.⁷⁶ In the chivalrous ritual as in the ecclesiastical, a link is being established with Christ and his angels, who are not of this world, and with Christ's passion and death, which are not of this age. Beings from the past and from the otherworld are being made present that they, and the knights and hermits of the present age, may together fight the powers of evil. As for the worship

of the pagans, that too is making their otherworldly protectors present to guard them and even to keep them in comfort: "e le deiable en qui il croioient lor donoit si grant habundance la dedenz que rien ne lor failoit."⁷⁷

The same apocalyptic principle applies to sacred objects even apart from the celebration of a specific earthly ritual: they, too, establish contiguity; they bring together past and present, this world and the other. The Grail fulfills this role in the last of its forms, when it appears as a chalice.⁷⁸ At this time there are no chalices in Britain, and the King orders that a supply be made according to the pattern of this miraculous model for all the churches and chapels in his realm. Virtually the same sequence of events occurs in the case of the bell that is borne in by the King for whom Gawain slew the giant, except that in this case the bell does not appear in a vision; the King is a living human character who brings the sacred object in a normal way as part of the entrance procession of monks coming to worship.⁷⁹ It has a past, however, and like the chalice it also has a future, as the prototype for the mass production of bells for all the churches of Britain.⁸⁰

Both bell and chalice share in the role of the Eucharistic liturgy and the Grail ritual. The bell comes from a past age and has passed through the other world. The chalice comes directly from the other world, but as a form of the Grail it has links to the passion and death of Christ, which are in the past. Like the rituals, the sacred objects bring the present into contact with the past, and make the other world present to our own. Moreover, by a process very much like sympathetic magic, the beings and events from the past and from the other world

that inhere in the original objects can be communicated also by images of those objects.⁸¹ As the reproductions of chalice and bell are spread throughout the kingdom, more and more people are enabled to join in the rituals celebrated with them, and more and more people are brought into contact with the Lord and his angels and saints, and with his passion and death: with the otherworld and with the past. Nothing has to happen. Bells and chalices have no function to perform and therefore require no power in themselves. They, like the rituals in which they are used, require only the appropriate form, so that they can be seen. When they are seen, the vision will be seen, and the past and the otherworld will be made present to the beholders.

This, far more than any kind of spiritual transformation of the worshippers, seems to be the role of ritual and of cultic objects in Perlesvaus: they leave us as we were, to carry on the same struggle as before, but in union with the rest of creation. They thus accomplish the goal of the apocalyptic vision of the Christian life: participation in the great struggle to overcome the united forces of evil opposed to God and his holy ones. Ritual incorporates us into the army of God's allies and allows us to fight one and the same fight with those who have gone before us and with those who dwell elsewhere. Ritual does not transform or conform; it connects. We are not saved by ritual celebration, but we are put in a position where we can fight for salvation. All this is as fully apocalyptic as is the pattern of warfare in Perlesvaus. It reflects a conception of the world as locked in a fundamental struggle of ultimate importance, encompassing all times and all realms of being, building to a crisis in which victory for God's

allies will constitute salvation, and defeat damnation.

The particular function of ritual thus witnesses to the breadth and depth of the apocalyptic influence on Perlesvaus. This is felt not only in the numerous individual motifs drawn from biblical as well as from non-biblical sources, but even more significantly in the principle of coherence and unity that makes sense out of the otherwise diffuse patterns of fighting and out of many other aspects of the text as well. The division of all creation into two opposing camps, the blending of religious warfare and militant religion into a single enterprise of supreme importance, and the consequent primacy of contiguity and participation as a mode of relationship among beings of every kind hold Perlesvaus together. The consistent adherence to this view, more than any other factor, gives thematic integrity to what would otherwise be a loosely organized series of interlaced adventures.

Notes to Chapter I

¹Kelly, Le Haut Livre du Graal, Perlesvaus: a Structural Study.

²Payen, Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale.

³Helen Adolf, "The Esplumoir Merlin," Speculum XXI (1946), pp. 173-93.

⁴William A. Nitze and T. Atkinson Jenkins, eds., Le Haut Livre du Graal Perlesvaus, Vol. 1: Texts, Variants and Glossary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), ll. 9988ff. (All subsequent references to the text of Perlesvaus will be to this edition and will appear in the form "Perl. ll....".) See also Kelly, op. cit., p. 110. As he admits, the Black Hermit is thrown into the pit, which in Revelation 20 is the dragon's place of temporary confinement for the millenium rather than into the fiery lake, and the scriptural account contains no spear thrust. However, the overthrow of Satan in an apocalyptic struggle is clearly evoked in the blackness of hermit and horse, in the pit, and in the immediate delivering up of the heads sealed in gold. The differences are sufficient to discourage any notion that Perlesvaus is borrowing material out of the New Testament, but the similarities are so striking that the two works unquestionably share the same world view. In any case, it is not Kelly's or anyone else's contention that Perlesvaus derives from the Book of Revelation, only that it belongs to an apocalyptic tradition which owes much to the scriptural Revelation.

⁵Perl., ll. 960ff. Kelly, op. cit., pp. 124-25. Again one might quibble over the details: in Revelation 20 the chain appears over the pit into which the dragon will be cast for a thousand years; whether the pit of Perl., l. 9600 corresponds to this pit, or to the fiery lake which is the place of permanent punishment is unclear. That here we have one more apocalyptic motif is unquestionable, however. Since there is no reason to suppose direct borrowing of material, the presence of that apocalyptic motif is all that really concerns us.

⁶Revelation 20:4-6. Kelly, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷Revelation 19:2. Revised Standard Version.

⁸Perl., ll. 8997-9032.

⁹Ibid., ll. 8770-72.

¹⁰Ibid., ll. 5387-89.

¹¹Kelly, op. cit., pp. 135-39.

¹²Perl., ll. 9571ff.

¹³Kelly, op. cit., pp. 116-23. For more details on Alexander the Great as a mediaeval legendary figure see A. R. Anderson, Alexander's Gate (Cambridge, 1932), passim.

¹⁴Adolf, op. cit., pp. 187-88.

¹⁵See, for instance, the Revelations of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, tr. by M. Gaster, Studies and Texts (1925-28), I, 147.

¹⁶Perl., ll. 7205-06.

¹⁷Payen, op. cit., pp. 427-28.

¹⁸Kelly, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁹Clamados has himself knighted by Arthur (Perl., ll. 3053ff.) with the express intent of avenging his brother's death. In the event, he becomes involved with the Damsel of the Cart, slays Meliot of Logres' lion, and is ultimately killed himself, so that he is much less of a preoccupation for Perceval than he expected to be--he is dead by l. 3883. He nonetheless does his part to perpetuate the traditional family feud.

²⁰Kahot's relationship to the Red Shield Knight is hazy. He could conceivably be his brother, or even his uncle. L. 3202 calls him Clamados's uncle, and there is some question whether Clamados is really the Red Shield Knight's brother or his son. Despite these uncertain relationships, which seem to confuse even the author of Perlesvaus himself, the three men are kin, and the principle of family feuding is perpetuated.

²¹Perl., ll. 3208-251.

²²Perl., l. 460. This is the incident in which Perceval loses his inheritance, the Vax de Kamaalot, and thus earns the name Perlesvaus. (This place name translates readily, of course, as "valleys of Camelot", but is left in its Old French form in conformity with the deliberately adopted policy of translating personal titles into English wherever they lend themselves to convenient translation, but of leaving place names consistently untouched in order to avoid facing

interesting but irrelevant problems of geography. Logres can hardly be turned into England, or Pennevoiseuse into Penzance without the proffering of explanation and the citing of evidence, all of which takes time and space, but adds nothing to the arguments being advanced in this particular study.)

²³Perl., l. 5410.

²⁴Ibid., ll. 7256ff.

²⁵Ibid., ll. 8983-84.

²⁶This latter traditional feud eventually becomes a part of the sustained warfare of the second half of the romance, and Gawain and Arthur are ultimately forced to fight a pitched battle to win their freedom from Anurez the Bastard and his vassals (ll. 7755-7802).

²⁷Claudas, too, becomes involved in the campaigns of the second half of Perlesvaus, conspiring with Brien of the Isles to undermine Lancelot's position at court and to persuade Arthur to arrest him, thus depriving himself of the one general capable of resisting Brien's army effectively (ll. 9438-9536).

²⁸Chrétien's Conte del Graal, ll. 495, 3051, 4825.

²⁹Perl., from l. 6252 onwards.

³⁰The Black Hermit is mentioned as early as l. 771, but the climactic struggle with him comes only at l. 9942ff.

³¹Perl., ll. 8078-82.

³²Ibid., ll. 8132-53.

³³Ibid., ll. 9505.

³⁴Brudan later threatens the younger sister of the Damsel of the Tents for a time, before being killed and decapitated by Perceval in one of the last encounters in Perlesvaus, ll. 10056-99.

³⁵Perl., ll. 7872-7912.

³⁶Perl., ll. 9438-9536. In its complete form the alliance may be presented schematically as follows:

<u>Arthur's Overt Foes</u>	<u>Traitors at Court</u>	<u>Red Shield Family</u>
Madaglan	(Brien of the Isles) (Madaglan's ally)	(Claudas) (Brien's formal ally)
(Jandree (bapt. Salubre)) (his sister)	(Kay (who serves) (Brien and Claudas))	(Melian) (Claudas's nephew) (Brien's liegeman)
(Lady of the Raging Castle) (Jandree's subject)	(Brudan) (Brien's nephew)	

³⁷Perl., ll. 6257-61. The New Law, which figures here for the first time and will recur frequently, is literally the law of the Gospel, the law revealed by Jesus Christ, as opposed to the Old Law of Moses revealed in the Old Testament. As the reader will quickly realize, however, the terms are used here more loosely. What little is said about the rule of life followed by the knights of the Old Law and those of the New--and there is actually very little--would suggest that their principles are fundamentally very similar. New Law and Old Law are in fact party labels, and reflect the division of heaven and earth into two great warring camps. The reader will probably understand them best by thinking in terms of loyalties: followers of the New Law bear allegiance to Christ, those of the Old Law to Christ's enemies.

³⁸Perl., ll. 7847-50.

³⁹Ibid., ll. 8492-96.

⁴⁰Ibid., ll. 7927-52.

⁴¹Ibid., ll. 9068-88.

⁴²Ibid., ll. 8525-28.

⁴³Ibid., ll. 9110-59.

⁴⁴Ibid., ll. 9104-108. The working of the divine power is exemplified in the three anti-Christian madmen who turn upon and slay one another. A similar combination of warfare, evangelization and divine grace later results in the parallel conversion of Queen Jandree (ll. 9178-256).

⁴⁵Ibid., ll. 8494-98.

⁴⁶Ibid., ll. 5417-24. In addition, in a move more particular to his own campaign, he drives the Christian hermits from their forest (ll. 6095-6106).

⁴⁷Ibid., ll. 9278-79: Por ce que, fait ele, que il creoient en Dieu e en sa douce mere. . . .

⁴⁸Ibid., ll. 9328-31: vostre n'estoient il mie, ainz estoient chevalier Dieu; si avez fait grant outrage qui si vilainement les avez ocis.

⁴⁹Ibid., ll. 764ff.

⁵⁰Ibid., ll. 2175ff.

⁵¹Ibid., ll. 9636ff.

⁵²Ibid., ll. 9942ff.

⁵³Ibid., l. 2184.

⁵⁴Anurez the Bastard, for instance, assembles a force to besiege Arthur and Gawain out of family motives, to avenge the death of his brother Nabigan at the hands of Gawain, but when Anurez is killed and entombed in the Chapel Perilous, his defence is taken up by demons. What begins as a localized family feud passes into the otherworld quite naturally. ll. 8281-378.

⁵⁵Epistola 138, l. 7: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum XLIV, 131.

⁵⁶Sermo 272, Patrologia Latina 38, 1246.

⁵⁷Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae, Book 6, ch. 19, 39: Patrologia Latina 82, 255.

⁵⁸On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith, Book 1, part 9; tr. by Roy Deferrari, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 1951, p. 155.

⁵⁹Peter Abelard, who died only a year after Hugh, in 1142, compiled a list of six, and Peter Lombard, in his Sententiae (Book 4 d, 2, n.1) that theological students would later comment on regularly as part of their training, enumerated the seven that later became standard.

⁶⁰Perl., ll. 295ff.

⁶¹Ibid., ll. 2468ff.

⁶²Ibid., ll. 5904-909 and 9145ff., respectively.

⁶³Ibid., ll. 2424-54.

⁶⁴Ibid., ll. 5939ff.

⁶⁵Ibid., ll. 5945 (cele male creanse) and 5948 (le deable en qui il croioient).

⁶⁶The Mass in St. Augustine's Chapel is described at lines 295ff., and the Grail apparition at lines 2424ff. The comparison in detail is as follows. In the vision two damsels enter, carrying the Grail and the Lance; in the Mass the hermit appears vested, and begins with the Confiteor. A sweet smell emerges from Grail and Lance, while fair responses, like the sounds of angels, come from the chapel where Mass is being said. The knights beholding the Grail are so awestruck that they forget to eat, and Gawain neglects to speak; Arthur, at Mass, marvels in awe at everything he sees. There appears to be a chalice in the Grail, though in fact there is none; Arthur thinks he sees a bleeding man, though in fact the vision is now once more that of a child. The Lance drips blood in the vision; the man's side runs with blood at the Mass. Light is provided by candles borne by angels when the Grail appears; the chapel is lighted by a miraculous light coming through its windows during Mass. Gawain cannot touch anything, and the three drops of blood vanish when he tries to kiss them; Arthur cannot set foot within the chapel, but can only observe the service from without. The Grail seems to be flesh, a king appears, crowned and nailed on a cross, with a spear in his side; the child appears with his mother, moves about according to the actions of the Mass, turns into a bleeding man, and then becomes once more a child. At the Grail apparition Gawain is moved to feel pity for the crucified king; at Mass Arthur is likewise moved to pity, even to weeping.

⁶⁷Perl., l. 308 and passim.

⁶⁸Ibid., ll. 541ff.

⁶⁹Ibid., ll. 2459ff.

⁷⁰Ibid., ll. 2250ff.

⁷¹Perceval approaches the first obstacle at l. 6113 and enters the castle at l. 6234.

⁷²Perl., ll. 6254-61.

⁷³Ibid., ll. 727ff.

⁷⁴Lancelot must go to the Chapel Perilous, remove the sword and a piece of the burial shroud of the knight lying there, take them to the Castle Perilous, then return to the castle where previously he had slain a lion, behead one of the two griffons he will find there, and take the head back to the Castle Perilous. Perl., ll. 8225-32. In the event the quest of the griffon's head proves to be a distraction, irrelevant to the healing process, but that does not change the basic situation: Lancelot has to accomplish a very difficult series of tasks for Meliot to be healed.

⁷⁵The lady appears to the left of the hermit. She addresses the child as her father, son and lord, guardian of herself and of the whole world--lest we be in any doubt who these people are. After the Gospel she offers to the hermit the child, who is placed on the altar. After the preface the child becomes a man, bleeding from his side, hands and feet, and covered with thorns. At the end of Mass he turns again into the figure of the child. Perl., ll. 290ff.

⁷⁶Perl., ll. 2424ff.

⁷⁷Ibid., ll. 5948-49.

⁷⁸Ibid., ll. 7215ff.

⁷⁹Ibid., l. 7213.

⁸⁰" . . . Salemons avoit fondues iii cloches por le Sauveur dou mont e por sa douce mere e por ses sainz honorer; si avoient ceste amenee par son commandement en ceste isle por ce que nule n'en i avoit": so the three Gregories explain the bell's past to Gawain, Perl., ll. 7243-46.

⁸¹By sympathetic magic is meant that religious sentiment and doctrine that led the ancient Egyptians, for example, to create effigies of the dead kings and deposit them in their tombs as places for their souls to inhabit: if we recreate the form of a thing, the life of that thing will come to dwell in it.

CHAPTER II

THE HOLY GRAIL IN THE THIRD AGE

PERLESVAUS AND JOACHIM OF FIORE

Perlesvaus is an apocalyptic romance, presenting the whole world locked in a fundamental struggle between good and evil powers. Its systematic incorporation of knights into two great forces doing battle respectively for the New Law and for the Old, and its use of sacred ritual to expand these forces beyond the bounds of time and space, leave no doubt of that. The theme of Perlesvaus can be identified more precisely than that, however, within the broad category of apocalypticism.

Far from merely transmitting the contents of the biblical Book of Revelation, the apocalyptic tradition had enjoyed a long and diverse development prior to the thirteenth century. Extra-biblical Christian apocalyptic in fact goes back at least to Irenaeus (ca. 140-ca. 202), but the relevant portions of his writings were lost and not discovered until 1575, far too late to influence Perlesvaus. Various Christian sibylline texts, some quite early, were known to the Middle Ages, however. The Tiburtina, from the mid-fourth century and inspired by the division of the Empire between the Catholic Constantine and the Aryan Constantius, was also familiar. It includes the standard elements of the great battle: the devastation of pagan cities, the destruction of temples, the baptisms or executions by the Christian hero, then the appearance of the Anti-Christ to persecute and destroy and lure away

the faithful, and finally the coming of the Archangel Michael to win the ultimate victory for God.

The same themes reappear, but with perceptible variation, in the Pseudo-Methodius of the late seventh century. The enemies of Christendom are now the Ishmaelites, representing the real-life Moslems, but the war they are fighting is clearly the great apocalyptic struggle. Christian priests are killed, the holy places are desecrated, Christians are either forced or seduced into abandoning their faith, until an Emperor long thought dead arises to institute a reign of peace and prosperity--a new motif not found in the Tiburtina--that endures until the Antichrist, with the hordes of Gog and Magag, destroys it. The Emperor eventually dies, and his crown is borne off to heaven on the cross of Golgotha, but after many years the cross reappears, and with it Christ himself to slay the Antichrist and judge the world.¹

The basic theme of struggle and the bringing together of the earthly and the heavenly powers are common to these and to other apocalyptic traditions, as they are to Perlesvaus. The details, however, the chronology, the roles to be played by individuals, and the relationship to contemporary realities are diverse. There are, in other words, many particular apocalyptic traditions: Perlesvaus belongs to one of them.

To assert that Perlesvaus belongs to such a specific tradition implies that it shares and expresses a particular apocalyptic vision--not just the generalities common to all. It is not to assert that it and its viewpoint and ideas can be matched with some other book and the viewpoint and ideas it might express. Neale Carman once tried to establish this sort of link between Perlesvaus and the New Testament.² He

believed that the whole romance was a tissue of exempla recalling the New Law (in the precise sense of the Law of the Gospel), and based explicitly on the New Testament and the New Testament Apocrypha. On the basis of this belief he made quite extravagant claims of direct biblical sources for countless individual incidents in the romance.³ Though Carman's conviction that the basic inspiration of Perlesvaus derives from outside the Arthurian legends themselves has much to commend it, few would take seriously the claim that Arthurian characters and stories were being used explicitly in an up-dated rewriting of the Bible. Perlesvaus almost certainly does not share its particular apocalyptic vision with any other specific book or collection of books.

There would have been no need, however, for Perlesvaus to draw from other written texts in order to belong to a particular apocalyptic tradition. Unlike the Aristotelian theory of matter and form, or nominalism, or other such philosophical doctrines, millenarianism did not have to be learned at the feet of a master or read in a book. Its various forms and branches were never far from the surface of the popular consciousness, so much so that any slight suggestion in the course of current events that the new age might be near was enough to set off a period of social upheaval, as happened regularly from the time of Tanchelm in Brabant in the eleventh century to the time of the Ranters in Cromwell's day in England.⁴ The author of Perlesvaus could quite easily have been part of a very definite stream of apocalyptic development while never reading a book expounding it. Without having any source as we in the age of print would understand sources, he could have absorbed, assimilated and given expression to a definite and precise vision of life that was held in similar form by others. This,

moreover, is almost certainly what he did with the unique variant of the apocalyptic world-view whose most prominent exponent, and in most respects creator, was Joachim of Fiore, (ca. 1130-ca. 1202).

The apocalyptic doctrines of Joachim of Fiore have both a superficial effect on the events of Perlesvaus and a more profound effect on their meaning and on the meaning of the romance as a whole. Central to Joachim's vision was a theory of history constructed around three ages of equal length, and some aspects of the transition from the second age to the third are reflected in episodes in Perlesvaus. Equally important to Joachim were certain principles of historical relationship, by which persons and events in one age are associated with counterparts in another from whom their lives derive significance and by whom their actions are often determined. Like the superficial characteristics of the incipient third age, these Joachimite principles of historical determinism also find their place in Perlesvaus, both in the direct explanation of the various adventures, and as the basis of certain customary patterns of behaviour. These two modes of Joachimite influence will each be treated in detail in due course, because each is a major element of the apocalyptic theme of Perlesvaus.

Some preliminary work is required, however, before the Joachimism of Perlesvaus can be adequately discussed. Joachim's own exposition of his theories is complex and often confusing, and his principles of exegesis of texts by concordia litterae and of necessary parallelism between ages, as well as his division of history into three ages, need to be set out clearly before they can be applied to Perlesvaus. In addition, the question of the extrinsic relationship of Joachimite writings and Perlesvaus must be investigated and the plausibility of

positing an influence of one on the other must be assessed. Only then can Perlesvaus be viewed in relation to the character of the third age or to Joachimite concepts of relationship, meaning and time.

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The Apocalyptic Theories of Joachim of Fiore

Joachim of Fiore (or sometimes in its Latin form Flora) has a modest place in the ordinary history of the Church as both a theologian and a reformer of the religious life. He is known to historians of the religious life as the founder of the Order of Fiore, a religious order of Cistercian roots which grew to number about forty houses, and survived into the sixteenth century. To the student of theology he is vaguely remembered as the author of a confusing doctrine of the trinity that was condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. If he enjoys any fame at all among secular historians or among mediaevalists in general, however, it is for his theory of history based on the three ages and on the principle of concordia litterae, or literal harmony.

The Joachimite division of history comprises an age of the Father which is also the age of the laity and corresponds to the Old Testament, an age of the Son, which is also of the clergy and corresponds to the New Testament and the time of the Church, and an age of the Holy Spirit and of the monks, which lies in the future, after about 1260. These three ages and the overlapping two times of seven seasons each into which he also divides history are brought together by the principle of literal harmony, which reveals the relationship of external realities in one age to those in another by a system of absolutely strict parallelism: what occurred at a given point in the first age recurred under a different

guise in the second, and will do the same in the third age as well.⁵

Joachim's theory of history is both superficially and profoundly apocalyptic. Superficially it assimilates into the historical third age much of the traditional eschatological material normally thought of by orthodox Christians as belonging to a vaguer end-time lying outside of history. Thus, incidents such as the apocalyptic conversion of non-Christians--spoken of in Matthew 21 and in Romans 11--and the consequent traditional belief that missionaries must preach to the ends of the earth before the end can come, both become characteristics for Joachim of the third age, to begin soon after A.D. 1260. The expectation of these events, and the preparation for them, are brought virtually into the daily life of Joachim's own time. If the great apocalyptic drama is not yet happening, it is at least so imminent as to be a major pre-occupation and to colour the perception and interpretation of current events.

In a more profound sense, too, Joachim's theology of history presents a picture radically different from traditional theology, fully within the apocalyptic tradition and strikingly similar to the apocalypticism of Perlesvaus. Orthodox Christianity is essentially a spiritual religion. The hope that it holds out to its adherents is of some type of spiritual transformation, variously expressed in terms of "entering the Kingdom of God", "being transformed in the image of the risen Christ", or perhaps "going to heaven". Past events in the history of God's people are understood as evidence of God's power and as portents of the salvation he will work for our sake. The conquest of earthly enemies foreshadows the overthrow of sin and death. Material blessings are symbols of the inner gift and life of grace. We are linked to those

who have gone before us through the invisible and spiritual life that we share in God. A certain primacy is accorded to what is inward and unseen.

In Joachim's theology of history the opposite is true. The hope that is offered us is the coming of the new age: a far better time than the present, but still an earthly, material society. Events from the past are not signs of a radically different power at work in us spiritually; they are forerunners of comparable events that will occur among us in exact parallel to what went before. Material blessings are harbingers of more material blessings, the overthrow of former enemies of the conquest of others like them in the future. We are linked to persons and events of the past not by participation in some greater life, but by our location in a structure in which they have a place parallel to ours.

By the same token anything that transcends the particular is irrelevant to Joachim: there are no real universals in his system of concordia litterae. David and Constantine, for example, would not exemplify wisdom, or godly kingship, or justice, or any other virtue--or vice, or neutral characteristic--that they might have in common. Literal harmony establishes one-to-one relationships of contiguity in which David can only be made present to Constantine, and Constantine to David. Particular beings are joined to one another; they do not share or participate in any greater reality.

That is not to say that Joachim's theology is individualistic: far from it. For all that it is devoid of universals and embraces only the particular, this system is uninterested in the salvation of individuals. Non-millenarian Christian faith, with its belief in an inner and spiritual life of grace existing independently of any persons who may

share in it, can be relatively indifferent to the processes of development, stability and decadence in particular societies or in the world at large. This life endures whether the Roman Empire is collapsing or the Saracen dominions expanding, whether Europe is at peace or at war. Individual believers can therefore receive the Gospel, be nourished by the sacraments, keep the commandments and thereby share in the inner life, whatever is happening around them. In Joachim's system, however, there is no place for individuals to go, nor anything for them to do, outside the society in which they are presently living: they are confined by the material and the particular, by time and by space and by the fate of the individuals with whom they are linked by the parallelism of concordia litterae.

Just as no individual can enjoy a personal destiny apart from the fate of his society, so too no one can influence the fate of others except by doing his part for the advancement of that society. Even Christ cannot reconcile us definitively to the Father and fill us with the divine life, since there is no such life available to us. He can only struggle in his day as everyone else does. He can be made present to others as they wage their battles, but he is only present, only in touch with them; he can do only what they do. One interesting consequence of this diminution of the traditional, orthodox place of Christ, is a radical growth in significance for the lives of all other Christians. In the orthodox view God has intervened openly in human history only at certain privileged moments in clearly miraculous ways; otherwise the ongoing works of God and their extension to ourselves are hidden, either with God in heaven or within our own hearts. In Joachimite apocalypticism, on the contrary, the ordinary processes

of religious growth and decay, the practice of politics and statesmanship, the struggles of individual men and women, are activities of the same nature as the work even of Christ. Some may accomplish more--and as the climactic period for the dawning of the Third Age approaches, certain individuals will undoubtedly work dramatic changes in the social order--but all will be engaged in the same task, and none will be able to accomplish it for another.

The broad lines of Joachimite apocalyptic doctrine thus comprise at least four major elements. Most striking are the three ages of history, each associated with one of the three divine Persons and with a particular order in society, and the third and last about to begin within the thirteenth century. Equally significant is the strictly material character of the hope held out to Christians, a hope not of spiritual transformation or immortality, but of a new and better society to be inaugurated at a specified time in the foreseeable future. Finally, in paradoxical balance, are the principles of collective salvation and of particular roles and relationships. None is foreign to the spirit or plot of Perlesvaus, and several are prominent. The discussion of their prominence and significance cannot proceed, however, until it is established whether similarities found in Perlesvaus might plausibly be ascribed to anything more than coincidence.

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The Likelihood of Joachimite Influence on Perlesvaus

That Perlesvaus depends on Joachim as a source, in the sense that the author of the romance read the works of the theologian and was inspired by them, is unlikely: at least there is no evidence to

suggest it. Given the widespread prevalence of apocalyptic speculation, however, the spread of ideas by word of mouth, rumour, secondary documents, and other forms of personal contact among circles of individuals is by no means a far-fetched hypothesis;⁶ and of that sort of contact between the milieu of Perlesvaus and Joachimite circles there is evidence.

The notion of personal contact is not magical, of course. In an age without printing or electronic means of communication ideas spread when those who held them went from one place to another and there talked about them, or when manuscripts were physically carried about. If Joachim and Perlesvaus share a common vision, then persons connected with each must have come in contact with one another or have had access to one another's writings.

According to general scholarly views about Perlesvaus such contact should have been established, if anywhere, either in the West of England or, on the continent, in the region Flanders-Artois-Picardy. Although one major manuscript, the Oxford manuscript Hatton 82, may be from the north-east of France, the remaining manuscripts listed by Nitze in his standard edition are from the north.⁷ In addition, the colophon added to the Brussels manuscript describes it as a gift of the Sire de Cambrin to Jean de Nesle, the castellan of Bruges and a well-known figure in his own lifetime, whose career is thoroughly documented. The circle surrounding Perlesvaus thus definitely includes northern French territory. It also includes England, however, and is probably centered there. Despite the northern French language of the manuscripts, Neale Carman could assert blandly that Perlesvaus was very probably written in England by a churchman well acquainted with Glastonbury Abbey, and

not arouse contradiction.⁸

Carman's assertion and its ready acceptance repose on the clear reference to Avalon in the colophon common to the Oxford and Brussels manuscripts, and on the slightly less persuasive reference in the body of the text to the chapel where Guenevere lies buried.⁹ Nitze establishes that these texts really are referring to Glastonbury, and that the reconstruction of the buildings there after the fire of 1178, followed by the reinterment of the alleged remains of Arthur and Guenevere in 1192, is reflected in the colophon reference and in the description within the text of Guenevere's burial in a newly built chapel with a lead roof and two gold crosses et cetera.¹⁰

It would not be unreasonable to argue, as Nitze and others have, that the exhumation and reburial of these famous remains--which was a major and well-publicized event at the time--provided the occasion for the writing of Perlesvaus: visions of the battle of Roncevalles and of abbeys competing for the custom of pilgrims suggest themselves without difficulty. In any event there is clearly a link between Perlesvaus and Glastonbury and through it with the West of England. It is in that region therefore, as in the north of France, that evidence of the early spread of Joachimism must be sought.

The search would be easier if Perlesvaus could be assigned to the late thirteenth century, as it was in the last century when scholars thought it to be derived from the Queste del saint Graal, or as Paul Imbs and Lucien Foulet have more recently assigned it on philological grounds.¹¹ It is difficult, however, to dismiss some of the evidence cited by Neale Carman,¹² whose arguments regarding the dating of Perlesvaus and Queste and their relationship to one another are far

more compelling than what he has to say about the meaning of Perlesvaus.¹³ Carman is not prepared to place the writing of Perlesvaus as early as the twelfth century: the exhumation of the bodies of Arthur and Guenevere and their reburial make the early eleven nineties an absolute terminus a quo in any case. On the other hand, however, his evidence makes it difficult to place its composition too late in the thirteenth century. Before 1222, he points out, a copy was presented to Jean de Nesle by a Flemish compatriot, and Jean's solidly established dates provide a solid terminus ad quem. Strict honesty might even force this terminus back another six years, since normal commerce and communication between England and Flanders were suspended after 1216, and the transmission of a text across the Channel between then and 1222 would have been difficult.

For the region north of the Alps in general early evidence for the spread of Joachimism--early enough even for Carman's dating of Perlesvaus--is not entirely lacking. Manuscript Amplonian E. 71 of the Stadtbücherei of Erfurt is from the fifteenth century, but contains some thirteenth-century letters of Peter of Blois, and it is thought to be based on a thirteenth-century exemplar. It also includes a Tractatus de fide Petri Blesensis, not an authentic work of Peter of Blois, but faithful to his doctrine in many respects. From folio 227r it deviates from Peter's usual preoccupations, however, to discuss the pagan hordes, representing Gog and Magog, that are massing against the Church. It then goes on to explain the relationship of the Old and the New Testament according to the Joachimite doctrine of concordia litterae, which it attributes to Joachim by name. By a lucky coincidence the author of this document mentions two lapses of time: 1213 years have passed

from the resurrection until the present, and Joachim has allegedly predicted that the Antichrist will appear 1260 years after the resurrection. Since 1260 was already a well-known date for the coming of the Antichrist, especially to some one familiar with Joachim, and since confusion of the Nativity and the Resurrection as a starting point for the calculation of the Christian era was fairly common, it is not implausible to suppose that the author of the Tractatus was writing in 1213, not in 1246.¹⁴

Around the same time Robert of Auxerre (1156-1212) mentioned Joachim in his Chronicle, where he noted Joachim's gift of spiritual intelligence to interpret the Scriptures, his expounding of the Apocalypse, and his schema of history in addition to the specific prediction that the Antichrist is to come in two generations, or approximately sixty years. Robert's death in 1212--a date not in dispute--provides an absolute terminus within the likely period of composition of Perlesvaus. The date of 1186 under which Joachim appears is not evidence of Robert's acquaintance with him that early--there is no reason to believe that the Chronicle was anything like an up-to-the-minute diary--but the reference to the two generations remaining before 1260 might place Robert's entry about Joachim as early as the turn of the century.¹⁵

It may be deemed far-fetched to conclude from passing remarks that Joachim was already well-known or that his views were widely discussed. Robert does, however, conclude his entry on Joachim with a personal observation: he regrets the tendency to discuss questions like the coming of the Antichrist; we would do better simply to let future generations discover for themselves whether the Antichrist

appears or not, and whether other prophecies are fulfilled or not. It would seem inconsistent with such views for him to promote the cause of Joachim. If Joachim were not already well-known, surely Robert would not speak of him. It is plausible to suppose that he has commented on Joachim and his influence because Joachim has become too prominent to be ignored, even by a writer who would prefer that he be forgotten and no longer distress people to no purpose.

In England itself there is evidence that Joachim became well known at the latest after the publication of the decrees of the Lateran Council of 1215, which condemned him for his trinitarian theories. M. Gibbs and J. Lang claim that the bishops of England made a special effort to publicize the decrees of the Council and launched a programme of reform based upon them. The Council was concerned, however, with Joachim's theological views, and awareness of his role as a trinitarian heretic would not necessarily prove anything of importance about his relation to Perlesvaus.

Later in the century there is no lack of evidence that Englishmen knew precisely the things about Joachim that might have influenced Perlesvaus. Adam Marsh, an English Franciscan who died in 1257, wrote to Robert Grosseteste in 1253, and spoke of Joachim in the letter as a biblical exegete laying claim to a special spiritus intellectus that allows him to penetrate the meaning of history through exegesis. In the same generation Roger Bacon became a devoted Joachimite, to the point, apparently, of being imprisoned in the late 1270's by the Master General of the Franciscans for his Joachimite views.¹⁶

From the earlier period only one piece of evidence of familiarity has emerged, but it is significant. Ralph of Coggeshall,

in his Chronicon Anglicanum,¹⁷ describes Joachim as an expounder of the Apocalypse and displays a special interest in his principle of concordia litterae and in its application to contemporary events. The dates of composition of Ralph of Coggeshall's chronicle--a continuation of the earlier work of Ralph Niger--are uncertain: the Dictionary of National Biography is reduced to asserting that he flourished around 1207, the year in which he became abbot of Coggeshall. Even the dates of his birth and death are uncertain. There is some internal evidence for believing that the chronicle continued down to 1227, but the extant copies only extend to 1224.¹⁸ It seems safe therefore to conclude that knowledge of Joachim's doctrine had spread to England, at least to this one individual, by the first quarter of the thirteenth century at the very latest, quite possibly before the Lateran Council made Joachim known as a trinitarian heretic.

It would be less prudent to assume from Joachim's inclusion in the Chronicon Anglicanum that his fame was widespread: the same argument cannot be adduced here as for Robert of Auxerre. In fact, Ralph of Coggeshall's work seems, in this as in other respects, to be quite personal: he tends to record what comes to his notice, and to speak of people who visit him or whom his visitors talk about, without any pretence of describing the major preoccupations of the world or of England. Here, for instance, in his entry on Joachim, he is actually describing an interview between Joachim and Adam, Abbot of Perseigne, and it would not be in any way inconsistent with his normal habits for this Adam to be his only justification for ever mentioning Joachim at all. He would thus not be providing any proof that Joachimite doctrines were prevalent in England, available to be taken up by the authors of vernacular

romances of chivalry.

The personal character of Ralph of Coggeshall's work and the relative narrowness of his range of interests limit his value as a witness to the possible general dissemination of Joachimite views, but they increase the significance of another entry in his Chronicon, the second oldest extant record of the exhumation of the body of Arthur at Glastonbury in the eleven nineties:¹⁹ for Ralph of Coggeshall has connections with the Glastonbury/Perlesvaus circle as well as with Joachim, and his reluctance to incorporate into his work subjects with which he has no personal connection heightens the probability that his contact with Glastonbury and with the exhumation was direct. This is especially likely since his account of the event is considered an early version, partly because it is contained in a part of the manuscript that runs only to 1195--the exhumation is chronicled under the year 1192--partly because it is a primitive account, with no mention of either Guenevere or the reburial of Arthur's body.²⁰ It does, however, make the connection of Glastonbury with the place once called Avalon, which it mentions as part of the inscription on Arthur's coffin, and which it translates--as insula pomorum.

If we accept the notion that Ralph of Coggeshall recorded primarily what came immediately to his attention, then we have in him living proof that the Joachimite circle of ideas and influence and the circle around the creation of Perlesvaus do touch. It might even be tempting to speculate on the possibility that Ralph of Coggeshall himself wrote Perlesvaus. A churchman, living in England, and well acquainted with Glastonbury Abbey was Carman's definition, and Ralph is certainly all three, as well as being familiar with Joachimite ideas. In fact, of

course, Ralph of Coggeshall almost certainly did not write Perlesvaus. The odds against the discovery of the identity of a heretofore anonymous author after almost eight centuries are staggering. If Carman is right about England and about Glastonbury, however, and if we are right about Joachim and millenarianism, then someone like Ralph of Coggeshall must have been the author, someone with his exposure to Arthurian legend and specifically to Glastonbury's part in it, with his awareness, too, of millenarian speculation, especially of Joachimite speculation. At the very least the Abbot of Coggeshall is concrete proof that at least one such individual did exist. If this ecclesiastic in Essex could be aware of Joachim in Italy and of Arthur's tomb in the West of England, then others could too. To speculate that an author influenced by Joachimism could produce a Grail romance involving Avalon/Glastonbury is not simply to chase after a shadow.

The hypothesis that a Joachimite and an Arthurian circle of interest could meet and result in the creation of an apocalyptic romance like Perlesvaus is strengthened by the general pattern of interest in Joachim both in England and in northern France. Joachim is viewed as the prophet of the last things or as the exponent of a striking method of biblical exegesis, or as the explainer of the seven visions of the Apocalypse. Emphasis is laid on the harmony of the Old Testament and the New and on the precise parallels in detail between the two. Commentators are interested in the sequence of seven persecutions, in the place of contemporary figures and events within the persecutions and in the larger scheme of history, or in the precise dating of the third age. Attention is paid to the special gift of intelligence, on the one hand, and to the plotting of ages, times and seasons on the other. Everything

revolves around concordia litterae, biblical exegesis, the understanding of history, and the consequent foreknowledge of its future course.

The conclusions drawn by B. McGinn regarding the spread of Joachimism support this view.²¹ McGinn distinguishes three periods in the dissemination of Joachim's influence. From his death until the 1240's he is perceived as the prophet of the Antichrist and as the object, for whatever obscure reason, of a condemnation by the Fourth Lateran Council. Interest then shifts to the theory of the three ages, and especially to the imminence of the third. Finally, with the passing of the year 1260, numerous treatises are written concerning the parallels between the two Testaments and the seven times contained within each. All three phases of interest address primarily the complex of ideas surrounding concordia litterae, the understanding of history, the plotting of its several divisions, and the prediction of what is to come. There are occasional exceptions to this pattern: Garnier of Rochefort, around 1209-1210, would seem to have written a sermon on the Trinity in which the Tetragrammaton is used in a manner derived from the use of the psalterium in the Liber figurarum,²² but the complex of concordia, patterns of history and prophecy based on concordia dominates overall.

Several conclusions can therefore be drawn about awareness of Joachimite ideas in northern France and in England. First of all, it is the apocalyptic vision of Joachim that spread most quickly and most widely: basically, wherever Joachim was known, his version of millenarianism was familiar, whether his trinitarian doctrines or his schemes for monastic reform had been heard of or not. Secondly, northern France and England were typical in this respect, in that

the apocalyptic theory of history and prophecy based on exegesis lie at the core of the various manifestations of interest in Joachim there. Thirdly, in the classification of interest by periods presented by McGinn, the northern countries fit into all three, suggesting a sustained awareness of Joachim from the early thirteenth century until well after 1260: interest includes the prophecies of the Antichrist--reputed the earliest phase of interest in Joachim--as well as the parallels between Old and New Testament--attested late. There is every reason, therefore, to believe that Joachimite apocalypticism had been heard of in England at the time when Perlesvaus is thought to have been written. Since, moreover, the figure of Ralph of Coggeshall attests to the coexistence of Joachimism and the Glastonbury legends concerning Arthur within a single individual, there is no extrinsic reason for rejecting the hypothesis that Perlesvaus may share in the same particular development of apocalypticism represented by Joachim of Fiore.

* * * * *

Joachimite Theories and the Events of Perlesvaus: the Coming of the Third Age

The striking and significant superficial similarities between Joachimism and Perlesvaus all concern the transition from the second age to the third, and provide a strong indication that the theme of transition in Perlesvaus has a broad scope and importance, extending beyond the narrowly military change from scattered and aimless fighting to planned warfare with a godly purpose. Most prominent are the similar fates reserved by Joachim and in Perlesvaus for virgins, for hermits and for knights.

In the whole of Joachimite doctrine probably nothing is more striking, viewed superficially, than the theory of the three ages of history, and within that theory nothing is more memorable than the process by which, in the transition from age to age, martyrs give way to virgins, the old and the young to little children, and laity and clergy to hermits. Those who are aware of only one aspect of Joachim's teaching are likely to know about the third age, of virgins, children, and hermits.

The parallel phenomenon in Perlesvaus to this aspect of the transition from age to age is less prominent, but significant nonetheless. It is certainly one of the superficial areas in which Perlesvaus and Joachim visibly come together. Children are not singled out as the heirs of the age to come, nor are they accorded any particular prominence in the romance at all: Perlesvaus is almost entirely a tale about adults.²³ Virgins and virginity are far more important, however. It is not the Good Knight's strength or prowess that are stressed when he is first presented, though in fact he is endowed with both, and both are mentioned. Rather: "Buens chevaliers fu sanz faille, car il fu chastes e virges de son cors, e hardiz e poissanz, e si ot teches sanz vilenie."²³ To be chaste and virginal takes priority over being bold and strong. Elsewhere Perceval's chastity and his determination to preserve it are singled out without reference to other qualities at all:

La Roïne des Puceles, qui molt estoit de grant
beauté, l'amoit de tres grant amor, mes ele
savoit bien que n'en avroit ja son desirier ne
dame ne damoisele qui s'entente i meïst, qu'il
estoit chastes, et en chasteë voloit morir.²⁴

Chastity even becomes the characteristic distinguishing Perceval from his companions, setting him above them, and giving him a power that

they lack, as his uncle explains to him after he has succeeded where Gawain and Lancelot failed at the Revolving Castle: "Beau niés, se il fusement ausi chaste com vos estes, il i fusement entrez, car il sont li mellor chevalier dou monde, s'il ne fusement luxurios."²⁵

Chastity and virginal purity are especially characteristic of Perceval, but they are not present in him as the unique traits of a remarkable individual. They characterize him rather because he is the precursor and the inaugurator of a new age, in which they will be the virtues par excellence, as they will be in Joachim's third age. They are not widely perceptible in others because the transition from age to age is only beginning, but some signs of the change are already appearing in individuals, of whom Gawain is the most obvious.

Gawain has a reputation in Arthurian tradition for womanizing, but it is a reputation that he does not live up to in Perlesvaus. His scrupulous respect for Marin the Jealous's wife might perhaps pass unnoticed, or be explained on other grounds, but when he then also disappoints the Damsels of the Tents, who openly invite him to make love to them,²⁶ he gives reason to suspect a real change in his character. This impression of change is later strongly reinforced when he similarly resists the Damsel whom he so meticulously obeyed during the tournament of the Golden Circlet, and the hypothesis of a general social development is rendered more plausible by Arthur, who behaves just like Gawain. The damsels for whom Arthur and Gawain fought in the tournament complain about their behaviour afterward: ". . . cist chevalier e Misire Gavains ont pris parlement ensemble; il n'a en aus ne solaz ne cortoisie. Lais[ons] les dormir, que Dex nos desfemde de tel hoste."²⁷ In the eyes of this disappointed maiden, at least,

Gawain's overall reputation is changed: ". . . encor soit Misire Gavains niche envers les da[moiseles], si sai ce, qu'il est loiaux en autre maniere . . . ,"²⁸ a radically different judgment of Gawain than would be encountered in earlier Arthurian legend.

Similar evidence can be obtained out of Lancelot's adventures, for example when the Lady of the Castle of the Beards loves him, and would make him her lord and her castle's, only to be rejected in favour of his quest of the Grail and the Castle of Souls:

Donc remandroiz vos, fet ele, en cest chastel aveques moi, car je vos aim plus que nul chevalier qui vive. Dame, fait Lanceloz, granz merciz, mes je ne puis demorer en un chastel que une nuit devant que j'aie esté la ou je doi aler. Ou avez vos la voie enprise? fait ele. Dame, fait il, au Chastel des Armes.²⁹

Lancelot's behaviour is less noteworthy than Gawain's, since his loyalty to Guenevere is an established Arthurian motif, but it is at least consistent with the conduct of Arthur and Gawain, and his motivation arises out of his quest, not from his feelings toward Guenevere.

The higher value placed on chastity in Perlesvaus, as compared to earlier Arthurian texts and the supreme importance of the virginal Perceval as the hero of the great watershed event that is the conquest of Castle Mortal reflect one characteristic of the Joachimite third age. In Joachim, however, that coming era is also the age of the religious, of monks and, above all, of hermits, and in this respect Perlesvaus is overwhelmingly Joachimite. Apart from any more specific and more sophisticated observation, no reader can help but be struck by the near omnipresence of hermits in this romance, especially in the later branches where they provide information so regularly to the various knights that they become virtual narrators, and essential to the advancement of the plot.³⁰

At a slightly deeper level hermits provide information not only about what is going on, but about what it means: there are hermit exegetes as well as hermit informants. It is one of the priests at the castle guarding the entrance to the Fisher King's land who explains the meaning of the sealed heads and of their relationship to the events of salvation history, and who goes on to provide a similar interpretation of the death of Marin the Jealous's wife.³¹ The Hermit King himself serves as just such an exegete when he explains to Perceval the meaning of the incident in which one priest adored the Cross and another beat it, of the battle with the devil-knight and the fire-breathing dragon, and of the death of the little white beast, devoured by the twelve hounds that emerged from her own belly.³²

Such appearances of hermits as informants or exegetes play an unquestioned part in the organization of the plot, and are not exclusively a reflection of the social order being portrayed, but the same qualification can hardly be applied to the assignment to hermits of all the functions normally carried out in Christian societies by the clergy in general. The course of the adventures would progress just as satisfactorily if Lancelot went for spiritual direction and confession to a diocesan priest or to a monk in a monastery, instead of to a hermit, as he actually does.³³ Nor do structural considerations dictate the many other incidents in which knights turn to hermits--and only to hermits--for ordinary pastoral care. Lohot's funeral is conducted by a hermit,³⁴ Guenevere is buried in a hermitage,³⁵ the Knight Hardy is prepared for death by yet another hermit.³⁶ Perceval is taken by hermits to the graveyard where his father and his eleven uncles lie buried.³⁷ When the knightly adventures have come to an end, hermits become the

custodians of sacred relics.³⁸ From the arrival of King Arthur at Saint Augustine's chapel to the disappearance of Perceval from earthly society, the men who sing Masses, care for relics, bury the dead and watch over their tombs, absolve the penitent and offer spiritual counsel are all hermits. One or another may occasionally be referred to simply as a priest, but always in a remote physical setting appropriate to a hermit or to a band of hermits.³⁹ There are no Dominican preachers, Franciscan friars, Benedictine monks, and certainly no diocesan priests or bishops to be found anywhere in Perlesvaus: all have been displaced by hermits.

The rise to prominence of the eremitical class in the new age is not confined to the replacement of other types of religious ministers. While hermits do not take over the functions of knights as they do of the ordinary clergy, they do attract a significant number of individual knights to their ranks through conversion. As early as Branch III⁴⁰ a knight becomes a priest at God's command. In Branch V it is revealed that King Pellès has been for some time a hermit and that his son, Joseus, who has killed his mother for telling him he would not be king, is himself in search of a hermitage in order to save his soul.⁴¹ The elderly knights that Gawain sees at the Grail service are all dressed religiously,⁴² which surely implies that they have entered some form of religious life, given the mediaeval bent for meaningful vesture. Most striking of all is the fate of the thirteen true believers at the Castle of the Copper Tower, the only defenders whom Perceval does not put to death when he captures it. These men remain inside their fortress until the New Law is firmly established, then go forth, not to preach or evangelize, or to serve as knights in the Lord's service, but to build hermitages:

Il furent la dedenz tant que la Novele Loi fu aselree,
 e menerent mout bone vie; ne onques nus ne pot entrer
 avec aus que il ne fust ocis e detrenciés, se il ne
 creïst fermement en Deu. Quant cil de totes les isles
 orent ferme creance, li .xiii. qui ou chastel estoient
 s'en issirent fors, si firent hermitajes par les forez,
 por la fause loi que il avoient maintenue e por conquerre
 l'amor au Sauveor dou monde.⁴³

To live on as Christian knights seems acceptable for a time, but once the New Law has been established, then to conquer the love of the Saviour of the world one ought to retire to a hermitage.

The conversion of specific knights into hermits is described in a limited number of instances. There is more general evidence, however, that as the ranks of the hermits increase in numbers and in prominence, the order of knighthood declines not only relatively but even absolutely: significant numbers of knights in Perlesvaus simply disappear from society, never to be heard from again, and their disappearance definitely seems to be linked to the work of the Good Knight and to the ascendancy of the New Law over the Old. In Branch VIII Sir Gawain finds himself in a region where he learns--again from a hermit informant--that there are no longer any knights living, except for a single individual who provokes quarrels between travellers in order to collect the spoils of the dead. The rest have all been driven off by the mysterious knight who comes ashore periodically from his ship, always in disguise.⁴⁴ A first fruit of Perceval's labours--for he is the disguised knight--is a drastic decline in the number of knights: the only good man left in the area to give Gawain information is a hermit.

While linked to the Good Knight and his mission, the disappearance of knights is not always a result of his labours. It is a wider phenomenon that is at least partly the consequence of the decline in

existing society that Perceval is struggling to overcome, one facet of the whole process of change from one age to the next. Perceval's uncle, for example, reports that the Grail Chapel is empty and that the hermits living in the forest round about it are eager for his arrival, because now they no longer see any knight who believes in God.⁴⁵ This vanishing of all but the godless knights from the very centre of holiness is clearly not Perceval's doing, nor is it a measure designed to implant the New Law. It is rather, in a more general way, part of the whole transition, through decline and regeneration, by which one age is giving way to the next. In the immediate environs of the Grail the old order of Christian chivalry has simply vanished just as much as has the traditional, diocesan and parochially based Church.

The impression of a transition from age to age is augmented by the increasing evidence of relative decline of knighthood in the latter part of Perlesvaus. Hermits are met more and more frequently,⁴⁶ another forest without knightly inhabitant is encountered,⁴⁷ a last knight from the forest in front of the Castle of Camelot is buried in a chapel,⁴⁸ leaving that region likewise empty. Significantly, too, the final adventure of the entire romance--the investigation of the long abandoned but still preserved chapel--is entrusted to knights, as its nature would require, but the experience immediately inspires the two individuals, as soon as they have emerged, to become hermits:

Il i entrerent par envoiesseure, mes il i demorerent puis
grant piece, e qant il revindrent fors, si menerent vie
d'ermite, e vestirent heres, e alerent par les forez,
si ne menjoient se racines non, e menoient molt dure
vie, mes ele leur plesoit molt. . . .⁴⁹

The decline of knighthood and its replacement by a class of religious solitaries is not wholly systematic: Perceval makes a highly

dramatic arrival at Pennevoiseuse⁵⁰ on board ship, at a time when there are still large numbers of knights in the Red Land, but his appearance, for all its striking character, does not drive them away. On balance, however, there is no question but that the leading class of lay persons and the ordinary clergy are giving way to hermits in Perlesvaus, and that the rate of transition increases as time wears on. In the external order the evolution of society portrayed in Perlesvaus bears a strong resemblance to the emergence of the third age out of the second in Joachimite apocalypticism.

* * * * *

Joachimite Theories and the Sense of Perlesvaus: Historical Parallels as the Basis of Meaning

Striking though the external similarities between the Joachimite third age and the evolving new society portrayed in Perlesvaus may be, they are overshadowed ultimately by the particular concept of meaning that is a more widespread, if less visible, characteristic in both Joachimism and Perlesvaus. Many incidents in the romance evoke Joachim's world when their own meaning is revealed. The concept of what meaning is, and the manner in which it is generated and revealed are remarkably similar in Joachim and in Perlesvaus. In each case meaning derives from the establishment of parallels between individual persons, things or events in different time periods. In Perlesvaus the parallel is sometimes revealed by an exegete introduced into the plot for that purpose, or it is sometimes revealed by the establishment of direct contact between the persons or things in question. In either case the process and the concepts underlying it are thoroughly Joachimite.

1. The Formal Exegesis of Adventures by Concordia Litterae

Joachim of Fiore called his own characteristic method of interpreting the Scriptures concordia litterae. As an exegetical technique it stands starkly apart from allegory, anagogy, moralising, even from typology, to which it has some affinities, and certainly from the higher criticism of our own day. Concordia is a process of mental linkage between individual persons and particular incidents in one age and their counterparts in another. It is not just a special technique for understanding the Bible, however; it is a unique epistemology, a unique conception of what meaning is, of what knowledge is.

For most of us in our everyday lives to know, or to apprehend meaning, is to associate the unfamiliar with the familiar. "Katze means cat" conveys knowledge to those of us who are native English speakers but know no German. "Sodium chloride means table salt" constitutes meaning for those who eat regularly but rarely set foot in a laboratory. Coming to know something, or discovering its meaning, is a matter of linkage on straight-forward lines; what is new or unfamiliar is mentally attached to something else that is already firmly rooted in our experience and in our memory.

That is far from the only sense of knowledge, however, either for us or for people of the Middle Ages. A Platonist might find the statement "Arthur is a King" meaningful, not so much because he is more familiar with kings than with arthurs, but because the title "king" establishes a link with the absolute, abstract form of kingship, in which all particular kings participate. Since for the Platonist all particulars derive their reality from the universal in whose being they

share, to know an individual thing or person is to associate it with the appropriate universal. Again a process of mental linkage, but of a different kind.

Among the exegetical theories current in the Middle Ages, allegory and anagogy arise out of a concept of meaning partly akin to the Platonic. They depend on the notion that there are different orders of being: the outward and the inward, the material and the spiritual, the earthbound and the heavenly. To apprehend the meaning of something in the outer, material, or earthly order is to link it suitably to the inner, spiritual, heavenly world.⁵¹ A more modern epistemology may be derived from this same pattern by substituting historical or evolutionary process for the higher order of being: thus the meaning of Magna Charta in the Whig theory of history derives from its place in the process of diminution of royal power and growth in freedom through the strengthening of parliamentary institutions. The meaning of the particular event is found in association with the centuries-long evolution.⁵²

Joachim and Perlesvaus stand together in isolation from these more or less standard epistemologies. Joachimite concordia, not just as an exegetical technique, but as a theory of meaning and its apprehension, links entities quite different from the strange and the familiar, the particular and the universal, the outer and the inner, the earthly and the heavenly, the material and the spiritual, or the event and the process. It is true that Joachim himself does speak of types or modes of knowledge--of seven in fact--that underlie concordia, but they are hardly what modern, or most mediaeval, readers would recognize as distinct modes. Notwithstanding Joachim's terminology a truer understanding of his epistemology results if his categories are thought

of as a single type of knowledge and a single order of being manifested in seven different historical periods. Time, not nature, is the principal distinction among the Joachimite modes. Each is related to one of the states of men in the Church, or to one of the holy functions,⁵³ but these states or functions are really what today would be called distinct moments in salvation history. Joachim's overriding fascination with ages, times and seasons finds expression here as elsewhere.⁵⁴

This phenomenon can perhaps be seen most readily in one of the simpler examples of Joachim's exegesis.⁵⁵ The trio of personalities comprising Abraham and his two wives--the slave Hagar and the freewoman Sarah--is explained according to most of the seven types or modes of knowledge. What is immediately striking about all the modes is that each is really another set of parallel characters in a different time period. In the first mode Abraham signifies the priests of the Jews, Hagar the Israelite people, and Sarah the tribe of Levi. In the second Abraham signifies the bishops, Hagar the church of the laity, Sarah the church of the clerics. In the third Abraham represents the prelates of the convents and monasteries, Hagar the church of the conversi, Sarah the church of the monks. There is no mistaking the connection in each case to one of Joachim's three ages, and the same relationship holds in the remaining interpretations: each simply establishes parallels for the three characters in two or in three ages simultaneously. That is what passes for meaning according to the principle of concordia litterae.

The two terms whose association comprises meaning for Joachim do not correspond exactly. Joachimite harmony depends on a parallel between salient characteristics, not among details.⁵⁶ This is conceived

and put forth as a real relationship, however, and is not to be dismissed lightly. The statement that Hagar equals the Israelite people does not convey to the modern mind the sense of satisfaction, the feeling of knowing the previously unfamiliar, that is derived from learning that "Katze means cat". The difference, however, is largely explainable by modern habits of mind, which are quite different from Joachim's. The basic experience is less different than at first appears.

That basic experience of knowing, the satisfaction that comes from having a mental handle on a word, concept, thing or person, derives largely from the consistency, predictability, even necessity of the linkage between the unfamiliar term and the familiar. Once the connection of Katzen with cats has been established, all the meaningful statements that can be, and are, made about cats can be predicated of Katzen: four legs, tails, sharp teeth and claws, fastidiousness, independence of character, propensity to scratch wooden objects, antipathy to dogs, and many another trait.⁵⁷ Katzen settle down into a familiar mental landscape, and they can be said to be known. In Joachimism the connection being made is not between languages, nor between individual and species nor between any other categories of being. It is between individuals. The impetus to settle the unfamiliar term within a familiar mental landscape is the same, however, except that the landscape is essentially a structure.

No one can study Joachim's attempts to systematize the course of history without being struck by his fascination--almost his obsession--with structure. His whole experience of life is structural, and the fundamental structures within which he lives and works are time periods, all interconnected according to various schemes of parallelism. What

is more, these time structures do not simply organize his experience of life; they govern it.⁵⁸ Now, in a system like this, where structure determines the course of reality, where structure ultimately is reality, and events only its consequences, linkages of the type "Hagar means the Israelite people" are neither artificial nor insignificant. Subjectively they should produce the same result as "Katze means cat" produces in the modern mind, that same sense of satisfaction that comes from being able to make meaningful statements about something that formerly was puzzling.

Once Hagar's place on the grid of time is shown to correspond to the Israelite people's place, or to the Christian laity's, all the meaningful statements can be made about Israelites or Christians that were once made about Hagar--or vice versa if Israel or the Christian Church happen to be more familiar initially than Hagar. On the level of the subjective experience of knowledge and meaning, Joachim's concordia has as much power to create the satisfied sense of having an intellectual handle on experience as has any other system of knowledge and meaning. Once its underlying structural premises are accepted, it will generate meaningful statements, and therefore deserves to be taken seriously. That is how Joachim took it--he applied it to the interpretation of the book he esteemed above all others, the Bible--and that is how the author of Perlesvaus took it as well.

Evidence of the epistemology characteristic of Perlesvaus is scattered throughout the romance, but not evenly. There are certain moments when the progress of events is halted and the author introduces a hermit-exegete who formally--and often with some solemnity--expounds the meaning of the principal adventures that have recently occurred.

This exegesis is fully as systematic as Joachim's, and it proceeds along Joachimite lines.

In Branch VI Gawain pauses in his questing at the Castle of Inquest, at the entrance to the Fisher King's lands, and asks the superior of the priests there to explain to him the meaning of many of the events he has witnessed and been part of. They discuss seven incidents: the appearance of the damsels carrying the heads of a king and a queen, and transporting in a cart the heads of 150 dead knights; the abduction of those 150 heads to the castle of the Black Hermit and their promised rescue by the Good Knight; the fate of the bald Damsel of the Cart; Marin the Jealous's murder of his wife; the Knight Coward's conversion into the Knight Hardy; Meliot of Logres's mastery of the lion; and the slaying of a king's son whose body is then eaten by his father's subjects in a sort of communion. The seven explanations⁵⁹ are unmistakably Joachimite in their method, and most fit the specific Joachimite modes.

In reply to Gawain's first inquiry--concerning the damsels and the heads sealed in gold, silver and lead--the priest explains that the king was betrayed by the queen, and that he and the hundred and fifty knights were slain in consequence. The king therefore signifies Adam--the first man and thus a king--while the woman is Eve--his consort--and the knights who suffered for her treachery represent all the people descended from Adam, who have all suffered through Eve's sin. The three sets of heads sealed in metal represent respectively the New Law--those sealed in gold--the Old Law--those in silver--and the False Law of the Saracens--those in lead.

This clearly is an explanation in the same sense that "Hagar

signifies the Israelite people" or "Abraham signifies the priests of the Jews" are explanations. Each establishes a parallel in another historical period. There is nothing to suggest that the king is like Adam, or the queen like Eve, that they share a common character or a comparable life history. What they share is a place within a structure, and in consequence of that place a function. The structure in which they are placed, moreover, is essentially Joachim's. The association of the king with Adam and of the queen with Eve is interpretation according to the first mode of concordia litterae. That is to say that it is the establishment of a parallel within the age of God the Father, with whom Adam and Eve had all their dealings. As is the case with Hagar, however, the same incident is explained according to several modes simultaneously. The hundred and fifty heads sealed in metal, when considered as three distinct groups, are to be understood according to mode four: they represent respectively the Old Law, the New Law and the False Law, and are therefore linked to the Father and to the Son, to the first age and to the second. Taken all together, however, these same severed heads are said to represent all the descendants of Adam, extending thereby through all three Joachimite ages and finding their meaning in mode six.

The theft of the hundred and fifty sealed heads and their promised rescue by the Good Knight are also assigned a meaning by the same technique and within the identical system of modes. Once more the explanation is a historical parallel. The castle signifies hell, to which all, good and evil alike, were consigned following the sin of Adam and throughout the entire first age until the coming of Christ. The Black Hermit who guards the castle and its prisoners represents Lucifer, who ruled hell. The Good Knight, who will rescue the sealed

heads from the castle, represents Christ, come to free his people from imprisonment and to harrow hell. In this case the relationship of the parallel in Perlesvaus to the Joachimite schema of history is particularly clear. The hundred and fifty heads have been sealed in their three metals for a vaguely long time, and will now remain in the castle for an equally undefined period. They are condemned to wait through the second age--in which the events of Perlesvaus are taking place--just as souls were made to wait in hell in the first age. The harrowing of hell occurred at the climax of the work of Christ, by which the second age was definitively established. Now the castle will be harrowed, and the hundred and fifty waiting dead saved, at the climax of the work of the Good Knight by whom the new age will equally be established definitively. What happened as the first age gave way to the second will recur as the second yields to the third.

This exegesis gives the recipient a sense of satisfaction, of knowing something, in the same way and for the same reason that Joachim's explanations give satisfaction: because the parallel is absolute, strict, and necessary. It matters not at all that part of the alleged interpretation rests not on fact but on prophecy: the Good Knight has not yet harrowed the Black Hermit's castle, nor has he even appeared so far as the priest-exegete is aware, but the rigid system of parallels characteristic of concordia litterae supplies what empirical knowledge cannot. The all-determining structure of history generates meaning as readily out of what has not yet happened as out of what has. By his position alone the Good Knight at the transition from the second age to the third can be linked to Christ, and meaningful statements can be made about him on the basis of what is known of Christ. To say that the Good Knight

harrowing the Black Hermit's castle represents Christ harrowing hell is both to express what he signifies and to enjoy one of the first fruits of knowing what he signifies. It is one of the basic meaningful statements that can be made about him once his place in the historical structure is fixed.

The same principle applies to the Black Hermit, whose admitted resemblance to Satan in appearance and behaviour only partially explains their identification with one another. The fundamental reason why the master of the priests can assert partly in advance of the facts what the Black Hermit's role must be in the current struggle of Old Law and New is his place in the structure of time.⁶⁰ The Black Hermit's place is Lucifer's, and he must therefore signify and function like Lucifer. His castle becomes hell and plays the role of hell. The sealed heads, as well as the living persons waiting in his castle, represent the souls of the dead waiting in hell, and endure their fate. All the characters in the drama are known, even though much of it has yet to take place. They can be discussed and understood because they are linked to counterparts already familiar. Except that the author is narrating an Arthurian adventure tale, and not searching the events of history in order to predict the course of the climactic year 1260, he is being consistently faithful to Joachimite orthodoxy.

As the third situation--the bald damsel, the unasked Grail question, and the languishing king--is explained, the sense of satisfaction, of intellectual mastery of the previously unfamiliar begins to be created before the reader's eyes. As the exegete does not fail to point out, the bald damsel has her exact parallel in the earlier age in the person of Fortune, who was bald before the crucifixion of the

Lord and regained her hair only when he had ransomed his people. While there is graphic justification for this comparison--the wheels that support the cart are like the wheel of Fortune bearing the world--this essentially is a further instance of concordia litterae: two individuals, in different ages, suffer the same fate in parallel circumstances, and, in the orthodox Joachimite manner, the one is said to signify the other. At this point the method of concordia litterae begins to bear fruit in Gawain's mind: the fixing of the appropriate parallels begins to give him the satisfied sense of intellectual mastery over the previously unfamiliar that is the subjective experience of knowing. He is able to make statements about matters that he could only question before the Joachimite historical structure was pointed out to him:

Missire Gavains ot ces senefiances, si li plest molt;
 et se pense que a l'escu qui en la sale le roi Artu
 pendoit n'osoit nus metre sa main ne enchargier, si
 comme l'en li out conté en mainz lex, ainz atendoit
 on le Bon Chevalier de jor en jor qui por l'escu
 devoit venir.⁶¹

Gawain soon discovers, too, that not only the special individuals and objects that he encounters, but his own life as well and its adventures can be given a meaning through the process of concordia litterae. He learns the meaning of the death of Marin the Jealous's wife, in an incident in which he was intimately involved:

Sire, fait soi li prestres, ce fu molt grant joie de
 la senefiance de sa mort, car Josephes nos tesmoige
 que la Viez Loī fu abatue par un coup de glaive sanz
 resociter, et por la Viez Loī [abatre] se sofri Diex
 a ferir en coste du glaive, et par ce coup fu la [Viez]
 Loī abatue et par son crucefiement. La dame senefie la
 Viez Loī.⁶²

This particular interpretation is especially evocative of the Joachimite fascination with historical structure because it can be based on no

other conceivable principle. There are numerous plausible reasons for associating the Good Knight with the good and gentle Saviour of the world, but this fundamentally noble and much-maligned woman seems to have little in common with an Old Law that, in the present age at least, has become the rallying point for all the enemies of God and of goodness. She and the Old Law are not alike in nature or appearance. They are linked only because she now, and the Old Law once upon a time, share a common fate at identical stages in the evolution from one age to the next. Historical structure alone binds these events to the meaning that each finds in the other.

This same exclusive dependence on historical structure to generate meaning is evident in the curious little sequel to the Marin story, which the priest-exegete also explains. As a result of his involvement with Marin, Gawain is challenged by a knight wearing armour half-black, half-white, who promises that he and his followers will become Gawain's men if Gawain can defeat him in combat. The challenge is accepted, the duel fought, the condition met, and the promise kept. The master of the priests then demonstrates how this secondary incident, too, is related to the destruction of the Old Law: "Ce est droiz, fait li prestres; par la Viez Loi qui fu abatue furent tuit cil qui enz demorerent sogiét, et seront a toz jorz mes."⁶³ The black and white armour symbolizes the anomaly of a servant of the Old Law living on in the time of the New, but it is not mentioned in the exegesis, where meaning is derived simply from the knight's place and situation.

External symbolism is by no means incompatible with the basic principles of concordia litterae. Like the knights in two-colour armour the Knight Coward displays his role visually, riding back to front on

his horse, with his habergeon around his neck, until he encounters Gawain who persuades him to set himself straight and turns him into the Knight Hardy. The exegesis does not depend on the symbolism, however, but on the structural parallel between Christ and Perceval: "La loi estoit bestornee devant le crucefiement Nostre Saignor, et tantost comme il fu crucefiez si fu remi[s]e a droit."⁶⁴ Only the turning around of the knight on his horse is given meaning, because that alone belongs with the parallelism between the work of Christ and the work of Perceval, between the setting right of two things gone awry at times of transition from one age to the next. The remainder of what is seen--in the knight's appearance and in his behaviour--is ignored.

The preeminence of structural principles over both symbol and fact is further illustrated in the significance attributed to Meliot of Logres as a child:

Je me merveil, fet Monsaignor Gavains, molt durement
d'un enfant qui chevauchoit un lion en un hermitage,
et n'osoit nus aprochier le lion se li enfes non; et
n'avoit pas plus de set anz, et li lions estoit molt
cruex. Li enfes avoit esté fiuz a la dame qui por
moi fu ocise. Molt avez dit grant bien, dist li
mestres prestres, qui le m'avez amenteli. Le enfes
senefie li Sauveres du monde qui nasqui en la Viez
Loi, et fu circoncis et s'umilia vers tot le monde
et le pople qui dedenz ert, et bestes et oisiaus,
que nus ne porroit gouverner ne jostisier se sa vertu
non.⁶⁵

A double parallel is thus established here, of Meliot with the Saviour and of the lion with the world that is saved and conquered. Both elements depend entirely on the structure of history, unsupported by empirical data: Meliot is still a youth, and his subsequent exploits on behalf of God and his New Law are as much a mystery at this point as is the Good Knight. In the absence of a Joachimite structure this single symbolic detail could mean virtually anything.

Not all Gawain's adventures are explained by reference to the Saviour. The King who boiled his son's body and parcelled it out among his followers is presented more as a faithful disciple:

Sire, fait li provoires, il avoit ja son cuer aporté
au Sauveor, si vout tel sacrefice fere de son sanc et
de sa char a Nostre Saignor, et por ce en fist il
mengier a toz çaus de sa terre, et vout que lor
pensee fust autretele comme la seue; et a si
desracinee sa terre de tote mauvese creance que
il n'en i a point demoré.⁶⁶

If put into strictly Joachimite terms, this exegesis probably belongs to the fourth mode, since it applies to the Father's age and to the Son's. The king is like God the Father in the first age, wishing to put in his people the mind that is in himself by sharing with them his own flesh and blood, and therefore sending his Son to die as a man and to give his flesh as food to his Father's subjects. He is also like a disciple in the age of the Son, however, wishing to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. By whatever mode it is interpreted, however, the incident has to derive its meaning from historical structure. The physical details--especially the boiling--make an analogy with the Mass improbable, and no other principle of exegesis could conceivably make of this apparently monstrous cannibalism a religious act.

Neither the organizational device of grouping explanatory material into exegetical discourses by hermits, nor the application of the principles of concordia litterae to the explanations is confined to this single encounter between Gawain and the priest at the Castle of Inquest. Perceval also approaches an exegete--in this case his own uncle, the Hermit King--to gain understanding of four incidents he has witnessed or been involved in.⁶⁷ He asks first about the little white

animal with the twelve hounds in her belly, which turn on her as soon as they are born and kill her, but are then unable to devour her flesh. A knight and a lady come, take the flesh, and place it with the dead beast's blood in two vessels of gold. The hermit offers a long and detailed exegesis:

Niés, fait li rois, je sai bien que Dex vos aime, quant iteus choses s'aperent a vos. La beste qui simple e debonaire estoit, en qui li .xii. chien glatisoient, senefie Nostre Seignor, e li .xii. chien les Juifs de la Viez Loi, que Dex cria e fist a sa samblance, e quant il les ot crîez il vout savoir combien il l'amoient. Il les mist .xl. ans es desers; onques drap ne lor porri, e il lor trametoit la manne des ciels. Il i estoient sanz mal e sanz anui, e avoient tant de joie com il voloient. Il tindrent .i. jor lor consile; e dist li maistre d'eaus que se Dex se corchoit, e il lor retolist cele magne, il n'aroient que mengier, e toz tans ne pooit ele mie durer. Il distrent qu'il en repondront .i. grant partie, e tantost com Dex iert corchiez a aus il le prendront [si q'il] vivront grant pieche. Il l'otriierent entr'aux. Dex, qui tot ot e voit e set, lor retraist la manne des ciels, e il vindrent as caves desoz terre, si quiderent trover ce qu'il i orent mis; mais ele fu muee par la volenté de Deu en laisardes e en culevres e en vermine. Quant il virent qu'il ont mesfait, si s'eparstrent par les estranges terres. Beau nies, li .xii. chien ce sont li Juifs que Dex a norriz, e qui nasquirent en la loi que il establi, ne onques ne le voudrent croire ne amer; ainz le crucefierent e depechierent son cors au plus vilainement qu'il porent. Li chevalier e la da[moisele] qui mistrent les pieces de la beste ou vaisel d'or senefie la deité dou Pere, qui ne vout sofrir que la char dou Fil fust amenuisie. Li chien que s'en fuïrent e devinrent sauvage quant il orent la beste depechie, ce sont li Juifs, qui sauvage sunt e ierent d'ore en avant.⁶⁸

The linkage here is a simple historical parallel, no different except in its prodigious length from the connection of Abraham with the priests of the Jews or of the Old Law with the wife of Marin the Jealous. It is remarkable, however, and especially characteristic of Joachimite principles, in its ability to generate meaning in both directions. Just as what happened to the Jews in ancient times imposes a meaning on the fate

of the dogs and their mother in a recent event, so their fate in turn imposes a meaning on the Jews of present and future: they are outcasts from society, like wild animals, and will remain such. In any system of meaning based on matter, form, allegory or any sort of symbolism, it would be ludicrous to speak in such terms. The hounds would be in some way a signifier and the Jewish people a thing signified, and only the latter could determine the meaning of the former. The hounds could express what the people are, but they could not make them be something or other. Ultimate control of meaning could rest only with the thing being represented, not with the means of representation.

In a Joachimite structure, however, the signifier can readily affect the fate of the thing signified, and that is what happens here. A pack of hounds can settle the future destiny of the Jewish people, because the generation of meaning is controlled not by either of the elements that are brought together within it, but by the structure that joins them. Once beasts are linked to people of the Old Law, and the suffering hound identified with Christ, the structure takes over and guarantees the meaning. Other, and fairly obvious, differences between a large nation of middle eastern people and a small litter of English dogs lose importance. The two elements need not be alike, so long as they are joined in parallel.

The second of the Hermit King's four explanations is less categorically Joachimite. Being an interpretation of a type of behaviour rather than of a person or thing, it fits less readily into Joachim's modes, and it would never suffice, standing alone, to prove that the epistemology of Perlesvaus is Joachimite, although there is nothing in it incompatible with Joachim's principles.⁶⁹

The third and fourth explanations are more typical, however, of both the overall pattern of eremitical exegesis in Perlesvaus and the Joachimite method. Perceval has fought the Knight of the Dragon, who was destroyed by the flames of fire issuing from his own shield, and wants to know what this adventure meant. The Hermit King relates it to the work of the devil:

Beaus niés, nus ne le pooit conquerre se bons
chevaliers non, e tot ausi com li deiable, qui
en l'escu estoit, ocist e art son seignor,
tormente li .i. des deables l'autre, e plus ne
vos puet faire de mal li Chevalier au Diable
que ardoir le cors dou fil vostre oncle qu'il
avoit mort, ainsi com j'oï conter. Il ot pooir
ou cors, mais l'ame n'ot de li garde, se Deu
plaist.⁷⁰

Once again meaning is generated in both directions, and the conduct of devils and knights alike is both understood and determined by the structural parallel connecting knight and devil.

In the fourth of his puzzling adventures Perceval has encountered the Turning Castle, with bears and lions chained by the gate with mechanical archers of copper shooting arrows. As soon as he approached it, the turning and shooting stopped abruptly. This, too, is linked by the exegete with the devil: ". . . plus n'avoit li diable par defors que cel chastel; c'estoit l'entree de sa forterece, ne jamais ceaus de la dedenz ne fusent converti se vos ne fusiez."⁷¹ Perceval alone could overcome the defences of this castle--and that with ridiculous ease--not because he could do anything that others--like Gawain and Lancelot, disqualified because of their wanton morals--could not do, but by absolute necessity. He is the promised Good Knight before whom this castle must give way because he is the one in this age before whom hell must yield. As with Christ in his age, so with Perceval in his:

there is no other who can perform his works: "Se cele gent fust demoree e i fust failli de vos, jamais ne furent destruit jusqu'en la fin dou siecle."⁷² This is among the briefest of examples of the application of concordia litterae, but in its orthodoxy it is perfect.

These numerous examples of formal exegesis by the technique of concordia litterae are very different in their details and are widely scattered through the text of Perlesvaus. They all share, however, in certain basic principles characteristic of Joachimite doctrine. The meaning of the incidents dealt with here emerges from the association of the unfamiliar with the familiar, but in a peculiar way. The familiar and the unfamiliar terms are themselves unusual, in that neither is a universal, a genus, a species, a nature, a quality, a category or anything else than a particular, individual entity. The manner in which the two terms are regularly associated is still more striking however, for they are only rarely and incidentally connected by any similarity in appearance, in functional, moral or symbolic value, or in nature (think of the hounds and the Jewish people). The relationship between each unfamiliar term and the familiar one that gives it meaning is a position on a time chart. Historical structure--and it alone--is the absolute determinant of the meaning of persons, things and events in Perlesvaus as it is in Joachim.

Historical structure alone cannot, of course, provide the subjective experience of knowledge or the fruits that derive from that experience. To be effective in the lives of those involved in them, historical parallels must be revealed, and it is the function of the exegetes in Perlesvaus to reveal them. Individual parallels, historical structure and its revelation are the three characteristically Joachimite

bases of meaning in Perlesvaus.

2. The Wider Application of Joachimite Theories of Meaning

In Joachim of Fiore's thought the principles of concordia litterae are not merely an exegetical method: they extend beyond exegesis to serve as the basis of meaning not only in the interpretation of the Bible but in Joachim's whole understanding of history. The same is true in Perlesvaus. Exegetes serve consistently to reveal the parallels between persons, things and adventures in the present age and their counterparts in the past, but such parallels are not revealed only by exegetes. The principle of relation by contiguity was seen in Chapter I to be an important element in the progressive concentration of all forms of warfare on the essential struggle of good and evil forces. The role of this principle in Perlesvaus is broader, however, and includes the realm of meaning and its apprehension. Many historical parallels of major significance are never mentioned by an exegete, but are revealed just as clearly by the direct linkage of individuals in various ways.

The disposal of the dead is unquestionably a very different form of activity from the interpretation of past adventures, but in Perlesvaus it also follows the principles of Joachimite theory. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this practice is the name that must be applied to it. The more usual "burial of the dead" has to be avoided as a misnomer because so few bodies are actually committed to the earth. Entombment above ground is probably the more common practice, but, more remarkably still, many bodies are not put away at all, but are left exposed in accessible places--often in chapels under the care of hermits--where they are carefully kept for the future. One particular coffin has

been awaiting Perceval since before his great grandfather was born, though his father can tell him nothing about it beyond what is written in the inscription it bears: "qant li mieldres chevaliers du monde vendra ci, li sarqueuz overra, e verra on ce qu'il a dedenz."⁷³ Cahus in his dream also comes upon a body waiting: he discovers a chapel surrounded by a great cemetery full of coffins; within the chapel the body of a knight is lying covered with a rich cloth of silk, surrounded by four candles on golden candlesticks. Though no one else is to be found in the vicinity, the candles are burning, so the chapel is obviously regularly tended to.⁷⁴

Gawain also encounters specially arranged and carefully tended burial places: the chapel on four columns of marble, for example, between the forest and the castle of Camelot in Wales that belongs to the Widow Lady. It is not fenced off in any way, so Gawain can enjoy a clear view of the coffin within, which seems to be the only reason for the chapel's existence.⁷⁵

These bodies are being preserved until a specific moment and for a definite purpose, as Gawain learns when he is warned to stand back from a coffin he finds near the Grail castle itself: "Ne tornez pas au sarqueu, car vos n'estes pas li chevaliers par qui l'en savra qui dedenz gist."⁷⁶ The principle embodied in this warning applies to all the preserved bodies: their identity will be revealed when they are brought into contact with the appropriate individual--in this case with the Good Knight.

Perceval encounters a more famous body in comparable circumstances when he comes upon Arthur's dead son Lohot.⁷⁷ The body is

reverently kept covered under a rich pall, and is watched and prayed over by a hermit. This is definitely a practice distinct from the general Christian concern to preserve the body intact in expectation of the resurrection of the dead: there is no interest, for example, in maintaining the corpse's integrity, as the hermit himself reports: "La damoisele me mena au sarqueu ou li filz le roi estoit couchiez. Ele m'en demanda le chief par guerredon, et je li otroiai molt volentiers."⁷⁸ The head, sealed in a richly jewelled coffer, then becomes the subject of an identification ritual like that promised for the preserved bodies. The young woman brings the coffer to Arthur's court and explains that only when the killer himself touches the coffer will it open to reveal, by an inscription concealed inside, the identity of the severed head and the circumstances of the death. Kay falls into his usual habit of boastfulness and wants to make the coffer open, little suspecting until the very last minute that he may face condemnation for a crime rather than acclaim for a feat of prowess. The coffer opens, however, at his touch, the head is revealed as Lohot's, and Kay stands convicted as his murderer.⁷⁹

This incident obviously belongs in part to a tradition concerning Kay's treacherous character. Moreover, even to the extent that it is an identification episode it is not Joachimite in detail: the passage of time involved is minimal and is not an essential element in the motif. In underlying spirit and in basic structure it is like Joachim's epistemology, however. The head is preserved and carried about in anticipation of a revelation of meaning--more than simple identification--that will occur when preserved object and appropriate individual are brought into contiguity. This whole concept of relationship by

contiguity--so characteristic of the ritual in Perlesvaus and of Joachim's particularistic epistemology--shares the Joachimite view of human experience on a far deeper level than that of incident, motif and conscious imitation, of which there can be no question in an incident so wholly contained within a single historical period.

Such episodes are a useful reminder of the level at which Perlesvaus and Joachim meet, and a safeguard against the drawing of unwarranted conclusions from other incidents in which even superficially the revelation of the meaning of the dead follows Joachimite methods and modes. Such an episode is Perceval's return to the coffin at his mother's castle, which he saw first in his boyhood.⁸⁰ Now he is the Good Knight, the individual who alone can open the coffin and reveal the identity of the occupant. Why he alone can perform this feat is made clear when the coffin opens:

[La Veve Dame] fet prendre a .i. chapelain une[s] letres seelees d'or qui estoient el sarqueu. Il les esgarde et lit. Après dit que ces letres temoignent que cil qui el sarqueu gist fu uns de cels qui Nostre Seignor eda a desclofichier de la croiz. Il regarderent el sarqueu delez lui et trouverent les tenailles toutes teintes de sanc, de quoi li clou furent osté.⁸¹

This man is intimately linked to Christ, and to Christ at the climax of his labours on behalf of the New Law, and so he has a unique, and in typically Joachimite fashion, reciprocal relationship with the Good Knight who will labour in his age as Christ did in his. By contiguity--literally by touch of body to body and body to coffin--meaning is revealed. The body in the coffin knows Perceval by touch because it has known Christ by touch, just as Perceval, being Christ by virtue of his place in the structure of history, knows the body. Each can thus, without any empirical, factual knowledge, reveal the identity and the

ultimate meaning of the other.

Many other corpses are carefully preserved and watched over until the arrival of some pre-destined individual. These include the bodies of Perceval's father and eleven uncles, kept beside twelve altars in twelve chapels surrounding a graveyard, with each chapel tended and supervised by a hermit.⁸² No miraculous sign reveals the identity of either Perceval or his ancestors--he and the hermits exchange information conventionally--but the pattern of waiting and watching over the privileged individual is maintained, and the recognition scene is its climax.

Even in the final stages of Perlesvaus, when the various wars and struggles cease, and Perceval enters a semi-religious life with his mother and sister in his own holy castle, though the confusion of the transition period is subsiding and the peace and calm of the new age are becoming almost tangible, watching and waiting with the dead remain as solemn and important a task as ever.

La Veve Dame i ot fet apporter le cors qui gisoit o sarqueu devant le chastel de Kamaalot, en riche chapele que ele i ot estoree. Sa suer aporta le drap que ele prist en la Gaste Chapele, si le presenta la o li Graauz estoit. Perlesvaus fist porter le sarqueu de l'autre chevalier, qui estoit a l'entree de son chastel, dedenz la chapele autressi, e metre delez le sarqueu son oncle, ne onques mes ne le pot nus remuer.⁸³

It is a major preoccupation in the life of Perceval, his family and the hermits they gather around them, to keep these bodies close at hand, to show them reverence, and to watch over them.

The treatment accorded all these various sets of bodies is comparable to that of the individual who took the Lord down from the cross, and through whom Perceval is linked to Christ, and the purpose for that

treatment is equally the same in the many examples of this motif of preserving and watching over the dead. They are being kept, with care and often solemnity, so that they can connect the various parts of a grid, of a structure that imposes meaning on the individuals that it joins together. Not only can they be identified because they have been preserved, but they have been preserved expressly so that they can be identified, and so that they in turn, through the links they create, can also confer identity and meaning even as they receive it.

The juxtaposition of parallel individuals is not the whole of the Joachimite system of knowledge and meaning: the structure established by concordia litterae is built around parallels between specific moments in history. So, too, in Perlesvaus: there is another dimension to the incidents in which coffins await the arrival of a particular individual, or heads sealed in precious metal are transported about until they reach the knight pre-destined to liberate them and consign them to their appropriate destiny. That dimension is time: not only can the dead be identified, or their death avenged, or expectations met only by a specific individual with a special link to the dead person or to the events of the death, but in many cases these things can be done only at a certain time, which is also predetermined. First the promised knight must come, or first he must conquer the Grail Castle, for example.

Examples of such necessary sequences of events are not rare. One of the Damsels of the Cart is constrained in this way: ". . . si ne [le] tenez pas a vilenie se ge ne descent, car ge ne puis descendre la o il et chevalier, ne ne doi, devant ce que li Graaus soit conquis."⁸⁴ So too are objects, including Joseph's shield:

Sire, li escuz que ceste damoisele porte fu Joseph
 le buen soudoier qui Dieu descendi de la croiz, si
 vos en faz present, ainsi com ge vos diré: qe vos
 garderex l'escu avec un chevalier qi porec vendra,
 e le feroiz pendre a cele colonbe enmi cele sale,
 e li garderez; car nus no porroit oster se cil non,
 ne pendre a son col.⁸⁵

The appointed time and the predetermined individual are intimately connected in this instance--it must be the Good Knight and he must come to Arthur's castle--as they are elsewhere. The contents of the coffin lying in the Widow Lady's chapel can thus be identified only when the Good Knight comes and only by that Good Knight as a privileged individual.⁸⁶ Just as the emphasis is sometimes predominantly on the person, however, at other times it is placed on the time. The Damsel of the Cart who wears her arm in a sling has done so since she touched the Grail while serving Perceval, and she will not take it out until she has again had the opportunity to touch the Grail.⁸⁷ Lancelot is even more severely bound by such a constraint of time: ". . . je ne puis demorer en un chastel que une nuit devant que j'aie esté la ou je doi aler. . . . au Chastel des Armes."⁸⁸

In each of these cases things have to be done in a definite order: the sequence of history and its structure, are important, just as they are in Joachim. In some instances, however, the parallel to Joachimism is particularly noteworthy. Take, for example, the Black Hermit and the prisoners he holds in his castle:

Sire, cist damages n'iert restorez, ne amendez cist
 otrages, ne cil malfeteur de la dedenz plessié, ne
 cil geté de la prison que la dedenz crient e pleurent,
 devant ce que li Buens Chevaliers vendra que vos
 oïstes ore regreter.⁸⁹

Why cannot the outrage committed by carrying off the sealed heads not be set right, and why can the prisoners in the castle not be freed until

the Good Knight comes? This, after all, is not a crisis immediately concerned with the Grail question, which clearly would make it his affair. It seems perfectly reasonable to hold, in fact, that the obligation he is under to appear in the character of the Good Knight before this difficulty can be cleared up pertains rather to Christ than to him immediately. Before the outrage committed by the devil could be set right, Christ had to come. Before the souls imprisoned in hell through original sin could be freed, Christ had to come. The correction of this latter-day outrage and the liberation of these new captives must proceed in parallel sequence in order that Perceval may signify Christ and his deliverance of the Black Hermit's castle signify the harrowing of hell. Once again the determinant historical structure is at work, not merely to connect individuals, but also to order events.

What is blatantly obvious in this one incident is present more subtly in the others. The predicament of the Damsel who cannot dismount from the cart, and the broader phenomenon of the fate of the sealed heads, to which it is connected, are consequences of sin in the latter age and so they must continue until the event occurs that signifies the loosing of the bonds of sin. Sequence and structure are crucial, as they are for Joseph's shield. Through Joseph it is linked to Christ and to Christ's saving action, and so it must await both the Good Knight and the new saving act.

As in Joachim, time is not conceived primarily as a linear sequence or as a relationship between sequences. It is a structure, a grid, a system of linkages, and it generates and reveals meaning with equal ease and effectiveness in both directions. Present realities--be they persons, things or events--acquire meaning when their antecedents

in the previous age are discovered, and they will have further meaning added to them if they can survive, in some way or other, until their appropriate successor is joined to them at the right moment in the future age.

That is why it is so important to preserve the dead, and to maintain their unique identity. They must be kept in a known place, watched over by persons who remember who they are and who, or what, they are waiting for, because they have a future destiny quite separate from the immortality of the soul or the general resurrection, a destiny reserved for them individually. This will be the great advantage to the Haughty Maiden of Branch IV in her plan to murder Gawain, Lancelot and Perceval by an ingenious device a little like a guillotine and to have their bodies preserved in three coffins richly adorned, beside which she will eventually lie in a fourth. She speaks of her love for them, and of a desire to enjoy them, in death if not in life, but the ultimate destiny she seeks is their companionship in death:

Ainsi, fet ele leur trencheré ge les chiés qant il
cuideront aorer les reliques qui sont otre les trois
pertuis. Après feré penre les cors e metre en cez
trois sarqueuz e molt richement ennorer e ensevelir.
Qar ge ne puis avoir joie d'eus a leur vie, si en
avré joie a la mort; e qant ma fins iert venue que
Dex le voldra, si me fere metre o cart sarqueu, e
avré la conpeignie des trois buens chevaliers.⁹⁰

The companionship of the three knights will do the Maiden no good as they all lie dead side by side, nor would it matter in the general resurrection, when all would rise together, and the fates of individuals would be determined on moral grounds. In a Joachimite new age, however, these famous and distinguished champions of the New Law will draw to themselves others like them, and she, through them, will share in the new

significance attached to them then. She will enjoy a fate analogous to that of the soldier who took Jesus down from the cross, and whose mortal remains were destined to come into contact with the new Good Knight.

There is, of course, a darker side to such a doctrine of future hope, and not only for this particular Haughty Maiden, whose plans are frustrated. Like almost everything in the apocalyptic world, the fate of the dead is essentially material: it depends on what becomes of their corpses. If these are refused burial, or thrown into common graves, or mutilated or actually destroyed, they have no future destiny. This gives to the living enormous power, for good or for ill, over the dead. It is by no means fortuitous that when Arthur slays the Black Knight, he leaves his body lying on the bare ground in the meadow in which he falls, making no effort to protect it from the beasts or to mark its identity in any way.⁹¹ The text does no more at this point than to state the bald fact that Arthur "le let enmi la lande, e se trest vers l'oissue," and leaves his motivation unarticulated. In a later incident, however, Marin the Jealous is expressly determined that his wife's body will not be buried, and he reacts violently when another knight attempts to bury it, as the knight reports:

Sire, ge voloie enterrer la dame que vos portastes en
la chapele, e Marins i vint, si me corut sus e me navra
ainsi com vos veez; e ge avoie ja la fosse fete a m'espee
por le cors enterrer qant il le me retoli e abandona as
bestes sauvages.⁹²

Where Arthur's treatment of the Black Knight might have been motivated by mere indifference, Marin's behaviour is very deliberate. It is one more example of his fundamental cowardice, of course: fearing to stand up to Gawain, he has already turned on his wife and murdered her, and now continues to vent upon her corpse the rage that he does not dare

to turn on a brave and powerful knight. This cowardice, however, finds an outlet only because the preservation of the body is so important to the individual's future destiny, making the corpse available as an alternative victim when the living knight is too frightening an opponent.

The same motif recurs in the duel between Perceval and the Knight of the Dragon. The Damsel of the Golden Circlet has borne about the body of Perceval's cousin, seeking a knight to avenge him. Having found the appropriate avenger in Perceval she lays down the body on the very plot of land on which he was killed. When thwarted in his attack on the living Perceval, the Knight of the Dragon turns on the dead cousin: "Li chevaliers s'en aïre molt, et passe outre et vient a la litiere dou chevalier mort, et torne son escu cele part et le chief del dragon. Il broïst et arst tot en poudre le cors del chevalier."⁹³ His declaration to Perceval as he incinerates the body leaves no doubt as to his motivation: "De cestui . . . enterrer estes vos quites."⁹⁴

Obstructing the Christian burial of the dead is more than an occasional phenomenon inspired by jealousy, rage or cowardice. In the course of Arthur's pilgrimage following the taking of Castle Mortal and the revelation of Kay's crime, the question of proper burial under the supervision of hermits becomes an important motif in the larger apocalyptic struggle of good and evil forces.⁹⁵ The attempt to bury or to prevent burial becomes a significant element in that struggle.

In Branch IX Arthur, Gawain and Lancelot come upon the former Damsel of the Castle of Beards, poor and in rags and tatters, living in a dilapidated house in a dark and lonely forest, charged with a mission that is a bizarre parody of the ministry of the hermits who watch over the bodies of the dead: ". . . il me convenoit porter dedenz cele

chambre toz les chevaliers c'on ocioit dedenz cele forest e en cest manoir, si les me covenoit gaitier, par costume tote sole sanz compaignie; e cil chevalier que j'ai porté ore a tant je'll dedenz la forest que les bestes ont mengié la moitié dou [cors]."⁹⁶ The full horror of the charnel house she presides over is barely hinted at, however, in her reference to bodies eaten away by beasts. The first impression the knights received was far more shocking:

. . . [li vaslet] lor dist que il avoit trové la plus desloial chambre dou mont, car il i avoit sentu que de testes que de piés d'ommes morz plus de .ii. c! Il s'assiét toz esfreez, e pres va qu'il ne se pasme. Lanceloz entra en la chambre por savoir se il dist verité. Il senti les hommes qui laienz estoient mort, si les portasta de cief a autre, e senti que il en i avoit .i. grant tax. Il revint sooir au fou tot riant.⁹⁷

This parody of burial, in which bodies are reduced to dismembered limbs and piled in a single great heap, denies all possibility of preservation of individual identity, and thereby becomes a very important part of the reign of evil. The dead are under the power of the evil forces, and are their victims, as much as the living. The triumph of goodness then involves not only the deliverance of the Damsel from her imposed duty and the conquest of the evil spirits who are her masters, but also the liberation of the dead from anonymity, a task appropriately performed by hermits:

Si com il issirent dou rechet, il encontrerent .iii. hermites, qui lor distrent qu'il aloient por les cors qui estoient en cel manoir, si les enterreroient en .i. chapele qui est pres d'iluec; car tel chevalier i avoient ge'll par qui la hantine des mauvais genz demorerait, e n'avroient mais pooir de mal faire; ainz metroient laiens .i. proudom hermite, qui edefieroit le liu en saintée e por Deu servir. Li rois en fu mout liez, e lor dist qu'il feroient mout grant bien⁹⁸

Denying to the dead their right to wait for the future revelation

and enhancement of their meaning is in this case a heinous crime perpetrated against the just. Elsewhere, however, it appears as a righteous punishment, still based on the same principles of historical structure and of individual destiny fulfilled in a privileged individual at a pre-determined time. A good example of such punishment is the fate of Aristor's head in Branch XI. That Aristor deserves retribution is not in question;⁹⁹ he is on several counts an obvious candidate for death, and Perceval does, in fact, behead him.¹⁰⁰ His punishment does not stop with death, however. His individual identity is preserved only long enough for Perceval to take the severed head to Dandrane, to prove to her that her unwanted suitor is dead.¹⁰¹ Immediately thereupon he is definitively consigned to oblivion, as Dandrane casts his head into the river,¹⁰² to be lost as his body was lost, lying in the field where Perceval struck him down.¹⁰³

On a larger scale the non-believing knights at the Mad Castle are similarly consigned to oblivion.¹⁰⁴ When the approach of Perceval, protagonist par excellence of the New Law, has made them fall in a homicidal rage upon one another, their punishment is only begun. Even before turning to the other non-believers, Perceval completes his vengeance on the three corpses: "Perlesvaus fait porter les cors fors de la sale as vallez qui laiencz estoient. Quant il les ot fait giter en une eue corant, apres les ocist toz" ¹⁰⁵

The consignment of the dead to oblivion, to loss of all recognisable form, is also characteristic of the most overtly apocalyptic incidents in the whole of Perlesvaus. The Black Hermit is thrown into the stinking pit, just as the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone in the Book of Revelation.¹⁰⁶ Another, equally gruesome pit

opens in the middle of the hall where Perceval is dining at the Castle of the Four Horns and a pitiful moaning moves the diners to tears.¹⁰⁷ The Serpents' Ditch receives the knight who would have thrown an innocent lady into it.¹⁰⁸ In all these cases consignment to the pit threatens disappearance, immersion in some sort of foul muck, darkness, remoteness from the dwelling places of men, everything most opposed to the picture of Christian burial, comprising entombment in a known place, illumination with the light at least of candles if not of miraculous flame, the companionship of hermits devoted to caring for the dead and to preserving their memory, and recurring visitations by other knights in future ages.

What becomes of the dead has an unmistakably apocalyptic, and specifically Joachimite meaning. If the dead are preserved, it is because their future destiny is recognised as dependent on some particular contact that will give new meaning to their existence. If they are destroyed, or sent off into oblivion, it is in a conscious effort to deny them precisely that sort of future fulfillment through the establishment of contact. What happens, or doesn't happen, in the next age is a more significant part of the fate of the dead than anything that might or might not happen in another world--which the author is generally silent about--and the destiny of their bodies is more important than the fate of their souls--which is not often discussed either.

In those instances where historical parallels between individuals are revealed by direct association rather than by exegesis after the fact, the necessary linkage may be effected by the actual persons involved or by their mortal remains, as in the examples cited above, but it may also be brought about through the intermediary of some

linking object. The great significance attached to relics in Perlesvaus is bound up with the concept of meaning based on historical structure and with the need to wait until the appropriate moment when parallels can be revealed: where individuals cannot wait, objects may wait in their stead, and where the waiting person cannot find the fulfillment of his destiny and the revelation of his fuller meaning through the person who discovers him, some thing may provide it for him. At both ends of the connection linking objects help to span the gap of time when the people concerned, or their mortal remains, cannot do so.

In some instances these objects are part of a ritual and play the characteristic role of ritual discussed in Chapter I,¹⁰⁹ but the range of linking objects employed extends far beyond those used in ritual, and their function is not confined to the drawing together of diverse individuals into a common struggle. It has as much to do with knowledge and meaning as it has with power and strength to fight.

Not surprisingly some of the most important linking objects are also among the principal items employed in ritual, beginning with the Grail itself. However vague the nature and origins of this cup may be elsewhere, the Grail in Perlesvaus is a holy relic of the Lord and of his passion and death, as is made abundantly clear by the vision that accompanies its first appearance to Gawain:

Et li senble qu'il voie trois angres la ou il n'en
avoit devant vell que .ii., et li senble q'il voit
enmi le Graal la forme d'un enfant. . . . et li
senble que li Graax soit tot en l'air. Et voit,
ce li est avis, par deseure un home cloufichié
en une croiz, et li estoit le glaive fichié eu
costé. Missire Gavains le voit, si en a grant
pitié. . . . 110

It is equally a link between ages and events, however, as is underscored

when it later appears as a chalice and becomes the model for chalices to be used throughout Britain.¹¹¹ It may have a nourishing role, as in other Grail romances, but here the provision of special food unquestionably takes second place to the prime function of linkage. The nourishing motif is actually missing completely from the appearance to Gawain, and moreover is developed quite apart from the Grail in the separate incident at the magic fountain.¹¹²

That linkage is the Grail's function is further confirmed after it has begun to reappear, when the Grail, the Lance and John the Baptist's Sword become a fixed trio of relics honoured together in the same chapel.¹¹³ Only one of the three objects has even a claim to a nourishing role, but all three are connected intimately with the life and the age of the Saviour.

Other links along Joachimite lines are established through linking objects quite independently of either Grail ritual or ecclesiastical liturgy. Two different winding sheets are used in separate healing miracles--of Meliot of Logres and Perceval--and each depends for its efficacy on a link to an appropriate individual. Meliot is healed by the winding sheet of Anurez the Bastard, whom he killed and by whom he was wounded, all in the same battle.¹¹⁴ This miracle has overtones of a magic motif--the touch of the one who wounded heals--and no great span of time is bridged, but the fundamental spirit of concordia litterae still prevails. The shroud does not heal by its nature, nor does Anurez by his character or by any property inherent in him. The shroud re-creates the link that existed in the earlier incident, when Meliot and Anurez fought, and once the link is reestablished, healing follows; the baneful effects of that incident are undone.

A more orthodox example of concordia in its details--because it clearly spans the gap between parallel periods in distinct ages--is furnished by the healing of Perceval with the Lord's own burial shroud, which Dandrane fetches from the Graveyard Perilous.¹¹⁵ As Jesus was wrapped in his burial shroud for the time that he lay in the tomb, before bursting forth to rise from the dead, conquering sin and death, so Perceval lies powerless to avenge the Widow Lady and to conquer her enemies until that very same burial shroud has touched his eyes, linking him to Christ:

Beaus frere, vez ci le saintisme drap que j'aporté
de la chapele del Aitre Perilleux. Besiez le, et
touchiez a vostre viaire; car un sainz ermites me
dist que nostre terre ne seroit ja recosse dusc'a
cele ore que nos en avrions.¹¹⁶

The linkage once established, the parallel result is produced almost instantly: "Perlesvaus le bese, puis la toche a ses elz et a sun viaire. Après se vet armer, et li .iiii. chevalier ave[c] lui. Puis ist hors de la port[e] comme lions deschaienez."¹¹⁷ Between the Lord in the tomb before his triumph over death and Perceval's confinement before his victory over his family's enemies there is an obvious parallel in Joachim's sense. The moment and the individual are the same within their respective ages, and their function and role are the same. For the parallel to become real and effective it is necessary only that a material link be established between the Lord and Perceval, and once again that link is forged by an object that has touched the first at the pertinent time, that bears his identity, and that can be brought to the second.

Virtually equivalent to the burial cloths are the shields that are likewise preserved as relics and are used to link their former

owners to their counterparts in the new age. The Damsels of the Cart deposit at Arthur's court the shield of Joseph, the Good Soldier who took Jesus down from the cross. The shield is to wait there until the Good Knight claims it:

. . . e le feroiz pendre a cele colonbe enmi cele
sale, e li garderez; car nus no porroit oster se
cil non, ne pendre a son col. E de cest escu
conqerra il le Graal.¹¹⁸

Links are forged again between Jesus and the Good Knight, and between the decisive, redemptive moments in the life of each. The meaning of the Lord's passion is extended in the labours of Perceval, and the meaning of the Good Knight's mission to come is revealed, by the vicarious meeting of Good Knight and Good Soldier through the intermediary of the shield.

The same shield, once in Perceval's possession, serves once more, and more conspicuously, as a revealer of identity and meaning, when Perceval encounters two unusual and clearly otherworldly men at the Castle of the Four Horns:

Il l'enclinent e aorent son escu que il portoit a
son col, e besent la croiz e puis la bocle la ou
les reliques estoient. "Sire, font il, ne vos en
merveilliez de ce que nos fesom, quar nos connelmes
bien le chevalier qui l'escu porta ançois de vous.
Nous le veïsmes maintes foiz ançois que Diex fust
crucefiez." . . . il n'avoit point de croiz en
l'escu devant la mort Jhesu Crist, mes il li fist
mettre après le crucefiement por l'amor del Sauveor,
que il ama molt.¹¹⁹

The painting of a cross on the shield and the witness of the otherworldly visitors add nothing to the role of the shield, but they reinforce its power to reveal the meaning of Perceval's life and work by associating them with the life and work of the Saviour.

Linking objects need not necessarily be associated with the acts of salvation. The second shield that serves a linking function appears in very different circumstances, but still plays its role according to the principles of concordia. This is the shield of Judas Maccabeus, who is presented here, not as a great general or religious hero, but as a bird-trainer of dubious honesty, "cil qui afeta un oisel a prendre l'autre,"¹²⁰ and whose shield becomes the means by which his questionable talents are revived by a scoundrel who acquires knights' shields by trickery. A damsel explains the scheme to Gawain, when he seems likely to be victimized:

Avoi! Messire Gavains, que volez vos fere? S'il enporte vostre escu la dedenz, tuit cil du chastel vos tendront por conquis, e vendront ça fors por vos, e vos en menront o chastel par force, o vos serez getez en la doleureuse prison; car on ne porte leenz escuz se de chevaliers conquis non.¹²¹

This incident, in which the timely advice given him saves Gawain from consenting to the proposed trade of shields, is at best a sidelight to the main concerns of Perlesvaus, and is even mildly humorous, but it still obeys the principles of concordia litterae, and perhaps because it is less than wholly serious or edifying, the working of those principles is brought into starker relief. There is no similarity between this dishonest knight and the Judas Maccabeus known to the Old Testament or even to the author of Perlesvaus, who calls him by the same title of "Good Knight" regularly ascribed to Perceval himself.¹²² The similarity lies in the purely material, external order: as Judas Maccabeus uses one bird to capture another, the knight uses one shield to win a second, and with it the knight who bears it. Judas Maccabeus lives late in the first age, and the deceitful knight late in the

second. In similarity of function and of historical moment the meaning of the knight's behaviour is imposed by the Joachimite structure. Interestingly, he even testifies to the element of compulsion in his own experience. He has found his constantly repeated scheme a burden, and is glad to be relieved of it:

Ci devant cest chastel avoit trespas de chevaliers
 maintes foiz, e de hardiz e de coarz, si me covenoit
 a toz joster e rendre mellee; e leur fesoie present de
 l'escu conquerre altressi com ge fis vos. Je trovoie
 les pluseurs hardiz e deffensables, qi me navroient en
 pluseurs leus, mes onques mes chevaliers ne m'abati, ne
 ne donna si grant cop com vos feïstes. E puis que vos
 enportez l'escu e ge sui conquis, jamés chevaliers qui
 past devant cest chastel n'avra garde de moi . . . 123

Much as he wanted to change his ways before, he couldn't. Now that the shield is gone, there is no question but that he must. The shield, in other words, binds him to Judas Maccabeus, and absolutely obliges him to behave in parallel fashion. In another world he could have thrown the shield away long ago, or put it to other use if he wanted, or, on the other hand, if he had wished to pursue his dishonest scheme after his defeat, he could have found another shield and told the same story about it. In the Joachimite world of concordia litterae and the epistemology underlying it, however, such options do not exist. The object creates the linkage, the linkage in turn determines the course of the individuals' lives, and this rather frivolous little story exemplifies the process as clearly as any of the more prominent and significant elements of the plot.

Somewhat more complex and involved is the story of the Golden Circlet, which is also a linking object. Its basic connection with past events of sálvation history is not in question: this is the crown of thorns which the Saviour of the world wore on his head. Nor is

there any doubt about its preservation in the present age precisely as a link to the past: it has become a relic, set in gold and precious stones by the Queen who has custody of it, and made an object of worship by pilgrims come to her castle specially to see it.¹²⁴

The role of the Golden Circlet is somewhat complicated by the number of hands through which it passes. The second terminus of the linking process ought to be Perceval, and it should be associated somehow with his definitive conquest of the powers of evil in his own day: the Saviour wore it in his moment of triumph; the Good Knight should wear it in his. Instead, however, it is apparently destined to pass into the hands of the knight who first visited the Grail, who is Gawain.¹²⁵ He does in fact acquire it, but only at the end of a complex adventure. In obedience to a promise made long before, he is embroiled in a confusing exchange of disguises with Arthur as they participate together in a three-day tournament.¹²⁶ He must fight bravely in one guise on the first day, dishonourably in his own arms on the second, and bravely in yet another guise on the third, causing the judges some difficulty in awarding the prize.¹²⁷

The introduction of the ritual of tournament competition, of Gawain's relationships with women, and of the force of his earlier promise of blind obedience obscures the underlying link of the Promised Saviour and the Promised Knight through the intermediary of the crown of thorns. That link exists, however. In the interval between its introduction as a relic and its conferral as a tournament trophy, the crown becomes closely associated with Perceval and his struggle against some of the major personifications of the forces of evil. The lady who has custody of the Circlet is in need of a champion to

battle the Knight of the Dragon.¹²⁸ Perceval becomes the champion, but not merely to conclude a family feud¹²⁹ or to champion a good cause. He is also defending the interests of King Arthur:

. . . se vos ociez le chevalier, vos avroiz garantie
la terre le roi Artu, que il meance a essillier, et
totes les autres terres qui marchissent a la seue,
car il ne het tant nul roi com il fet lui, . . .¹³⁰

Perceval is engaging himself in an even wider struggle than that moreover. The Knight of the Dragon is one of the major demon figures in whom the powers of evil live, and the conversions from Old Law to New that accompany the arrival of Perceval at the Turning Castle put the whole incident firmly within the context of the apocalyptic struggle.¹³¹ As Perceval is approaching this castle, he and his companions are given a warning which makes explicit the connection between the Golden Circlet, the Grail, and the broader cause of the New Law--"Il n'i doit passer se cil non qui le chevalier doit conquerre et le Cercle d'Or et le Graal et la fause loi du chastel"¹³²--and the point is well taken. The Golden Circlet is at the centre of a complex of objects and circumstances that highlight the ultimate significance of Perceval's fight with the Knight of the Dragon and unite it to the struggle and triumph of Christ. Perceval wins the Circlet as Christ receives the crown of thorns. Perceval's shield contains relics of the cross by which Christ won his victory. Perceval, like Christ, is wounded on the right side of his body. The dragon is destroyed in a clap of thunder and lightning évocative of the natural phenomena accompanying the moment of Christ's death. Alein of Escavalon is avenged on the very spot on which the Knight of the Dragon killed him, suggesting the tradition that Christ was crucified on the spot where Adam was buried.¹³³ The Golden Circlet is thus a

linking object in orthodox Joachimite fashion, joining the appropriate individuals at the right moments in history. That Perceval decides not to take it with him--for the excellent reason that he is not sure where he is going next--and that it thus remains available as a tournament trophy, does not fundamentally alter its basic role.¹³⁴

Several other objects in Perlesvaus also play similar linking roles, though they are less prominent or significant in themselves. One of these minor items is the pair of pliers with which the nails were removed from the Lord's body. They are merely an accessory to the body of the man who helped remove the body.¹³⁵ The connection of the Good Knight to the Saviour is adequately established already through the body, but the object provides a further link fully consistent with the same principles.

The sword with which John the Baptist was beheaded also belongs in the category of secondary linking objects, not because it is a minor motif in itself, but because it belongs within an incident of the second rank, involving Gawain rather than the Good Knight himself. It would be audacious to associate Gawain presenting the only son of King Gurgaran to be eaten by the king's subjects with John the Baptist presenting Jesus, who is to be eaten sacramentally by Christians,¹³⁶ but the link with John the Baptist is real nonetheless. Gawain is the secondary figure who shares in the work of the Good Knight in his own preliminary way, slaying the giant who is a minor representative of the powers of evil that Perceval will confront in graver forms, and inspiring King Gurgaran to convert to the New Law and to force his subjects to choose between conversion and death, just as Perceval will do in other circumstances later. Gawain is definitely Perceval's John

the Baptist, and he is linked to John the Baptist by the appropriate object presented to him at a suitable moment.¹³⁷

Finally, the white mule that Perceval rides at the conquest of Castle Mortal is also a linking object. It formerly belonged to Joseph of Arimathea when he was a soldier under Pilate, then came into the possession of the Hermit King. The mule's history, the cross on its forehead and its presence at both the crucifixion and the reconquest of the Grail mark it as a standard linking object. It can be relegated to the second rank only with some qualification, since it is unquestionably one of Perceval's important sources of strength in the final assault on Castle Mortal: "La vertu de Nostre Seignor e la bonté de la mule e la sainteé des bons hermites plaisa si la force des chevaliers qu'il n'orent pooir de aus meismes. . . ." ¹³⁸ Here and elsewhere, however, it is only one of several sources of power. There is another animal that is equally "de par Dieu", namely the white lion--which is not a Joachimite link--there is a banner which also bears God's power within it, as Perceval's uncle tells him: "e si prenez le fanon, si perdront vostre anemi auques de lor force; car nule chose ne confont si tost anemi com fait la vertu de Deu," ¹³⁹ and there are the monks, mentioned in the same breath as the goodness of the mule, whose prayers are a very important weapon against the defenders of the castle and its bridges. In this climactic battle all the possible sources of divine power are invoked and play their part. Linkage is only part of the total picture, and the mule is far from being the central and dominating motif.

Not all objects in Perlesvaus are links to the past, therefore, just as not all corpses are waiting to share their meaning with someone

yet to come. There is, however, a definite and widespread tendency to use material objects in this way. The implements of ritual and objects of devotion, holy relics and weapons can all be found standing in the place of individuals and incidents associated with them in the past, and imparting the meaning of those individuals and incidents to new persons in a new age.

To have meaning, whether in Joachim or in Perlesvaus, is largely a matter of finding a counterpart, virtually a twin, and in the fundamentally material world in which both live that means establishing physical contact, directly if possible, through a linking object if necessary. Such objects are thus a significant element in the epistemology characteristic of Perlesvaus. They are part of the larger phenomenon of the generation of meaning out of extension through time and linkage of individuals, that is to say of the concept of knowledge and meaning that lies at the core of the basic way of thinking about life that finds expression in Perlesvaus.

* * * * *

Conclusion

Perlesvaus is not a planned and deliberate exposition of the principles of concordia litterae or of Joachimite doctrine in general. It is a loosely connected narrative of Arthurian adventures. Yet it is a narrative created by an author with certain orientation of mind and with definite preoccupations, which exert a strong influence on his writing, and which are closely akin to Joachimite concordia. The Joachimite categories of being are not the external and the internal,

the particular and the universal, the material and the spiritual, thing and word, being and becoming, or language and its transformations. They are rather "then", "now", and "someday", and knowledge consists in the correct organization of "then", "now" and "someday" into a coherent structure and the accurate placement of persons, things and events in their appropriate place within that structure. Joachim's mind is oriented strongly toward such historical structures, he is preoccupied with chronology, and, on both counts, the author of Perlesvaus resembles him.¹⁴⁰

In at least two different senses the categories "then", "now" and "someday" express the recurring preoccupation that gives thematic unity to Perlesvaus. Superficially, what was then is no longer now: Arthur's kingdom has fallen into decline; its life, its values, its purpose have all faded away, and it is not yet clear what will someday take their place. Indeed, the principal heroes of Perlesvaus devote much of their time and effort, in pilgrimage, moral repentance and fighting to overcoming the enemies that have destroyed their old way of life and to creating a newer, better and holier order to take its place. Transition from one age to another--portrayed in terms derived as much from Joachimite doctrine as from Arthurian tradition--is a consistent, major theme in Perlesvaus, and is one source of its unity, coherence and meaning.

On a more profound level too, however, Perlesvaus is a story of "then", "now" and "someday". The decline of the old order is characterized by ignorance and confusion, and the creation of the new order requires revelation: the identification of enemies, the identification of allies, the discovery of personal identities and roles. This process,

too, as we attempted to demonstrate by numerous examples of formal exegesis and of the subtler influence of concordia litterae, is organized around the categories "then", "now" and "someday". When an individual is located in time and space--when he is fixed in position on a time scale--then his identity, his relation to God and God's enemies, his role and his future destiny stand revealed. He then can--and indeed must--take his place in the struggle to bring about the new age. What once was reveals the meaning of what is, and what is and was determines the meaning of what will be.

Perlesvaus is thus an apocalyptic romance, in which knightly heroes and chivalrous adventures are all subsumed in the greater struggle of God's friends to achieve collective salvation in the face of the hostility of God's enemies, but it is also a special kind of apocalyptic romance, in which historical structure and the divisions of time have a unique importance in both the waging of the struggle and the discovery of its meaning.

Notes to Chapter II

¹This survey of Christian apocalyptic is based on Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1970), pp. 29-34.

²"The Symbolism of the Perlesvaus," PMLA 61 (1946), pp. 42-83.

³The final defeat of the King of Castle Mortal is presented as a symbolic crucifixion, the nine bridges as stations on the Way of the Cross, Meliot de Logres represents Christ as a child, Perceval's comings and goings on his ship represent the public ministry of Jesus, Gawain for a time represents John the Baptist then becomes Peter, Kay is Judas, Arthur's pilgrimage to Saint Augustine's chapel represents Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, and so on.

⁴Cohn's work is primarily devoted to cataloguing the recurring outbreaks of apocalyptic fervour that were a regular feature of life in Northern Europe in the Middle Ages, and is a convenient source of information on them.

⁵A brief resume of Joachim's life and thought is appended to this study; the principal details of his apocalyptic doctrine are included there along with references to the works in which they are expounded. Such references are consequently omitted for the most part from the body of the text, and the reader is invited to consult the appendix for any necessary clarification of Joachim's teaching.

⁶As suggested above, p. 61.

⁷William A. Nitze, et. al., Le Haut Livre du Graal Perlesvaus (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1937), II, 10-11. The manuscripts from the north are: the Brussels Manuscript, likely Walloon, the Paris Manuscript, also Walloon, the Chantilly Manuscript from Artois, and the Bern Manuscript, from Picardy.

⁸The Relationship of the Perlesvaus and the Queste del Saint Graal, Dissertation, Chicago, 1934, reprinted in the Bulletin of University of Kansas, Humanistic Studies V, no. 4, July 1936. William Nitze, q.v. directed the thesis.

⁹Perl., ll. 7569-7602. This reference is less useful only because, while mentioning Avalon and describing what is clearly Glastonbury Tor, it does not speak of the eleventh-century tombs and religious establishment there: this is, after all, a part of the story, not a colophon.

¹⁰Nitze, op. cit., pp. 45-61. Other descriptions of the reinterment are listed on p. 62.

¹¹Kelly, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

¹²The Relationship of the Perlesvaus and the Queste del Saint Graal, ch. 1.

¹³In "The Symbolism of the Perlesvaus," PMLA 61, 1946, pp. 42ff., and elsewhere, where he interprets Perlesvaus as a symbolical New Testament. Cf. above p. 60.

¹⁴Information on the spread of Joachimism is derived from M. Bloomfield and M. Reeves, "The Penetration of Joachimism into Northern Europe" in Delno C. West, ed., Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought (New York: Burt Franklin, 1975).

¹⁵Unlike the Tractatus Robert's work is published, in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum tomus XXVI (Hanover, 1882, reprinted 1965). Joachim is mentioned on pp. 248-49.

¹⁶On Joachim's reputation after the Lateran Council see M. Gibbs and J. Lang, Bishops and Reform 1215-1272 with Special Reference to the Lateran Council of 1215 (London, 1934), p. 105. On Adam Marsh see Bloomfield and Reeves, op. cit., p. 120. On Roger Bacon, mentioned in passing by Bloomfield and Reeves, see details in the New Catholic Encyclopedia XII, 552.

¹⁷Ralph of Coggeshall, Chronicon Anglicanum, ed. by J. Stevenson, Rolls Series LXVI, pp. 67-70.

¹⁸Stevenson's source is an autograph.

¹⁹Chronicon Anglicanum, p. 36.

²⁰Nitze, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

²¹B. McGinn, "The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reaction to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore," in West, op. cit., pp. 453-71.

²²Bloomfield and Reeves, op. cit., p. 117.

²³Perl., ll. 15-17.

²⁴Ibid., ll. 3940-44.

²⁵Ibid., ll. 6046-48. It was already prophesied earlier that the inhabitants of the Turning Castle would be converted by a perfect knight who would be a virgin, l. 5792.

²⁶Ibid., ll. 1812ff.

²⁷Ibid., ll. 6990-92.

²⁸Ibid., ll. 6995-96.

²⁹Ibid., ll. 2782-87.

³⁰To cite only one sequence of events in which hermit informants prove their worth: Gawain first learns from one hermit about the Knight of the Sea and the Knight of the Land, then finds out from another that Perceval is appearing in disguise (ll. 4184ff.); Lancelot learns of Perceval's latest appearances and finds out about his change of shield through a visit to the hermitage of Joseus (ll. 4495ff.), who also prepares him for an encounter with the kinsmen of four robber knights that he formerly hanged for their crimes; Joseus then provides similar information about Perceval to Gawain, then add, for him as for Lancelot, a report of personal interest, about Meliot of Logres and his quarrel with Nabigan of the Rock (ll. 4687ff.).

³¹Perl., ll. 2153ff.

³²Ibid., ll. 5975ff.

³³Ibid., ll. 3647ff.

³⁴Ibid., ll. 4909ff.

³⁵Ibid., ll. 7591ff.

³⁶Ibid., ll. 8776ff.

³⁷Ibid., ll. 9818ff.

³⁸Ibid., ll. 10135-37.

³⁹This is true of the master of the priests who explains so many things to Gawain at the Castle of Inquest (ll. 2140ff.). Neither he

nor his companions are said to be hermits, but he is attached to the castle which stands at the entrance to the Fisher King's lands, which are so remote as to be undiscoverable by most men. These priests are servants of the Grail, as is the priest mentioned in l. 941, who is not expressly called a hermit either.

⁴⁰Perl., l. 941.

⁴¹Ibid., ll. 1634-48.

⁴²Ibid., ll. 1697ff.

⁴³Ibid., ll. 5967-73.

⁴⁴Ibid., ll. 4188ff. Gawain finds out that the mysterious knight is Perceval only at l. 4356.

⁴⁵Ibid., ll. 6067-69.

⁴⁶Two groups within ten lines: 9818 and 9828.

⁴⁷Perl., ll. 10062-64.

⁴⁸Ibid., ll. 10119-21.

⁴⁹Ibid., ll. 10177-81.

⁵⁰Ibid., ll. 4082-129. Perceval is fast asleep, somewhat like the sleepers of apocalyptic legend.

⁵¹Anyone familiar with the traditional carol "King Jesus hath a Garden" will recognize this as the sort of meaning attached to the various flowers: the lily white is purity, the gentle, fragrant violet humility, the lovely damask rose patience, the rich and fruitful marigold obedience and so forth. Those acquainted with psychoanalysis may also find this sort of outer-inner linkage familiar, though they would have experienced it in very different form.

⁵²By the same epistemology with a different doctrinal basis, the European revolutions of 1848 derive meaning from their place in the long drawn-out overthrow of the merchant class by workers, and of the Capitalist system by the Communist.

⁵³The terms are Joachim's. See the Psalterion 264, 4.

⁵⁴ These modes and types are also alleged to be related to the different persons of the Trinity: the first three respectively to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the fourth to Father and Son, the fifth to Father and Holy Ghost, the sixth to Son and Holy Ghost, the seventh to the Trinity as a whole. Joachim associates each of the three ages in his theory of history with a person of the Trinity, and in practice his association of the first type with the Father and so on really means that it is connected with the age of the Father, and likewise for each of the other modes. The fundamental category is once again time.

⁵⁵ Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'écriture (Paris, Montaigne, 1959), t. III, p. 442. Cf. Psalterium decem chordarum 264, 5.

⁵⁶ "Concordia non secundum totum exigenda est, sed secundum quod clarius et evidentius est; non secundum cursum historiae sed secundum quid." Concordia l. 4, c.I.

⁵⁷ The Platonist can do the same with Arthur: having made the connection Arthur-King, he can make meaningful statements about Arthur and have the same feeling of mental mastery over him.

⁵⁸ The artificiality that the average modern reader senses in Joachim's division of time might be expressed by the analogy of a grid placed over a map. The neat pattern of squares superimposed on the mountain ranges of British Columbia is not a real representation of the province. The mountains and rivers, valleys and canyons, and all the other confused details of the landscape are the reality. The squares are an admittedly contrived pattern put in place to make the reality easier to talk about. The opposite, however, is true from Joachim's point of view. For him the structure is the reality. In the example of the map the landscape would not determine what appeared in any given square of the grid; the pattern of the grid would determine what could appear at a given point of the landscape. The North Thompson could flow into the Thompson at Kamloops only if the fixed pattern of the grid required it to do so.

⁵⁹ Perl., ll. 2160-252.

⁶⁰ There are other details involved, granted: the Black Hermit does resemble Lucifer. "Quod clarius et evidentius est" in this case is clearly a place within a determined course of events running parallel to another course of events in a different age.

⁶¹ Perl., ll. 2200-203.

⁶² Ibid., ll. 2207-211.

⁶³ Ibid., ll. 2222-24.

⁶⁴Ibid., ll. 2217-18.

⁶⁵Ibid., ll. 2225-33.

⁶⁶Ibid., ll. 2246-50. It may be noted that, while proceeding according to the same principles, the exegeses become progressively less detailed. Two causes seem likely for this phenomenon. First, considerations of style militate against the multiplication of long and elaborate explanatory passages; and secondly, the reader's increasing familiarity with the pattern ought to make such repetition unnecessary.

⁶⁷The explanations are again grouped, Perl., ll. 5976-6054.

⁶⁸Ibid., ll. 5983-6006.

⁶⁹Ibid., ll. 6011-24. Perceval has seen two priests approach the cross near which the beast was killed. The one kisses and adores the cross, the other beats it with a stick. A parallel with the cross of Christ is involved, of course, but the explanation rests equally on the memories and emotions of the two men: the one thought of the redemption, and was moved to love, the other remembered the Lord's sufferings, and hated the cross on which he endured them. Furthermore, crosses naturally resemble one another, and this particular one could thus have triggered the appropriate emotional reactions without the symbolic scene enacted at its foot, and thus without any specific connection to the cross of Christ. On the whole, therefore, not strong evidence for the presence of Joachimite principles.

⁷⁰Ibid., ll. 6033-38.

⁷¹Ibid., ll. 6041-43.

⁷²Ibid., ll. 6051-52.

⁷³Ibid., ll. 474-75.

⁷⁴Ibid., ll. 130ff.

⁷⁵Ibid., ll. 1029-33.

⁷⁶Ibid., ll. 2286-87.

⁷⁷Ibid., ll. 4916ff.

⁷⁸Ibid., ll. 4942-44.

⁷⁹Ibid., ll. 6291-354.

⁸⁰The coffin is first encountered at ll. 469ff.

⁸¹Perl., ll. 5236-41.

⁸²Ibid., ll. 9827ff.

⁸³Ibid., ll. 10118-25.

⁸⁴Ibid., ll. 618-20.

⁸⁵Ibid., ll. 622-27.

⁸⁶Ibid., ll. 1056ff.

⁸⁷Ibid., ll. 1408ff.

⁸⁸Ibid., ll. 2785-86.

⁸⁹Ibid., ll. 770-73.

⁹⁰Ibid., ll. 1466-71.

⁹¹Ibid., l. 401.

⁹²Ibid., ll. 1422-25.

⁹³Ibid., ll. 5857-59.

⁹⁴Ibid., ll. 5857-60. Interestingly, the dead knight retains a special connection with the only two people who continue to know his identity, because they witnessed his body's destruction. At the suggestion of the damsel who is one of the witnesses, his ashes are used to heal the wounded shoulder of Perceval, the other. Ll. 5892-96.

⁹⁵Ibid., ll. 6394ff.

⁹⁶Ibid., ll. 6450-55.

⁹⁷Ibid., ll. 6416-22.

⁹⁸Ibid., ll. 6513-20.

⁹⁹Aristor is the murderer of a good hermit and the abductor of Perceval's own sister, whom he intends to marry by force (ll. 8723ff.). The apocalyptic doctrine of justice is eminently applicable to him: God will not bear with him any longer (ll. 8770ff.), and he is deemed to deserve death quite apart from his slaying of the Knight Hardy--which he did in fair fight.

¹⁰⁰Perl., ll. 8772-73.

¹⁰¹Ibid., ll. 8887-88.

¹⁰²Ibid., l. 8894.

¹⁰³This incident is a particularly effective illustration of the importance of burial or its denial, because it contains two other incidents framed within it that contrast strikingly with the fate of Aristor. The body of the Knight Hardy is entrusted to the same hermit who had absolved him and prepared him for death (ll. 8778-85), and the damsel who has so long borne about the knight's head now has it buried properly and arranges to have Mass sung regularly for his soul (ll. 8859-61). The appropriate reward or punishment is meted out to the mortal remains of each of the three men, not to their souls in heaven.

¹⁰⁴Perl., ll. 9101ff.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., ll. 9111-13. Most of the non-believers to whom Perceval then addresses himself are put to death, though the well-disposed Celestre is converted.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., ll. 9988ff.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., ll. 9600ff.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., ll. 8997-9032.

¹⁰⁹Cf. above, pp. 41ff.

¹¹⁰Perl., ll. 2438-50.

¹¹¹Ibid., ll. 7865ff.

¹¹²There Gawain encounters three damsels carrying respectively a golden vessel of bread, an ivory vessel of wine and a silver vessel of meat, as well as a young cleric who takes yet another vessel, with an unidentified substance, from a pillar near the fountain. This ritual is ordered to the nourishing and healing of hermits and of the knight who lies ailing at the home of his uncle the Hermit King, but it is not connected with the life of the Fisher King, and none of the vessels involved is called the--or a--Grail. Perl., 11.1949ff.

¹¹³Ibid., 11. 6254-56.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 11. 8300ff.

¹¹⁵This lengthy incident is described in detail, 11. 5052-172.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 11. 5347-49.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 11. 5349-51.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 11. 625-27.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 11. 9559-68. Perceval is amazed to learn that the visiting men, who appear quite young, knew Joseph of Arimathea, who lived so far in the past.

¹²⁰Ibid., 1. 791.

¹²¹Ibid., 11. 823-27.

¹²²Ibid., 1. 817.

¹²³Ibid., 11. 834-41.

¹²⁴Ibid., 11. 4524ff.

¹²⁵Ibid., 1. 4528.

¹²⁶Gawain's promise to do whatever was asked of him by the first maiden to make a request was made in order to obtain John the Baptist's death sword.

¹²⁷Perl., 11. 6796-956.

¹²⁸She bears a grudge against the Knight of the Dragon because he murdered Alein of Escavalon, whom she loved.

¹²⁹Perceval is a relative of the dead Alein of Escavalon.

¹³⁰Perl., ll. 5690-93.

¹³¹Perl., l. 5799. Cf., Kelly, A Structural Study, p. 105.

¹³²Perl., ll. 5732-34.

¹³³See Kelly, loc. cit.

¹³⁴Perl., ll. 5917-20. The parallel with Christ's triumph is emphasized by the way in which the Golden Circlet is given to Perceval, in what is unmistakably a coronation ceremony. The Queen places the circlet on Perceval's head, puts the sword into his hand, and tells him explicitly that with this sword he receives the power of life and death over her subjects. He may thus convert or destroy all who hold to the Old Law. He becomes ruler of a new kingdom in a new age, just as Christ did, and he is linked to Christ by the crown that they both receive when acclaimed as kings.

¹³⁵Cf. above, p. 111, and Perl., ll. 5326-41.

¹³⁶Though Gawain does present the son. Perl., l. 2057.

¹³⁷This is both the right moment for him, when the new age is dawning and when he has an opportunity to join in the Good Knight's struggle, and the right moment for the sword, at noon, when it bleeds daily in memory of the Baptist, beheaded at that hour. Perl., ll. 1980-2071.

¹³⁸Ibid., ll. 6195-97.

¹³⁹Ibid., ll. 6079-81.

¹⁴⁰These structural categories of time should not be confused with the factual question of what happened when. Particular moments in past and future are as important to the author of Perlesvaus as they are to Joachim, even though he may set out the order less systematically, but that concern for time structures does not go hand in hand with any commensurate skill, or for that matter interest, in the actual reckoning of chronology. When it comes to indicating who lived when and which event occurred before which other--and by how long--the author of Perlesvaus is as thoroughly lost as any other mediaeval writer. Unlike even the author of the Queste del Saint Graal he takes no pains

to indicate when his story is set. The atmosphere seems near contemporary, with its allusions to towns setting up communes, to tournaments, to the menace of the Saracens and their false law. Certainly, too, the entombed bodies and the preserved relics from the time of Christ seem old, old enough for people no longer to remember the man who proves to be Josephus. On the other hand, the introduction to Branch 1 reveals that Joseph of Arimathea was Perceval's great uncle, which would place the story well within New Testament times. On the other hand still, though, not only do the life and death of Christ appear as part of the distant past--not as events of the preceding thirty or forty years--but there is even a chapel of Saint Augustine awaiting Arthur's visit. A thirteenth-century man could probably not date Augustine and the coming of the faith to Britain with the precision expected in modern times, but even he would not have thought Augustine a contemporary of Jesus himself, and would have avoided this glaring anachronism if he had had the slightest interest in such matters at all.

CHAPTER III

APOCALYPTIC SPIRIT AND MYSTICAL DOCTRINE

THE QUESTE DEL SAINT GRAAL

The Queste del saint Graal differs from Perlesvaus in almost every conceivable respect,¹ including the degree of attention it has received from critics. It therefore need not, and may not, be approached in the same way as Perlesvaus. Much greater weight must be given to previous scholarship, and a fuller account of it must be given than was offered in the Introduction. It is the obvious starting point for all further speculation concerning the central and unifying theme of the Queste.

Essentially critical assessments of the Queste are reducible to one of four general positions, emphasizing respectively moral struggle, growth in and through grace, spiritual enlightenment and knighthood. To the extent that the author himself adopts a position regarding his own work--and he does, by means of hermit exegetes comparable to those of Perlesvaus--he inclines toward morality and grace far more than toward enlightenment or knighthood. Despite his privileged position, however, his view does not invalidate the conclusions of those who think differently. Whatever may have seemed most important to him, and to the critics who share his interpretation, it cannot be denied that the revelation of secrets plays a large role in the Queste, and that the principal characters are knights very much concerned with their knighthood.

No single existing explanation, therefore, accounts adequately for the validity of the others: and all are unquestionably valid. The unifying and integrating theme that gives sense and coherence to the whole work must consequently lie elsewhere. As was true of Perlesvaus, so too in the Queste the particular nature and role of knowledge and meaning are most helpful in the discovery of a basic theme. Whereas in the former work, however, knowledge was of a highly unusual kind, in the latter it is utterly banal, and is, in fact, of little interest in itself. Notwithstanding the contrary opinion of one critic, the knowledge revealed to participants and to the reader in the course of the Queste is of secondary importance. What is of primary importance is its revelation: revelation does not really take place to disclose meaning; rather, meaning exists to be revealed.

The purpose of revelation is thus to be found, not in its contents, but in its recipient. Revelation occurs to single out certain predestined individuals, who are chosen both for a moral reason and for a moral purpose, that is to say because of the goodness that is in them and for the sake of the greater goodness that grace is to produce in them. The final product of this process, however, is not merely holiness, but holy knighthood. Certain pure and righteous individuals are chosen, and are then made holier still by grace, in order that they may live a meaningful life as knights in an age when the older values that formerly supported chivalry have no further power or validity.

That, in briefest resumé, is the thesis to be argued at greater length and in detail in the course of this chapter. The unifying, integrating theme of the Queste involves elements of moral struggle and growth, of revelation and enlightenment, and of knighthood, as critics,

including the author himself, have rightly pointed out. That theme is holy, or even sacramental, knighthood, a renewed knighthood in a new age, practised in many of the old ways, but with an entirely new spiritual basis, founded on the production of holiness through grace and moral struggle in certain predestined knights chosen by a process of revelation.

* * * * *

The Critics' Interpretations

The diversity of critical opinion of the meaning of the Queste del Saint Graal can be organized in four basic streams, of which three agree in emphasizing religion, two of which coincide further in concentrating on the moral side of religion. Schematically the four interpretative tendencies may be classified as follows:

1. The Queste is about the individual's moral struggle against evil, principally against lust.
2. It is about the working of grace within the individual, leading to sanctity.
3. It is about enlightenment through the infused knowledge of God.
4. The Queste is about knighthood.

The foremost champion of the first interpretation is Albert Pauphilet,² who sees the Queste as more a book of edification than a romance properly speaking. It is essentially spiritual, religious, even ecclesiastical. The traditional world of chivalry and of courtly love, with all the values that accompany it, has disappeared almost entirely. Love stories and relationships have no part in the plot, except as incidents out of the past to be recalled and repented of. Beautiful women

hardly appear except as sinners or penitents, or as temptresses who are as often as not incarnations of the devil himself.

Chivalry hardly survives any better than love. Gawain is the only knight to retain a classic knightly character and code of conduct, and he blunders constantly, sometimes comically, sometimes with tragic brutality. The real heroes, though knights, fight less than in any other romance, and kill one another more rarely still. Even the Grail itself is further spiritualized and becomes more of a liturgical vessel than elsewhere: it is found in places of worship, its approach is announced by clerics, it appears surrounded by heavenly beings, and it becomes progressively more closely associated with the chalice of the Mass.³

The spiritualizing of the Grail as object is matched by a similar transformation of the quest as event. The questing knights are not interested in becoming the Grail King.⁴ They do not even seek to liberate the Grail by conquest, as happens in Perlesvaus. They want to see the Grail more openly than they have heretofore. They want to know the truth of it. Their goal is to see and understand, not to triumph or to possess.⁵ Their story is also told in terms not only spiritual but ecclesiastical, in images and symbols derived ultimately from the Scriptures, but through the traditional interpretation of those Scriptures handed down by the Fathers of the Church.⁶ For the author of the Queste life is Christian life, and even Church life.

Life is also essentially moral, moreover. It is a struggle against evil. The concept of the Christian life presented in the Queste includes a few matters of doctrine and policy,⁷ but it attributes pride of place to the struggle within the individual between grace and temptation. The life of the first is summed up in the quality--more moral

than physical--of virginity. The second is essentially reducible to lust.⁸

Between this interpretation and the second--the Queste is about the working of grace within the individual, leading to sanctity--there are obvious points of contact, even in detail. Etienne Gilson, the typical exponent of this second view, would agree even on the paramount importance of lust and virginity,⁹ and on the practical course that the Queste proposes for the Christian to follow through life. Like Pauphilet, he sees the heart of Christian practice in the Queste as consisting in the performance of suitable and regular acts of devotion, especially the frequent confession of sins.¹⁰

In fundamental viewpoint, however, there is a real difference between these two interpretations: a difference between the negative and the positive, between remaining and becoming, between resistance and growth. It is probably best illustrated in the analysis of characterization. Both views locate the prime motivating force of behaviour in something other than the actual character or personality of individuals, but they disagree on what replaces it. For Pauphilet people are characterized by their degree of attachment to or detachment from the world of the material and the fleshly, which is ultimately the world of lust and of the tempter. This principle is illustrated in the contrasting careers of Gawain and Lancelot. Gawain retains the courage, generosity and knightly prowess traditionally associated with his name, but this has little effect on the course of his life. He blunders repeatedly from crime to crime because he remains attached to the things of the world and the flesh, and cannot make a good confession. Lancelot, on the other hand, declines in prowess as the plot unfolds, yet the course

of his life is not determined by this external development, but--as with Gawain--by the results of his struggle to overcome temptation and to escape attachment to the flesh. He repents of his liaison with Guenevere, makes his confession, does penance, and despite some lingering imperfections that prevent him from seeing the Grail as openly as Perceval and Galahad, he is granted a far more intimate vision than Gawain.

Pauphilet's principle of attachment/detachment is also seen at work in other characters. Bohort does long and laborious penance for his sin, and thus attains a certain level of sanctity proportionate to the sins and the repentance, not to his personal character or talents. Perceval also remains as he is pictured traditionally--impetuous, imprudent and rather incompetent--but is led by his very naivety to put no store in whatever talents he may have, but to place absolute trust in God and to remain almost wholly oblivious of the world around him. He thus stands far higher on the scale of resistance and detachment than on any scale of personality traits, and his reward is commensurate: he outranks all but Galahad himself.¹¹

In Gilson's view, however, the major characters are seen in relation not to a world conceived as a locus of evil and a source of temptation, but to grace. They are distinguished from one another, and their fate is determined, by their varying responses to the movements of grace. Although there is much in the plot that might be seen as a struggle, the questing knights are actually being drawn toward the domain of purity by God's grace rather than by their own exertions. They may combat evil adversaries in tournament or battle, and they may do penance and make satisfaction for sin, but they do not thereby attain a particular moral state any more than they conquer the Grail.

They are drawn to a transforming vision, to the unveiling of the secrets of God, and they perceive that vision and are affected by it with varying intensity and in different modes according to the effect that God's grace has been able to have on them. Their adventures are adventures of grace, and the outcome of each is determined by and representative of some response to grace: it is neglected, lost or regained; it is preserved and grows; it leaves the hero in a new position somewhere between the two poles of purity and lust, between the ecstatic vision and the clutches of the tempter. That position is attained by the attraction of grace, however, more than by resistance to temptation, and that position fixes the spiritual worth of the individual.

Gilson's analysis of the Queste is thus a particular type of moral interpretation: the work describes the workings of grace and the path to sanctity. It may often seem to be about the acquisition of knowledge, and the questers may profess a desire to see the Grail more openly, but all the talk of knowledge is really about the affective side of life, and in seeking to see and to know, the knights are actually attempting to love and be transformed by grace.¹² The adventures are moral, therefore, though they belong to a morality of growth and transformation, not to one of resistance and detachment.

Gilson is joined in championing this second interpretation by H. J. B. Gray, who perceives parallels between the Queste and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's doctrine of grace, in the light of which he examines the question of Lancelot's conversion.¹³

Lancelot is initially moved to repentance by a voice that tells him he is unworthy to enter the place where the Grail is. His tears, curses and lamentations place him in the requisite preliminary condition

for receiving grace. This is the initial consent of the will to the first movements of grace, leading to repentance.¹⁴ Lancelot then makes his confession, in conformity with Bernard's doctrine that holds out hope to those inclined to weakness of the flesh provided that they confess their sins.¹⁵ Grace continues to work, and Lancelot to cooperate with it according to Saint Bernard's principles.

Bernard maintains further¹⁶ that one who has made his confession and received the consequent grace needs a period of humiliation to purify him. This is exactly what happens to Lancelot, who is upbraided for his past sins by a mere youth, and accepts the reproaches with humility. At the same time the first perceptible fruits of the working of grace begin to appear: Lancelot confesses that he finds his new life happier than his old: he is delivered from unhappiness as well as from sin. The climax of Lancelot's conversion--the initial visions that he enjoys at this point, then the twenty-four days of ecstasy in the Grail chamber that mark the high-point of his deliverance from sin and misery--fits equally into Bernard's schema.¹⁷

The third line of interpretation of the Queste accepts the language of cognition in the romance at face value. The allusions to seeing, learning and knowing are not symbolic representations of fundamentally affective states, as Saint Bernard or the proponents of the second interpretation would have it. They really do refer to cognitive processes, and the Queste is essentially about enlightenment through the infused knowledge of God.

Myrrha Lot-Borodine is the leading exponent of this view.¹⁸ She is convinced that something more is being sought and something more happening in the quest than the simple movement of grace inspiring growth

through various affective states. The zeal with which the knights pursue their search for what appears to be knowledge is difficult to reconcile with the notion that their final goal is only a form of love. The object of their search is, after all, in no way hidden from them. They all know that it resides at Corbenic and appears there regularly. If they merely wish to gaze upon it and be dissolved in the divine essence under its influence or to have its power protect them from the tempter, they have only to go to Corbenic and stare at it. This, however, is not what they do at all. Rather, they wander apparently aimlessly for long periods of time from adventure to adventure, protesting all the while their desire to look, to contemplate, to see openly, and to know. They give every evidence of wanting to be enlightened, to learn something. Most of them, moreover, do acquire some knowledge of how to be better Christians.

To be sure, not all the learning involved is a straightforward didactic process.¹⁹ There is another and more important form of enlightenment--intuitive knowledge illuminated by divine wisdom--which is indeed very close to love. Yet even it is real knowledge; special charism though it may be, it is not just an affective state in cognitive guise. Galahad's progressive illumination in three stages--at Corbenic, on board the ship of Solomon, and in the celestial Jerusalem--is a good example of this latter process, and it involves actual learning at each stage. Galahad gains insight into specific mysteries, and he sees and understands more than he did before, albeit in a mystic sense different from ordinary book-learning.

Mme Lot-Borodine would associate the Queste more closely with William of Saint Thierry than with Bernard. For William charity is

created in the soul by the work of the Holy Spirit transforming the will, but also revealing the image of God implanted in us at our creation. The love that we then experience for God is an act of like recognizing like, and requires the revelation of knowledge. This revelation is what Mme Lot-Borodine sees taking place in the Queste allowing her to treat the enlightenment that occurs there, intimately bound up with love though it is, as nonetheless real learning.

The fourth line of interpretation of the Queste is the most independent: 'it is about knighthood. The foremost exponent of this viewpoint, Jean Frappier,²⁰ acknowledges that the Grail romances are all religious in the broad sense of the term--they all preach Christian faith and morality to some degree--and that the Queste is more religious than most: it could pass in parts for a treatise on the devout life. Nevertheless, it is more than coincidence that the questers in the Grail stories are all knights. The mixture of religion and chivalry is not unusual in mediaeval literature, but it is significant that even--and perhaps especially--in the most theologized of the romances religion is exalted in terms of chivalry and for the purpose of enhancing the status of the knightly class.

The meeting point of religion and chivalry and the common bond uniting all the various Grail quests is eucharistic communion and the eucharistic spirit. Seen from a religious point of view the questers are being drawn together into an ecstatic communion in and with God. Seen as knights they are above all companions, again in a sort of communion, standing each on an equal footing and excluding from their midst the members of all other classes of society. On the one hand there are no merchants, peasants or government officials on the quests;²¹ nor

are there any dukes, earls, barons or other peers of specific rank either.²² The questers are all knights and they are only knights. They form a brotherhood which stands parallel to and is interconnected with the eucharistic communion that the Grail experience establishes among them.

Frappier has a sociological explanation to offer in support of his theory. The Grail literature, he believes, became popular at a time of social crisis. A large portion of the nobility was losing its real military value, and hence much of its political power and influence. The feudal hierarchy was becoming more important in the real world, and authority was becoming concentrated in its upper echelons. The defence offered by the victims of this process was in large measure moral and symbolic: they wanted to create a myth for themselves, an idealized vision of a knighthood performing high and noble feats, a knighthood in which they would stand as brothers and equals in a way that they no longer could in real life. Such aspirations lead directly to a blending of chivalrous and religious motifs, since they treat knighthood as essentially a mystical ideal. Hence such notions as messianic chivalry, rooted in biblical times and providing access to the mysteries of the faith and the knowledge of God. Hence, too, characters--like Perceval's uncle, the holy hermit in Chretien de Troyes's Conte del Graal--who retire from knighthood into the eremitical life without really abandoning chivalry, passing from the active to the contemplative state, from the practical to the ideal, but remaining part of the communion or brotherhood for all that, and taking on the responsibility of passing on its principles and vision to a new generation. Instead of practising a craft they now contemplate and communicate a mystery; but the mystery is

chivalry, the same reality viewed under a different aspect. In this they are representative, for Frappier, of their whole class: in the heavenly knighthood of the Grail stories knighthood retains its inner characteristics after the death of its external form in the material world.

The orientation of mind characteristic of the Queste cannot be extracted directly from any of these lines of interpretation. Each leaves enough questions unanswered to preclude its being chosen as the definitive explanation of the guiding ideas underlying the romance. If, for example, the Queste is essentially a work of edification promoting Christian faith and morality, then why is so much assumed, and so little actually said about grace, free will, conversion and other basic Christian doctrines?²³ Surely such concepts ought to enjoy pride of place in a work of edification. Furthermore, whether the Queste is about resistance to evil or growth in grace, why is such prominence given to knights and their adventures? It may be true that almost nothing is retained of the chivalrous world that is not given a new and spiritual meaning, but a great deal is nonetheless retained. The adventure story, remythologized though it may be, still occupies a larger place in the work as a whole than does the remythologizing.²⁴ If the essential theme of the Queste is spiritual enlightenment, then the question of retaining so much knightly adventure becomes especially cogent: can all those battles with the tempter and his allies--which the characters in the text seem to take so seriously--really only be present to introduce virtual sermons?

The fourth school of interpretation can not be faulted for neglecting the significance of the action to concentrate exclusively

on the expository passages, but Frappier's views also invite questions. If the Grail romances are a reaction to the decline of ordinary knights relative to the higher feudal orders, and if they are written to exalt a knightly brotherhood of equals, then why are they generally--and the Queste more than most--so resolutely elitist? Though distinguishing titles of rank may be missing, and all may sit as equals at the Round Table, from the moment the knights rise to go questing a ruthless process of election and distinction begins. Hector and Galahad, for example, do not for one minute stand on the same footing. Frappier's theories are also open to question on extrinsic grounds: do the facts sustain his hypothesis of a real crisis in the social status of knights of lower rank? Granted that the trend in the evolution of feudal society was toward a concentration of power in the upper echelons, was this process marked enough or rapid enough in the early thirteenth century to constitute a crisis or to inspire a search for symbolic substitutes for political authority and economic influence?²⁵

Identifying the way of thinking about life that is characteristic of this romance cannot be an act of choice, therefore. The strengths and weaknesses of the various critical views of the work must be assessed and a synthesis formed. Before any such synthesis is attempted, however, one further critic not included in the schema of four basic approaches needs to be considered, namely the author of the Queste himself.

* * * * *

The Author's Interpretation

The Queste del Saint Graal is far more generously furnished with hermit exegetes even than Perlesvaus. They provide an authoritative interpretation of the more important adventures and of the meaning of life as perceived through them. They admonish and exhort individual knights. They preach short sermons. They provide background information. No one of these eremitical discourses is capable of expressing the author's understanding of what his romance means, but taken together they develop patterns of views and ideas from which a comprehensive interpretation can be extracted.

Among the patterns of thought to emerge, in the very broadest sense, is a tendency toward a moral understanding of the romance, in some sense, and away from notions of enlightenment. Insight into the mysteries of God's being is promised to the questing knights before they set out:

Quar ceste queste nest mie queste de terrienes choses
ains doit estre li ecerquemens] des grans secrez [&]
des priuautes nostre seignor que li haus maistres
moustrera apertement al boin eure cheualier quil a
esleu a estre son seriant entre les autres cheualiers
terriens a qui il moustrera les grans merueilles del
saint graal. & li fera veoir ce que cuer mortels ne
poroit penser . ne langue de hom terrien dire.²⁶

The promise of insight into private secrets and into matters beyond the power of man to think or speak is fulfilled in visions and mystical adventures in the course of the plot, but such revelations are rarely dwelt upon in the explanations offered by the hermits. Where incidents are interpreted as revelatory of God's affairs, the emphasis is more commonly laid upon his deeds and his ways than on the mysteries of his inner being. This is certainly the tendency in the explanation

offered Bohort of the vision of the pelican feeding its young:

. . . il oisiaus senefie nostre creator qui forma
lome a sa samblance. & quant il fu boutes fors de
paradis par son mesfait il vint en terre ou il
troua la mort. Car de vie ni auoit il point. . . .
Li pouc[h]in senefient luman lignage qui ert
[adont] si perdus quil aloient tuit en ynfer au[s]si
bien li boin comme li maluais Quant li fiex
dieu vit ce si monta en larbre . ce fu en la crois
& fu ferus del glaive desous la poitrine el coste
destre si que li sans en issi. Et del sanc receurent
vie li pouchin . [Ce sont li vrai crestijen] cil qui
ses oeures orent faites. Car il les osta dinfer ou
toute mors estoit & est encore sans point de vie.
Et sera tous iors tant comme diex durera.²⁷

Similar, too, is the explanation offered Galahad, Perceval and Bohort of their vision of the white stag transformed into a man and the four lions with him changed into the four living creatures:

Car en ce quil mua le chers en home celestiel [Il
nest mie hom carnel ne mortel] . vous moustra il la
veniance quil fist en la crois la ou il fu couers
de couerture terriene. Car il fu couers de char
mortel & venqui en morant la mort & ramena nostre
vie . Et bien doit estre senefijes par le cerf.
Car tot au[s]si comme li cers [quant il est uis]
se raioignist en laissant son cuir & son poil en
partie . tot au[s]si [se] reioignist nostre sires
& reuint de mort a vie quant il laissa le cuir
terrien. Ce fu la char mortel quil auoit prinse
el ventre de la beneoite virgene . Et por ce quen
la benoite virgene not onques point de pec[h]ie
terrien . si aparut il en guise de cerf blanc
sans tache.²⁸

There are suggestions in this explanation of doctrines concerning the relationship of the divine and the human nature in Christ and the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but they are more in the nature of textbook theology than of mystical insight, and they are in any case incidental to the primary emphasis on what God is doing in Christ: taking flesh and exacting his vengeance on sin and death.

Where the author chooses to highlight an aspect of God, then,

in the explanations offered by his hermit exegetes, the emphasis tends rather to be placed on doing rather than on being, and on the external and perceptible rather than on the inner and secret.²⁹ Frequently, moreover, there is a progressive development within the explanations themselves, moving from God's ways and actions to the ways and deeds of human beings. A movement of this sort is noticeable even in the exposition offered to Bohort after he has seen the pelican sacrifice itself for its young.

Both Bohort's vision and the hermit's explanation are more complex than the partial excerpt cited above. The vision also includes a scene in which Bohort fought on behalf of a lady against a rival, and another in which he saw a rotten tree trunk and two flowers, representing the spiritual meaning of the incident in which he chose to defend a maiden in distress instead of aiding Lionel. Both scenes are explained, and both explanations are resolutely moral: they are addressed to the value of human acts. In the first the virtue of loyalty to the Church is extolled:

Car par la dame entendons nos sainte eglise qui tient
sainte crestiente en boine foi & en droite creance
qui est le droit yretage de ihesu crist Par
lautre dame qui desiretee en estoit [& le guerroit]
entent on la vielle loy Quant la ione dame
vous ot contee sa raison de lautre dame qui la
guerroit . vous empreistes la bataille si comme
vos deustes. Car vous estes cheualiers ihesu crist
par qu[o]i vous estes a droit tenus de desfendre
sainte eglyse.³⁰

The second emphasizes rather the basic personal virtue of purity:

Le fust sans force & sans vertu senefie lyonel ton
frere qui na en soi nule vertu de nostre signor
qui en estant le tiegne. la poureture senefie la
grant plente des pechies qil a en soi amonchelees
de ior en ior Par les . ij . flors qui
estoient a destre dois tu entendre . ij . virges .

si en est li cheualiers que vos naurastes li vns
 & lautre la pucele que vous rescousistes
 Mais li preudons les departoit cest a dire que
 nostre sires ne voloit mie que lor biautes & lor
 blanchors fussent ensi perdue & il vous i amena
 si que vous les departistes & sauuastes lor
 blanchor Garde se tu vois teile auenture
 auenir que tu ne laisses mie les flors [perir]
 por le fust porri secorre.³¹

As interpreted by the author through his hermit exegete, therefore, these scenes progress from the work of Christ--in the action of the pelican--through the life of his Church--in the struggle between the two ladies--to the actions and responsibilities of the individual follower of Christ--in the vision of flowers and rotten trunk. The emphasis is placed on action throughout the explanations, and the thrust of the development from one element to the next leads to a climactic message of personal moral responsibility.

The same pattern of evolution is discernible in other explanations as well. Very early in the quest Melias comes to a fork in the road he is following, disregards a posted warning, and takes the left-hand path instead of the right. In the subsequent explanation it is made clear that he should have trusted the sign and taken the right-hand way, because it was the sign of the cross, pointing to the way of Jesus Christ, which is compassion.³² Divine compassion, the cross and the person of Jesus are all related intimately to the being and ways of God, but they are not the essence of the explanation: although they are present as objects of choice, the whole emphasis is placed not on them, but on the process of choosing, which is narrated in detail.

. . . quant tu veis le brief tu tesmerueillas que
 ce pooit estre . & maintenat te feri li anemis dun
 de ses dars & ses tu de coi . dun de ses dars dorguel.
 Car tu te pensas que tu en istroies par ta proece . &
 ensi fus tu decheus par entendement . Car li escriis

parloit de la cheualerie celestiene & tu entendis
 de la seculer. par coi tu entras en orguel . & por
 cestui orguel chais tu en pechie mortel . & quant tu
 fus partis de galaad li diables qui taüoit troue
 [foible] se mist en toi & li sambla que poi en auoit
 encore fait se il ne te faisoit encore chaoir en . j .
 autre pechie . si que de pec[h]ie a pechie te mist en
 enfer.³³

Whether trust in God or surrender to the devil is being described, the author's mouthpiece clearly understands the incident as a story about how a human being responds to the invitation of divine grace and to the temptations of the devil.

Even in scenes of an obviously supernatural character with a marked aura of mystery the hermits tend to draw the reader's attention toward the question of human behaviour. The Grail miracle that Lancelot witnesses in a dilapidated chapel is of this type: he sees a sick knight carried in on a litter and laid down, whereupon a silver candelabrum moves unsupported across the room, followed by the Holy Grail itself, in the form in which Lancelot saw it previously at Corbenic. He notes the arrival and departure of the mysterious objects, witnesses the healing of the sick knight through prayer and the Grail's touch, but cannot make any movement or response to the experience. In consequence his helmet, sword and shield are taken from him and given to the healed knight, who will make better use of them.³⁴

Within the incident itself Lancelot is passive and remains on the periphery, dismissed even by the healed knight as probably some unconfessed sinner, and not given another thought. In the explanation, however, he is the centre of attention, and his moral state is discussed at great length. The hermit explains the nature of Lancelot's sin, which is essentially a combination of disloyalty and ingratitude. God

has given him such great gifts, he must not misuse them: ". . . si ne serues mie del grant don quil vous a done son anemi ce est le diable. Car si diex vous a este plus larges que as autres & ore vous perdoit . moult vous en deuroit on blasmer."³⁵ Yet this is precisely what Lancelot has done: "Car si tost com il tot paie bien & richement tu le lai[s]sas pour [aler] servir celui qui tos iors lauoit guerroie . ce ne feist nus hom a mon essiant quil eust au[s]si bien paie comme il te paia."³⁶ The hermit therefore sets out for him what he must do to return to God's favour: he must cry out for mercy, which God will give, and he must change his life:

. . . se vous de cest large don quil vous a fait esties ses anemis . sacies quil vous tornera a noient en poi de tans se vous ne li criez merci en confession vraie & en repentance de cuer & en amendement de vie. Et ie vous di uraument se vous en tel maniere li criez merci il est tant [dous &] deboinaires & tant aime le relieuement del pecheor . si vous releuera plus fort & plus uiguerous³⁷

True confession of sin is most important, and the hermit encourages Lancelot to it: ". . . li preudons lamoneste toute[s] uoi[e]s de iehir son pec[h]ie & del lai[s]sier del tot . Car autrement est il honis sil nel fait. & li promet la vie pardurable por le iehir."³⁸ The power of confession and penance would be lost however without real amendment of life:

Au[s]si seroit perdue en vous la paine [del chastement que len i mettroit] se vous ne le receues de boin cuer & metes a oeure Dont vous requier ie fait li preudons que vous me creantes que iamaiz ne mesferes a vostre creator en faisant pechie mortel ne de la roine ne dautre dame [ne] de chose dont il se doie corecier³⁹

There is no question but that this explanation constitutes a developed doctrine of the nature of sin and of the process of repentance

and forgiveness. It has far less to do with the unique experience that Lancelot has had than with the ordinary experience common to all men and women. Lancelot's adventures figure in it, and so do his visions, and the two interpenetrate, but they are united to one another and ultimately find their significance in a third reality, which is the state of Lancelot's heart. Vision and adventure, inward reality and outward are given a common meaning which is moral, rooted in concepts of sin and righteousness, repentance and forgiveness.

This particular experience is primarily a vision, but even when the character of the incident is different, when, for instance, the knights are engaged in feats of prowess, the author applies the same principles of the interpretation of outer and inner realities and the discovery of meaning in moral responsibility and growth to his explanation. This is clearly illustrated in adventures befalling both Lancelot and Perceval.

Lancelot becomes involved in a tournament matching the white knights of Eliezer against the black knights of Argustes, taking the side of the blacks, who appear to deserve his support as being the underdogs.⁴⁰ Despite his greatest efforts he makes no progress, and is eventually overwhelmed by the irresistible white forces. His lengthy adventure is followed by a very brief dream, which already has a strongly moral character:

Quant il fu endormis si li fu maintenant auis que de
deuers le ciel venoit vns hons qui bien resambloit
preudom . & venoit [aussi comme courouchies] vers lui
si li dist . he hons de male foi & de poure creance
porcoi est ta volentes si legierement changie vers
ton anemi mortel . se tu ne ten gardes il te fera
chaio[i]r el parfont du fu denfer.⁴¹

The recluse who explains both adventure and dream draws them together to expound the moral significance of the whole quest of the Holy Grail.

Lancelot's enlistment among the black knights signified his departure on the quest in sin, his defeat and capture betokened his acknowledgment of his sinfulness, his treatment at the hands of his captors represented the contribution of the holy men to his incipient conversion.⁴² Once more--in this instance through a holy woman--the author makes clear that he sees the meaning of adventures, visions, and the quest as a whole in the pursuit--or quest--of holiness.

Perceval's adventure occurs during his sojourn on a rocky island in the sea.⁴³ He comes upon a serpent carrying off a lion cub, and chooses to fight on the cub's side, killing the serpent. In a subsequent vision⁴⁴ a young woman mounted on a lion warns him to be ready to fight the champion of the world, and an older woman on a serpent harangues him for killing the serpent that she claims to have been hers. The good man who interprets the scene demonstrates the interpenetration of external and internal reality, of the two women in the vision with his own adventures, with his inner spiritual history in relation to God and the devil, and with the history of Christ's church.⁴⁵

In salvation history both women have symbolic meanings: "Cele qui sor le lion estoit montee senefie la nouele loy cele dame si est fois & esperance & creance & baptesme . cele dame est la pierre dure & ferme sor coi ihesu crist [dist] quil fermeroit sainte eglise cele dame que tu veis en ton soigne chevauchier sor le serpent senefie la vielle loi."⁴⁶ They have also played a role in Perceval's adventures. He has, for instance, already killed two serpents belonging to the elder woman: "ele ne se plaint pas de cel serpent que tu ocheis [h]ier . ains dist de cel serpent que tu ocheis lequel tu vins chevauchant cestoit li anemis qui tenportoit vers liaue quant

tu feis le signe de la crois sor toi quant tu venis en ceste roche."⁴⁷

The principal interest of both women, however, is in his inner spiritual relationship to God. The elder woman once held his spiritual allegiance, subsequently lost it, and now seeks to regain it:

ele [te] dist que aucune fois lauoies tu este ains
que tu recheusse[s] lomage de ton seignor . a ceste
chose as tu hui [moult] pense & si le deus[ses] tu
bien sauoir . Car sans faille anchois que tu eusses
recheu baptesme ne creance estoies tu de la subiection
a lanemi.⁴⁸

Both Lancelot's experience and Perceval's involve the three elements of adventure, vision and exposition of meaning. In both cases the exposition does two things: it demonstrates the interpenetration of the external-material and the inner-spiritual elements, with clear priority given to the inner and spiritual, and it attributes to the entire experience a significance that is essentially moral--the internal reality consists in nearness to or remoteness from God; the external reality comprises either sinful or virtuous actions. Interpenetration of the external and internal worlds, the primacy of the inner life and its basically moral significance are three major elements in the author's own interpretation of the meaning of his romance.

A further related element emerges from the conclusion of the good man's explanation and from its sequel: the experiences of the knights have not only a moral significance, but a moral purpose as well. The point of all that the good man has to say to Perceval is not his enlightenment but his betterment: "Or tai deuise de lune dame & de lautre la senefiance si men vois car trop ai [aillours] a faire . Et tu remanras chi & si te souiegne de la bataille que tu as a faire . Car se

tu [i] es vencus tu a[u]ras ce quele tu promis."⁴⁹

The importance of this moral purpose is emphasized by the obviously conscious placement of the fulfillment--at least of one partial fulfillment--of the warning and prediction immediately afterward. A maiden, who is in fact the devil in disguise, appears to Perceval on his rocky island, presents herself as his only means of escape, entices him with the pleasures of food, drink and sex, and arouses his pity by her account of the mistreatment she has received at the hands of her master.⁵⁰ He very nearly falls into the temptations, but finally resists and triumphs through the sign of the cross. This encounter is then explained in its turn, and is thus framed by parallel explanations stressing the interpenetration of worlds and the primacy of moral meaning and purpose.⁵¹

The author of the Queste does not explain only the adventures that his heroes achieve and the visions they enjoy. He also expounds the meaning of adventures that are unsuccessful, and of visions that are not enjoyed or profited by. What happens to most of the other questers is quite different from the course followed by Lancelot, Galahad, Bohort and Perceval. They take wrong turns, unwittingly commit crimes, line up on the side of the evildoers in battle, but most of all simply fail to find adventures of any sort. They wander aimlessly for days and weeks, encountering no one except others of their own company searching as fruitlessly as they are. Their failures, however, different though they be in themselves from the fate of the four principal heroes, are explained according to the same basic principles.

Of the failed knights--the vast majority of those who first set off on the quest--Hector and Gawain are by far the most prominent,

although their experience is typical of that of their fellows. Gawain rides from Pentecost to Saint Mary Magdalene's day without accomplishing anything except wearing out ten horses. Hector, in the same period, encounters only twenty of his own companions, all with the same tale of no adventure that he has to tell. They join together, but without changing their fate, unless it be for the worse--they unwittingly kill Owein the Bastard, for example. Their systematic failure is explained in two visions--one appearing to each man--followed by explanation along familiar lines.

Gawain in his dream sees 150 bulls feeding at a hayrack. All but three of these are spotted; one is mostly white, the last two pure white. The last three are tied by the neck. All the bulls set off in search of richer pasture. Many perish in the search, and all return thin and weakened only to find no food and to be forced once again to leave the rack. Only one of the white bulls is among the returnees.⁵²

The interpretation offered by Nascien the hermit identifies the herd of bulls at the hayrack with the company of knights at the Round Table and their pursuit of richer pasture with the quest of the Grail. The quest in turn is presented as a spiritual adventure in which the inner state of soul of the participants is of paramount importance.⁵³ The vision is applied to the adventure that is the quest, the quest is linked to an inner morality of humility, patience and virginity, and the vision is applied directly to the inner life. There is again interpenetration of what is done and what is seen, of the outer world and the inner, with moral values as the stable element constant in both domains.

Hector's vision is even more directly moral. In it he and

Lancelot ride off in quest of something they know in advance they won't find. An old man drags Lancelot from his horse, strips him, re-dresses him in a fringed coat and mounts him on a donkey. He then rides on, comes to a fountain which vanishes when he tries to drink from it, and finally returns to his starting point. Hector rides on, is refused entry to a rich man's house because he is mounted, and then he too sadly returns home.⁵⁴ Nascien's explanation of this vision emphasizes first the inner moral life, focussing on Lancelot's fall away from his initial pride, his being stripped of his sins so that he recognizes his emptiness and longs to be filled with grace. The vision and its spiritual meaning are then linked secondarily to Lancelot's future experiences, which are contrasted with the prospects of the unrepentant Hector.⁵⁵

These and numerous other direct explanations of the meaning of adventures and visions follow a consistent pattern that reveals something of what the author of the Queste must have understood his own story to mean. If it were reduced to a single sentence analogous to the capsule summaries applied to other critical views of the work, it would not correspond exactly to any of them, moral, doctrinal or chivalrous, though it would clearly be closer to the moral interpretations than to the others. The fairest such capsule summary would probably be something like: the Queste is about the sacramental character of human life. The orthodox sacramental theology discussed in chapter two finds expression in the author's exposition of the meaning of the Queste. Sacraments are outward signs of inner, spiritual grace; they operate outwardly as sign and inwardly as grace to effect that aspect of salvation appropriate to the occasion and to

the needs of the recipient. So, too, outward adventures in the Queste signify inner, spiritual realities. The explanations attribute to visions the role of sacramental sign, uniting the external reality with the saving effect. And the ultimate effect is salvation, or some aspect of salvation. The external adventure, its internal analogue, and their joint moral significance correspond to the sacramental sign, the sign with its meaning, and the sacramental effect, or to sacramentum, res et sacramentum, and res tantum.

It is not necessary, or even wise, to assume that the meaning of the Queste is identical with the meaning that its author attributes to it. As an interpreter of his own creation he must take his place with other interpreters, who may well have seen things in his work that he was not conscious of when he wrote. His views must form a significant part of any attempt at assessment of judgments or harmonization of trends in interpretation, however.

* * * * *

The Nature of Explanation, Knowledge and Meaning in the Queste

A significant source of insight into the meaning of Perlesvaus was the investigation of precisely what was understood in the work by meaning. A similar inquiry into what passes for explanation and knowledge in the Queste is likely to prove equally illuminating. The content of the knowledge that the author conveys through his holy exegetes has been uncovered and set out systematically, but what of the nature of that knowledge? Just as the discovery that knowledge in Perlesvaus consists essentially in the linkage of particulars revealed the patterns of thought underlying and shaping it, so too consideration of what knowledge

is in the Queste should prove helpful in assessing and developing the varying views of its meaning.

As the customary scenario attendant upon virtually every explanation of meaning in the romance makes apparent, knowledge in the Queste is essentially revelation. That is to say that it is not discovery, or logical conclusion, or the data of experimentation. It is not to say, however, that it is necessarily mystical in character, that it lies in any way beyond the realm of ideas, propositions, opinions, facts and other categories that are the stock in trade of our ordinary mental functions. Revelation of the unknown need not necessarily be of the unknowable, and in the Queste it consistently is not.⁵⁶

Illustrations of the eminently knowable character of what is revealed in the Queste are abundant. Consider once again the explanations offered Perceval on his rocky island by the good man who arrives in the white ship.

La damoisele a qui tu as parle ce est li anemis li plus
(haut] maistres denfer cil qui a poeste sor tous les
autres quant ele se vit si abaissie del haut
siege & de la grant hautece ou ele soloit estre & ele
fu mis en pardurables tenebres ele se porpensa quele
guerroieroit celui qui la lauait mis de quanque ele
poroit mais ele ne veoit pas de coi. . . . cis anemis
qui che li ot conseillie ce fu li serpens que tu veis
a la uielle dame c[h]eualcier ce fu la damoisele qui
[h]ier te vint veoir il ne sera iamaiz eure
quele ne tente les cheualiers ihesu crist & les preudomes
& ceus en qui li sains esperis est herbergies. . . . li
pauillons qui iert roons a la maniere de la circonstance
del monde senefie tot apertement le monde quil ni sera
ia nus sans pec[h]ie Ele te pria que tu te
reposasses tant que la nu[i]s venist cest a dire tant
que la mors te sospregne qui vraiment est apelee nuis.⁵⁷

There is little in this explanation that could be reckoned unknowable by ordinary means. The revelations offered here are far more concerned with

overcoming simple ignorance, clearing up misunderstanding, and especially countering the work of the devil who has previously appeared in disguise and done his best to present a very misleading picture of Perceval's experiences and of his own role in them. The mode of presentation of knowledge here is revelation, but its nature is simply factual, and its purpose is essentially practical and moral: to thwart the deceptions of the devil.

The explanation of the pelican legend and of the white and black birds that is given to Bohort similarly follows upon an attempt at deception by the devil in disguise, who has given him a very different version of the meaning of the two birds and of the significance of his own behaviour than will eventually emerge from the holy exegete:

li [blans] oisel qui venoit a toi en guise de cisne
 senefie vne damoisele [biele & rice & de uailant
 gent] qui tamera par amors [& a ame longement] . &
 te [volra proier et te] venra prochainement proier
 que tu soies ses amis & ses acointes . Et ce que tu
 ne li voloies otroier senefie que tu li escondiras . &
 ele sen ira & moura de duel sil ne ten prent pit[i]es .
 Li noirs oisiex senefie ton grant pec[h]ie qui le te
 fera escondire . Car por crieme de dieu ne por bonte
 que tu aies ne lescondiras tu pas . ains le feras . ains
 le feras por ce que on te tiegne a caste por conquerre
 la loenge [& le uaine gloire] del monde . Si en venra
 si grans maus de ceste chastete que lancelet tes cousins
 en morra . Car li parent a la damoisele lochiront . &
 ele en mora de duel quele aura del escondit . Et por
 ce [te] pora len bien dire que tu es [h]omicides de
 lun & de lautre au[s]si comme tu as este de ton
 frere58

There are enough clues within this lying explanation itself to warn Bohort that he should not heed it, so that it is questionable whether the subsequent demystification is absolutely necessary in the fight against the devil. Structurally, however, the demystification fits into a pattern following the initial adventure of deceitful explanation,

temptation and resistance, true explanation, renewed adventure. However it is regarded, whether as a progressive linear development or as a balanced set of parallel elements, the emphasis is directed to moral purpose: in the renewed encounter with Lionel that is the final element in the series viewed as a straight line Bohort acts virtuously and successfully, and in the centre of the same series viewed as a parallel structure lie temptation and resistance. The context into which the demystification fits is thus one of resistance to the tempter and turning to God, and it appropriately provides the type of knowledge necessary for this purpose: once again what is revealed is essentially factual. Knowledge here is fundamentally a matter of who is who, who has done what, who desires or has desired what, and what is expected of whom.

Even when the devil's trickery is less in evidence and an overt moral purpose is lacking, the nature of knowledge revealed in the Queste remains largely the same. A significantly large proportion of the explanatory material in the romance consists of historical flashbacks, explanations that reach into the past to answer the same sort of questions addressed by the demystifications. These also provide largely the same sort of answers: factual information that is by no means unknowable by ordinary means in itself, but has been concealed through coincidence or through some deliberate act of will.

The miraculous shield with the red cross poses the same sort of problem created elsewhere by the wiles of the devil, though the devil is not involved with it. This shield is especially reserved for Galahad, but for reasons that are initially not clear.⁵⁹ The explanation of the special character of the shield and of its absolute reservation for Galahad alone proves to be an account of its history. It began with

the departure of Joseph of Arimathea for Sarras, where he converted Mordrain, King of that city, to Christ by miraculously assuring him victory in a war with his neighbour Tholomer:

. . . li fist [aporter] . j . escu ou il fist vne crois
de chendal & li dist Rois evalac or te mousterai ie
comment tu poras conoistre la force & la vertu del
crucefiement ihesu crist . Il est voirs que tholomers
aura seignorie sor toi . iij . iors & iij . nuis & tant
fera quil te metera a paor de mort . Mais quant tu
verras que tu ne porras escaper lors descueuvre la
crois & di . biax dous peres ihesu crist de qui mort
ie port lenseigne . ietes moi sain & sauf de cest
camp . & ie sui prest a receuoir vostre foi & vostre
creance.⁶⁰

Having been delivered as promised, Mordrain was baptized, and took the name Evalach, and the shield became one of his treasured possessions:

"Lors rechut evalac baptesme & deuint boins crestiens en ihesu crist .
si ot puis nostre seignor en grant amor & en grant reuerence & fist
garder lescu moult ricement."⁶¹ On his deathbed Joseph made with his
own blood a cross on the shield, and left it with Evalach as a remem-
berance of himself, adding that it was to be kept for the last
descendant of Nascien:

. . . ne il ne faudra mie si tost . por ce que iamais
nus ne le pendra a son col puis quil sera cheualier
quil ne sen repente . iusquant que galaas li boins
cheualiers li daarains del lignage nascien le pendra
a son col . Et por ce ne soit nus si hardis qui a son
col le pende se cil non a qui diex la destine . si i
a tel ocoison que tot au[s]si come plus grans [merueilles]
ont este ueues en cest escu que en autres . tot au[s]si
trouera on en celui plus merueilleuse proueche & plus
haute cheualerie & plus haute vie que en autre
cheualier.⁶²

The knowledge on which this explanation of the shield and its relationship to Galahad is based clearly derives from events, not from its nature: the general characteristics of shields, crosses and bleeding figures are of no help or interest. Nor does the concept of nature

in any sense have a significant role here: the operative force creating the meaning of the shield is rather will. It is made a powerful talisman in the first place through the will of Joseph and through the will of God underlying and supporting him. It bears an unfading cross because Joseph endows it with one, and it is reserved for the Good Knight, to be the instrument by which he works still greater marvels, because Joseph prophesies that it will be. Both the power inherent in the shield and its special connection with Galahad derive ultimately from Joseph's will made strong and effective by God. The special relationship is not determined by a historical structure, as it might have been in Perlesvaus. The shield is not needed to link Galahad to any figure out of the past, nor even to identify him: he is already known by name at the time of Joseph's death. The knowledge that comprises this explanation is of a uniform empirical type, consisting of decisions, promises and proclamations--all essentially acts of the will--made in the remote past.

The first story of the Castle of the Maidens is explained along similar lines, by a background story. The incident itself is a mixture of the mysterious and the prosaic: Galahad is bidden by an unseen voice to deliver the castle, and he is clearly mysteriously predestined to be its deliverer, but he takes it conventionally enough by defeating the seven brothers who hold it, receiving its surrender and forcing the vassals to forswear the evil custom they previously practised.⁶³ The evil custom and the predestination of Galahad to end it are explained as the consequence of incidents and prophecy. The castle fell under the control of seven brothers years earlier when they were guests of Duke Lynor, attempted to rape one of his daughters, and in the subsequent melee killed the duke and one of his sons. When the brothers

then imprisoned the daughter and won control of the whole region she predicted their ultimate punishment:

Quant la fille au duc uit ce si fu moult corecie &
dist au[s]si comme par deuinaillies . certes fait ele
[seigneur] se vous la seignorie de cest chastel aues
il ne vous puet chaloir . Car se vous laues ore par
ocoison de feme au[s]si le perderes vous par feme . &
en seres tot . vij recreant par le cors dun seul
cheualier . [Icil tinrent tout cou a despit] & li
distrent por ce quele auoit ce dit quil ne passeroit
iamais damoisele par cest chastel quil ne la retenront
iusquatant que le cheualiers vendroit par qui il
seroient vaincu . si lont fait dusques a ore.⁶⁴

The ultimate explanation of both the evil custom and the manner of its destruction lies in the will of the duke's daughter. Galahad is uniquely chosen for this role because she has decided he will be, and the evil custom arises because the seven brothers know she has decided this, and wish to forestall her. The evil custom is thus like the special shield reserved for the Good Knight. The significance of both is determined by a human will--reinforced by the divine--that enjoys the same sort of power wielded in Perlesvaus by historical structure and position. The Divine Will, which in such a Christianized romance must be the ultimate controlling influence, is not working through a determining structure, but through human agents who make decisions and utter predictions. Because control is exercised through them, knowledge, understanding and explanation of present phenomena must always consist essentially in discovering who they are and what they have decided or predicted. Uncovering the facts, especially about the background to any person or incident, is as important for the meaning of the Queste as delineating historical structures is for Perlesvaus.

It is equally revealing of the meaning of the Queste to discover the purpose that is being served by the predictions and decisions and

by the revelation of them through the work of the holy exegetes. Such revelations have an obvious moral purpose when they are set in opposition to the devil's lies, of course, but they have also a more fundamental function, both in those cases and on the other occasions when they are merely expounding meaning by providing background. When, for example, the history of the shield is told, or when the origins of the evil custom are related, the major result is the setting apart of Galahad, the Good Knight. They do not identify him, for he is already known even by name. They do not confer his mission upon him, or reveal it to him, for he is already performing it by both external prowess and inner purity. They do, however, single him out, and such singling out of the elect is a very important part of the process of revelation and of the meaning of the Queste. The author does not make the point explicitly, and he may not have planned it consciously, but in fact the Queste is about, among other themes, divine election.

This motif of reservation and election appears clearly in the explanation of the three fellowships.⁶⁵ Parallelism obviously figures in it prominently. The Good Knight is like Joseph, who is in turn like Christ. The Seat of Danger at the Round Table is like the Seat of Dread at Joseph's table. Each table is the focus of a fellowship, and each nourishes in a more than ordinary way. Each, too, is blessed, either by Christ or by the Holy Grail. In part, then, the mystery of the present Round Table and of the reservation of the Seat of Danger for Galahad alone is explained by parallels to the earlier tables and fellowships. Tables, seats and fellowships possess something akin to natures, insight into which provides a measure of understanding of the mystery surrounding them. Once again, however, the mystery is one of reservation and

election, and the nature of the phenomena that explain it is the consequence of specific incidents and the conscious expression of individual will.

The special character of the Seat of Dread derives from its association with Christ first and then with Joseph of Arimathea, and the transference of characteristics from one to the next is not accomplished through determinant parallelism of structures or natures but through deliberate intent. The Seat of Dread at the second table is reserved for Joseph alone, and usurpers are subject to divine punishment, because it was expressly set aside for that purpose, consecrated and blessed by the Lord's own hand.

En cele table auoit vn siege ou iosep[he] li fiex
iosep[h] deuoit seoir . cis sieges ert establis a
che que li plus maistres daus & lor paistres si
assiet . ne a nule autre ni ert otroies . & estoit
sacres & beneis de la main nostre seignor [meisme]
si comme lestoire [le] deuise . & auoit receue la
cure que iosep[h] deuoit auoir sor crestiens &
[en] celui siege lauoit nostre sires a[s]sis.⁶⁶

In the same way the Seat of Danger at the third table is deliberately set aside by Merlin:

Qvant cil oirent ceste parole si distrent . Certes
merlin puis quil sera si preudons comme tu dis tu
deuroies faire vn propre siege ou nus ne sa[s]siet
fors il tot seulement . si ferai ie dit merlin . lors
fist . j . siege grant & meru[e]illeus . & quant il
lot fait . si le commencha a bessier & dist que ce
auoit il fait pour lamour del boin eureus cheualier
qui si reposeroit [& asseroit] Car iamais
nus ne si asserra quil ne soit mors ou mahaigies
[einz quil sen parte] iusquatant que li vrais
c[h]eualiers si asserra.⁶⁷

The mystery of the Seat of Danger, like the mystery of the Seat of Dread, is one of reservation--the exclusion of the unworthy and unchosen--and election; and the source of the mystery lies in the will of Merlin, the will of Joseph and ultimately the will of Christ. They

create the mystery so that the unworthy will be excluded, and they provide for the revelation of its meaning so that the elect will be acknowledged.⁶⁸

The relationship between the purpose of mysteries and revelation--reservation and election--and their nature--empirical knowledge concealed or revealed--is not accidental. Because reservation and election are essentially moral acts, the product of divine and human will--Galahad is not stronger or brighter than the other knights, but holier--they find their expression in acts of will and their meaning in the consequences of those acts. There is therefore little reason to pursue knowledge of other kinds, even if it is attainable, and in such circumstances it is not, in fact, pursued. The sword found on board the Ship of Solomon certainly poses a mystery that might be approached through the wealth of symbolic detail that surrounds it and that ought to furnish insight into its nature. Its pommel is a rich jewel of many colours, each possessing a special virtue, the hilt is covered with a red cloth, the scabbard is red with gold and silver inscriptions, the underside of the sword itself is black as pitch, and also inscribed, and the hangings are strikingly out of keeping with all the rest, being merely of hemp.⁶⁹ Something surely could be made of these descriptive features, but little actually is.⁷⁰ The meaning of the sword mystery is explicated in the inscriptions, and they are concerned with the sword's relationship to the unique individual selected to bear and use it:

Ie sui merueilleus a veoir & plus merueilleus a
connoistre . Car onques nus ne me pot empoignier
tant eust la main grande ne [nus] ne fera fors vns
tous seuls . Et cil passera de son mestier tous
cels qui deuant lui auront este & qui apres lui

vendront. . . . & voient autres lettres vermeilles
 comme sanc . qui disoient Ia nus ne soit tant hardis
 qui del feure me traie sil ne[n] doit miex ferir que
 autres . Et qui autrement me traira bien sace il quil
 ne faudra ia a estre mors ou mahaigies . Et ceste
 chose a ia este esprouee aucunes fois.⁷¹

The subsequent lengthy account offered as an explanation of the sword mystery is really the story of how the unique connection of sword and Good Knight was preserved against various presumptuous or merely ignorant individuals who tried to appropriate it to their own use.⁷²

The sword incident leads directly into the even longer and more involved legend of the Tree of Life.⁷³ This legend is not original to the Queste--it is lifted verbatim out of the Estoire del Saint Graal--but it is incorporated for a purpose in complete harmony with the established function of mysteries and their explanation. The various coloured trees provide Solomon with the means of constructing the symbolic bed on board his ship and thereby of hiding its meaning from all except those to whom God will choose to reveal it. The meaning--which is a narrative of facts and events--is denied to the unchosen and revealed to the Good Knight and his companions by the will of Solomon and the will of God. Smybolic colours express the nature of the tree and its many offshoots, but the purpose for which they are used does not arise out of their nature; it arises out of Solomon's will. That purpose is, moreover, to single out the Good Knight, to establish a relationship with him, and to express the special status that his unique moral qualities have earned for him.

In various instances, therefore, the revelation of otherwise inaccessible knowledge in the Queste serves as a means of divine election. It is not wholly unconcerned with the nature of holiness,

righteousness or purity, but it is far more concerned with singling out those who are holy, righteous and pure, those in whom grace can produce still greater fruits, and with distinguishing them from others who are destined to failure and sin because of their unholiness. Those to whom revelation is granted are more important than the message conveyed to them. It is in them that the struggle against evil will be won, in them that grace will foster spiritual growth, in them that knighthood will continue to flourish.

* * * * *

The Nature of Meaning and the Meaning of the Adventures:
a Divergent View

The line of interpretation being developed here has tended, through external and internal interpretation and through reflection on the nature of knowledge as presented in the Queste, toward the notion of grace at work to choose certain individuals, to overcome evil within them and to foster holiness. Essential to this development at every stage, although for the most part unstated, is the assumption that the Queste truly is a work of fiction, and that knowledge and explanation are therefore in some way or other at the service of the story. Though the author intervenes consciously and regularly as critic to interpret the significance of the adventures he recounts, he is nonetheless primarily a storyteller. The discourses delivered by holy exegetes are really explanations of the significance of the adventures. The adventures are not simply bearers and exemplars of the significance of the discourses.

The strong emphasis on will that emerges from consideration of the nature of mystery and knowledge can conceivably lend itself to other

interpretations, however, notably to interpretations that would ascribe prime importance to knowledge, and only secondary value to the actual narrative of events. The notion of deliberately creating secrets so that certain privileged individuals--and they alone--can discover their meaning in later ages is the central tenet of a distinct school of criticism that has a persistent fascination with material like the Arthurian legends. Esoteric theories of mediaeval literature are not uncommon, and motifs like the Tree of Life and the Ship of Solomon obviously lend themselves to interpretation along such lines.

The esoteric meaning of the Grail legend has, of course, been expounded in particularly extravagant form in a recent study, The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail.⁷⁴ The case made in that work is probably weakened by the authors' obvious delight in shocking the sensibilities of Christian believers and their espousal of the improbable cause of the restoration of the Merovingian monarchy in France, to say nothing of the difficulties they encounter with the chronology of the Grail literature itself, but that case is not inherently preposterous in so far as it touches on the Grail legend, and it has been made in sufficiently plausible form to merit a hearing. Even serious students of the Grail and Arthurian material sometimes view it as the freemasonry of the mediaeval world, preserving a body of secret knowledge for transmission down through the ages from generation to generation of initiates, unknown to the world at large. They would interpret the great flourishing of Arthurian and Grail legends in the twelfth centuries not as a growth and development but as an eruption into the public domain of what was already fully developed and thriving in closed circles, and would continue to live on in those circles once the public clamour had finally

exhausted itself.

By its very nature such a genre of interpretation is as difficult to expound as it is to attack, wholly secret literary sources not lending themselves readily to scholarly investigation. A coherent and fairly representative statement of the case for esoteric sources and the primary importance of knowledge has been made by René Guénon, however.⁷⁵ For Guénon the Grail is one of those symbols whose very nature is esoteric and initiatory. He readily admits that the sudden eruption of what he holds to be a secret tradition into the public domain is not readily explainable, but he argues that a poet can easily transmit initiatory material without himself realizing its true significance, and that the absence from a work of overt signs of preoccupation with a higher meaning is no proof that that meaning is not present.

Guénon also foresees and attempts to counter arguments based on the unquestionably Christian message of the Queste and other Grail texts: because the Grail legend is presented in Christian guise many tend to treat its other elements as simple folklore, imagining falsely that a people is capable of creating things and thus of being cited as a source. On the contrary, he maintains, such elements may be clothed in the trappings of magic and fairytale, and their transmission may depend on popular culture, but they constitute a tradition in the most precise sense, a body of material handed on, and that material comprises esoteric data, as remote from folklore and popular culture as anything could be.

The presence of such esoteric data in a popular adventure Guénon explains as the conscious decision of the last heirs of a tradition in danger of extinction to confide their precious secrets to the collective memory. In this particular case certain traditional, initiatory elements of Druidism have been confided to the care, so to speak,

of Christians so that they can live on as part of the inner, esoteric core of Christianity in parallel with ordinary, external Christian religion. Such elements would include the Grail itself, with links both to the Eucharistic chalice and to the vessel of abundance, and the lance. Both point toward the heart or centre of the world, the now lost earthly paradise where the true sense of eternity is to be discovered, but which is now accessible only through secondary centres, through substitute objects like the Grail and lance.

Guénon's view of what is happening in the transmission of the Grail material unquestionably corresponds in external characteristics to what takes place within the plot of the Queste when secrets are handed down from generation to generation by people who do not know what they are transmitting, until the message reaches those for whom it was destined. However, though the process be the same, neither the nature of the secrets nor the purpose for which they are first transmitted as secrets and later demystified corresponds in any way to esoteric, initiatory principles.

In nature the secrets first preserved and then revealed in the Queste are utterly prosaic and in no way esoteric; they are little more than ordinary facts and incidents. More significantly, however, they have absolutely no initiatory purpose. The chosen recipients of previously concealed knowledge are chosen and singled out by the preservation of the secrets from others and by the revelation of those same secrets to them, but they are not chosen in order to learn the secrets. The order is rather the opposite. The secrets are servants of the process of reservation and election. The purpose for which individuals are chosen is the conferring of grace to overcome evil and to produce

holiness. The creation, preservation and ultimate revelation of secrets are only a means, and a tertiary means at that, of effecting the choice: the will of God working through human wills employs the manipulation of knowledge to signify the choice of knights to be recipients of grace.

In effect it would be less plausible to argue, as Guénon does in respect of the Grail legend in general, that the Queste contains an esoteric message in Christian guise than to maintain that it contains a Christian message and meaning--explicitly stated in a form that any reader can grasp--in esoteric guise and forms. The significance of the transmission of secrets to predestined individuals is not to be found in the secrets transmitted--which are of the most banal character--but in the individuals for whom they are destined.

* * * * *

Election, Sanctification and the Renewal of Knighthood

If the transmission and revelation of secret knowledge does not provide a basis for interpretation of the Queste, it at least prevents the facile acceptance of other and inadequate bases for interpretation, such as the struggle against evil, or the sanctification of the individual. Though knowledge may be transmitted and revealed for purposes related to moral struggle and to sanctification, it nonetheless and undeniably has a proper role of its own, prior to them, which is election. All interpretations of the Queste center in some way either on knowledge--the enlightenment and the esoteric theories--or on moral struggle and sanctification. Election is the middle term between them, and it is the key to uniting them in a cogent synthesis.

The fourth trend in analysis of the Queste--that it is about

knighthood--has been the most neglected to this point, but must be considered in relation to the question of election. That the chosen individuals in whom grace produces fruit are all knights may be so obvious as to seem insignificant. When viewed along with the phenomena of reservation and revelation of knowledge, however, the knighthood of Bohort, Lancelot and Galahad takes on added significance, because these three chosen individuals are really the only men in the Queste who succeed in being knights in any meaningful sense. Their brother knights in name are excluded from the effective realization of their knighthood just as they are excluded from access to reserved secrets. The elect, however, are provided by the morally oriented revelation they receive with a set of values and a code of conduct to replace the traditional values of chivalry, and they are given the factual information necessary to recognize real enemies and thus to win legitimate victories.

In this regard it is striking how often the reinterpretation of adventures by holy exegetes allows the chosen knights the opportunity precisely to be knights, not necessarily in any new way, but in the old traditional sense of being warriors with a cause. The revealed secrets make possible the old way of life, now become unrealizable by the old means.

Galahad's raising of the tombstone of great weight, with its protective shrieking voice,⁷⁶ to reach the body of the knight lying beneath, is explained in a way that creates a parallel between Christ and Galahad and thus gives Galahad an identity as Messiah. It also, however, gives him a knightly identity and an opportunity to do knightly service. It identifies him, through Christ, as the vassal of a particular lord--the Lord God, of course--and gives him a bona fide

battle to fight against an enemy powerful enough to be worthy of both him and his Lord.

Car tot au[s]si comme lerror & la folie senfui a
lauenoment nostre seignor . & la verite fu lors
manifestee . au[s]si vous a diex esleu sor tous
autres chevaliers por [vos] enuoier par les
estraignes terres por abatre les maluaises
costumes & por [faire] sauoir comment eles sont
aenues . par coï on doit vostre venue comparer
pres [a] lauenement ihesu crist.⁷⁷

The pelican story and its explanation also provide an enemy and a cause for a knight who would otherwise be without adventures, in this case for Bohort. He champions a lady against a rival, according to the old pattern of knightly conduct which no longer seems to produce any meaningful result, but purpose and meaning are given to the encounter by the revelation that the lady he is defending is the Church, and that her dispossessed rival is the Old Law:

Car par la dame entendons nos sainte eglise qui tient
sainte crestiente en boine foi & en droite creance qui
est le droit yretage de ihesu crist . [porcoï vous
esties a droit tenus a [la] desfendre] . Par lautre
dame qui desiretee en estoit [& le guerroit] entent
on la vielle loy Quant la ione dame vous ot
contee sa raison de lautre dame qui la guerroit . vous
empreistes la bataille si comme vos deustes . Car vous
estes cheualiers ihesu crist par qu[o]i vous estes a
droit tenus de desfendre sainte eglyse⁷⁸

Even the archetypal enemy, Satan, appears in the struggle, disguised as a white swan, to give further noble purpose to Bohort's cause. The combination of traditional knightly patterns of behaviour and newly revealed meaning allows Bohort to carry on being what otherwise he could not continue to be: a noble Christian knight.

That is not to say that the old ways can be retained entirely, merely invested with new meaning. The old patterns of behaviour can remain--knights can still be knights--but the values and principles

associated with the old ways are clearly altered: that is part of the new meaning that is revealed in the course of the quest. Such seems to be the thrust of the incident in which Melias comes to the fork in the road and, contrary to a clearly posted warning, takes the left-hand path. "Car tu te pensas que tu en istroies par ta proece . & ensi fus tu decheus par entenedement . Car li escriis parloit de la cheualerie celestiene & tu entendis de la seculer."⁷⁹ Along with new and more worthy adversaries come new principles of warfare: the godly knight can no longer depend simply on prowess, but requires spiritual strength, because he is now engaged in heavenly chivalry. Although he will ultimately fight, as knights always have, with sword and spear, his success will depend on other types of skill and strength, requiring him to train by acquiring virtues, making his confession, choosing the way of the cross and of divine compassion.

The *précise* goal of knightly endeavour is also changed by the introduction of new principles. The knight continues to seek victory, but it is now victory over the Enemy, over Satan, whose spiritual powers cannot be destroyed by a sword blow or the thrust of a spear. The physical death of an adversary now becomes a defeat rather than a victory, since a partisan of the devil, once dead, is definitively in his power and can never be rescued. True victory consists in thwarting the designs of the wicked, but keeping them alive to repent and be converted. The failure to realize this is Gawain's great blindness and sin in the episode of the Castle of Maidens, in which he, Owein and Gaheriet kill the seven brothers whom Galahad previously defeated but spared:

certes se vous ne fu[s]sies si pec[h]ieres comme vous
estes ia li . vij . frere neu[s]sent este ochis par
vous ne par vostre compaignie . ains feissent encore

lor penitance de la maluaise costume que il auoient
 si longement maintenue el chastel as puceles . &
 sacordassent a dieu . ensi nesploita mie galaas li
 boins cheualiers liquel vous ales querant. Car il
 les conquist sans ochire.⁸⁰

Galahad regularly spares his enemies, and on the rare occasions when he does kill someone, it is an individual so far lost to the power of Satan that repentance is out of the question. This is the case with the three knights whom Galahad and Perceval slay in the episode of Count Ernol and his three sons, and they are promptly reassured by a holy man that their victims were, indeed, beyond conversion.⁸¹

The relationship between knighthood and repentance is reciprocal. Just as the fostering of repentance is one of the duties of the Christian knight, so repentance, in its turn, has a large role to play in making him a true knight. This is evident in the conversion of Lancelot, which is patently oriented at several points to fitting him, not just for a holy life, but for holy, meaningful knighthood. When, for example, he fails to respond to the vision of the healing of a brother knight by the Grail, he is punished in a manner appropriate not merely to a sinner, but to a sinful knight:

li escuiers vient a lespee lancelot si le prent & son
 hiaume au[s]si . si le baille a son seignour puis[s]en
 vient a son cheual & li met la sele & le fraim . &
 quant il lot aparellie si [s]en vient a son seignor &
 li dist . sire montes car a boin cheual [& a boine
 espee] naues vous pas failli . & certes ie ne vos ai
 chose baillie qui miex ne soit emploie en vous que en
 cest maluais cheualier qui chi gist.⁸²

When, at a later stage of the conversion process that begins with this humiliation, Lancelot seeks an explanation for his failure in the tournament between black and white knights, he receives an answer that is moral in character but equally, in its thrust, chivalrous.

The essence of his repeated failures is his persistence in trying to be a heavenly knight according to the principles of earthly chivalry:

"lancelot tant comme vous fustes des cheualiers terriens fustes vous li plus merueilleus hons del monde & li plus auentureus . Et puis que vous estes entremis des cheualeries celestien[e]s se auentures merueilleuses vous auient ne vous en esmerueillies pas."⁸³ It is to equip him for this heavenly chivalry that moral improvement is needed, to allow him to fight as a knight worthily and on the right side, so that he will stop making mistakes by instinctive empathy with the sinful, and will no longer exhaust himself fighting vainly against the invincible power of God.

The same essentially knightly thrust is evident in the explanation and moral exhortation that Perceval hears after his encounter with the lion and the serpent. The facts are provided, and their moral significance is spelled out, but the ultimate result envisaged is a more authentic and more fruitful knightly service, as is made clear from the outset:

mais il vous a ore mis [en essai &] en esproue por
sauoir & conoistre se vous estes ses feel serians
& ses urais cheualiers ensi comme [l]ordre de
cheualerie le requiert. Car puis que vous en si
haut degre estes montes vos[tre] cuers ne doit
abai[s]sier por paor ne por peril terrien car cuers
de cheualier doit estre si durs & si se[r]res contre
lanemi son signor que nule riens ne le puet flechir
& sil est menes iusca paor il nest pas des urais
cheualiers qui se laissent ochire en champ ains
que la querele a lor signor ne fust desrainsnie
[bien & loiaument].⁸⁴

Perceval is being prepared not only for a struggle against the devil, but for a knightly struggle in which he will fight the only enemy who really counts with the one weapon that is really effective, with the power of the cross of Christ.⁸⁵

The true explanation of Bohort's encounter with his brother Lionel, the moral character of which has already been noted, is also most readily understood when it is read in terms of knighthood. For purely personal moral reasons Bohort is in no need of revelation after he has already resisted the temptation to succour his brother at the expense of the maiden threatened with rape. His holy instincts do not need to be improved, nor does he really need to be enlightened about the supreme worth of purity, for he is already pure. What he does need is the assurance that his choice represents the foundation of heavenly chivalry, and that this is the basis on which henceforth he is to act as a knight:

. . . on vous doit tenir a [urai cheualier celestial]
 seriant ihesu crist boin & loial . Et si mait diex se
 vous fuissies terriens ia si haute auenture ne vous
 fust auenue que vous deliurissies les crestiens nostre
 signor le[s] cors de paine terriene & l[es] ame[s]
 des dolors dynfer.⁸⁶

The concept of a new knighthood, retaining the old forms but infused with a new meaning that is essentially moral and the work of grace, also furnishes an eminently plausible account of the failures of the vast majority of the questing knights. The basic dividing line between the successful and the unsuccessful knights in the quest is not proximity to the Grail--Lancelot is anything but a success at the moment when he beholds a Grail miracle in a passive stupor--but rather the experience of adventure. Access to adventure depends on moral qualities, but not via the route of reward and punishment: rather by way of election or non-election. Revelation of the fundamental principles of the new knighthood is reserved. So too are specific secrets regarding swords, or shields or roles to be played. Knowledge is conveyed,

producing moral effect, permitting meaningful realization of knightly adventures by the elect. For the remaining knights the process of election does not function. There is no knowledge or adequate moral effect, and therefore no possibility of adventure: adventures are not forbidden, they are simply not possible.

This principle is illustrated in the beginnings of Lancelot's restoration to grace.⁸⁷ The hermit who hears Lancelot's confession dispels his mistaken conviction that in order to be converted he must give up chivalry; the hermit is even willing to provide him with armour, weapons and a new mount. Lancelot has not been failing in his quest because he is committing wrong acts and being punished. His knightly service is being vitiated rather by the principles and motivation underlying his life. The path to reform involves receiving revelation, assimilating new moral principles, being inwardly converted by grace to the love of purity and of the cross and thus giving new meaning to the existing forms of chivalry.

The nature of the dividing line between success and failure is even clearer in the case of Perceval's failed attempt to follow Galahad, in the course of which he tries to get a horse to ride, but encounters only a series of vexations and misadventures, culminating in a grave temptation by the devil.⁸⁸ Far from catching Galahad, he finds himself on the deserted rocky island, where he is eventually instructed in the new ways by a holy visitor. His failures, his misadventures and his exile can hardly be punishment for evil deeds, for he has sought a remount by perfectly honourable means, and has resisted the one temptation to sin placed in his way, nor, given his rejection of temptation, is his ignorance likely to be of ordinary holiness. He

requires instruction, rather, in knighthood: who is the real enemy, what are the appropriate means of fighting him, what sources of inner strength are needed?

Exactly the same principle is exemplified in the lives and careers of those knights, unlike Lancelot and Perceval, for whom there is no enlightenment, no conversion, no new knighthood. Gawain and Hector are typical of the failed questers: some of their failures and the explanations given for them have been noted here already. Ultimately their difficulty is the same sort of blindness or ignorance, but in their case invincible. There is a new harmony between the external world and the internal, between holiness and adventure, such that the new adventures cannot be achieved by sinners:

les auentes qui ore sont & qui ore auient si sont
 les senefiances & les demonstres del saint graal &
 napparront ia al pec[h]eor ne a home envolepe de pec[h]--
 ie . dont il ne vous apparront ia . Car vous estes trop
 desloial pec[h]eor . Si ne deues mie quidier que ces
 auentes qui auient ore soient domes tuer ne de
 cheualiers ochire . nenil ains sont de[s] choses
 [celestiaus] & espritex qui sont mieudres & valent
 asses plus. . . . Sire fait hestor se nous vous creons
 nos retournerons a camaalot . Ie le vous lo fait li
 preudons . & encore vous di iou bien tant comme vous
 seres en pechie mortel ni feres ia chose dont vous
 aies honor [ne preu].⁸⁹

Hector, Gawain, and the many like them are not under a divine sentence of punishment, from which they could be freed by the divine mercy. They are suffering the inevitable consequences of not being among the elect. They have not been singled out by revelation. They have not been transformed inwardly by grace. Since inner sin and outer prowess are now no longer compatible, since the harmony of inner and outer worth has been restored, there is absolutely nothing that can be done. In a much earlier incident Gawain's hermit confessor recognizes that he is not

among the elect as soon as he admits that he cannot face doing penance, and without any further attempt at persuasion, the confessor simply gives up on him: "Et il dist que la paine de penitance faire ne poroit il souffrir. & li preudons en laisse la parole que plus ne len dist . Car bien voit ke ses amonestemens seroit paine perdue ."90

There is a sad inevitability in the fate of Hector, Gawain and their companions in failure. Being unchosen, unenlightened, ungraced, they will consistently err, even without any specific evil intent on any given occasion. When they join in a tournament between the residents of a castle and their opponents from outside, they instinctively side with the outsiders, and find themselves doing battle with Galahad, whom they so long to join. They mean no harm--indeed their intentions are all for the best--but they literally know no better, and they are left to reflect bitterly that, unless God takes pity on them, they might as well give up the quest altogether.⁹¹

* * * * *

Renewed Knighthood and Thematic Unity

A survey of critical literature and the investigation of the text have yielded at least seven subjects that the Queste del saint Graal may be said "to be about": resistance to evil, growth in holiness, the transmission of knowledge (in several possible forms), knighthood, the sacramental nature of human life, the process of divine election, and heroic adventures. If these were disposed in the form of a wheel, only knighthood could serve as the hub. It is not the best interpretation of what the Queste means, for there is no best interpretation: all are partly true and in some way inadequate. It is the centre, however,

around which the other meanings can be grouped harmoniously. It is through the concept of knighthood that the other meanings are connected to one another.

The inner struggle against lust and the growth in grace toward purity would be disconnected from and irrelevant to the heroic adventures which constitute the bulk of the romance if they were not taking place within knights. The author himself has clearly expounded the sacramental character of our life, in which external behaviour and its results are signs of an inner reality, which in turn produces the outer effect. Most of the adventures, however, are battles, tournaments or quests, and they could be neither signs of an inner state of soul nor the product of it if the soul in question were not the soul of a knight. If the story were not about knighthood, the inner realities of purity and lust and of grace at work to lead from the latter to the former would find expression only in the episodes of direct resistance to temptation or of overt pious acts of devotion, which even in the Queste are still in the minority.

The reservation and transmission of knowledge also fits into the whole scheme of the romance only through the concept of renewed knighthood. Revelation is not needed to reveal the intrinsic worth of purity and humility: Galahad and his companions are pure and humble without it, and Gawain, Hector and the other failures cannot be made pure even with it. The private moral state of each character is fixed, and only changes very laboriously in a limited number of individuals. The whole process of election through the secret transmission of knowledge is oriented toward the matching of high and noble tasks with the noble individuals uniquely suited, by their inner purity, to perform them, a

process which is necessary only because the old knighthood of purely external prowess has died, and a renewed knighthood, based on the sacramental principle of harmony between outer sign and inner grace, has taken its place.

The sacramental concept, too, finds its place in the Queste through the notion of renewal of knighthood. The sacraments act outwardly as signs and inwardly as grace to effect that aspect of salvation appropriate to the occasion, and what must be saved in the Queste is knighthood. The sacrament being administered and received is knightly; one could almost say that it is knighthood itself, acting outwardly as prowess and inwardly as grace to produce, as two aspects of an absolutely indivisible whole, purity and meaningful adventure. The whole process of election has no relevance to the concept of sacrament if the sacrament is not knightly and not oriented to the achievement of chivalrous adventures of a particularly noble and lofty type. The selection of individuals in which the sacramental harmony of outer and inner being would reach special perfection could not make sense unless they had a special mission. Purity within and righteous conduct without could be matched without the selection of an elite if the characters were not knights.

What is said of the sacramental concept in relation to the process of election may obviously be said of election in the opposite direction, as well as of the adventures. The relationship of the several themes in the Queste is not so simple or structurally neat as the figure of a wheel with hub and spokes. Knighthood and sacramentality, to cite only two themes, are certainly more intimately and more complexly united than that. The image of the wheel, however, is

an imprecise structural representation of a precise functional reality. That knighthood be undergoing spiritual renewal in the Queste is essential for the work to make sense. The old knighthood of prowess must be dying, and a new knighthood established on the sacramental principle must be taking its place. The process of divine election might conceivably be carried on by other means than the transmission of secrets and the revelation of knowledge, or it might go undescribed entirely. Inward grace might be shown at work only to overcome the devil and his works, or only to produce growth in holiness and purity. Mystical insight might be provided in place of historical background. All this and more might be changed without destroying the Queste and its meaning. Without a new, revived, sacramental knighthood, however, it would not in any meaningful sense be the same work.

To conclude, therefore, in the same form in which the chapter began: the Queste del saint Graal is about sacramental knighthood. It is thus, in an interestingly ironic way, the mirror image of Perlesvaus. In Perlesvaus an essentially religious experience of life--the sense of the imminent crisis of the new age--elicits a knightly response: to enlist in the struggle in order to fight on the side of God and his friends. The religious order is changing; the characteristics of knighthood remain constant; a means must be found--and is found through proper incorporation into historical structures and processes--to bring the knightly resources to bear on the religious experience. In the Queste the experience is chivalrous and the response religious. The worldly order of knighthood is changing; religious values remain constant; harmony must be established between the religious values and the outer forms of knighthood, so that the latter may be renewed by

the former.

The lines of this comparison must not be drawn too strictly, as they might be if the historical rationale offered by Jean Frappier for his interpretation of the Christian Grail material were uncritically transferred to this rather different view of the more specific subject of the Queste.⁹² Frappier was attempting to show why interest in the Grail legend generally speaking arose among knights when it did, and for this purpose he was obliged to offer some evidence from external sources of an actual decline in the social status of knights, such as might induce them to create for themselves a new status out of a new mythology of knighthood. This is at best a dubious procedure, since the unquestioned evidence of a decline in the power of the nobility and especially of ordinary knights relative to the highest nobles and the King points to a crisis coming rather later than the early thirteenth century. No doubt many knightly families were already well on their way to being ruined by the expense of equipping successive generations of their members for crusading service. No doubt many were losing land to wealthy bourgeois as they struggled to cope with debts. No doubt, too, the encroachments of royal justice on seigniorial, and on the right of private warfare had already diminished the prestige and independence of the lesser nobility especially. There is little concrete evidence, however, that these developments constituted anything like a social crisis for ordinary knights until a period almost a century after the composition of the Queste del saint Graal. Manorial courts do not lose appellate jurisdiction before 1278, and are still resisting the encroachments of the King's justice through the fourteenth century. The crusades are still available as an outlet for knights in search

of greater glory than can be won domestically. The reputation of French chivalry, moreover, remains high throughout this whole period, as the shock occasioned by Courtrai in 1302 and by Crécy in 1346 makes abundantly clear.⁹³ It would be most difficult to prove that knights as a class were so weakened and so stripped of prestige in the first quarter of the thirteenth century that they turned to religious values expressed in fiction to create a new mythology for themselves.

In any case, when the crisis in the status of the nobility and chivalry is finally perceived as such, the reaction is not to remythologize in a spiritual sense. Rather than being creative and spiritual, it is intensely conservative and materialistic:

Et dans un même instinct de repliement, d'auto-défense, la noblesse va plus que jamais tenir à ses distinctions, à ses privilèges honorifiques. Elle devient une caste, elle se ferme aux autres couches de la société. A la fin du XIII^e siècle, le Parlement, d'accord avec la noblesse, interdit à quiconque d'octroyer la chevalerie à un roturier, ce qui pouvait se faire auparavant. Désormais les privilèges de la noblesse seront rigoureusement héréditaires. On s'efforcera aussi d'empêcher l'achat de fiefs nobles par des non-nobles, en les rendant plus onéreux pour ceux-ci. La noblesse vivra désormais entre elle : les mariages auront lieu entre nobles et un appauvrissement physiologique accompagnera l'appauvrissement matériel et la décadence morale des féodaux.⁹⁴

The notion of a crisis in the lives of the French nobility and chivalry inspiring recourse to the Grail legend as source of a new mythology of a band of brother knights achieving meaningful adventures together is thus questionable in itself, quite apart from the difficulty of applying its rigorous insistence on the brotherhood of equals to the blatant elitism of the Queste. Such a crisis need not be posited, however, to support the interpretation of the Queste as a tale of renewed, sacramental knighthood, largely because explaining the Queste

del saint Graal as a specific literary work is a very different task from accounting for interest in the Grail and Arthurian legends in general.

The Queste del saint Graal is part of an established literary tradition: Arthuriana have been popular for a long while by the time it is written, and the author is living and working within an existing literary tradition. Where the first knights to interest themselves in the Grail legend--whoever they were--can only have been inspired by some external consideration--whatever that may have been--the author of the Queste del saint Graal and his readers were almost certainly reacting at least in part to the existing Grail tradition: they must surely have known and even liked it or they would not have been adding to it or continuing to read more of it.

The existence of persons already familiar with the Grail tradition suggests another possible explanation for the impetus to remythologize knighthood, a more plausible and more easily defended explanation than Frappier's. It is eminently possible that the impetus to remythologize knighthood along the lines described in the Queste may have come not from a comparison of how things had been, and how they now were, but from the more commonplace comparison between how they were in reality and how they appeared in romances of chivalry, especially in the existing Arthurian and Grail legends. An interesting picture of the life of a French nobleman from a much earlier time than the crisis period of the late thirteenth century is provided by the same manual from which the earlier description was taken:

. . . le seigneur est celui qui perçoit les redevances
et exerce les droits féodaux, celui pour qui l'on
accomplit les corvées et l'on s'acquitte des banalités.
Mais le seigneur est aussi celui qui rend la justice

dans le domaine, qui fait régner l'ordre et garantit la sécurité sur les chemins . . . et qui participe à la défense du royaume. En d'autres termes, il remplit les fonctions qui sont assumées de nos jours par l'armée, la justice et la police.⁹⁵

There must obviously have been wide discrepancies between the amount of any given lord's or knight's time given over to warfare or to administering justice, to collecting his revenues or maintaining his roads. In all cases, however, as this description reminds one so succinctly, to be a knight or a lord was a job and a demanding one: hunting, tournaments and feasting were only parts of a way of life that was more regularly concerned with financial and judicial administration, and that was anything but the kind of life described in romances of chivalry, especially in the Arthurian legends.

There was no need, therefore, for a crisis in the social standing of knights to inspire the remythologizing represented by the Queste del saint Graal: the ordinary humdrum reality of manorial administration, relieved only by the annual forty days service in the royal host, in a probably inconclusive campaign significant primarily as a financial burden on the participants, provided more than enough contrast with the ideals portrayed in fiction to inspire anyone who thought seriously about those ideals to reflect on how they might actually be realized. Some such process as that almost certainly lies behind the Queste. The knightly ideals and the sense of meaning and purpose they give to life are clearly attractive: how are they to be made part of real life? The outer forms of the social order are virtually untouchable in a society that so highly respects custom as the rule of life, but God's grace and our good will can change our hearts. Knighthood can be made something nobler than constant preoccupation with money and administration if it

is brought into harmony with hearts renewed. It can be an expression of the highest ideals, if those high ideals inspire it.

The Queste del saint Graal is essentially the consequence of thinking seriously about the Arthurian and Grail legends and seeking the means to bring the ideals they express into harmony with the reality of life. It is not simply allegorical; it is in the strictest sense sacramental. It is about the harmonious relationship of inner purity and outer prowess together creating a new mythology of knighthood.

Notes to Chapter III

¹Perlesvaus and the Queste do not differ in absolutely every respect--see Carman, The Relationship of the Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal, pp. 81-82 for a number of similarities in detail--and they are almost certainly products of the same generation, written within a quarter century of one another. The date of composition of the Queste is not a crucial factor in the study of its thematic relation to Perlesvaus, but is deserving of brief mention at least. The best evidence for dating the Queste seems to come from the Chronicle of Helinand of Froidmont, which alludes to an Estoire del Saint Graal, which is generally assumed to be the Queste. Two allusions in Helinand's work allow it to be dated in the period 1211-1223, that is in the latter part of the reign of Philip Augustus. One allusion is to Ludovici nondum regis, that is to Philip's son Louis, "not yet king", and suggests that, while Philip is still alive, the succession must already be a question of public interest, and the heir an established public figure. The second allusion is to one Gislebert of Foigni, who is said in the Chronicle to be dead, and whose death can be fixed from other sources in 1211. Hence the conclusion that the Chronicle was written between 1211, when Gislebert died, and 1223, the year of the death of Philip Augustus. Hence, too, the further conclusion that the Queste already existed in this period. Given the likelihood that the Queste was influenced in some respects by Perlesvaus, and given, too, the lack of any evidence to suggest that the Queste could possibly be older than the beginning of the thirteenth century, it seems probable that it was a recent work when it came to Helinand's attention. The Queste is, therefore, a product of the first quarter of the thirteenth century. (This argument is set forth in greater detail by Carman, The Relationship . . ., pp. 10-13.)

²Albert Pauphilet, Etudes sur la Queste del saint Graal attribuée à Gautier Map (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, repr. 1968).

³*Ibid.*, pp. 14-15 (on love) and 21-23 (on chivalry and the changed character of the Grail).

⁴The traditional aim of Grail questers. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶Pauphilet believes even more specifically that the Queste derives from a tradition of moral and apologetic tales, lives of saints, miracle stories and similar catechetical works. He supports this hypothesis with extensive comparisons with the Dialogus de Miraculis of Caesarius of Heisterbach, *op. cit.*, p. 85. Such considerations of possible sources are important, but lie outside the scope of the present study.

⁷Ibid., pp. 37-43. Doctrines considered include transsubstantiation, divine clemency and the relative value attributable to personal effort and to intercessory prayer in the process of salvation.

⁸There are secondary characters, like Hector and Melyant, for whom the struggle between pride and humility is more significant, but the heart of the plot and the life of the principal characters, Pauphilet believes, center around the opposite poles of virginity and lust. Pride--or homicide, Gawain's abiding sin--is an external manifestation of evil. Lust is its essence.

⁹It is Gilson who points out that Galahad, the only perfect virgin among the questers, is equally the only one to bring the quest to its ultimate conclusion: "La Mystique de la grâce dans la Queste del saint Graal," Les Idées et les lettres (Paris: Vrin, 1932), p. 75.

¹⁰Both acknowledge as significant the exhortation delivered in the name of Nascien the Hermit--that no knight should begin the quest without confession--and both attach importance to the recurrent use of the statement that such and such an individual has not made a good confession for a long time to express the perilous state of his soul. Gilson, op. cit., p. 77. Pauphilet, op. cit., p. 49.

¹¹Pauphilet, op. cit., pp. 127-135

¹²Gilson is naturally aware that many of the adventures seem to be about knowledge more than about grace or morality, and that many pages of the Queste are taken up in explaining to the questers how to lead a godly life. He believes, however, that even what passes for revelation and enlightenment is more concerned with growth in holiness than with growth in knowledge. This contention he bases on the conviction that the author of the Queste is a disciple of Bernard of Clairvaux, and that he therefore uses the language of cognition to describe what are essentially affective states. Ecstasy in this life is the closest approach that we can make to the union with God to be provided by the beatific vision in heaven, and the two are spoken of in the same terminology, although the one is knowledge and vision, the other love and desire. (Bernard, De diligendo Deo, X, art. 27.) In seeking to see and know, therefore, the knights are really attempting to love and be transformed by grace.

¹³H. J. B. Gray, "The Mystical Doctrine of the Queste del saint Graal," Arthurian I (1928-29), pp. 49-57.

¹⁴Bernard of Clairvaux, De gratia et libero arbitrio, 14.

¹⁵Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles, lx.

¹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, De gratia 5.

¹⁷ Gray does make the important reservation that Lancelot's teachers, guides and counsellors take his knowledge of Christian doctrine for granted. Even as they are following with him the pattern of responses to grace elucidated by Bernard, they don't say much about either grace or how to respond to it. Philosophical problems of grace and free will underlie the conversion process without being taught or discussed or appearing prominently in the story. This, however, does not in any way alienate Gray from Gilson or from the type of interpretation he represents. If the cognitional basis for conversion is ignored, then surely something else must be the real concern behind all the references to learning and enlightenment.

¹⁸ "Les Grands Secrets du Saint-Graal dans la Queste du pseudo-Map," Lumière du Graal (Paris: Chaiers du Sud, 1951), pp. 154-74.

¹⁹ . . . although there is enough even of that in the form of advice, counsel, moral exhortation, sermons and the assignment of penances in confession.

²⁰ "Le Graal et la chevalerie," Romania 75 (1954), pp. 165-75.

²¹ . . . nor clergy either, though many of the latter are helpful as assistants or advisers to the questers.

²² One could hardly read a reference to Duke Galahad or to Viscount Gawain without laughing.

²³ Cf., above, note 17. Gray has to admit that most basic Christian doctrine is taken for granted.

²⁴ It could conceivably be argued that the adventures are retained for the sake of the readership, but if that is true, then why spiritualize the traditional material at all?

²⁵ The second question that Frappier's interpretation inspires calls for analysis by a historian rather than by a literary critic, but certainly ought to be addressed somewhere. Do the facts sustain the social theory on which his view is based? Was the concentration of power in the higher echelons of the feudal hierarchy dramatic enough to provoke a crisis of self-identity among knights? Though the long-term trends toward centralization are clear to a modern analyst, were they perceptible at the time? Did the average knight or baron think of his social and political importance as waning?

²⁶ Les Aventures ou la quête del saint graal in H. Oskar Sommer, ed., The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances (Washington: the Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1913), Vol. VI, p. 16. Subsequent references to the text of the Queste will appear in the form Queste, p. . . . , and will refer to this edition.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 167-68.

²⁹ The kind of linking revelation common in Perlesvaus is only rarely encountered in the Queste. The explanation of the incident in which Galahad raises the tombstone of great weight to remove the body of the knight buried beneath it is one example: it attaches to each of the details a meaning which links Galahad with Christ. Queste, pp. 28-29.

³⁰ Queste, p. 132.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 133-34.

³² Ibid., pp. 31ff.

³³ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 42ff.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 100ff.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 101.

⁴² Ibid., p. 103.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 67ff.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 73ff.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 73-74.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 74-75.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 75.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 80ff. The explanation only reinforces the obvious meaning of the struggle. The maiden who tried to seduce Perceval is the enemy, once an angel, flung down by God because of his pride. He lured the first woman into the same sin, concupiscence, for which he was punished. He now lies in wait night and day to snare the knights of Jesus Christ. The tent that she spread represents the world, ever full of sin, into which she wanted him to enter. She encouraged him to rest inside, that is to be idle, and to enjoy earthly cheer and gluttony, not to sow seed against the day when good men reap their harvest. She wanted to shelter him from the sun, for it is the light of Christ and the fire of the Holy Ghost.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 107ff.

⁵³Nascien explains this vision in terms of the fellowship of the Round Table, which is founded on humility and patience, symbolized by the meadow in which the bulls are supposed to eat, but which all but three forsake in search of richer food. Two of the three exceptions--representing Galahad and Perceval--are white and fair, because they are pure. The third--Bohort--is barely spotted, because he sinned only once, and promptly repented. The other, dappled, bulls seek richer food in moors and wastelands, not in the meadow, representing the sinful knights who avoid confession and the ways of patience and humility to follow the path of hell. Many do not return; others come back crippled, wounded, blinded, or otherwise afflicted. Of the unspotted bulls, two never return, and the one who does feeds contentedly on the grass of the meadow, on patience and humility. The explanation is offered in the manner of a parable, not of a sustained allegory, and there is thus no attempt made to harmonize details. The hayrack is allowed to represent the Round Table--a positive value--at one point, but the temptation of pride and greed at another; and the gifts dispensed by the Holy Ghost through the Grail are also allowed to be both blessing and temptation at different points in the exposition.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁵In Hector's vision he and Lancelot stepped off a throne, vacating the honour and prestige that they enjoyed at Arthur's court. Both mounted the high horses of pride and arrogance, but Lancelot fell from his, turning his back on pride. Christ stripped him of his sins, so he saw that he was equally naked of virtue, and sought forgiveness. He was arrayed in patience and humility and rode on an ass, humility's own beast. Lancelot saw a spring, an image of the Holy Grail, the grace of the Holy Ghost, which the penitent desires more and more, the more he savours it, and increases as water is drawn from it. Lancelot will humble himself still further, stooping to drink from the spring, which will hide itself. He will be in a trance for twenty-four days as punishment for the time he indulged in worldly enjoyments. Hector, on the other hand, will remain mounted on the warhorse of pride, and so will be turned away from the Fisher King's palace and will achieve nothing in the quest.

⁵⁶The distinction is readily explained by simple examples out of the Gospels. Jesus may be offering his disciples an insight into the divine nature--though he may also be delivering a moral exhortation--when he tells them that God is love and that he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. On the other hand, when he tells them on the way to Bethany that Lazarus is dead, he is merely setting the facts straight. In the first instance he is providing, out of the divine wisdom, a remedy for the intrinsic limitations of the human intellect. In the second he is providing information that minds perfectly capable of grasping it happen not to have received.

⁵⁷Queste, pp. 80-81. These are only highlights of a much more detailed exposition, but are representative of the whole.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 128.

⁵⁹When first found, the shield is mounted behind the altar in a monastery of white monks, and is reckoned miraculous, so that there is some question as to who is worthy to take it. Owein declares himself unworthy, but Baudemagus is more daring, and is attacked by an avenging knight for his presumption. Galahad alone is eventually found worthy to bear the shield. Queste, pp. 24ff.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 24.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 25.

⁶²Ibid., p. 26.

⁶³Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 55ff. The account of the fellowships is too extensive to quote, but is approximately as follows. The first table was established by Christ for the fellowship of his apostles at which he himself held the first place. The second was set up by Joseph of Arimathea in conscious imitation of the first, and was brought to Britain when Joseph and his 400 followers first brought the faith there. It was doubly hallowed, through the multiplication of twelve loaves by the Holy Grail, and through the blessing of Christ himself, who consecrated a special seat for Joseph corresponding to the one he had occupied at the first table. Joseph's exclusive right to this place was underlined when two of his relatives revolted against his authority and one sat in it, only to be swallowed up by the earth, giving the chair its subsequent name of Seat of Dread. The third table, the Round Table, was established by Uterpendragon at the suggestion of Merlin, who reserved a Seat of Danger for the knight who would be sent by God to find the Grail and to be master of the Round Table.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 55. The second Joseph mentioned here was certainly confused with Flavius Josephus, and in consequence he is often cited in criticism as Josephus. The variants on his name, however--iosep, iosephes, iosephe and others--overlap widely with the variants of the name of his father, so that it seemed more appropriate to assign the same name to each. Hence Joseph and his son Joseph.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁸ On some occasions the Divine Will lies immediately behind a mysterious situation, but even then it is expressed and has its effect in much the same way as do human wills. A good example is the case of the very old king whom Perceval finds hearing Mass from bed in the monastery he visits soon after leaving his aunt's. Queste, pp. 60ff.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 155-56.

⁷⁰ The only symbolic details that the author judges worthy of exposition are the images of the serpent Papagustes, on one side of the hilt, and of the fish Ortenaius on the other, one of which is to guard the bearer from excessive heat, while the other makes him forget everything except the cause for which he drew the sword. Queste, p. 145.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 146. The explanation of the very ordinary hemp hangings is also a reservation/election story.

72. When Lambar, the maimed king's father, was at war with Urlain, the defeated Urlain took refuge in the ship, found the sword, and returned to shore with it. The sword did not fail Urlain: on the contrary, it cut right through Lambar and his horse under him. His presumption was doubly punished, however, first by the devastation of the land--this being the first fatal blow producing the waste land--and secondly by his own death. In a separate incident Mordrain's brother-in-law Nascien, who knew better and had initially kept his hands off the sword, had recourse to it to defend himself against a giant on the Turning Isle, only to have the sword snap in his hands as punishment. Subsequently, he was further punished on leaving the ship by a blow from another sword, which wounded him on the left shoulder. Finally, Pellinor commits his sin of presumption by drawing the sword slightly out of its scabbard, to the point where it remains until Galahad's arrival. For this Pellinor is maimed, to be cured ultimately by Galahad. Queste, pp. 147ff.

73. Queste, pp. 152ff. The story begins chronologically with the sin of Adam and Eve. Eve retained the bit of branch that adhered to the fruit she ate, and after her repentance she stuck it into the ground where she could see it and be reminded of her sin. Miraculously it took root. This branch brought out of paradise was like a promise of an eventual return, and through another maid like the one who bore the branch in her hand. The tree that grew from this branch was all white, in token that she who planted it was then, even in spirit, a virgin. Being consoled by an angel in a time of sadness and being persuaded that the tree was a source of life, Adam and Eve began to break off branches and plant them, and each sprouted into another white tree. After Abel had been conceived under it, the original tree became green and began to flower--as a token of the child's chastity and purity--and bear fruit--as a sign of the good works that would flourish in him. New shoots subsequently taken from this original tree grew up green, though the earlier offshoots remained white. Abel was then murdered by Cain under the same tree where he was conceived, and the tree consequently turned red in remembrance of the blood poured out under it. From that point on, no shoot taken from it ever survived. The original, however, and the earlier cuttings all survived, and were the only things to resist the bitterness that followed the flood. They were thus ready to hand when Solomon, being consoled over his constant defeats at the hands of his wily wife by the revelation that another woman would one day bear a man of his line who would surpass Josiah in valour, decided that he wanted to communicate to that future knight what he knew of him in advance. His wife conceived the idea of the ship, with a bed on board bearing Solomon's crown and David's sword, the latter lavishly adorned but hanging from a belt of hemp to be replaced by something worthier and more precious, the gift of a maiden in the future age. She had three posts cut from different coloured trees: one from the original tree, now red, which bled when cut; one from a white offshoot; one from a green offshoot. These she had fastened together on the bed. Solomon was well satisfied with this arrangement, because no one, including even the good knight, would know the meaning of the ship unless God revealed it to him. Solomon dreamed that night that

a man came from heaven accompanied by angels, blessed the ship with water, and inscribed both it and the sword. The next day he saw the warning on the ship that no one lacking in faith should dare to step aboard. The ship then departed of its own accord, and a voice informed Solomon that the last knight of his lineage would one day sleep in the bed.

⁷⁴Michael O. Baigent, The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (London: Cape, 1981). The work is not really Grail scholarship as such, but rather a sequel to a television documentary on another subject, which may or may not be connected to the Grail.

⁷⁵René Guénon, "L'Esotérisme du Graal," Lumière du Graal (Paris: Cahiers du Sud, 1951), pp. 37-49.

⁷⁶Queste, pp. 28-29.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁵This is only one instance of the appeal to the power of the cross, which is mentioned repeatedly in exhortations to knightly conduct. It gradually becomes the knightly weapon par excellence and the symbol of the new principles of knightly combat. The sword and the lance are no longer effective against the ultimate enemy, just as the old values no longer avail.

⁸⁶Queste, p. 134.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 115.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 40.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 140-41.

⁹²See above, pp. 151-52.

⁹³Histoire du peuple français, publiée sous la direction de
L. -H. Parias (Paris: Nouvelle librairie de France, 1951), Vol. 1:
Des Origines au Moyen Age, par Régine Pernoud, pp. 343ff.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 344-45.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 149.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNDERLYING UNITY OF PERLESVAUS AND THE QUESTE DEL SAINT GRAAL

Analysis of the Queste del saint Graal and of Perlesvaus in the preceding chapters of this study has identified a centre of thematic unity proper to each: participation in the apocalyptic struggle in the New Age in Perlesvaus, and the renewal of knightly ideals through sacramental principles in the Queste. These two themes bear interesting relationships to one another, and may even be construed as mirror images, but for all that they are quite distinct. The minds of the two authors run along separate lines: they ask different questions, and offer different answers.

The specific apocalyptic and sacramental themes found in the Queste and Perlesvaus are only part of what those two texts are expressing, however. Human experience, and hence human expression, is not limited to questions, answers, views, opinions and theories. Human persons are far more than what they think, and are hardly capable of articulating their thoughts without at the same time, whether willingly or not, giving expression to other aspects of their total being. Even when the content of what they communicate is pure idea, the form in which they choose to express themselves reveals more. What they express can not, ultimately, be divorced from how they express it. This is not to say that the traditional distinction between content or meaning and form is invalid. It

is certainly possible to think thoughts or to hold opinions first, and then, quite independently, to arrange them structurally according to some plan, or to couch them in a particular style, high or low, tragic, comic, or heroic. Imagery, however, especially where it is created more or less unconsciously, according to no pre-arranged plan, and where it is more material than formal, is a very different matter. It can not readily be separated from what it is expressing.

Gaston Bachelard, more than any other critic, has drawn attention to the importance of the material imagination and of the images it generates,¹ and much of what he says about the meaning inherent in the very matter of images, however they may be formed, and about the primacy of the four elements of earth, air, fire and water, is applicable to Perlesvaus and to the Queste. Their authors, so different in their ways of thinking, turn equally to the same material elements--predominantly to fire (and with it light) and to water--and form them in similar ways. They do not do this in the sort of organized and artful way that would suggest a deliberate attempt to enhance their tales with visual beauty, but rather sporadically and apparently instinctively in a pattern that only makes sense if viewed not as esthetic adornment but as an aspect of meaning, as that part of the total expression that derives more from manner, from the how, than from content or the what. The imagery of Perlesvaus and of the Queste, in other words, is part of their meaning, and their full significance cannot be appreciated if it is not taken into account.

The meaning inherent in the imagery of Perlesvaus and of the Queste is distinct from the meaning consciously expressed in the form of doctrines, views, questions and answers, opinions or ideas, but it is not,

for all that, incapable of being expressed in those terms. It is, in fact, no more mysterious, and lies no deeper in the psyche, than the notions of apocalyptic struggle or of sacrament. The common theme expressed in the imagery of these two romances is simply change. In addition to what each one means individually, they are both stories about the experience of transition, about the anxiety it causes, and about the struggle to replace vanished structures and values with something new. This is as distinctive a mark of the two taken together as either apocalypticism or mysticism is of either alone.

The world of Chrétien de Troyes's Conte del graal is essentially stable, despite the catastrophic effects of unasked questions. Perceval is instructed by Gornemant of Goort in a chivalrous code that includes principles of courage, honesty, dignity, reticence, magnanimity and service to the distressed,² and that code continues to govern the lives of good and bad alike throughout the narrative. Whether obeyed or disobeyed, fulfilled or unfulfilled, the basic code is accepted by all. Nothing could be more different from this than the world of Perlesvaus and of the Queste, which, for all the differences between the two texts, is the same world, in that it is in transition, with the traditional chivalrous values expounded in the Conte del graal and the way of life based on them fading away, and a period of confused and anxious uncertainty following them. This phenomenon is not expounded at length in either work, but it is an important theme of both, and is clearly and vividly presented in imagery, most notably in the material imagery of fire and of water and in the formal imagery of colour, in which red holds the same preeminence enjoyed by water and fire among the elements.

Water Imagery

Water, in both Perlesvaus and the Queste, appears frequently and in a variety of forms. It is sometimes fresh, sometimes the salt water of the sea. It occasionally occurs as a lake or pond, but much more often as a running stream or river. It pours out of springs and fountains, falls as rain, is formed countless times into tears welling up in the eyes of bereaved heroes, imprisons those heroes on islands or isolated rocks, carries them in ships from place to place, and receives their dead.

Some of the forms that water assumes in these two texts are, though hardly unique or rare, at least more prominent than they would be in many other works, but the forms and the functions of water are not the essential aspects of its role in Perlesvaus or in the Queste. Before it is salt or sweet, running or still, cool or hot, water is liquid, and liquidity is consistently its most striking and most important characteristic in these works. Even when it is at rest--and most of the time here it is not--water, as the primary liquid of our experience, is movement, and flux, and change. It physically carries people from place to place, it transports them from the known world to the mysterious beyond, it bears them off in death, it nourishes, it destroys, and it even, in the form of tears, softens and liquifies the person, fostering inward change.

It will be convenient, for practical reasons, to treat the several significant forms of water imagery in sequence, first running water, then the waters of death and mystery, finally tears. In all three forms, however, and in both romances, the essential quality of water, and the ultimate foundation of the meaning which the two have in common, will remain

liquidity. These are, in a very real sense, fluid tales, stories of movement and change whose sense lies as much in the phenomenon of transition as in apocalyptic theories or Cistercian mysticism. Liquidity is the dominant image of Perlesvaus and the Queste, the source from which other images, of earth and fire especially, draw their role and their significance. To demonstrate that this is so, and how it is so, is the purpose behind the detailed presentation which follows of images of running water, the waters of death and mystery, and tears.

Running water is visually the easiest form of water to associate with change and transition. It is in motion, bearing objects small or large along with it, changing aspect as the light plays on it in different ways, eroding the earth in one place and building it up in another, and bringing change with it, usually by refreshing, or nourishing, or dissolving.

Flowing water is not bound by its nature as liquid to be either a negative or a positive force: it can as easily be the one as the other; the only thing it cannot be is conservative. In Perlesvaus and the Queste, however, the balance lies heavily to the negative side. Each of the two stories is very much concerned with the decay and passing of an old order, whether with the decline of Arthur's court and the passage of an age, or with the decadence and increasing meaninglessness of external chivalry. Though each eventually presents the emergence of a new and better order, it does so only after prolonged struggle. The forces of change are essentially menacing and a cause of anxiety, and this is reflected in the imagery of flowing water, which only rarely nourishes or refreshes, but consistently threatens, endangers, imprisons, and even destroys.

In the Queste the image of the river flowing from Nascien's son Celidoine through his nine descendants to Lancelot, the father of Galahad, portrays a water that carried nourishment and life with it, and that is at certain points at least, clear and beautiful.³ This image is so carefully structured and so thoroughly explained, however, that it belongs more in the realm of the mind than in that of experience and its expression. It is more an idea than an image. Moreover, even it is not immune from the tendency of water to threaten and endanger, for it also has at times a daunting aspect: "si estoit si roide & si bruians quil nest riens qui le puisse souffrir."⁴

Perhaps by coincidence Perlesvaus also contains a single good and desirable river standing in contrast to most of its fellows. This is the Fisher King's own river, which transforms his land with the bounties it brings from the Earthly Paradise:

Il avoit derier le chastel .i. flun, ce tesmoigne
l'estoire, par coi toz li biens venoit au chastel.
Icil flun estoit mout beaus e mout plentious.
Josephez nos tesmoigne que il venoit de Paradis
Terrestre, e avironnoit tot le chastel, e coroit
dusq'en la forest chiés .i. prodrom hermite.
Iluec perdoit son cors e entroit en terre, mais
tot la o il s'espandoit estoit grant la plenté
de toz les biens.⁵

No other river in Perlesvaus, nor even any stream, shares in the beauty or the bountifulness portrayed here. At best other water courses are neutral, like the undescribed rivieres coranz surrounding the Castle of Great Endeavour,⁶ while most rivers are frankly hostile in themselves. The three violent bodies of water that bar the approach to the Grail Castle are life-threatening: the water is wide, deep and swift-flowing, and the bridges treacherously narrow, and only a divine miracle calms the water and broadens the bridges to allow Gawain to pass in safety.⁷

Elsewhere the threat of death in running water becomes reality. The blood of the eleven knights of the Lord of the Moors is poured out into the river,⁸ the water thereby completing their destruction and at the same time being itself transformed into blood. The same double transformation, in which water simultaneously carries victims to their death, and is itself made deadly, recurs at the taking of the Castle of the Copper Tower, when Perceval throws the obstinate non-believers into the river, which then turns the portion of the sea into which it flows into a horrible and dangerous place that no ship can pass through without being lost.⁹ The transformation of the water itself is not always portrayed, but its role as the final agent of destruction of the dying recurs several other times. On three occasions during the taking of Castle Mortal Perceval throws the bodies--or pieces of the bodies--of his enemies into the deep and swift water flowing under the bridges,¹⁰ and in a much later incident other non-believers, at the Mad Castle, are thrown into running water as well.¹¹

The running water in the Queste is not as conclusively destructive as it is in Perlesvaus, but, with the single exception of the image of Celidoine's offspring, it is a source of danger and menace. The very first running stream encountered in the Queste is not a clear brook but "vne iauwe fort & roide",¹² typical of most of the other flowing water in the narrative. When Perceval is later tricked by the devil in feminine disguise, and accepts the gift of a dangerous horse, he is carried to another "grant iauue & rade" so violent that it terrifies him: "Et quant perceual la uoit si tres grande si se redoute de passer por ce quil estoit nuis . ne [il] ni voit ne pont ne pla[n]c[h]e."¹³

The devil, again disguised as a woman, does not describe the

watercourse "con apele marchoise",¹⁴ but in her deceitful tale it is a dangerous place, in which the Good Knight's horse drowns, and from which he escapes only by good fortune. When Lancelot again comes to this same river it is "lieue qui tant est parfonde & perilleuse",¹⁵ and the prospect of crossing it is so daunting that Lancelot becomes its prisoner.¹⁶

The menace inherent in the images of running water cited here is not always explicit: sometimes bodies are discarded or blood poured out or ships destroyed, but as often as not the threat is vague and only suggested. Almost without exception, though, the essential danger that makes the water so frightening in its violent forms is the ultimate transition, the passage from life to death. Water is terrifying because it can kill, and this awesome power of the liquid element is reflected in far more images than those of flowing water alone. In addition to two singular episodes in Perlesvaus in which water establishes a type of communion with the dead in unconventional ways,¹⁷ there is also in both the Queste and Perlesvaus a regular custom of passage into--and sometimes out of--the realm of the dead by water.

Perlesvaus contains the best example of this practice: a near classic instance of the motif of the ship of the dead.¹⁸ The body of Perceval's sister is committed to the water in a ship especially prepared and richly decorated for the purpose. A letter is placed with the body to explain to anyone finding it who the dead woman is and what she accomplished in her life, and all the inhabitants of the castle gather on the shore to mourn until the ship is out of sight.¹⁹ This significant incident is interesting not only in itself, but also as a clue to the probable meaning of the other mysterious ships that appear

frequently in both romances. Gaston Bachelard has argued cogently in L'Eau et le rêve that mysterious ships in fiction almost all participate, to one degree or another, in the phenomenon of the ship of the dead,²⁰ and the presence of a classic example of this phenomenon, explicitly presented as such, confirms the applicability of his theory to Perlesvaus and the Queste.

Bachelard's explanation of the significance of mysterious ships and voyages provides powerful support for the hypothesis that Perlesvaus and the Queste are not only tales of movement and transition, but more precisely stories in which transition and change are threatening and dangerous, because such ships and voyages are an important element in both plots. Some are overtly connected with death, like the voyage in Branch IX of Perlesvaus that brings Perceval to his uncle's castle, which is burning with an unquenchable fire, then to islands that are entirely barren and deserted, and finally to the tombs of his father and uncles in twelve chapels watched over by hermits.²¹ The unquenchable fire, burning in consequence of a sin, unmistakably evokes hell, the islands are lifeless--and the last of them a graveyard--and even the sea is without life or movement, being "coie e serie".²² This is a different world from the one in which the knights of the Round Table live and do battle, and water is the medium by which one moves from one into the other, from the land of the living to the realm of the dead.

In other cases the presence of death is less explicit, but the aura of mystery and of otherworldliness surrounding the ships is strong enough to evoke Bachelard's theory of participation, and there is always some evocation of death or the threat of death. On board the ship that appears like a candle, moving without sail or wind, and with only a

single helmsman for crew, death is evoked by the knight who lies sleeping, laid out on a bier like a corpse surrounded by candlelight.²³ On board the ship that eventually carries Perceval to the Castle of the Four Horns the threat of death is suggested by the uncertainty of the destination: ". . . il est en grant peril de mort, car cele nef arivera, se Diex n'en pense, en itel leu ou jamés n'en orra l'en novele."²⁴ The fear is real, because the power of water to transport beyond the domain of the living is real. The voyage ultimately proves a fortunate one for Perceval and his helmsman, but it is God, not the water, that has brought them to a good end: "Damedex le conduit come celi qui le croit e aime e sert de bon cuer."²⁵ It is in fact the will of God, recognising Perceval's great virtue, that has brought him to the Castle of the Four Horns,²⁶ but until this divine intervention was revealed to him, he had no cause to expect other than the worst: on a mysterious ship, sailing apparently at random, he was in danger, as he and his fellow knights are repeatedly when in proximity to water.

Characters in the Queste live and struggle in different ways, but they, too, go down to the sea, and once allowance is made for differences in doctrine and plot, it can be seen that their sea voyages have the same basic significance as those in Perlesvaus. Perceval's adventures on the rocky island in the sea, for instance, parallel his mysterious voyage in Perlesvaus, and the waters of the sea play the same role. They transport to a place that is not only distant, but different: he and his life are changed in a way that is eminently frightening: "Car il voit bien que par proece de cheualerie ne puet il escaper ne autrement se diex ni met conseil."²⁷ God is indeed watching over Perceval here, and God can use the water for his own beneficent

purposes, by sending a good and wise counsellor in a white ship, for instance,²⁸ but the sea leads to the good realm of God and his saints only when divine providence makes it do so. When God is not intervening actively, the sea brings rather the diabolical black ship that arrives in a whirlwind and is driven off by the sign of the cross.²⁹

The motif of transition by sea to a realm beyond death recurs in other incidents in the Queste as well. Lancelot is carried away from confinement at the river Marchoise by the real ship of the dead described earlier--the ship bearing the body of Perceval's sister³⁰--and is taken to the Grail Castle, where he lies for fourteen days in a sort of coma that makes bystanders wonder whether he is alive or dead.³¹ Bohort, Galahad, Perceval, and the latter's sister--then still alive--are transported mysteriously by sea to Solomon's ship, where they meet Lambar, Urlain, Solomon and others long dead, and are even brought into contact, through the three staves and the tree of life, with Adam and Eve.³² In each case the principles remain the same: the sea and its waters are a transitional force, leading to a realm that is not only distant, but radically different from the world of normal experience, and different in a way that remains menacing and terrifying until God intervenes to bring promise of beneficial change. The image of the voyage is an extension of the image of running water and of liquidity in general: an image of change, transformation, transition, and of the threat of decay, destruction, and death: water is change, and change is menacing.

In the narrowest sense these two principles of change and menace do not quite apply to the commonest form of water in both Perlesvaus and the Queste, that is to tears. It is hard to imagine tears as threatening: we are not normally frightened by a person who

is crying. Like all other liquids, however, they do suggest change in various ways; and, while not menacing, they are certainly unpleasant and undesirable in their connotations. They are hot; they are salty, and they are usually held to be bitter. They may express anger or hurt pride, less often joy, but most of all grief, and always transition. We weep when overcome with anger, joy or grief, not when we are chronically frustrated, cheerful, or depressed. This largely holds true for Perlesvaus and the Queste. Just as change externally creates threats and fear, so internally it gives rise time and again to the sense of loss that finds expression in tears of grief.

Grief does not appear among any critic's list of what either Perlesvaus or the Queste is about. It is not a theme like apocalyptic warfare or mysticism or the social status of knights. It is, however, constantly present, like the threat of destruction and death, and is an important element in the experience that the two romances are expressing.

In some instances in Perlesvaus the grief expressed in tears is of a common sort, close to simple frustration. The maiden whom Gawain discovers in a hermitage chapel is weeping out of annoyance because only the Good Knight can save her inheritance, and she cannot find him.³³ The Widow Lady and her daughter, likewise, weep more for their lands and goods than for any deeper sense of loss.³⁴

On other occasions, however, tears are called forth by a more directly human empathy. Arthur weeps out of compassion in Saint Augustine's chapel when he sees the vision of Jesus crowned with thorns and bleeding from his wounds,³⁵ and Queen Jandree later cries over a similar vision that she sees in a dream.³⁶ The great suffering of the moaning victims in the pit in Branch XI also draws tears from the

pitying bystanders.³⁷ Even in these situations the change signified by the shedding of tears is relatively superficial, a matter of feeling and mood, but in some instances, the sense of grief is deeper, and the flowing tears signify a more profound and more lasting change.

Most often tears of deep and lasting change arise out of personal loss, like the bereavement of the maiden in Branch VIII who cries for the love of the promised husband who jilted her.³⁸ Lancelot is vulnerable to such grief through his love for Guenevere, and it reduces him to tears twice, once when he supposes that his own death is imminent,³⁹ and again when he learns that Guenevere really has died. This surrender to grief and the liquid image that accompanies it are not attached directly to a conversion scene, and, of course, Lancelot never does convert from lust to divine love in Perlesvaus in the absolute way that he does in the Queste. Yet there is in Lancelot a definite turning to God and a perceptible growth in holiness in the course of the adventures, amounting in effect to a gradual conversion, and the softening and liquifying of the person implicit in the shedding of tears of grief is not disconnected from this change. Bachelard draws attention to the extraordinary power of water to dissolve fully and radically. He insists explicitly that this power resides in liquid matter, and is not limited to the particular form of tears,⁴¹ but his principle is certainly applicable to the tears of the converted Lancelot, and even more directly to those of Queen Jandree. This pagan woman is brought to faith in Christ through a vision of his sufferings during which she repeatedly dissolves in tears. As she is liquified externally, she is changed within. Joseus, the son of Pelles, also weeps at the precise time of his conversion, crying with remorse at having killed his mother, and resolving to enter a hermitage

to do penance.⁴³ Like Lancelot, and like Queen Jandree, he dissolves and he is changed.

The Queste, like Perlesvaus, contains numerous incidents in which tears are shed for relatively commonplace reasons. The motifs of change and of menace are present, but the change is rarely radical, and the sense of grief or dread only occasionally profound. Thus, the devil in disguise as a beautiful woman appears to weep when Bohort refuses to become her lover,⁴⁴ Perceval cries over the decline into poverty of his aunt, the sometime Queen of the Waste Land,⁴⁵ Bohort weeps when he is confronted with his brother and a threatened maiden, and cannot possibly help both,⁴⁶ and the onlookers who see Lancelot in a coma outside the Grail chamber shed tears of pity over him.⁴⁷ In the face of more radical change--of the ultimate transformation that is death--Lancelot tearfully laments the death of Baudemagus,⁴⁸ Hector and Gawain weep over the death of Owein the Bastard,⁴⁹ Bohort grieves when he thinks he must kill his brother Lionel,⁵⁰ and the knights taking leave of Perceval, Bohort and Galahad pour out their tears at seeing the companions for the last time.⁵¹

Far more significant, however, both for the meaning of the Queste, and for the hypothesis of its thematic kinship with Perlesvaus, is the occurrence here too of the phenomenon of symbolic liquification of the person at a moment of profound change. Lancelot's slow but thoroughgoing conversion from lust to purity is marked, more distinctly than his conversion, or even Queen Jandree's, in Perlesvaus by his gradual dissolution into tears. Initially he remains dry and hard, and it is rather the hermit who weeps at his initial confession.⁵² Lancelot is "plus dur que pierre & plus amer que fust nul & plus despris que

figuiers".⁵³ When next admonished, however, he is both morally and physically softer and more permeable.⁵⁴ As he succeeds in weeping for himself, he also becomes more sensitive to the tears of others, beginning with the old man whose fellow hermit has died apparently in sin: "Quant lancelot vit le preudome si tendrement plorer si len prinst moult grant pitie".⁵⁵ He is also receptive to the advice that this second hermit gives him, and is once again moved to cry, this time more copiously: "Atant se taist & regarde lancelot qui ploroit si durement comme se il veist deuant lui mort la riens el monde que [il] plus amoit. . . ." ⁵⁶ From this point onward Lancelot is dissolved, permeable, changeable: he weeps, and he reforms his life.⁵⁷

Like Joseus in Perlesvaus, Bohort in the Queste is a secondary convert--though a major character overall--whose conversion is marked by tears. He does not cry as often as Lancelot, but he does shed tears at the climax of his conversion, at the moment when he confesses his faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and prepares to make his communion.⁵⁸ Compassion and grieving over an impending loss may have their influence here, but essentially this tearful individual is softened within, receptive to the word of the Holy Spirit that can now permeate him and move him to plead for forgiveness.

Grief, loss and change are thus constantly present in both Perlesvaus and the Queste, represented by the tears that are the dominant form of the commonest material image in either romance.⁵⁹ The significance of this phenomenon is emphasized, moreover, by the very early appearance of both motifs and images in each text. Even before the nature of the decline of Arthur, or of the apocalyptic struggle to be waged, or of heavenly chivalry and the passing of worldly knighthood,

tears are being shed. Both tales begin under the double sign of change and menace.

Perlesvaus is set in motion by Guenevere's tears over the decline of her husband and his court. She weeps over it, he asks her why,⁶⁰ and he is thereby set on the road to St. Augustine's chapel, and his knights on the course of adventures comprising the plot of Perlesvaus. In the Queste the changed order of knightly society is foreshadowed by the coming of the Good Knight who displaces the worldly Lancelot from his place as the best knight in the world, and of the maiden on the white palfrey who notes the change and weeps over it.⁶¹ The shedding of tears is more widespread than that however, as is the consciousness of radical change and the sense of anxiety provoked by the appearance of the Good Knight and by the knights' vow to seek the truth of the Grail and to bring the adventures of Britain to an end. Not only Guenevere and the other women weep;⁶² even the King does so, when his knights take their oath, and he foresees the destruction of the fellowship of the Round Table.⁶³ Nothing in either romance will ever again be as it supposedly was before they began, and the warm, bitter liquid of tears, shed from the outset, is the mark of the change.

The water that flows in tears is thus like the other waters in Perlesvaus and the Queste. It is an image of transition in tales of transition. It represents the instability of persons and of institutions: of knights whose customary family feuds or casual encounters with one another are no longer worthy causes in which to fight, or whose traditional virtues of strength and courage have become meaningless; and of the fellowship of the Round Table itself, which in one case begins in decline and is later torn apart by treachery, and in

the other is destroyed by the rash vow to pursue the Grail. Despite the world of difference between the apocalyptic and the mystical outlook, between the quest for a new cause in which to fight and the search for new, interior values, Perlesvaus and the Queste are each about the passing of an old order and the anxious pursuit of a new one to take its place. As knightly fellowship declines, and traditional virtues provoke repeated disasters, the threat of water is constantly present to destroy, to carry off into places of danger, to soften and make vulnerable the individual, to destabilize everything that was formerly hard and firm.

Ultimately, of course, neither persons nor societies disintegrate. By very different means appropriate to the theology of each work and its author, God intervenes to rescue the victims of destructive waters, to guide mysterious voyagers to safety, to give new form and solidity to vulnerable individuals dissolved in tears. The actual manner of such intervention is naturally proper to each text, just as the manner in which societies collapse and individuals find their way into danger is proper to each. The imagery is similar, however, and on that level Perlesvaus and the Queste display real unity. Danger and dissolution are imagined and dreamed of in similar ways, and so, too, is deliverance from them. Water has a natural enemy, which is fire, and their enmity extends into the realm of images and reverie and into the two romances we are studying.

* * * * *

The Imagery of Fire

To demonstrate that an aspect of form, such as imagery, is equally an aspect of meaning is an enterprise fraught with risk. Any argument built up along such lines is in constant danger of being invalidated by the counterargument of coincidence. Both Perlesvaus and the Queste show a marked preference for water that is destructive over water that is nourishing or refreshing, but what is the basis for the preference? Is it based on some choice made either consciously through deliberate intent or unconsciously through some fundamental orientation of mind, or has it resulted from purely esthetic considerations unrelated to theme, or from sheer happenstance? It was important to establish that water may have different functions symbolically as well as practically, and that the authors of our two romances made a definite choice from among those symbolic functions.

The same question of coincidence and choice arises in respect of fire imagery. There is a markedly similar orientation in both texts, but it is not immediately self-evident that this orientation has thematic significance. It is necessary to investigate the range of possible uses and types of fire imagery, and the evidence that might suggest that a meaningful choice has been made from among them.

Once more, as was true with water images, Gaston Bachelard can be very helpful in clarifying the context within which a choice of types of fire imagery might have been made. In his study The Psychoanalysis of Fire,⁶⁴ he points out how many values may be attached to fire, even if they be mutually contradictory. Fire, alone among the elements, can contradict itself, can represent the opposing values of good and evil: fire shines in heaven and burns in hell.⁶⁵ It can also depict other

opposites: material and idealistic knowledge, or simply matter and spirit.⁶⁶ It can be intensely sexualized or ethereally pure.

One whole, very highly developed class of fire imagery stresses warmth and is very sexual. Bachelard is convinced that primitive man was inspired to try to make fire by rubbing sticks together not through any observation of falling trees starting forest fires, but by the intimate experience of warmth created by rubbing and caressing in sexual activity. Prometheus, for Bachelard, is a vigorous lover punished by a jealous husband.⁶⁷ Reminders of this sexual origin of fire continually recur in literature and in folklore: in the insistence on the use of woods of different nature when rubbing sticks, in the belief that ashes spread on a field make the land fertile and the cattle fat, or in the joyous rituals surrounding the preparation of fire among primitive peoples, where the joy of anticipation is closely related to the anticipatory pleasure of sexual foreplay.⁶⁸ Having a sexual origin, fire remains very sexual in its associations, especially where its warmth is emphasized.

There is a second and equally developed class of fire images and of reverie centered on fire that is as fully idealized and purified as the first is sexualized. It is widely believed that fire purifies everything. Fire deodorizes: in cooking it conquers putrefaction. It also separates substances and destroys material impurities. Moreover, it melts, thus giving homogeneity and purity to mixed substances that have passed through it. Even in agriculture there exists, along with the ash that makes fertile, a fire that purifies by burning off weeds and stubble, and even the roots below the soil, leaving the earth virgin.⁶⁹ The emphasis in this reverie is very different. Fire that is pure and

idealized is centered at the point of the flame, where colour gives way to an almost invisible vibration. At this point fire burns with a pure light, without residue, inexhaustibly.⁷⁰ Fire that gives heat and leaves a residue is material and sexual. Fire that gives light without heat or ash is pure and idealized. It possesses an absolute quality: it has nothing to separate, nothing to unite. It only exists, simple and pure.

Bachelard does not hesitate to associate the conscious intervention of the will with the reverie of idealized fire. He is unashamedly partial to the concepts of sublimation and of conscious repression, which he considers a normal, useful, even joyful activity.⁷¹ The deliberate and systematic acceptance of limitations is inherent in all joy of learning, and it underlies the somewhat learned reverie that centers on purified fire.

Quite apart from the duality in moral and symbolic value affecting fire images, there are distinct and very different individual themes that can predominate in them: profound and rapid change is one, concentration another. There are also fire images of aggrandizement, and of the quest for the beyond.

For the primitive mind only changes caused by fire are truly deep, striking and definitive. Falling fruit and running streams pose no enigma; the succession of night and day is superficial and inconsequential; but whatever has been touched by fire has a different texture and a different taste.⁷² Whether it has been burned or cooked, it is irreversibly altered. This primitive experience still exists as a basis for reverie: fire suggests sudden and rapid change, and change that is radical and irreversible.⁷³

Closely allied to dreams of sudden and radical change are the

urge to speed up the passage of time and the longing for the beyond, which are also provoked by images of fire. Destruction is the most radical change of all, and the funeral pyre, which no longer figures in our real-life experiences, still looms large in dreams of transcendence. The fire that destroys utterly, and leaves behind no trace of our being, is the ultimate guarantee of definitive passage into the world beyond.⁷⁴ When men long for the other world, they dream of fire.

Certain dream images--mostly, though not exclusively, in dreams of the beyond--are characterized by a tendency to aggrandizement and a fascination with the concentration of power. There are numerous images--which Bachelard deems a particular obstacle to scientific thought--that assimilate the spark and the seed and thus associate fire with life.⁷⁵ The spark is imagined as a small cause producing a great effect, just as the seed does. In a reverie centered on concentration and aggrandizement it is easy for the burning log in the fireplace to suggest the funeral pyre.⁷⁶ Images of that peculiar marriage of fire and water that is alcohol are highly receptive to dreams of concentration. Alcohol responds to the desire to hold a great power within a small volume, and it has inspired a surprisingly tenacious legend of spontaneous combustion in chronic alcoholics, who are supposed to be utterly impregnated with fire-producing liquid.⁷⁷

The imagery of fire is thus remarkably rich and varied. It is marked above all by the fundamental duality of good and evil, the spiritual and the material, the desexualized and the sexualized, the heat that produces ash and the pure light that vibrates at the limits of the incorporeal. Even beyond those opposites there are further symbolic themes or aspects of fire imagery: concentration and aggrandizement, change and

the longing for the beyond. All these elements, moreover, are of primitive origin. They are not inventions of the Symbolists or the Surrealists, inaccessible to a mediaeval author. The authors of Perlesvaus and of the Queste were not bound by any narrow established pattern of symbolism; they had all these possibilities at their disposal. Whether they were consciously introducing fire imagery into their works to illustrate some deliberately and carefully conceived idea, or whether they were giving free expression to their dreams and imaginings, they were not constrained by a limited range of traditional meanings. Fire could be imagined in many different forms and in association with a multitude of possible associations. The cultural and psychological context in which fire imagery exists is very broad and very free.

It is significant, therefore, given the breadth and variety of the range of fire imagery, that the authors of Perlesvaus and the Queste are so similar in their use of fire images. They seem to have made a definite and deliberate choice of images, and it was in each case the same choice. Purified fire is overwhelmingly dominant over sexualized fire. Light is consistently chosen over warmth, and in those cases where fires are allowed to burn and leave residue, that is to have a material existence, they are unreservedly classed with the evil forces of destruction. There is in both works a duality between light, which is good and which is in the ascendancy; and burning fire, which is evil and subordinate.

In many ways the less significant category, the fire that burns, is the easier to deal with, because the volume of evidence involved is smaller. The fire which has turned the Black Forest black in Perlesvaus is typical of this kind of fire image.⁷⁸ It is the image of a residue,

but not of the ash that makes fields fertile and cattle fat; this residue produces barrenness and sterility; it is a repulsive image of obvious evil. Other, similar fires are still burning: they are devouring material, producing a residue to leave behind them; and they too are unquestionably evil, destructive forces. One of these fires is destroying a city that Lancelot discovers;⁷⁹ another is presently burning up the Hermit King's castle, and will eventually be one of the two sources of the fire that destroys the world.⁸⁰

There are also certain other fires in Perlesvaus that belong on the opposite side of the fundamental duality from the purified fire that is light. The black and foul knights who defend the abandoned house with its chamber of the dead are armed with burning spears and firebrands.⁸¹ The Knight of the Dragon is filled with fire, which spews out when Perceval cleaves his skull,⁸² and the dragon itself exhales foul and stinking fire that infests the whole countryside round about.⁸³ These fires are diametrically opposed to the purifying fires that deodorize or to the spiritualized fire that is entirely light. These fires are dark and they stink, and they are the fires proper to the enemies of God and of his holy knights.

These, the sole representatives in Perlesvaus of that whole class of fire images that are material, warm, consuming and residue-producing are relatively insignificant, being both few in number and confined to the world of the villains. Their counterparts in the Queste del saint Graal are less significant still, because they are not only equally few but are also, in a sense, perverted by the intervention of the Divine Will that is one of the characteristic features of the plot of the Queste. The stream of reverie or thought suggested by burning,

destroying fire is contradicted by the function assigned to it. Divine Providence intervenes to frustrate the inner dynamics of the type of fire at work.

There is a scene in the Queste in which a hermit is found dead clothed in a silk shirt, which is contrary to the religious rule under which he lived. The forbidden shirt is eventually shown to have an innocent explanation, and the dead hermit's holiness is demonstrated, in part by the evidence of the preservation of shirt and corpse; for this man has died by fire. A fire that destroys life is in no sense pure, spiritual or incorporeal light. It is hot; it is material; and by all rights it ought to leave behind a blackened residue. This fire is denied its inherent properties, however, by God's providential action. It destroys life, but it may not scorch, blacken or create a residue.⁸⁴

This is not the only incident in which the reverie suggested by a hot and powerful fire is cut off before it can develop. Lancelot is prevented from fighting the two lions who guard the entrance to the castle sheltering the Grail by a flaming hand which strikes him so violently in the arm that his sword is sent flying out of his grasp, but the images of power and flame are not allowed to inspire the reader to dream or reflect. The role of this flaming hand derives from the will of God, not from the inner realm of dreams and images, and that role is explained immediately by a voice: ". . . ha . hons de poure foi & de maluaise creance pourquoi te fies, tu plus en ta main que en ton creator . Tu es chaitis quant tu quides que tes armes te puissent plus aidier que cil en qui service tu es."⁸⁵

In only one incident in the Queste is burning fire allowed to be experienced as an image in its own right:

Maintenant descendi entreus .ij. vns brandons de
 fu en samblance de foudre & vint de deuers le
 chiel . si en issi vne flambe si merueilleuse &
 si ardans que andoi lor escu furent brule . & en
 furent si effrae quil en chairent andoi a terre &
 iurent grant pieche en paumisons. Quant il [se]
 releuerent si sentregarderent moult durement. &
 vo[i]ent [entreus deus] la terre toute rouge del
 fu qui i auoit este.⁸⁶

This fire is allowed to burn shields, to strike down warriors, and to leave the earth scorched and red, yet even it is subordinated to a divine purpose at odds with the reverie it inspires. Its appearance and symbolic associations notwithstanding, this fire actually effects rescue, not destruction. It is sent by God to separate Bohort and his wicked brother Lionel at the moment when they are about to fight one another, thereby saving Lionel from death and Bohort from the sin of fratricide.

Consistently, therefore, Perlesvaus and the Queste both avoid and devalue images of material, heat-producing, residue-producing fire. Such images occur infrequently, and when they do occur, the reader is as much as told, in Perlesvaus that this kind of reverie is evil, and in the Queste that it is not allowed. The one work consigns such fires to the world of the antagonists; the other denies them their full development as images.

No such limitations or strictures are imposed upon the fires of purity, those pure lights that glow without heat, residue or apparent material existence. They are a constantly recurring image in both Perlesvaus and the Queste, and appear in close association with the most highly esteemed objects and at the most highly privileged moments. These are the fires that burn in chapels, beside the Grail or near other holy relics. The reveries of purity, of holiness, of the beyond that

they inspire are far from being frustrated by the context in which they are placed or by the use that is made of them. On the contrary, the dream effect of the image reinforces, and is reinforced by context, function and associations.

The examples of purified fire in both texts are abundant, and could not all be treated here, but a representative selection will convey some idea of the significance of such fire. In the Queste, for instance, Lancelot comes to an old and dilapidated chapel of surprising beauty, lit by a silver candelabrum containing six burning candles. This chapel is a holy place, a focus of the life of the beyond, with which the candelabrum and its six candles are even more closely connected, as Lancelot soon discovers when they reappear, this time illuminating the Holy Grail itself.⁸⁷

In these two instances the same candlestick appears, but it is not a relic in itself, or an object of special significance. It is the pure light of the candles that is the sign of the beyond. When Joseph, the first Christian bishop, celebrates Mass at Corbenic, and once again the Grail appears, this particular candlestick does not return, but other candles do, borne from heaven by angels to illuminate the Grail and those other holy symbols: the cloth of red samite and the bleeding lance.⁸⁸

Pure fire is not reserved to the Grail in the Queste. It appears in conjunction with any manifestation of the otherworld, including some that are not even visual: a "gros chierge qui molt ardoit cler" is the visual accompaniment to the voice that miraculously proclaims to the unworthy knights Hector and Gawain why they will not be allowed to see the Grail.⁸⁹ Where the beyond, the otherworld, the

pure, the holy are evoked in vision, word or incident, images of pure light are regularly seen.

In Perlesvaus such light has even less of an exclusive relationship with the Grail itself, since Perlesvaus includes so many other holy objects and relics, but the fundamental principle that associates pure fire images with the holy and the beyond continues to operate. One means of evoking the otherworld in Perlesvaus is death, by which the otherworld is entered, and the dead and dying are regularly bathed in light. Cahus on his deathbed is surrounded by candles and candelabra,⁹⁰ and the hermit that Arthur finds near the point of death in his chapel is illumined by miraculous candlelight.⁹¹ The haughty maiden who has her own funeral chapel built with places for the three finest knights in the world to lie in death beside her goes to great lengths to have the tomb brightly lit by light produced by candles and reflected off walls decorated lavishly with gold and precious stones.⁹²

In none of the death scenes is light the medium of transition from this world into the beyond or even the sign that transition is imminent. In this way it is equally unlike water in Perlesvaus and the Queste and unlike material fire in general. The reverie suggested by these lights burning around death beds or biers is not that of the funeral pyre. These are not destroying fires; they are lights. They evoke the beauty, the desirability, but above all the incorporeality of the beyond. These fires are absolute; they illuminate without creating or destroying. As such they are in more than one way evocative of hope and of rescue. They suggest absoluteness, permanence, stability in a context of change and dissolution. They are beautiful and desirable at a time of fear and unhappiness. They symbolize the enduring spirit when

the body is decaying. They portray the other aspect of change and transition, the holy and joyous goal that may be achieved if God's knights fight bravely in the cause of his New Law.

Perlesvaus also includes many more conventional scenes in which pure light and holy objects are associated. The Grail feast in Branch VI is the classic example of this association. There is natural light coming from the great candelabra on the table, miraculous light from two golden candlesticks carried by angels, and a yet more wondrous light still emanating from within the Grail.⁹³ In Cahus's dream he enters the otherworld and finds himself surrounded by typically otherworldly objects--rich cloth, isolated chapel and knight lying dead on a bier--in a scene illuminated by four candles.⁹⁴ Even Perceval's ship, which belongs to the realm of water, also represents the beyond and has associations with light: when first seen as a distant object, it appears to be a candle coming over the water, and on closer inspection it proves to be carrying a knight lying on an ivory table with candles at his head.⁹⁵

For a Christian the ultimate other, the beyond in the fullest sense, is God, and the fullest manifestation of the beyond is a theophany. Perlesvaus and the Queste are both Christianized romances; both contain theophanies; and in those theophanies the imagery of pure fire is prominent. It almost seems, moreover, as if the imagery has been deliberately manipulated for symbolic reasons, because the light that accompanies the manifestations of the divine is almost always conspicuously bright, as if the level of light were being adjusted according to the importance of the object being presented.

Bright light accompanies both the miraculous Mass in the chapel

of Saint Augustine in Perlesvaus and Joseph's Mass in the Queste, in each of which it is especially closely connected with the figure of the child, who is clearly Jesus. In Perlesvaus he is "le plus bel enfant que nus veïst onques, e estoit revestuz d'aube, e avoit une corone d'or en son chief carchiee de pierres precieuses, qui rendoient molt grant clarté."⁹⁶ In the Queste he appears at a slightly different moment, not to be crowned and enthroned, but to enter the altar bread, yet the appearance is clearly a theophany, and the image of great brightness accompanying it is similar:

Et al leuer quil fist descendi de devers le ciel
vne figure [en semblance] denfant & auoit le viaire
aus[s]i rouges & aus[s]i embrase comme fus si se
feri el pain . . .⁹⁷

Other theophanies in the Queste are also accompanied by bright light. When a voice from heaven explains a miracle to Galahad and his companions in the hermit's chapel in the Waste Forest, it is accompanied by a bright flash of lightning and by such a deafening thunderclap that they suppose the chapel to be collapsing around them.⁹⁸ The voice that commands Lancelot to take up his arms and enter the first boat he encounters is likewise signalled by a mysterious brilliant light, so strong that, though it is dark at the time, Lancelot thinks it must be daytime.⁹⁹

In Perlesvaus there is brightness when God manifests himself in the Perilous Graveyard from which the Holy Cloth must be fetched. This is a sacred place, the burial place of the just, adorned with a crucifix and an image of the mother of God, in many senses a dwelling place of the divine. It is appropriately illumined by "grant clarté" therefore, even though it is surrounded by darkness and by evil powers without.¹⁰⁰

It is true that on rare occasions exceptionally bright light is

seen where God is not revealing himself directly. The Fisher King is surrounded by such light when Lancelot visits him, though for all his great importance he is certainly not God or an image of God.¹⁰¹ This exception might argue against the hypothesis that light images are being consciously manipulated according to a theologically-based system of symbolic hierarchy. It may well be that neither author has deliberately assigned brighter lights to the greater manifestations of the beyond, and feebler lights to the less direct revelations. At the very least, however, there seems to be a correlation between the manifestation and the image within the mind and imagination of the authors. The vision of God is bright and radiant because it is preeminently pure and spiritual and holy, and because it is absolutely other; and so are the dreams and images it suggests. The Grail and other holy persons and things are not such absolute representations of the other; perhaps they do not impress themselves upon the imagination with such great intensity; but they are still part of the beyond; they still inspire, and are evoked by, images of fires that give light without burning, without consuming matter or leaving a residue behind.

Our discussion of pure fire has so far scrupulously avoided any inquiry into the source or specific identity of that fire. Pure fire is a symbolic category in itself and a significant one in both Perlesvaus and the Queste. It deserved, therefore, to be treated independently of any other considerations, so that the pattern of similarities in function, associations and symbolic value could be seen clearly. There is, however, another similarity between the fires in Perlesvaus and those in the Queste: less significant than their symbolic purity and incorporeality, it is nonetheless of some importance.

There are a few pure and immaterial fires in Perlesvaus and the Queste whose source is unknown or at least unspecified. In Perlesvaus a flame appears through the window of Saint Augustine's chapel at the moment when Mass is beginning, comes down on the altar and remains there until the celebration is over.¹⁰² This is unmistakably a pure, divine fire, and may have its equivalent in the light on the child's face in Joseph's Mass in the Queste, which is compared to fire,¹⁰³ and it certainly is matched by the inward fire of the Holy Ghost that burns in Lancelot before he becomes a knight.¹⁰⁴ These are all fires belonging to Bachelard's category of purified fire; they all evoke the beyond and the longing for it; and they are all of uncertain or mysterious source. In that they are exceptional, because virtually every other light or fire that we have cited in discussing the evocation of the beyond and of purity has been the flame of a candle. Fire in Perlesvaus and the Queste is not only predominantly light; it is candlelight.

The counterargument of coincidence might be introduced here, for thirteenth-century knights certainly lit their castles by candlelight, as monks did their chapels. Candles were the principal source of light for anyone who could afford them. The force of this counterargument cannot be denied, but certain facts must be borne in mind. First, in any age and any society the sun is a more obvious source of light than any other, but it is mentioned less often than candles in both texts; secondly, Chrétien de Troyes's Conte del graal, featuring many of the same characters in nearly the same age and comparable socio-economic circumstances, contains only a single ten-branched candelabrum, which appears twice in the company of the Grail;¹⁰⁵ and thirdly, the sheer consistency with which candles are the source of light is too great to

be readily explained by coincidence alone. Lancelot sees a candelabrum in the dilapidated chapel; the same candelabrum reappears with the Grail; angels carry candles before the Grail at Joseph's Mass; the voice addressing Hector and Gawain is accompanied by the appearance of a candle; Cahus on his deathbed is surrounded by candles; the hermit on his deathbed is bathed in miraculous candlelight; the haughty maiden has her burial chapel lit by candles; the Grail Feast is lit by candelabra on the table and by the miraculous light of candles carried by angels; the scene in Cahus's dream is illuminated by candles; Perceval's ship both appears as a candle and carries on board a bier with candles burning at its head. These, moreover, are only examples taken from the sample of fire images already treated above. The texts contain many more, ample evidence that flame from candles is a significant category of image, and not merely a reflection of social custom.

Gaston Bachelard once again has helpful guidelines to follow in seeking to understand the significance of this feature. Certain of his reflections on the reverie of candlelight in the short booklet La Flamme d'une chandelle¹⁰⁶ are not applicable to a mediaeval work. He emphasizes, for example, the tranquility of the dreams suggested by a candle, precisely because the light from a candle is such a small light.¹⁰⁷ In a world where the night is brightened by fluorescent tubes, or even by nineteenth-century gas lighting, that is of course true, but it is less obviously valid for an age when candlelight would be the brightest illumination available other than the sun itself, and it certainly is irrelevant to works in which candlelight is consistently said to be bright, brilliant or radiant, as it is in the two texts under consideration. For the same reason Bachelard's comparisons with the effect of

chiaroscuro in painting¹⁰⁸ are of little significance for Perlesvaus or the Queste, where candles do not shine in the midst of darkness, but rather banish the darkness with their brilliance.

Certain other characteristics of the reverie of candlelight have more bearing on Perlesvaus and the Queste. Two of these are closely related: verticalisation and aggrandizement. Small as it is, the flame of a candle very readily suggests the most grandiose, even cosmic images; in contemplating the flame of a candle we pass easily from our own world to one much grander.¹⁰⁹ In large part the flame of a candle has this power because it is so straight and vertical. It reaches upward; it cannot spread outward. It thus inspires thoughts and dreams of the above, which is the ultimate beyond.¹¹⁰ A third characteristic is less closely related to the other two, but has a comparable significance for our two romances. That is the independence of candlelight. One can help a fire to burn by feeding and stoking it, or by improving the draught, but a candle is quite independent--once it is lit, of course--of the one who contemplates it.¹¹¹

All these characteristics are very closely related to the function of fire in Perlesvaus and the Queste. Verticality, aggrandizement to an almost cosmic scale, and independence of the one contemplating all suggest the beyond, the other and our longing for them, the kinds of reverie most fittingly associated with the Grail, with holy places and objects, and with God. Not only the choice of light over more material types of fire, but even the particular form of light and the source that gives it off point to a consistent orientation of mind and imagination that is both very specific and common to Queste and Perlesvaus alike.

Reflection on fire imagery thus adds in two important ways to

the conclusions drawn from the study of images of water. From the narrow point of view of defending the thesis that Perlesvaus and the Queste are related thematically, fire imagery facilitates a response to the counterargument of coincidence. The range of possible fire images, the forms that they might take and the associations that might be made with them are extremely broad and varied; yet the authors of Perlesvaus and the Queste both made precise, narrow choices extending even to the particular source of light; and these choices were the same. From the broader point of view of understanding what the two works mean, reflection on fire imagery clarifies and enhances the common theme of transition. In both narratives persons and things are undermined or are carried away by water, which threatens destruction, but they are equally drawn to the purified fire that is light, that promises rescue. There is a beyond, another and better world that is beckoning even in the midst of the collapse of the old and familiar world. It is spoken of differently, and the means of entry into it that are proposed in the two plots could hardly be less similar, but on the level of imagery it is one and the same world: it provokes the same reverie, inspires the same longing. On this level Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal are giving expression to something that they have in common.

* * * * *

Imagery of Earth and Sky

The imagery of earth and sky in Perlesvaus and the Queste cannot be compared to the reverie of fire or of water either in extent or in intensity. There is little evidence that either author dreams of earth or air as he dreams fearfully of water, or longingly

of light. Yet earth and sky are potentially enemies, just as fire and water are enemies; the reverie of the beyond suggested by the verticality of the candle flame may as readily be inspired by any image of the sky, and a present world subject to decay and loss can be portrayed in images of earth as well as in water. The simple opposition of below and above can have many of the characteristics of the opposition of water to fire, of the old to the new, of what is feared to what is longed for. There is a pattern of opposition into which the reverie of earth and sky can be fitted.

That the imagery of earth and sky in Perlesvaus and the Queste actually does fit into this pattern of opposition of the above and the below is significant in exactly the same sense in which the particular character of fire and water imagery is significant. That is to say that it is significant because, once again, out of a wide range of possible ways of viewing the cosmos, a definite choice has been made, whether consciously or not, just as definite choices were made from among the many possible types of fire and water imagery.

To a modern reader the way in which earth and sky are portrayed in the Queste and in Perlesvaus corresponds so perfectly to what is assumed to have been the universal pre-scientific picture that it may not initially be evident that a choice has been made. These two romances both present images of what is popularly called the three-storey universe: heaven above, hell below and earth in the middle. There was nothing original about such a portrayal in the thirteenth century certainly: this is the cosmology presupposed in New Testament references to Christ's descent among the dead and to his ascension to the Father on the fortieth day after Easter. For mediaeval Christians,

therefore, it was a commonplace, but it was far from being the only cosmological theory to be proposed or discussed.

Already in the twelfth century Honorius of Autun could describe the earth and its environs as being like an egg, with the several elements of the ether, the heavier air, the surface of the earth and its internal mass corresponding respectively to particular parts of the egg, and this same Honorius could interest himself in matters like calculating the distances between the various planets.¹¹² Others in the same period addressed themselves to such problems as the mystery posed by biblical allusions to "the waters above the heavens", and attempted to describe a structure of the universe that would account for them.¹¹³ The composition of the earth and of the other components of the universe was also of interest, and various theories were propounded to explain the relationship of earth and the heavenly bodies to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. Certainly no thirteenth century author was forced to depict earth and sky in simple opposition for want of other and more varied imagery: many other possibilities already existed and were widely known.

In place of any of the pictures proposed by Honorius and others, the authors of Perlesvaus and of the Queste limit themselves to the simply imagery of the three-level universe. In the Queste the association of height with heaven is often absolute. Joseph, who is without question a citizen of heaven, simply descends, accompanied by angels, "de deuers le ciel", as does the figure like a child, in the same miracle, who enters the bread at Mass.¹¹⁴ When the Lance and the Grail are removed from human midst a hand descends "de deuers le chiel",¹¹⁵ just as earlier it was "de deuers le chiel" that a man descended to sprinkle and

inscribe Solomon's ship when it was completed.¹¹⁶ Even in the world of dreams the same doctrine of space prevails: in Lancelot's dream vision of two knights the man who transforms the younger knight into a winged lion is "li hons qui de deuers le ciel venoit", and the wings he confers carry with them the power to rise up physically and to enter heaven.

Et cil commencha a voler & devindrent ses eiles si
grandes & si merueilleuses que tos li mondes en
estoit couers . Et quant il auoit tant vole que
tous li mondes le tenoit a merueille se sen aloit
tot contremont les nues & maintenant ouuri li ciels
por lui recheuoir . & il entra ens sans plus demorer.¹¹⁷

As the site of heaven the sky is also the locus of moral goodness. In the most obvious--and unoriginal--example Abel's smoke rises and Cain's does not.¹¹⁸ Lancelot sleeps first in a hemmed-in valley after his frustrating experience in the tournament between black and white knights,¹¹⁹ then, after receiving counsel and promising amendment, sleeps on a lofty crag with God alone for his companion.¹²⁰ Perceval is able to turn to God, pray, and behold a series of symbolic visions on a mountainous island,¹²¹ and Gawain and Hector receive spiritual counsel and the interpretation of their dreams in a mountain chapel.¹²²

The sky and heights have the same conventional associations in Perlesvaus as in the Queste. The holy chapel of Avalon where the body of the dead Guenevere is preserved like a sacred relic is on a high mountain.¹²³ The whole incident of the winding cloth from the Graveyard Perilous likewise presumes the structure of the three-level universe.¹²⁴ The imagery may occasionally be more subtle--there is a certain ambiguity to the knight and damsel climbing a tree to escape from a serpent, a balanced interplay between natural situation and symbolic meaning¹²⁵--but

even then the underlying structure is still essentially that of heaven above and hell below.

In several of these images the same vertical thrust may be felt as in the rising up of the flame of a candle. This is especially strong in the ascension of the young knight transformed into a winged lion, in the rising smoke, and in the scene where the winding cloth is gradually lowered from heaven and then raised up again out of the reach of those below. Similar evocations of fire images and the values attached to them are to be found among the images of earth, especially in Perlesvaus. The great pit with the suffering dead that opens up in the middle of the hall at the Castle of the Four Horns,¹²⁶ the Serpent's Ditch¹²⁷ and the stinking hole in the earth into which the Black Hermit is thrown¹²⁸ are not said to be burning, but they are distinguished from the air above by the very same qualities of gross materiality, blackness and foul smell that set material fire apart from the pure, incorporeal light. The bowels of the earth and the fires that burn and consume belong equally to the realm of all that is evil and repulsive, and that is reflected in the way in which they are portrayed.

Whether the reluctance to bury any good person in the earth is a phenomenon associated with the imagery of the bowels of the earth and with the opposition of the evil and threatening earth with the pure, good and desirable heavens above is open to question. There is certainly ample evidence visible to any tourist visiting Britain today to suggest that entombment above ground was a regular practice to which no symbolic meaning ought to be attached. One has to venture no farther than the Temple Church in London or Westminster Abbey to see numerous floor burials, tombs and chantry chapels; and even other locales with

more immediate Arthurian associations bear witness to the same phenomenon.¹²⁹ The rich and socially prominent were--and for that matter still are--buried in churches or in chapels, not committed to the common earth.

Allowance must therefore be made in this case for the influence of social custom, but it remains undeniable that, at the very least, the authors call attention repeatedly to the funeral arrangements made for their characters. In Perlesvaus the sealed coffin that can be opened only by the best knight in the world stands above ground in a chapel supported on four marble columns.¹³⁰ The four tombs that the Proud Maiden has prepared for herself and the three finest knights in the world are in a chapel.¹³¹ The body of Kahot the Red is taken to a chapel for burial,¹³² and Lohot's corpse is buried in the chapel of a hermitage.¹³³ In the Queste Owein is buried before the high altar of an abbey,¹³⁴ and Simeon before the high altar at Gorre,¹³⁵ and Bohort seeks out a monastery or other religious house for the burial of his brother Lionel whom he mistakenly believes to be dead.¹³⁶ That these individuals, and others not mentioned, are buried above the ground may not be significant, but ought the same to be said of the constant allusion to where they are buried? It is not inconsistent with the pattern displayed by other images to suppose that both authors felt an abhorrence for the earth and therefore an urge to recall that their heroes, even in death, were not being put into it.

The imagery of earth and sky in Perlesvaus and the Queste furnishes further evidence against the argument of coincidence as an explanation for the similarity in image patterns between the two texts: once again a definite choice is made from among a variety of

possibilities, and the validity of the evidence is in no way undermined by the acknowledgement that the choice in question is of a banal and unoriginal kind of imagery. Either author could as easily have chosen to picture the cosmos in the terms of Honorius of Autun or of the Pseudo-Bede or others. Both chose instead images which are conventional, but which also complement other and more prevalent images that place in opposition what is old and familiar and what is new and eagerly awaited, what lies near and what lies beyond, the material and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly. The opposition of below and above deserves a place alongside the contrasts between fire and light or between light and water.

* * * * *

Images in Colour

The variety of ways in which fire, or water, or the cosmos might be portrayed is extremely limited in comparison with the range of choice that is available in respect of colours and their symbolism. Numerous commentators, from Philo of Alexandria to Jung and others more recent still, have associated particular colours with the four elements or with specific aspects of the human psyche or of human experience.¹³⁷ Philo's schema of association linked white with earth, green with water, violet with air, red with fire. A pattern more familiar to modern readers would be red-fire, white-air, green-water, black/brown-earth. Jung and others in his tradition would make still further associations, for example of green with nature and growth, and of blue with thought.¹³⁸ There are also systems of colour symbolism in alchemy, in which black stands for prime matter, withdrawal of the recluse, hidden rebirth or

sorrow; white for mercury, innocence, illumination, frankness or gladness; red for sulphur, passion, blood, wounds, sublimation and ecstasy; gold for glory; blue for heaven; green for nature.¹³⁹

Two reflections are suggested by even this minuscule sampling of the countless patterns of colour association that have been expounded over the centuries. First, colour symbolism probably does not have an inner dynamic of its own. There is not something inherent in whiteness, for example, that provokes dreams of absolute purity or of the beyond: for Philo of Alexandria whiteness suggested the earth, the antithesis of the beyond. Secondly, there is a close connection between the symbolic associations of colours and simple observation of their occurrence in everyday life. Freud makes the point in The Interpretation of Dreams that colours in dreams generally derive from the sensory qualities of recent or fairly recent impressions. He cites a dream of his own featuring deep blue water, brown smoke from a ship's funnels and dark brown and red buildings, all readily explainable by quite superficial recollections of objects he had recently seen that had made an impression on him.¹⁴⁰ The colours that are associated with dreams, reveries or imaginings do not arise out of the metaphorical depths of the human personality; on the contrary, they lie very close to the surface.

Freud's theoretical conclusion seems amply confirmed by many of the actual colour associations in the schemas mentioned already and in the numerous others that also exist. If green is associated with nature and growth, it is surely because trees, plants and grass are green. The alchemists associated white with illumination and with gladness because bright light is white, and the light of the sun causes joy. Red symbolizes blood for the alchemists, fire for Philo of

Alexandria and martyrdom for the Catholic Church because blood is red, chemical fires burn much of the time with a red flame, and martyrs are burned or shed their blood. What is seen in ordinary life regularly passes into the colour patterns of reverie and of symbolic systems.

It may fairly be concluded, therefore, that the authors of Perlesvaus and the Queste were even less constrained in regard to colours than in respect of material imagery. Many symbolic systems existed, and none was, or is, authoritative, and no inherent quality either in colours themselves or in the human personality gives any evidence of controlling the occurrence of colours in unconscious dreams or in conscious reverie. No form of compulsion, external or internal, can be invoked to explain any similarity that might be noted among the colours that occur in the imagery of the two works. It may consequently be judged significant that the two authors confined themselves to three predominant colours--white, black and red¹⁴¹-- and associated them consistently with the beyond that is longed for; with earth, matter and moral evil that are to be shunned; and with destructive and frightening change. These colours and their associations cannot possibly represent the whole range of the authors' experience or of the supposed experience of their fictional characters. These romances take place almost entirely in forest, in the countryside or on the water, but where are the blues and greens, or the yellows and pinks of flowers, or the brown of the ploughed earth? The source of dream colours for Freud is those colours in everyday experience that have made a strong impression. In the colours adopted by the two authors there is evidence, therefore, of the colours and of the colour associations from everyday life that made the strongest impression on them. Those colours are the same for both authors, and they are the

colours most readily associated with the opposition of above and below, of light and material fire, of the longed-for and the feared, and with a prevailing preoccupation with change.

To associate blackness with evil is a commonplace. No cultural tradition is required to make us appreciate the terrors and dangers of the night, or the joy that comes with dawn. The authors of Perlesvaus and the Queste are thus doing little that is original when they depict evil, whether it be death, sin, the powers of the underworld or human wickedness, in black. At times black images may be impressively vivid, like the Black Hermit's castle and the area ten leagues square surrounding it in Perlesvaus. The terrain is thoroughly black: "tuit li arbre noir ausi comme brullé de feu, e la terre par desoz arsice e noir e sanz verdeur e plainne de granz crevaces". In addition, the castle itself is black, as is the water that emerges from a nearby hilltop and flows noisily through it; the Lord of the manor is the Black Hermit; and his thieving knights wear totally black armour and ride black horses.¹⁴² In other manifestations of evil, blackness is only one descriptive element among several. The knight who attacks Cahus in his dream is "un home noir",¹⁴³ but he is also physically ugly, unnaturally tall, and a vicious individual in his conduct. The Graveyard Perilous, likewise, is surrounded by pitch darkness filled with the menacing shapes of solid black knights, but their flaming red swords are more striking visually and probably more significant symbolically.¹⁴⁴ In all these cases the symbolic meaning of blackness is clear, although conventional, and frequently secondary to some other image or motif.

The use of black images in the Queste is largely the same as in

Perlesvaus, save only that, with less external warfare against fewer enemies, the frequency of such images is somewhat reduced. The smoke from Cain's sacrifice is black, as well as foul and rank.¹⁴⁵ The symbolic allies of the devil in the tournament that Lancelot enters wear black armour.¹⁴⁶ The mysterious knight who comes out of the water Marchoise to slay Lancelot's horse is "j cheualier arme dunes armes plus noires que meure & sist sor j c[h]eual grant & noir."¹⁴⁷ The devil in disguise offers Perceval--in return for a promise to do his bidding-- "j cheual grant & merueilleus & si finement noir que ce estoit vne merueille a veoir."¹⁴⁸ The devil's ship, like his horses, is all black, being covered entirely in black draperies.¹⁴⁹ Once more, as in Perlesvaus, there are no surprises in the use of black imagery, and no suggestion that the author's mind and imagination are greatly preoccupied with such images, but there is consistent association with the earth, with the residue of fire, and with the powers of evil.

Like evil, goodness is essentially a static element in the Queste and Perlesvaus: it is longed for as evil is shunned. Like it, too, it inspires conventional colour images. As consistently as evil is black throughout the two works, goodness, except in its most important and dynamic forms, is white. The Desired Knight may initially appear in red, and the Grail may be draped in red in its major appearances, but ordinary goodness, whether it be in the form of holy things or people, ships, armour, bedlinens, trees or animals, dreams or legends, is uniformly white.

When the Grail first appears in the Queste away from its home, it is draped in white samite.¹⁵⁰ The worthy knight who protects Galahad's exclusive right to the shield reserved for him by attacking Baudemagus and

making him give it up is in white armour.¹⁵¹ The aged King Mordrain who has lived for four hundred years on the Blessed Sacrament alone is white-haired, clothed in white, and lying in a bed with white silken sheets.¹⁵²

The black-shrouded ship that bears the devil in disguise to tempt Perceval is preceded by another, all in white, that carries a real priest dressed in white to warn Perceval of the temptation to come.¹⁵³

The old monk that Lancelot meets, who had died in a soft white shirt and thereby provoked a scandal, is clad entirely in white, as are all the holy monks in the Queste.¹⁵⁴ The good knights against whom Lancelot fights in vain are in white.¹⁵⁵ The two especially pure bulls in Gawain's vision are white, unlike the others, which are dappled.¹⁵⁶

The symbol of purity in Bohort's second dream is the whiteness of the lily.¹⁵⁷ Perceval's ship is all covered in white samite when it appears to Bohort.¹⁵⁸ The original tree of life, in the time of Adam and Eve's purity and innocence, is white. The knight who finally summons Galahad to leave his ship and his father Lancelot to terminate the adventures of Logres is dressed in white armour and leading a white horse, which he gives to Galahad.¹⁵⁹

The distribution of white images in Perlesvaus is superficially different from what it is in the Queste. Not only is whiteness used in a way that it is not in the Queste--as background against which more significant, and generally red, images may be displayed¹⁶⁰--but even when it appears independently, it is arranged differently. The manifestations of goodness in Perlesvaus, and with them the white images, are more tightly grouped than in the Queste.¹⁶¹ Of course God's friends and defenders move through all the interwoven threads of the plot, but they encounter goodness in its several forms principally in well-defined

locales. It may be at the damsel's tents, the nourishing fountain, the meadow where the beast with the twelve hounds in its belly suffers martyrdom, the castle of the three day tournament, a hermitage, an island, a ship or a tower, but goodness is not generally found just anywhere.

Gawain encounters one such centre of goodness in the tiny land of the King of the Watch, which he visits while seeking the sword that slew John the Baptist. Materially this is a wonderful spot: "une terre molt bele e molt riche . . . le plus biau païs que nus veïst onques e le melz garni, e les plus biax vergiers."¹⁶² Most important, however, its deepest recess contains the magic fountain from which the ailing Good Knight and the hermits of the forest are nourished, and this fountain's environs, attendants and equipment are either white or richly and brilliantly metallic.¹⁶³ The meadow in which the noble beast is martyred is framed by a knight and a maiden seated at either end of it, each dressed in white and holding a golden vessel; and the martyr itself is a "beste blanche comme nois negiee."¹⁶⁴ The Grail Castle, too, is a centre of goodness, holiness, nourishment and divine presence, and it is surrounded by hermits in white, who come in procession three days a week to chant before the Grail.¹⁶⁵ The Castle of the Four Horns is likewise a focal point of sanctity, and is predominantly white, though other colours are present.¹⁶⁶

The different grouping of white images and of the goodness that they express is hardly of profound thematic significance, however. The really important observation to be made regarding whiteness, as regarding blackness, too, is that it is static and conventional. Goodness is very important and very desirable, but it is a known quality and therefore not

a major concern or preoccupation. The great cause for concern is the dynamic, uncertain intermediate state that may lead to goodness, may lead to evil, but is unquestionably leading somewhere different. That fluctuating state, which so dominates both Perlesvaus and the Queste, is reflected in the strong, dynamic and omnipresent colour red.

Superficially, the most striking feature of the colour red in Perlesvaus and the Queste is the variety of contexts in which it appears. In Perlesvaus there are red crosses on shields, red crosses not on shields, red shields without crosses, scarlet garments, red samite cloths to cover the Grail, red flames, red blood, and a number of red knights. In the Queste the same crosses and clothes are found, along with rich red cloths, armour and blood, as well as a piece of marble and the scarlet offshoot of the tree of life. No single motif characteristic of either romance is specifically marked by red imagery, nor is redness linked exclusively to the Grail and its appurtenances, to arms and armour, or to luxurious social settings. Red is not the emblem of violence, bloodshed and suffering, nor of grace and the divine life. There is no object, quality, phenomenon or other entity that can be associated with red images in the way in which evil is associated with black, or goodness with white.

There is, however, a coherence in the use of redness in both Perlesvaus and the Queste, though it is manifested in quite disparate objects, experiences and persons. These are both, as the imagery of water and fire suggests, tales of transition in values and structures, of decay and dissolution on the one hand and renewal on the other. Redness is associated with that transition, and specifically with privileged moments when it reaches particular intensity. Red is the

colour of crisis, of the encounter between the absolute and the forces of change and confusion.

The beginning of Branch II of Perlesvaus is a good example of such a moment of crisis in the process of transition: it is the point at which Arthur determines to renew his life: "Talenz e volentez li fu revenuz, par le plesir de Dieu, d'oneur e de largesce fere tant com il porroit."¹⁶⁷ It is also marked by an unusual concentration of red heraldry: Perceval's original red shield with the white hart, Joseph's shield with the red cross, and the red shield of Judas Maccabeus with the golden eagle.¹⁶⁸ Elsewhere red arms and armour are sometimes of purely esthetic significance: the red armour that Gawain and Arthur wear in the three day tournament in Branch IX, and the red shield that Arthur carries, are just splendidly coloured.¹⁶⁹ The red shields borne by Kahot the Red, by Clamados of the Shadows, and by Clamados's father before him,¹⁷⁰ form a meaningful pattern, however. These are, in many ways, key transitional figures. They are an evil force, whose enmity has contributed to the decline of the kingdom; they are traditional enemies whose essentially personal and familial causes are transformed into one facet of the new struggle between the Old Law and the New Law; and they are important obstacles to be overcome if the New Law is to triumph over the Old.

Red has similar associations and value even where heraldry is not involved. It appears where absolutes--old or new, good or evil--intrude forcibly and dramatically into the process of change. This is what is happening in the Graveyard Perilous, where the wicked powers--their absolute quality of evil expressed in their blackness--fight and cut one another with flaming red swords.¹⁷¹ This is a moment of intense

crisis: the Holy Cloth must be secured if the process of creating the new order is to go on; the forces of evil are present in powerful form to threaten and resist; the clash of the two powers is depicted in flaming red against a black background.

Other moments of equal importance, if of less visual drama, are also occasions for the appearance of red objects, notably of cloths and clothing. The Fisher King is pre-eminently a pivotal figure in both the passing of the old order and the coming of the new, as well as being the quintessential Grail personage. The process of change and the absolute goodness represented by the Grail and all that is associated with it meet in his person. That he should be found robed in red samite, with a gold cross, is more than an esthetic matter, therefore.¹⁷² Even more blatantly, the Castle of the Four Horns and the ship that will return Perceval to his island are focal points of great importance in the later stages of transition, as the new order is being created out of the chaos left by the old, and it is more than coincidental that the servants in the castle should wear red crosses on their robes,¹⁷³ and the ship bear a red cross on its sail.¹⁷⁴ A less compelling case can be made for the cloth-like red samite that covers the ridge pole of the tent in Branch V, but this is a white image set up in the midst of a kingdom in transition and disorder, and the presence of a hint of red is in no way inconsistent with the hypothesis that red images signal the intrusion of the absolute into the transitory.

The same principles basically apply to the use of red imagery in the Queste, though not without variants in detail. Red armour is more sparingly used, but it is even more closely connected with moments of intense crisis in the clash of transitional process and absolute

values. Galahad is much more obviously the quintessential Good Knight than is Perceval in Perlesvaus. His arrival marks the decisive intrusion of the new values of inner holiness and purity into the decaying world of traditional chivalry, and it is, by any standard, a strikingly red arrival. He carries a red shield, and is clad in red armour with a red tunic and mantle beneath.¹⁷⁵ A meaning proper to the author's theological viewpoint is offered long after the fact to account for this profusion of red,¹⁷⁶ which is linked to the grace of the Holy Ghost, but in fact the colour, the context in which it appears, and the significance of the arrival of the Good Knight in Arthur's kingdom are all comparable to what they are in Perlesvaus, where no such theological rationalization is offered. Galahad's red attire does signify the grace of the Holy Spirit, therefore, but it also signifies the eruption of the absolute in the midst of the transitory.

Not only the person of Galahad, but also objects that bring absolute values into a dissolving society are portrayed in red or draped in red. The Grail is frequently covered in red samite.¹⁷⁷ The sword found on the miraculous ship is also covered with a red cloth, and its scabbard is the colour of a bright red rose.¹⁷⁸

Just as the intrusion of the absolute into the midst of things transitory is depicted in red, so too is the passage of individuals out of the confusion and uncertainty of the dissolving old order into the certainty of the new. Bohort puts on a hair shirt at the moment of his conversion to the new ways of purity and holiness, but covers it over with a red gown,¹⁷⁹ and Lancelot does likewise when he has reached the climax of his quest and has seen as much of the Grail as he is destined ever to see.¹⁸⁰

The use of red imagery, and of colour imagery in general, is thus as closely bound up with the crucial phenomenon of dissolution, change and renewal as is the material imagery of earth and air, of water, of fire and of light. The static values of the old order and of the new are conventionally portrayed, while the dynamic elements of interplay between those values and the forces at work to dissolve the ones and to implant the others are depicted far more vividly, thereby confirming once again the hypothesis that, while each author is thinking about theological values and principles, he is more pre-occupied, on another level, by decay, dissolution and renewal than by the particular entities being dissolved or to be renewed.

* * * * *

Conclusion

Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal each tell a distinct story, but they tell a common story as well, primarily through imagery. Even the most vivid images obviously lack the precision of a narrative, but in their own way they do have the power to give expression to an experience and even to what that experience has meant to the one undergoing it. Water has meaning. To picture water over and over, to imagine it, to dream of it, to portray it deliberately in a work of art or literature is already to say something about life, even in the absence of any narrative. It is, moreover, to say something that can be understood: though less specific than the structures of rational discourse, images form a type of language, with meanings mutually understood by the broadest spectrum of people.

The meaning of water is a good example of this broad familiarity

with the significance of images. In the beginning of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis the earth is without form and void; and it is made of water. The Lord God moves over the face of the waters, imposing order, separating light from darkness, the earth from the seas, the water above from the water beneath the firmament. Until God imposes order there is only a fluid state of pure potency that might become anything or nothing, depending on what is done to it. At several thousand years' distance from the Book of Genesis King Richard the Second, in the fourth act of Shakespeare's play, prays as he abdicates:

O! that I were a mockery king of snow,
 Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
 To melt myself away in waterdrops.¹⁸¹

All that Richard has been is melting away, and he has already spoken repeatedly of tears as he laments his loss, washing away the balm with his tears, surrendering his crown and sacred state, ceding lands, revenues and rights. In whatever time or culture, what is liquid is unstable; it may be given stable form, but if left to itself it will melt and pass away. To dream of water is to contemplate change and the passing away of what has been; to write of water is to express, however vaguely, the feeling that what has been truly is passing away. To write of water is to tell a story, although that story may not be told in much detail.

What is true of water is equally true of light. God is present to his people in the Book of Exodus in a pillar of fire; he appears to Moses in the burning bush; those to whom he reveals himself are radiant with dazzlingly white light. In other cultures altogether the Germanic Odin and the Greek Zeus are gods of lightning. In a context far removed from religious faith an age of progress from superstition to greater

understanding and more rigorous thinking can be called Enlightenment. Light represents what is higher and better than the things of our immediate experience. To dream of it is to dream of the beyond; it is to hope for salvation, fulfillment or progress. To create such images in writing is to express hope.

The major images of Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal thus tell a story by their very existence. It is a story of anxiety, uncertainty, uneasiness, of the conviction that the firm bases of existence are dissolving away. At the same time, however, it is a story of hope in the midst of the anxiety, of the awareness of a beyond and of the longing for it. This skeletal story is fleshed out to some extent by the minor images of material fire, earth and air, which give fuller expression to the fears that dissolution inspires and to the hopes that the fundamental ambiguity of water and the presence of light encourage. This is not the story of apocalyptic knighthood or the story of heavenly chivalry: those are proper to Perlesvaus and to the Queste respectively. It is a real story about the Arthurian knights and about life, however; it is a story that the reader can understand; and it justifies the assertion that there is a thematic unity shared by these two texts, and that they may best be understood in relation to one another.

Notes to Chapter IV

¹Gaston Bachelard, L'Eau et les rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière (Paris: José Corti, 1942), pp. 2-4.

²Chrétien de Troyes, Le Roman de Perceval ou le conte du Graal, d'après le ms fr. 12576 de la Bibliothèque Nationale, ed. by William Roach (Geneva: Droz, Paris: Minard, 1959), ll. 1639ff., p. 48.

³Queste, p. 96. A lake came forth from Celidoine, which then divided into nine rivers, the last greater and deeper than the others. This last became progressively clearer as it proceeded from source to mouth.

⁴Ibid., p. 96.

⁵Perl., ll. 7198-203.

⁶Ibid., l. 5714.

⁷Ibid., ll. 2287ff.

⁸Ibid., l. 5402.

⁹Ibid., ll. 5963-65.

¹⁰Ibid., ll. 6173, 6209, 6214.

¹¹Ibid., l. 9113.

¹²Queste, p. 34. The description is not inaccurate, since this is the Severn.

¹³Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁶He is rescued from this river, once again described as "parfunde & noire" by a heavenly voice that offers him advice, p. 174.

¹⁷In one Gurgalain has the body of his dead son boiled in water so that he can divide the flesh and give it to his vassals (Perl., ll. 2061ff.). In the second the box containing the severed head of Arthur's son Lohot breaks into a sweat perceptible to all those present, as soon as Arthur's hand touches it (Perl., l. 6314).

¹⁸See Bachelard, op. cit., pp. 100, 105, 109 on this practice in dream and in folklore.

¹⁹Queste, p. 171.

²⁰Bachelard, op. cit., p. 107.

²¹Perl., ll. 9817-9854.

²²Ibid., ll. 9828-29.

²³Ibid., ll. 4080ff.

²⁴Ibid., ll. 9407-409.

²⁵Ibid., ll. 9541-43.

²⁶Ibid., ll. 9560-63.

²⁷Queste, p. 67.

²⁸Ibid., p. 72. He knows Perceval even better than the latter knows himself.

²⁹Ibid., p. 79.

³⁰Ibid., p. 174.

³¹Ibid., p. 184. Though the castle where he enters into the trance is on the mainland, and he can leave it by horse, he must reach it by sea, on board a ship of the dead.

³²Ibid., p. 139ff.

³³Perl., ll. 964ff.

³⁴Ibid., ll. 1113ff. Even when the daughter finally locates the knight by whom she and her mother will be saved, and bursts into tears of joy (l. 5007), she is moved more by the prospect of deliverance

than by the reappearance of her brother, whom she does not yet recognize (l 5026).

³⁵Ibid., l. 319.

³⁶Ibid., l. 9236.

³⁷Ibid., l. 9605.

³⁸Ibid., l. 3764. On the other hand, the relief that is felt when grief is eased and the separated reunited also finds expression in tears. The most striking such incident is probably the reunion of Perceval with his mother and sister in Branch IX, when his mother breaks into tears: "benoite soit l'eure que vos nasquistes, car par vos me revienent tot mi grant anui en joie" (ll. 8907-908). The tears in the eyes of Perceval's two cousins when they realize who he is reflect the same joy, albeit with less intensity (l. 9726).

³⁹Ibid., ll. 6693-94.

⁴⁰Ibid., l. 7161.

⁴¹Bachelard, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴²Perl., ll. 9227ff. See also ll. 9230 and 9235-37.

⁴³Ibid., l. 1634.

⁴⁴Queste, p. 130.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 126.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 110.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 138.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 192.

⁵²Ibid., p. 47.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 49-50.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 85. Almost immediately upon leaving the hermitage Lancelot is accosted by a squire who upbraids him for his insensitivity to the Grail's presence and for his lechery, and this time he is moved to tears: ". . . lancelot ne le regarda onques ains sen vait plorant & dementant & priant nostre signor quil le remaint a tel voie qui profitable li soit a lame."

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 85. The relief felt when grief is mitigated and the separated reunited also finds expression here in tears, as it does in Perlesvaus. In a relatively banal example Galahad's childhood companions weep with joy when he returns to Corbenic (p. 187), while in a nobler context, when Galahad, Bohort and Perceval hear the story of the stag and the four lions, an allegory of the life and passion of Christ, they weep both with pity at the Lord's sufferings and with joy at his abiding presence (p. 168). Union with the Lord touches the same emotions as the rediscovery of a lost friend, and is symbolically expressed by the same image.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 92. He puts on a hair shirt, promises to make his confession every week, and sets out seriously to live his new life.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 120. In his converted state he then retains a certain softness, and weeps again in asking forgiveness of his brother Lionel, who challenges him to the death (p. 136).

⁵⁹The prominence accorded by Perlesvaus to the social custom of washing a guest's face when he removes his armour--a custom not mentioned in the Queste--accounts for the difference between the forty-six water images catalogued in the Queste and the fifty-one in Perlesvaus. The same forms of water dominate in each, with tears the commonest by a large margin, followed by rivers, the sea, lakes and other still bodies of fresh water, and finally springs and fountains.

⁶⁰Perl., l. 82.

⁶¹Queste, p. 11. Superficially this plot begins very differently from that of Perlesvaus, where the whole of Arthur's kingdom has been in decline for some time and the first steps toward the establishment of a renewed order are imminent. Here all is seemingly well until the rash oath leads to dispersal of the fellowship and to tragedy for so many. The similar imagery, however, reflects accurately the fundamentally identical process of collapse and transition under way in both narratives.

⁶²Ibid., p. 15.

⁶³Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁴Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, tr. by Alan C. M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). The reader should be aware that Bachelard's analysis of fire imagery has been removed from its original context and employed for a purpose distinct from his. For Bachelard, who was by training a scientist, the psychoanalysis of fire was one aspect of a broader interest in the psychoanalysis of objective knowledge. He was therefore very interested in such questions as the origins of scientific thought and discovery and the survival of primitive forms of dream imagery and associations in what was assumed, even by the thinker, to be rigorously objective thinking. Such concerns are not relevant to this purely literary study, and in consequence significant portions of Bachelard's work--on the principle of pleasure, for instance, as well as on substantialism and the reverie of concentration--have been disregarded. What is included here, therefore, should not be taken as a full summary of Bachelard's theories on fire.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 23-24.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 29-33.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 102-104.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 104-106.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 100-101.

⁷²Ibid., p. 57.

⁷³Ibid., p. 16.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 46.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 93-96.

⁷⁸Perl., l. 740.

⁷⁹Ibid., ll. 3515ff. The burning city is undergoing a destructive transition comparable to that of Arthurian society as a whole. It began to melt and burn from the moment when its king died, and will burn until a new king is crowned in the midst of the flames.

⁸⁰Ibid., ll. 9817-23.

⁸¹Ibid., ll. 6452ff.

⁸²Ibid., ll. 5853ff.

⁸³Ibid., l. 5836.

⁸⁴Queste, p. 87.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 178-79.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 138.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 42.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 189.

⁸⁹The candle appears in company with two mysterious objects: the hand and the bridle. The Grail itself does not appear.

⁹⁰Perl., l. 165.

⁹¹Ibid., l. 225.

⁹²Ibid., l. 1454.

⁹³Ibid., ll. 2423ff.. Candles and candelabra remain much in evidence even in the sequel to the feast. Gawain moves on from the banquet to the chessboard, which is lit by two burning chandeliers (l. 2459). The candles in this minor incident do not bear the significance they have in the Grail appearance, but the consistent pattern of association between this type of light and the otherworldly or miraculous is respected, for this is no ordinary chess match, but a magical encounter in which Gawain is opposed and defeated by an opponent

who makes the pieces move on their own.

⁹⁴Ibid., ll. 134-38.

⁹⁵Ibid., ll. 4109-12.

⁹⁶Ibid., ll. 291-93.

⁹⁷Queste, p. 189.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 167.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁰⁰Perl., l. 5093.

¹⁰¹Ibid., ll. 3716-18.

¹⁰²Ibid., ll. 302-4.

¹⁰³Queste, p. 189.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 185 and 189.

¹⁰⁵Conte del graal, ll. 3216-19.

¹⁰⁶Gaston Bachelard, La Flamme d'une chandelle (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964).

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 7 and passim.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 8 and passim.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 3, 22, 50-51.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 4, 29, 57.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 35.

¹¹²Honorius of Autun, De Imagine mundi libri III, I, v, col. 122 and I, lxxxiii, col. 141, quoted by Gian Carlo Garfagnini, Cosmologie medievali (Turin: Loescher, 1978), pp. 169 and 174.

¹¹³Garfagnini, op. cit., pp. 162-63 (citing the Pseudo-Bede) and 190ff. (citing Hugh of Saint Victor).

¹¹⁴Queste, p. 189.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 198.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 160.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 94.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 155.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 101.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 104.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 67.

¹²²Ibid., p. 110.

¹²³Perl., ll. 7571-73.

¹²⁴The cloth withdraws from the maiden because of her sins (ll. 5100ff.) and rises up to the holy place in which it belongs, then redescends after she has presumably convinced the Lord of her innocence by her long prayer-speech (l. 5131). When she is told of the death of the Fisher King, it is by a voice heard near midnight above the chapel (l. 5141).

¹²⁵Perl., ll. 9766ff.

¹²⁶Ibid., ll. 9596-603.

¹²⁷An evil knight intends to throw an innocent maiden into it, but finds himself confined there instead as just punishment for his wickedness when Perceval intervenes: ll. 8997 (the threat) and 9028 (the punishment).

¹²⁸Perl., ll. 9987-91.

¹²⁹Glastonbury Abbey is no longer standing to provide such evidence, of course, but Saint John's Church, Glastonbury has at least one late mediaeval example, as does Saint Materiana's, the parish church of Tintagel.

¹³⁰Perl., ll. 467ff.

¹³¹Ibid., ll. 1451ff.

¹³²Ibid., l. 3243.

¹³³Ibid., l. 4946.

¹³⁴Queste, p. 27.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 186.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 128. Oddly, Galahad, Perceval and Perceval's sister may form an exception to this pattern and be buried in the ground (Queste, p. 198, where a grave is being dug for Galahad; the other two are later said to be buried with him). In at least one variant, however, ms. M (see p. 198, note 4), the three burials are said to take place in the Spiritual Palace.

¹³⁷Jean Chevalier, ed., Dictionnaire des symboles, mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1969), p. 241.

¹³⁸Ibid., under the respective colours in their alphabetical order.

¹³⁹Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing, 1974), p. 107.

¹⁴⁰Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, tr. by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1955), p. 547.

¹⁴¹The predominance of these three colours may be judged from some statistics. An azure band on a shield (l. 610) is the only blue object in Perlesvaus, and some blue lettering on a scabbard is the only blue in the Queste (p. 147). There are a half dozen allusions to green (to emeralds or to grass) in Perlesvaus, and as many as eight in the Queste, but five of the latter are in the interpolated story of the Tree of Life. On the other hand, red, white and black together are mentioned almost seventy times in Perlesvaus, as against barely two dozen images in all other colours combined. The margin in the Queste is almost sixty to only a dozen. Established custom, taste, heraldic practice, the availability of dyes and countless other extrinsic factors may play a role in this colour distribution, but thematic considerations proper to the two texts should not be too hastily disregarded, especially because a more balanced arrangement of colour is not unheard of in other Old French adventure romances: the statistics for Erec et Enide, for

instance, show 11 reds, 9 blacks, 16 whites and 22 other colours, or a proportion of about three to two of red-white-black over other colours. (Chrétien de Troyes, Erec et Enide, ed. by Mario Roques (Paris: CFMA, 1956).

¹⁴²Perl., ll. 739-41 (the quotation), 748, 752, 759-63.

¹⁴³Ibid., ll. 145-60. This same enemy reappears, identified as the Black Knight, to challenge Arthur (ll. 365ff.). Again he is ugly, powerful, and black: black shield, black sword, black horse.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., ll. 508lff.

¹⁴⁵Queste, p. 155. This is, of course, an interpolated incident ultimately based on a passage from the Old Testament, but there is no foul black smoke in Genesis 4. The image is not required by the authority of Scripture.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 75. Occasionally the colours are reversed and the tempter appears in white, but this is always a conscious device adopted to further the theme of temptation and deception, revelation and resistance, and it depends for its efficacy on the automatic assumption that what is black is evil and diabolical. This is true, for example of the white bird and the black bird (Queste, p. 122), an incident in which the devil tries to exploit Bohort's instinctive reactions to colours.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 13. It appears at Arthur's court instead of the court of the Maimed King.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 85. Properly so, since they are Cistercians, but also symbolically.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁶⁰The white mule with the red cross on its forehead (Perl., ll. 2997 and 6154), the white garments of the 32 men at the Castle of the Four Horns (l. 9589), the white harts on shields (ll. 627 and 4118).

¹⁶¹There are only a very few white objects scattered at random: the white tent with the ivory pegs (ll. 1756ff.), Lancelot's white shield with the golden cross (l. 2961), Meliot's white shield (l. 3332), the white shield that Perceval bears temporarily (l. 9658) and the great white sheet surrounding the tents (ll. 3151-54).

¹⁶²Perl., ll. 1919-22.

¹⁶³Ibid., ll. 1959ff.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., l. 5495. The martyred animal represents Christ in his passion, as is revealed later (ll. 5978ff.).

¹⁶⁵Ibid., ll. 7204ff.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., ll. 9548-90.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., ll. 568-69.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., ll. 627, 784-85.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., ll. 6805ff., and 7128ff.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., ll. 1143-45 and 3042.

¹⁷¹Ibid., ll. 5081ff.

¹⁷²Ibid., ll. 2358ff.

¹⁷³Ibid., ll. 9589-90.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., l. 9616.

¹⁷⁵Queste, pp. 7-8.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 108, 180, 189.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 146-47.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁸¹Shakespeare, Richard the Second, Act IV, Scene I.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of a scholarly study is, in a way, the second of a pair of intellectual bookends, of which the first is the introduction: identical in form and content, it looks at the intervening material from the opposite direction and sees it in a different light. What was once future is now past; what was a project to be realised is now alleged to be an achievement; tentative hypotheses have become firm convictions.

One function of this very brief final chapter is therefore to return to the promises made in the Introduction and to note that they have been fulfilled. Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal have been analysed in terms of what they have in common and of what is characteristic of each. The Joachimite apocalypticism of Perlesvaus has been described and its salient features explained: the struggle to save Christendom from the forces of the Old Law, the application of the exegetical principle of concordia litterae in order to link past and present, and the more general recourse to historical structures and patterns to determine the role of individuals and the significance of their lives.

The mystical character of the Queste del saint Graal has also been expounded, along with its principal traits: the struggle to preserve knighthood as a meaningful way of life, the sacramental relationship of the external act and the internal state of heart, and the role of will, acting through revelation and concealment to choose holy individuals and

thereby determine their role and significance.

The common preoccupation with transition and disintegration has also been studied, indications in each text of a concern with the passing of established values have been cited, and the relationship of certain types of imagery to the hopes and fears inspired by transition and disintegration has been commented on.

The plans announced in the Introduction have, therefore, been carried out, but to what advantage? In what ways and to what extent do we understand Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal better for having created, or for having read, this thesis? The simpler answer to that question would certainly be that what is better understood is the relationship between the two texts, and that simpler answer would not be entirely invalid: the interplay of apocalyptic doctrine and mystical doctrine against a common background of Grail tradition is more thoroughly elucidated here than in most other studies of these romances. Yet that simpler answer would also be largely artificial, because the precise question it replies to is itself largely artificial. When two authors in widely different milieus and at different ages treat the very same story, the similarities and differences between their literary products are of near-universal interest: countless readers, casual as well as scholarly, are curious about the relationship of Marlowe's version of the Faust legend and Goethe's. This is hardly true of Perlesvaus and the Queste, which are only two of many developments of the Grail legend produced during the High Middle Ages. A more complex answer is therefore needed, demonstrating how this or any comparative study leads to a fuller understanding of the meaning of each text individually, for that is the real question that is actually asked.

The more complex answer is that the thematic unity and coherence

of both Perlesvaus and the Queste, and the relationship between the role of the traditional legendary material and the role of the apocalyptic or mystical doctrine introduced by the authors is now better understood than it was previously. To identify the dominant theological theme of either Perlesvaus or the Queste is not difficult: the one is apocalyptic and crusading, the other mystical and quietistical. To demonstrate how either doctrine is related to the whole of the traditional material is another matter; and even those who have studied the theological themes most thoroughly have not really attempted it. On the contrary, they have invariably concluded that both authors have succeeded only imperfectly in adapting the Grail and Arthurian legends to their theological viewpoints, and that the result is a degree of fragmentation, greater in Perlesvaus, but present also in the Queste, preventing the achievement of complete literary unity and coherence.

The fragmentation of Perlesvaus is self-evident, and no thematic analysis has even pretended to account for the family feuds, political turmoil and Celtic social customs and traditions that it contains. These are accepted as part of the common Arthurian heritage that Perlesvaus has received and preserved alongside its main doctrinal and moral concerns.

The extraneous material in the Queste is less abundant, and the author is consequently less sternly condemned for want of organization, but many incidents and motifs in it are still regularly dismissed as unassimilated Grail tradition. The description of the knights' departure on the quest and of the circumstances surrounding it is certainly not assimilated into the themes of enlightenment and inner holiness. The incidents of the "Seat of Danger,"¹ of the sword in the block of red marble,² and of the miraculous appearance of inscriptions referring to Galahad

have little to do with these theological themes. These and other signs may be interpreted after the fact as evidence of the great grace at work in Galahad,³ but even such explanations are not rigorously accommodated to the theological viewpoint of the Queste as a whole, and some, like the explanation of the shield, are couched in terms more appropriate to Perlesvaus.⁴ In addition, there is real ambivalence in the nature of the Round Table fellowship and of the quest that the knights are undertaking. Galahad is chosen to heal the Maimed King and to bring the adventures of Britain to an end⁵--a traditional Grail mission--but he professes to be setting out to learn the truth about the Grail, which is something quite different.⁶ The quest itself seems to be commanded by God, but it is viewed by Arthur as a tragedy destroying the fellowship of the Round Table, and is represented by a priest speaking on Nascien's behalf as a moral danger to a band of knights most of whom are mortal sinners in dire need of reconciliation.⁸ More is happening here than can be explained by an appeal to mystical enlightenment, inner purification, the sacramental character of human life or the inner renewal of knighthood. Even the most rigorous thematic explanations of the meaning of the Queste are forced to treat some material as an unassimilated heritage of earlier Arthur and Grail legend, without real thematic function.

The traditional heritage of Grail legend in Perlesvaus and the Queste--the material that is not recast either apocalyptically or mystically--is not without thematic function, however, and it is the great advantage of a comparative study like this one that it is able to make that function clear. In isolated studies of the Queste little attention is paid to an object like Galahad's shield or to its history, or to incidents like the mission to end the adventures of Britain, or to the breakup of

the fellowship of the Round Table; nor is great significance attached, in the explanation of Perlesvaus, to family feuds, or to details of the political unrest and civil war that bring Arthur's kingdom into increasing disarray. Even less weight is given to images and symbols, which appear, even more than the extraneous plot motifs, to be conventional and derivative. Only when the two romances are brought together does it become clear that images, symbols, and many of the seemingly irrelevant incidents are more than an insignificant literary inheritance preserved by chance.

There is a functional as well as a merely historical reason for the presence of certain images of water, fire and light, for the family feuding and civil war in Perlesvaus, and for the ambivalence of the quest's purpose and of Galahad's mission in the Queste. These are related to the apocalypticism and mysticism with which they coexist not only as extraneous and derivative remnant to central, unified thematic core, but also as cause to effect, as stimulus to reaction, as experience to the articulation of its meaning. The reason why the Christianized Grail romances like the Queste and Perlesvaus are different from earlier Arthurian romances with their stable and uniform sets of values and social codes finds expression within the texts themselves. The imagery, the symbols and the many non-apocalyptic, non-mystical elements of the plots are giving expression to the sense of disintegration, of transition, of the passing of formerly established ways and values, and that sense of disintegration inspires the search for integrating values in the form of apocalyptic or mystical doctrine of one type or another. Were it not for the confused mass of family feuds, political conflicts, personal antagonisms and images of tears, seas and raging rivers--all reflective in one way or another of real experience, internal or external--there would be no reason to theo-

-logize about the apocalyptic struggle, the coming age, mystical enlightenment or the inner purification of the soul.

This more complete and accurate picture of what is being expressed in Perlesvaus and the Queste emerges only when the two have been compared and the full significance of seemingly coincidental elements of plot and imagery has been discovered through the observation of their parallel occurrence in both texts. In each work a similar experience of instability and disintegration is given meaning and has an order imposed upon it. It is dealt with according to a particular system of thinking and believing, different in content in each case, but similar in function. The Joachimite apocalypticism of Perlesvaus and the mysticism of the Queste both impose unity, meaning and purpose on the confused data of experience. Perlesvaus unifies or integrates life on a time scale, creating a coherent structure whose essential components are then, now and someday. The Queste unifies spatially, by establishing a sacramental relationship between the inner-spiritual and the outer-material aspects of life. Perlesvaus finds meaning in the functional relationship of age to age and of individual to individual; the Queste finds it in the state of the human soul and its potential for growth in purity and holiness. Perlesvaus provides a sense of purpose in the structure of history and in the struggle to be waged, once that place has been found, to vanquish the enemies of the New Law and to overcome the obstacles to the new age. The Queste provides the same sense of purpose in the form of the inner struggle to become holy and pure through penance, confession of sins and the assiduous practice of virtue until the necessary interior foundation for good and successful external action has been built up.

The dominant themes of Perlesvaus and the Queste del saint Graal

are not simply doctrinal, pedagogical or devotional, as has so often and so erroneously been supposed. They are principles of integration and of the articulation of meaning. Likewise, the material not recast in terms of these dominant themes is not extraneous to them, but is an expression of the experience in response to which they are formulated and upon which they impose order, meaning and purpose. The meaning of both Perlesvaus and the Queste is to be found ultimately in a relationship: in the relationship between a lived experience still present to the consciousness of an author and a system of meaning in terms of which he understands and expresses that experience, between a preserved body of traditional Grail material and original tales of apocalyptic struggle or of inner growth in holiness. That meaning can only be discovered when two works dissimilar in their doctrinal viewpoint are studied together, and the functional and structural similarities between them are brought out. That is the more complex, and more significant answer to the question: in what ways and to what extent do we understand Perlesvaus and the Queste better for having created, or for having read, this study.

Notes to Chapter V

¹Queste, p. 5.

²Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³Ibid., p. 8.

⁴Ibid., pp. 24-26.

⁵Ibid., p. 10.

⁶Ibid., p. 14.

⁷Ibid., pp. 10 & 15.

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APPENDIX

THE LIFE AND THOUGHT

OF JOACHIM OF FIORE

Joachim of Fiore (ca.1130-ca.1202) holds a modest place in the ordinary history of the Church as both a theologian and a reformer of the religious life. Although he is not a canonized saint, Joachim's life is reminiscent in some respects of hagiographic types. He was born in Celico, near Cosenza, in Italy, and led an uneventful life until aroused out of complacency by a major traumatic experience that befell him during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Only moderately inspired by the holy places themselves, he was terrified by an epidemic that he witnessed en route, and was moved as a consequence to embrace a more rigorous and austere spiritual life.

After this conversion experience Joachim went to live with the Cistercians at Sambucina, though without becoming a monk, and he carried on for some time an active ministry, until he was forced to desist by legislation forbidding lay preaching. He thereupon joined the Cistercian community at Corazzo as a monk, and was ordained a priest in 1168. In 1191 he established a reformed house at San Giovanni, in Fiore: originally Cistercian, though reformed, this foundation was made independent by Pope Celestine III in 1196, and became the mother-house of an order that survived for almost four centuries. At its peak the Order of Fiore numbered approximately forty communities, all in Italy, but it declined in the later

Middle Ages and all its houses had been absorbed by other orders by 1570.¹

Joachim made a far greater impact on both his own and subsequent generations by his theological speculations than by his monastic foundations, even though the production of the major part of his writing took up only a small portion of his life. He would seem to have written the bulk of two of his three longer works--the Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti and the Expositio in Apocalypsim--and perhaps even begun his third--the Psalterium decem chordarum--while living as a guest at Casamari in 1183. A letter of Pope Clement's from 1188 speaks only of the first two works, and even implies that they may still have been unfinished, but Luke of Cosenza indicates that they were virtually complete in the early 1180's, and more weight is generally given to his opinion than to what may be inferred from the Pope's letter.

Many other works have been attributed to Joachim, and the corpus of his writings has still not been established with absolute certainty. At least five shorter texts are generally accepted today by scholars as genuine. These include two brief treatises: Contra Judaeos and De articulis fidei, as well as De Unitate Trinitatis, Super Regula Sancti Benedicti, and Tractatus super quatuor Evangelia. Joachim is also believed to have been the author of two Latin hymns appended to the Psalterium decem chordarum and of a sort of literary testament written around 1200 and prefixed to the Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti.²

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries certain other writings were attributed to Joachim, and were consistently more popular than what he actually wrote. The Interpretatio in Hieremiam prophetam, Scriptum super Esaia prophetam, Expositio Sibyllae et Merlini and Vaticinia Pontificum

either expounded the meaning of prophecy or purported to be prophecies in their own right. These were all written in a much more bombastic style than were the accepted Joachimite works, and were characterized by specific allusions to dates and events in the thirteenth century.³ They cannot therefore be considered authentic works of Joachim--who died around 1200--or valid sources of information about his ideas.

The doctrine to be found in Joachim's authentic works is less eccentric than what is contained in the pseudo-Joachimite prophecies, but it is certainly unconventional, and in one respect at least has been condemned as heresy. Joachim attacked Peter Lombard's doctrine of the one divine essence common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit as virtually a fourth entity creating a God of four, rather than three, persons. This strong emphasis on the distinction of the three persons was judged by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 to be tritheism, and it was declared heretical.⁴

Despite the attention naturally drawn to Joachim's trinitarian doctrine by its formal condemnation, he really was not at heart a speculative theologian. He was far more interested in history, and his belief in the existence of three absolutely distinct divine persons derives from his conviction that human history comprises three equally distinct ages, each dominated by one of those persons. "Tres status mundi propter tres personas divinitatis" was a guiding principle and virtually a slogan for Joachim, but in the actual development of his thought the view of history almost certainly comes first, and it is unquestionably more fully and systematically developed.

In that development of the theory of history the connection between time period and divine person is central. The first age, the era of the

Mosaic law, is the age of the Father, characterized by knowledge. The age of the Gospel, the second, belongs to the Son and to wisdom. The third will be the age of the Holy Spirit, and those who live in it will enjoy the fulness of the Spirit.⁵ Other aspects of the three ages are also important, though secondary, in Joachim's theory. The first age, for example, is that of the laity, the second of the clergy, and the third of the monks.⁶ It is also noteworthy that each age is ushered in by an act of liberation: when the first age gives way to the second, God's people are freed from the slavery of the law to live under the truth of the Gospel; when the third age replaces the second, they will be freed from the burden of suffering, and given over entirely to the praise of God.⁷

Many aspects of this concept of history are reconcilable with traditional faith in God and Christ, but the strict parallels between one age and the next, and especially between the first and the second transition, are radical departures from the conventional understanding of the person and mission of Christ as central to history and to the work of salvation. For Joachim Christ and the era he inaugurates are transitional: there is another revelation and another and better age to come within history. Christ's conquest of sin and death is no more significant than the second breakthrough still to come, and the new life of church and sacraments that he instituted will yield to more powerful signs⁸ and a more perfect system of religious organization.⁹ The church in the new age will be chaste and virginal, wholly spiritual, ruled by monks and hermits in place of clerics and doctors, and fortified by new and more powerful sacraments making it possible to surpass the teachings of Christ and to attain the perfection of the third state.

The notion of continuous progress is very important in Joachim's thought, and is not confined only to the point at which one age gives way to the next. Each new and more advanced age has a double beginning, and develops over a long period of time within the age preceding it. Thus, the first age begins with creation, but that beginning is only a kind of germination, to be followed by a long season of growth before the age flowers and bears fruit in the days of the Patriarchs.¹⁰ The second age, in turn, is germinated during the first, in the person of Azaria,¹¹ then grows and develops for many generations before it comes to fruition in Jesus Christ and his disciples. The third age is germinated in the person of Saint Benedict, and, after a similar time of development, will be confirmed and fructified at the return of Elijah according to the Spirit, an event which, for Joachim, still lies in the future. There is, therefore, in each of the three ages, a period extending over many centuries during which the coming age toward which the world is advancing is almost more important than the current age. This naturally becomes increasingly true as the actual end of a given age draws closer.

The importance, in the last decades of a given age, of the age to come largely explains the great importance that Joachim attaches to questions of history and chronology, because according to his theories the three ages may be subdivided quite accurately by generations in a way that points unmistakably to the imminent end of the second age. From the evidence of the first and second ages it can be determined that each age lasts for sixty-three generations, of which exactly one third, or twenty-one generations represents the transitional period between the germination and full flowering of the age to come. Azaria is born twenty-one generations before

Jesus Christ, and Saint Benedict twenty-one generations before the return of Elijah according to the Spirit. Since the generations of the New Testament, unlike those of previous times, are all based on the age of Christ when he gave birth to his spiritual sons by calling the apostles, it is possible to calculate the exact dates of the germination and flowering of the third age simply by multiplying the number of generations involved by thirty, yielding the dates A.D.630 and A.D.1260, the first date coming forty-two generations after Azaria and the second sixty-three.¹² The third age should thus begin within less than a century of the time when Joachim is writing, and should already be so far advanced toward fructification as to be of great importance for his contemporaries.

The schema of three ages is not the only system by which Joachim subdivides history. In the short treatise De septem sigillis and elsewhere he proposes a more conventional division of time into two times--before and after Christ--of seven seasons each.¹³ By this calculation also, however, the immediate future is of crucial importance, for Joachim's own day marks the end of the season which started with Charlemagne and the beginning of the very short period that will precede the last season of the world's history.

Although the dominant system of dividing history into three ages and the less prominent subdivision into two times of seven seasons are very different in detail, Joachim approaches them in exactly the same way, and explains their significance according to the same principle of strict parallelism that he calls concordia litterae, or literal harmony. The season from the death of John the Evangelist to the reign of Constantine, for example, does not just stand in the same relationship to the second

time as the period from Moses to Samuel and David does to the first; it is like the first, and necessarily like it by virtue of its position alone. The same is true for all seven pairs of seasons, as it is for corresponding generations in the other time scale. Even time periods still in the future are bound by the same law of parallelism: the sixth season of the second age will be like the time from the exile to Esther and Malachi, and it can be known in advance through study of the earlier period.

The systematic application of this principle of literal harmony was a further significant contribution of Joachim to theology. He did not utterly renounce the traditional practice of interpreting the history of salvation allegorically,¹⁴ but allegorical understanding is supplemented, not to say overshadowed, in his speculation by the great importance given to typological interpretation of the particular kind that he termed concordia litterae. This is not a type of spiritual knowledge; it is rather the perception of a relationship between external realities: between the letter of the Old Testament and the letter of the New, between the history of Israel and the history of the Church, always seen in their outer, accidental character.¹⁵

Where most of the Fathers of the Church understood the New Testament and the life of the Christian Church as revealing the inner and spiritual meaning of the Old Testament and the life of Israel, Joachim tends rather to see two books and two histories lying parallel to one another, not one within the other. The essential unity between the two times, or among the three ages, is to be found by establishing a whole series of particular parallels between orders, events and persons.¹⁶ There is a real connection between the literal meanings, between the series of facts and events in

the Old Testament and those in the New, such that the former can be said to engender the latter, and both together to engender comparable phenomena in the new, spiritual, third age.¹⁷

It is precisely because the essential relationship between Old Testament and New, between one age and the next, lies on the level of the factual and anecdotal that the establishment of lists and tables of events and personalities is so important for Joachim: everything must be correctly placed if it is to be understood. The meaning of Justinian's life in the second age and the character of his counterpart to come in the third can be known only if a counterpart can be found in the first age. It is not sufficient to know about kingship in the Old Testament in general.

By means of such particular parallels combined with his various chronological schemas Joachim could propose a relatively detailed picture of the events of his own and succeeding generations. The transition from the second age to the third would approach its climax between 1200 and 1260. Since this would be the sixth season of the second time, it would parallel the period of the exile and return of the Jews in the Old Testament, a time in which trials and persecutions purified a faithful remnant of God's people, leading to an ultimate spiritual revival. A comparable season of persecution would therefore purify the spiritual men, the monks, who would play the part of the faithful remnant in the new age. Filled with spiritual knowledge appropriate to the new age, they would go forth to convert the gentiles, reunite the Greeks with Rome, and then persuade the Jews to be converted en masse, thus fulfilling the basic eschatological missions that Joachim brought forward from the end time into history.¹⁸ For Joachim to make such prediction required no gift of prophecy.

Once the assumption was made that such events as the apocalyptic conversion of non-Christians spoken of in Matthew 21 and Romans 10 really belonged within history and not outside it, this entire picture of the immediate future could be created out of the records of the past.

The ability to predict the future was not the only practical attraction of Joachim's historical theories. They were equally useful for interpreting the present. By drawing on elements of past history and of future expectation contemporary developments could be explained. Thus, Saladin could be identified with the sixth of the seven heads of the seven-headed dragon, serving as God's unconscious instrument, killing false Christians but also putting to death many true believers, making them martyrs. The eventual triumph of the Christians over him could be predicted, but so, too, could the subsequent emergence of a seventh head in the form of an alliance of many enemies of the Christians.¹⁹

The apparent relevance of Joachim's theories and methods to current events and to the immediate future was the principal source of their popularity: most of the works written in imitation of Joachim focussed on current events and prophecy. His was a method for using details out of the past to explain details in the present and to predict the future, and it is for just this purpose that that method is applied in Perlesvaus: to explain what is happening to Arthurian knights by appealing to the fate of their forebears, and to look ahead to the new age that is being ushered in by their efforts.

Notes to Appendix

¹Henry Bett, Joachim of Flora (London: Methuen, 1931, reprinted 1976). Joachim's biography is presented in chapter 1. The original sources for it are the Virtutum Beati Joachimi Synopsis of Luke of Cosenza, who was for a time Joachim's secretary, and the Cronica of the thirteenth-century Franciscan Balien Adam, called Salimbene. Though of a later generation, Salimbene was for a time a convinced Joachimite and Joachim figures prominently in his chronicle.

²Ibid., pp. 23-24.

³Ibid., p. 28.

⁴Heinrich Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, 32nd. ed., revised by Adolf Schönmetzer (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), pp. 261-62.

⁵Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti, l. 5, c. 84. Liber introductorius c. 13, f. 13, 3.

⁶Tractatus super quatuor Evangelia, 155.

⁷Psalterium decem chordarum, l. 2.

⁸Expositio in Apocalypsim, prologue.

⁹Tractatus super quatuor Evangelia, 121.

¹⁰Inauguration, initiation and germination, as well as completion, confirmation, clarification and fructification are all terms used by Joachim, who is not at all rigorous or technical in his choice of words.

¹¹Azaria was King of Judah, probably from 783 to 742, and is mentioned in 2 Kings 15, 1-7 and in 2 Chronicles 26 as an orthodox and enterprising King, remembered for successful wars against the Philistines and others; for numerous public works and improvements in commerce, and for a conflict with the high priests over the right to offer incense in the Temple.

¹²De Vita sancti Benedicti, c. 45. Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti, l. 4, c. 30; l. 3, c. 6. Quoted in Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Ecriture (Lyon: Aubier, 1964), vol. 3, p. 458. Joachim's dates don't exactly coincide with those of Benedict's life.

¹³Liber introductorius, c. 6. See also the short De septem sigillis. Also E.R. Daniel, "Apocalyptic Conversion: the Joachite Alternative to the Crusades" in Delno C. West, ed., Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought (New York: Burt Franklin, 1975), p. 305; and M.J. Reeves and B. Hirsch-Reich, "The Seven Seals in the Writings of Joachim of Fiore" in Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale 21 (1954), pp. 239-47. In outline this division of history is as follows.

First, the time from Abraham to the Incarnation, of seven seasons:

- 1) from Jacob to Moses or Joshua.
- 2) from Moses to Samuel and David.
- 3) from Samuel and David to Elijah and Elisha.
- 4) from Elijah and Elisha to Isaiah and Ezechiel.
- 5) from Isaiah and Ezechiel to the exile in Babylon.
- 6) from the exile to Esther and Malachi.
- 7) from Esther and Malachi to Zachariah, father of John the Baptist.

Secondly, the time from the Incarnation to the end, of seven seasons:

- 1) from Christ to the death of John the Evangelist.
- 2) from John's death to Constantine.
- 3) from Constantine to Justinian.
- 4) from Justinian to Charlemagne.
- 5) from Charlemagne to Joachim's own day.
- 6) from this day for a very short period.
- 7) from the conclusion of that period to the end.

¹⁴Joachim occasionally refers to standard forms of allegorical interpretation, for example in the Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti, 1, 5, c. 1.

¹⁵De Lubac, op. cit., p. 445.

¹⁶Liber introductorius, c. 6. De Lubac, op. cit., pp. 450-51.

¹⁷Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti, 1. 2, cited in the Protocol of Anagni, the report of the inquiry into Joachim's orthodoxy. De Lubac, op. cit., p. 461.

¹⁸Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti, 2. 2, 5 and 5. 50. Expositio in Apocalypsim, 3, 137.

¹⁹Liber figurarum tab. 14. Expositio in Apocalypsim, 3, 134.