


UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

LOVE, SEX AND CONFLICT
IN THE GRAIL NARRATIVES
OF CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES,
WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH
AND THOMAS MALORY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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Dedicated to my parents,
Who were my very first teachers,
And gave me my first book on King Arthur.

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that chivalry and its attendant values of love, sex and conflict were a source of serious debate during the Middle Ages, and that this debate featured prominently in the various versions of the Grail legend. There are quite a few variations on the Grail legend, but for the purpose of this study three have been selected: Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte du Graal*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. These three texts have been selected because they are arguably the most influential medieval Grail narratives.

The problematic nature of chivalry is dramatically testified to by the wide variety of mediums used in attempting to shape and control knighthood, including papal bulls, royal edicts, chivalric histories, handbooks of chivalry and war, and, of course, romances. All of the romances, by the very nature of the genre, deal with the themes of love, sex and conflict, but the Grail legends, in particular, provide us with a glimpse into the inner-workings of that debate, and certainly suggest the dilemma faced by the knights who found themselves pulled between the frequently conflicting values of Christianity, secular society and chivalry. Repeated attempts were made to find an answer which, to paraphrase Wolfram von Eschenbach, would permit knights to gain honour on Earth while not robbing God of their souls. Obviously honour, and the very existence of this warrior caste, required knights to prove their masculinity through military prowess and through their virility, but in doing so they ran the risk of losing their souls. This perplexing dilemma created a great deal of discussion and compromise between the Church, courtly society and the knights as they attempted to define socially acceptable behaviour. Some conduct was approved of by Church and state, while other actions were beyond the pale, and were roundly condemned. Much behaviour, however, remained morally ambiguous. Each of the Grail authors dealt with this problem and offered their own unique vision of knighthood. Not surprisingly, none of these visions harmonize exactly. Chrétien's vision of knighthood is sharp and cynical. He sets forth the problems of chivalry without providing solutions to the problems. Wolfram's view is more optimistic in that, while he acknowledges problems with knighthood, he believes that knighthood can be reformed and he sets forth a realistic programme for implementing the necessary changes. His ideal knights, in essence, must separate themselves from the superfluous elements that had accumulated around chivalry and weighed it down. Knights might love, but in moderation, as God directs, and preferably under the sanction of the Church through the rite of matrimony. Combat should be practiced, but again, in moderation, and for the glory of God instead of personal glory.

The final vision of knighthood provided by Malory is, of the three perspectives, the most tragic. Ordinary knights, for the most part, cannot achieve the Grail. Only by renouncing the very virtues that make them knights of the Round Table may a select few approach the mystical vision of the Grail, and then most of these disappear forever from the world of Arthur. Wolfram's vision of an enlightened knighthood existing in the world is lost in Malory's account, and instead Arthur's knights are faced with the parting roads to Sarra and Avalon. They may either follow the Grail and leave the world behind or return to Arthur's court for the final destruction of the golden age of chivalry.

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CHAPTER I

Chivalry and the Themes of Sex, Love and Conflict

The great Arthurian heroes are the literary archetypes of the medieval knight.

Again and again, in songs and tournaments, their names recur;
and their parts in the history of Logres, Arthur's realm,
reflect the development of the ideals to which all knights looked.

(Barber, 1974, 122-123)

Sir Thomas Malory, in *The Book of Tristram de Lyones*, tells of how Trystrames and Isode are captured by Sir Brehnour, a knight who has instituted a barbaric custom. The custom requires the two knights to compare the beauty of their ladies. She who is less fair loses her head, and then the two knights fight over the remaining lady. The winner, of course, gets to keep the lady as his prize. Trystrames protests that "this is a foule custom and a shamfull custom," but in the end, confident in the superior beauty of Isode and his own prowess at combat he participates, first striking off the head of Brehnour's lady, who is judged less beautiful, and then slaying Brehnour in combat (Malory 1948, 1:413-415). This disturbing tale embodies in an extreme fashion two preoccupations of medieval romances as well as introducing the two dominant themes of this paper: conflict and the intertwined issues of love and sex.

Karl Gröller, speaking of Middle English romances states:

The topic of war is of prime importance in the Middle English romances. One might even say that – together with the theme of courtly, and at times, even uncourtly love – it is the main subject of this genre. The two themes are, more often than not, closely linked with each other and sometimes even mutually dependent. (1987, 118)

Gröller's assertion is essentially true of all medieval romances, Middle English and otherwise. Love, sex and conflict were as indispensable to the genre of medieval romance as they are to our own modern entertainment industry. Indeed, these elements, which Sarah White describes as the "knight's double game of love and war", were defining characteristics of knighthood and thus, because the romance genre was always about knights, intimate relationships and violence were inextricably linked to romances (1983, 116).

Given the popularity of sex and violence as entertainment in many societies, including our own, it is not surprising then that the Middle Ages saw the emergence and growth of a genre – the medieval romance – where these two themes were central and, in many cases, glorified. What is surprising, however, is the degree to which those two traits were identified with one of the three estates: knighthood. Even a brief examination of medieval literature would prove that the clergy were frequently sexually active and were

sometimes shockingly violent. The commoners also, as many stories attest, shared in the violence and sexuality of the Middle Ages.¹ Yet the Church and the aristocracy only legitimized these two traits within the estate of knighthood, and even then with some uneasiness. What was disgusting, shocking, or even sinful for the other estates was justified when applied to knighthood, particularly as sex and violence were reinterpreted and made to conform to “courtly” standards. In the subsequent transformation sex and sensuality were subsumed into courtly love, and violence was subsumed into chivalrous combat. Margaret Richey has shown how the social order of chivalry became intertwined with these themes of love, sexuality and conflict:

Chivalry may, indeed, be described as a conjunction of Mars and Venus: war and love are its two interacting spheres, in which the lives of the sexes meet and join. War, the man’s special province, is imagined anew as a service fitting him to receive love’s guerdon. Love is a quickening influence which fosters nobleness and gives strength in battle. (1957, 117)

The desire to earn the favour of a lady inspires knights to combat, and prowess proves a knight’s worthiness to receive that favour. Richey’s depiction of war and love as the god Mars and the goddess Venus is particularly apropos, for in the literature or romance these qualities were indeed deified.

The transformation of the vices of sex and violence to the virtues of love and combat, however, was tenuous at best, and medieval writers were aware of how easy it was to slip across that thin line between virtue and vice. Numerous medieval stories tell of good knights losing their way through violence or sex only eventually to be redeemed by either renouncing sex and violence entirely or by submitting to the socially acceptable norms of combat and love. As we shall see in Chapter V, these concerns were seriously discussed by medieval intellectuals and authorities, and we are fortunate enough to have evidence of this dialogue in the form of papal bulls, royal edicts and manuals on warfare and chivalry.

One might well question why love, sex and conflict do play such a significant role in entertainment, both then and now. The simplest answer is that sex and violence are inherent parts of masculinity, and that within a patriarchal society, such as the one we have, and the Middle Ages had, sex and violence must be dressed up, justified and glorified in order to sustain masculine dominance. Physical strength has often been cited as the “natural” evidence of masculine superiority, and sexual performance, as Vern Bullough points out, “was a major key to being male. It was a man’s sexual organs that made him

¹ Examples of stories dealing with sex and violence outside of the estate of knighthood can be found in

different and superior to the woman. But maleness was somewhat fragile, and it was important for a man to keep demonstrating his maleness by action and thought, especially by sexual action” (1994, 41). In one sense, violence is how a male demonstrates dominance over other males, while sex is how a male shows dominance over females. Within medieval romances these two forms of dominance were often coupled: one knight would fight another knight for access to a lady. The assertion of dominance through violence and sexuality in Arthurian legends is implied in the passage from the Vulgate *Lancelot* which states:

The Customs of the Kingdom of Logres are such that if a lady or a maiden travels by herself, she fears no one. But if she travels in the company of a knight and another knight can win her in battle, the winner can take a lady or maiden in any way he desires without incurring shame or blame. (Krueger 1995, 10)

Implicit within the custom of Logres is the concept of masculinity being performed for the benefit of both the imaginary audience within the story and also, in a sense, being performed for the very real reader enjoying the story. Within the custom the woman and violence are explicitly linked. So long as the woman is not claiming the protection of a knight she may travel safely, but as soon as she places herself under the protection of a knight, or, as is perhaps more likely, is claimed by a knight, then she becomes as open a challenge to other knights as a flung gauntlet. Men require their heroes to be dominant, and, in a patriarchal society, frequently measure their own self worth in terms of aggression and sexual prowess.

In the older pre-Christian cultures of Western Europe sex and, even more so, violence, were accepted as part of the natural order, and this heritage had an impact on the development of chivalry. Maurice Keen, for example, refers to:

[The] influence[...] of a cult of war and of belligerence that was deeply imbedded in the traditions of the medieval west, being part of its heritage from the warrior ethos of the barbarian past, and which was fundamental to what we call chivalry. (1987, 94)

The medieval cultures which emerged in the latter part of the twelfth century still valued the warlike and sexual prowess of the earlier age, but found it necessary to temper, where they could, those older values with the more recently introduced virtues of Christianity.² The fact that violence and sex were predominant elements of chivalry was not lost on the Church, which first criticized, and then gradually condoned chivalry. The Church’s early attitude is implied by the testimony of a monk, Heinrich von Melk, who “in his unsparing

Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Andreas Capellanus’s *The Art of Love*.

denunciation of the sins of knights, claims that when they are gathered together the knights' talk is confined to two topics: how many women each has seduced and how many of his foes he has slain" (Green 1978, 14).

Compromises in attitudes, however, occurred, and between the ethos of secular chivalric society and Christianity developed a spectrum of possible behaviours. On one end was conduct that was beyond the pale of both lay society and the Church. Murder and rape, for example, were abhorred by both the Church and lay society. On the other extreme of the spectrum, however, celibacy and pacifism were promoted, at least in theory, by the Church. Somewhere in between the two extremes of anti-social behaviour and Christian saintliness lay the values of chivalric society. Again, between the chivalric and Christian virtues lay a gradation of behaviour. Knights concerned for both their social status and their salvation, found themselves having to balance the demands of chivalry and Christianity, and the Church found itself having to compromise its expectations in accordance with the realities of masculine nature. Both the secular and religious institutions recognized a dynamic interplay between the vices and virtues. As medieval writers acknowledged, lust could develop into love, love could end in lechery; socially justified combat could fall into unjustifiable violence and apparently unjustifiable violence could, under the proper circumstances, be condoned. In attempting to circumscribe the behaviour of knights while preserving some of the essence of the morality of the Middle Ages, I have defined the negative attributes as sex and violence, and the positive, socially acceptable attributes as love and combat.

The tension between the masculine values of knighthood and the virtues of the Church is a muted theme that runs through many of the romances. In the Grail legend, however, the tensions between the secular and spiritual, the chivalric and ecclesiastic, are dealt with explicitly. Because the Grail, as a holy object of significant religious veneration, is being sought by knights, and not saints or hermits, each author must fully explore the dynamic relationship between the secular and sacred. The manner in which each author depicts his hero, particularly in relationship to knightly violence and sexuality, when compared against other knights engaged in secular quests, reveals a great deal about which of the two ideologies the writer privileges.

Combat, violence, love and sex are, from the very beginning, essential themes of Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal*,³ Wolfram's *Parzival*,⁴ and Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.⁵

² For further details on the development of feudal society and the rise of knighthood to power, see page 11.

³ All of the translations from *Le Conte du Graal* are taken from William Kibler's 1991 translation of the *Arthurian Romances*, published by Penguin Classics. Unless otherwise stated, the original French texts are taken from Charles Méla's critical edition of *Le Conte du Graal*, published by Le Livre de Poche, 1990.

⁴ All of the translations from *Parzival* are taken from A. T. Hatto's 1980 Penguin Classics edition. The

Malory, in his description of King Uther's war with the Duke of Cornwall, and subsequent mating with the Duke's wife, connects violence and sex to the very conception of King Arthur, and thus to the entire Arthurian cycle. Wolfram, likewise, establishes Parzival's origins in the combat, lusts, and loves of his father, Gahmuret. Violence also plays a role in the heritage of Chrétien's Perceval, though love does not become a theme until somewhat later in the romance. Each of the authors in the course of their narratives uses violence and sex to demonstrate how his hero differs in behaviour from other "worldly" knights.

Before turning to the analysis of the three works in question, it is necessary to develop some idea of the type of readership that romances might have enjoyed and the types of responses readers might have had to the romances. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw a burgeoning of literacy among the upper and middle aristocracy, particularly in the vernacular.⁶ Yet in spite of this growth of literacy in the vernacular, it is not altogether clear how many people could read. While the clergy were in theory expected to be literate in Latin at least, levels of literacy among the aristocracy, where there was no corresponding imperative, are difficult to judge. Being able to determine exact levels of literacy among the aristocracy, however, is perhaps not the best way to determine the size of audience a text might receive, for, as Sandra Hindman points out, texts, including romances, were not merely read, they were also performed. Hindman describes audiences as follows:

Clerical culture [...] was of course literate Latin culture, whereas knightly culture was for the most part illiterate, oral, or vernacular. However blurred these distinctions remain—especially when applied to vernacular texts, since orality persists within literacy—for our purposes they can most usefully be taken to define two poles, which I will call performative and nonperformative cultures instead of literate and illiterate. Performative culture, which is essentially based on orality, could include both those who read aloud to a group and those who could

Middle High German texts are taken from Karl Lachman's study edition of *Parzival*, published by Walter de Gruyter, 1998.

⁵ All quotations in this paper are taken from Eugène Vinaver's 1948 three volume edition *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* which is based on the Winchester manuscript instead of Caxton's *Le Morte Darthur*. *Le Morte Darthur* is, as Vinaver and others have pointed out, not an entirely satisfactory title, as it tends to be identified primarily with Caxton's edition instead of the Winchester manuscript, because it overemphasizes the importance of Arthur's death in the narrative, and also because it gives Malory's various stories the appearance of being one cohesive work. Vinaver has settled on the more apt title *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* to describe Malory's Arthurian cycle. I, however, have decided for the purpose of this thesis to remain with the more traditional title given to the works by Caxton, *Le Morte Darthur*.

⁶ The term "class" is not appropriate for this research, because the idea of "class", as we define it today, was not a medieval concept. Moreover, Bumke has argued in *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages* that the "knightly class" is a fiction. Medieval thinkers had developed the concept of the three estates (i.e. militants, clergy, and workers), but generally people in the Middle Ages tended to view society as a progression (as illustrated in *Piers Plowman* and in *Canterbury Tales*) moving from the lowest peasant up to the king. People recognized that in this progression there would be lower aristocracy, middle aristocracy and upper aristocracy. Indeed, Andreas Capellanus finds these divisions useful in talking about the art of love.

not read themselves but who listened. Nonperformative culture, like literate Latin culture, included those who read to themselves whether silently or aloud, in Latin or the vernacular. (1994, 42)

Thus, we can see that the traditional application of the phrase “readers” may not hold true for a medieval audience, which contained readers to be sure, but also had listeners. This was certainly true of the periods in which Chrétien and Wolfram wrote, and only slightly less true in the time of Malory, when Europe had become a book culture on the edge of discovering movable type.

Romances, usually written in the vernacular, were considered inferior to the more important texts which were composed primarily in Latin. The decision of Chrétien de Troyes to write in the vernacular, along with his choice of matter, suggests that he intended his works for a relatively wide courtly audience. In writing his *Lancelot*, Chrétien tells us that he is indebted to Marie de Champagne for providing the material and treatment of the story, suggesting that both men and women enjoyed his works. This is further supported by the inscription found in one manuscript of *Le Conte du Graal*: “This book belongs to the Sire of Haregerie, who lends it to Madame de Contay, who promises to return it to him” (Hindman 1994, 46).⁷ In *Parzival* Wolfram also alludes to the diversity of his audience by suggesting that some of his audience may not be literate, and by directly addressing the ladies of his audience. The popularity of Malory’s work is well attested to by Caxton’s preface which states that “many noble and dyvers gentylmen of thys royaume of Englonde camen and demaunded me many and oftymes wherfore that I have not do made and enprynte the noble hystorye of the Saynt Greal and the moost renommed Crysten king” (Malory 1947, 1:cxi, ll. 4-8). Larry Benson proves that Caxton’s assertion is not an exaggeration:

There can be no doubt of the popularity of Malory’s book among the English-reading public, for despite its length and presumably, therefore, its relatively high price, enough copies were sold to warrant five editions before 1600. The attacks of the humanist writers of the day upon the book, which they name specifically, show that it was widely read; otherwise, such writers would not have felt a need to criticize it. (1976, 105-106)

Indeed, Caxton was an astute businessman and it would have been very surprising had he agreed to publish a book he did not think would do well commercially.

⁷ Most manuscripts that we possess were copied years after the original piece was composed, and it is not entirely safe to speculate that authors had exactly the same audiences as the number, ownership and distribution of the manuscripts would suggest. Nevertheless certain inferences can be drawn from these facts, and these inferences do suggest an audience that crossed the barriers of gender, estate, and status .

The impact of Arthurian literature on actual chivalric practice has been debated. Christopher Dean, for example, speaking strictly about Arthurian literature in medieval England argues:

Second only to the teachings of the church, chivalry with its religious, moral, and social codes dominated the minds of the nobility in the Middle Ages. Consequently, since the knightly class of medieval England knew from its reading of romances and histories that King Arthur's court at Camelot represented the very pinnacle of chivalric splendour and prowess in the past, we might expect Arthur and the Round Table to have played a significant part in medieval chivalry, and thus in turn to have influenced the everyday lives of the aristocracy who claimed to espouse chivalric ideals. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality we find that the deeds of King Arthur and his court and the principles they exemplified affected the noble way of life in medieval England hardly at all. (1987, 32)

Dean's argument, however, is not convincing, and indeed, his own chapter, "Arthur and Chivalry," goes some way to show that "the deeds of King Arthur and his court and the principles they exemplified affected the noble way of life in medieval England" at least to a certain extent, if not as dramatically as scholars previously thought. Larry Benson's earlier book, *Malory's Morte Darthur* (1976), anticipates some of Dean's arguments and reveals that knights in the late Middle Ages were indeed aware of the Arthurian tradition and consciously attempted to emulate their fictitious heroes.⁸ One of the best arguments, however, against Dean's opinion is presented by Elspeth Kennedy in her essay "The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance". She states:

There is sometimes a tendency, especially among non-medievalists, to think of Arthurian romance as escapist literature, concerned with lost dreams and a past golden age, primarily written for women, in contrast with the "manly" epic. However, although there is indeed evidence from references to patrons and from the ownership of manuscripts that *dames* were amongst the avid readers or listeners to the reading of romances, there are also examples of interplay between life and Arthurian literature which concern knightly activities. (1994, 70)

Kennedy provides collaborating evidence for her assertion by examining the writing of four knights, Phillippe de Novare, Philippe de Beaumanoir, Ramon Lull, and Geoffroi de Charny and showing that these men had obviously read and been influence by Arthurian romances.⁹

⁸ See Benson's chapters "Fifteenth-Century Chivalry", "Knighthood in Life and Literature", and "The Realism of Fifteenth-Century Romance" (1976).

⁹ Geoffroi de Charny specifically mentions Guinivere in his *The Book of Chivalry* (1996, 119), thus proving his own acquaintance with Arthurian romance. See also my reference to Philippe de Novare on page 10. Unfortunately I have not come across any references in early English literature that would suggest the impact of Arthurian romance on the development of chivalry, but we know without any doubt that Arthurian legend

Although Arthurian literature may have had a lesser impact on the practice of chivalry than previously thought, the relevance of the romance and the Grail legend to courtly life over the ages seems fairly evident. Graham Caie is quite justified in arguing that Chrétien's works were relevant to Chretien's contemporaries:

Chrétien gave the aristocracy a medium in which to discuss their ideal and social concerns. It is not escapist literature for the idle rich, but presents vital issues such as feudal obligations, and mutual love as opposed to marriage while attempting to harmonize heroic ideals with the new code of courtly love. (Caie 1988, 17)

A number of scholars have lent credence to this assertion by suggesting, through close readings of the text, that Chrétien's writings were referencing the society in which they were written.¹⁰ This is equally true for Wolfram and Malory, who discuss within their works contemporary interests such as the crusading experience and the dilemma of blood feuds.¹¹ In particular, Richard Kaeuper, a historian, has also argued that medieval literature, through its ambiguous portrayals of violence, initiated discussions on the subject. Medieval society, Kaeuper argues, did not have a fixed conception of violence. How violence was used and who could use it were all things that society debated in literary works. As Kaeuper says:

Behind institutional change, social norms regarding violence were the focus of much reflection and active debate. Many of the works of literature patronized and enjoyed by a broad segment of society worried (however cautiously) over socially disruptive violence, even as they portrayed with considerable fondness the heroic violence of bold men acting in approved causes. (2000b, x)

Thus, it seems accurate to say that, as vernacular literature, medieval romances were not considered entirely serious literature, but neither were they the purely escapist literature that is found so frequently in book racks at airports. The idea that literature might be read simply for entertainment was not common then, and indeed, the prohibitive cost of producing books insured that they were not produced as only entertainment. Today, readers of modern romance fiction understand that the world they are entering into is a fictitious one separated from their own reality, which they willingly enter for the purpose of escape. This was not so for medieval readers of romance. For them the romances were based in a vague, but real, historical past, and the heroes and heroines of the story provided examples of appropriate behaviour. Vernacular literature on the one hand mirrored society, and on the other hand actively influenced society, so that writers such as Chrétien de

played a large role in the political propaganda of the Plantagenets (see Markale, 1977).

¹⁰ See Cazelles, 1996, Cosman, 1966, Diverres, 1990 and Noble, 1982.

¹¹ For Wolfram see: Green, 1978, and Jackson, 1991 and for Malory see: Barber, 1997, Barron, 1981, and

Troyes depicted society as they knew it while at the same time creating, through their popular writing, modes of conduct and thought which were idealized if not practised. The idealized world of the romance writers, however, was problematic, both because it tended to ignore the pragmatic problems of mundane life and also because its ethos, the chivalric ethos, came dangerously close to conflicting with Church doctrine. Thus, some writers thought it necessary to balance their heroes between the demands of courtly society and the Church. Part of the reason why medieval readers were fascinated with the romance tales is because these tales dealt with a very real preoccupation of their own: how to live spiritually acceptable lives while still participating in a secular world. The idea that the medieval romance could be used as a guide to living with these conflicting demands is supported by Caxton, who, in the preface to *Le Morte Darthur*, states:

Doo after the good and leve the evyl, and it shal bringe you to good fame and renomme.

And for to passe the tyme thys book shal be plesaunte to rede in, but for to gyve fayth and byleve that al is trewe that is conteyned herin, ye be at your lyberté. But al is wryton for our doctryne, and for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne, but t'exersyse and folowe vertu, by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame and renommé in thys lyf, and after thys shorte and transytorye lyf to come unto everlastyng blysse in heven. (Malory 1948, 1:cxiv, ll. 6-15)¹²

Caxton published *Le Morte Darthur* in 1485, which was quite late in the Middle Ages, but it is evident that earlier medieval readers read Chrétien, Wolfram and other writers almost as much for edification as they did for entertainment. Certainly Chrétien establishes in the introduction to several of his works that his romances should act as a guide to the readers.¹³ In *Cligés*, he links within his story learning and chivalry, suggesting that it is through stories such as his that chivalry is kept vital:

The story, which I intend to relate to you, we find written in one of the books of the library of my lord Saint Peter at Beauvais. From there the material was drawn of which Chrétien has made this romance. The book is very old in which the story is told, and this adds to its authority. From such books which have been preserved we learn the deeds of men of old and of the times long since gone by. Our books have informed us that the pre-eminence in chivalry and learning once belonged to Greece. Then chivalry passed to Rome, together with that highest learning which now has come to France. God grant that it may be cherished here, and

Field, 1999.

¹² Caxton's commentary on the pedagogical value of *Le Morte Darthur* is based on several biblical passages attributed to St. Paul. In Romans 12:9 St. Paul exhorts his audience to "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good," and in 1 Cor 10:11 he says, in reference to the sufferings of the Jews, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us [...]" All translations are taken from the New International Version Study Bible (1985).

¹³ For examples see the beginnings *Erec et Enide*, *Cligés*, and *Yvain*.

that it may be made so welcome here that the honour which has taken refuge with us may never depart from France: God awarded it as another's share, but of Greeks and Romans no more is heard, their fame is passed, and their glowing ash is dead. (Troyes 1975, 91)

Vernacular literature was not, however, necessarily intended as a guide to proper courtly etiquette. Much of it, through its usage of satire and irony, was actually more of a guide on how not to behave, or a commentary on the foolish extremes of secular society. Searching for satire or irony which might undermine the apparent message of medieval texts has not always been well accepted in academic circles where some scholars have insisted on more literal readings. Dean is one of those scholars who questions the degree to which irony and parody are read into medieval texts now:

Seeing irony and parody at the heart of much medieval writing is today's current fashion in criticism, nowhere more evident than in Chaucerian scholarship, despite the fact that none of Chaucer's contemporaries or immediate followers seemed to think of him in this way. We should surely be skeptical of perspectives that tell us that all the contemporary readers of a medieval writer misunderstood him and that only now has the key been turned that reveals the true nature of his work. (1987, 6)

Dean correctly suggests that we should be wary of "perspectives that tell us that all contemporary readers of a medieval writer misunderstood him and that only now has the key been turned that reveals the true nature of his work," but Dean may well have underestimated a medieval audience's awareness and appreciation for irony within a text. Anyone reading Chrétien's *Lancelot*, for example, has seriously to consider the possibility that Chrétien is passing an ironic judgment on the excesses of courtly society, and most scholars now are of the opinion that Andreas Capellanus's *De amore* was intended as a humorous satire, and not as a serious guide to "courtly love", as was thought by earlier scholars.

The Grail legends are unique in that they are neither entirely a guide to appropriate living nor entirely an ironic commentary on chivalry, although both elements are contained within them. The authors of the Grail literature did not apparently intend their readers to emulate the behaviour of their heroes. Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval, after all, is portrayed as a naïve young man in the first part of the story, and, after he finally is trained and begins to behave in appropriately chivalric manner, is alienated for five years from society and forgets during that time to act as a Christian. Galahad, on the other hand, behaves perfectly, first as a Christian, and then as a knight, but because of the mystical nature of his quest he is removed for all practical reasons from the realities of mundane life. Neither of these examples, then, are entirely to be emulated. The Grail heroes may represent perfect

knighthood, but it does not seem as if the authors thought their audience capable of achieving that level of perfection. Wolfram von Eschenbach is the exception to this rule in that he has attempted to establish a human, practical Grail knight, although Parzival's behaviour is also at times sinful and thus not entirely to be emulated.

Having suggested the significance of conflict, love and sex as themes in medieval romances and examined in brief the readership and possible responses to romances, it is now necessary to consider the historical and social contexts of violence, sex and love as it related to knighthood in the Middle Ages. Due to the constraints of space and the evident fact that we are examining these themes in three different cultures and two different periods, it will be necessary, unfortunately, to present simplified models of violence and combat and sex and love based on limited historical research, keeping always in mind that in actuality attitudes were far more complex. As Kaeuper (1999, 2000a) has suggested, even within one culture at one period there was no set consensus on violence. Corinne Saunders has likewise pointed out that "medieval thought and writing, then, are by no means monolithic: systems of thought, and particularly approaches to sex and gender, differ widely" (2001, 318). These statements seem self-evident in light of the fact that this study is dedicated to examining changing attitudes towards sex, love and conflict as portrayed in the Grail legends. Had there been, after all, complete agreement on these themes the Grail legends would not have been written in such a way as to draw attention to sex, love, violence and combat. Although it is evident that a final statement regarding attitudes towards these themes in the Middle Ages is impossible, general trends in attitudes can be discerned and it is these trends that I will briefly address.

When Chrétien de Troyes began writing his romances in the second half of the twelfth century, chivalry was still in its infancy and the violence of the various combatants had not yet been greatly tempered either by the Church or chivalry. Tony Hunt shows that "until the final quarter of the twelfth century the terms *chivalier*, *chevalerie*, and *chevalros* continue to designate a professional military function of armed service devoid of any strong connotations of value, moral, spiritual, or social" (1981, 5). Knights, in other words, were defined primarily in terms of their military prowess though, as Linda Paterson argues in her examination of knighthood in the south of France, this conception of knighthood varied from region to region. According to Paterson, "In the North [of France], c. 1180 seems to have been the turning point between the old-fashioned concept of the knight as a 'professional horseback warrior' and a new chivalric ideology" (1984, 125). The date here, as both Hunt and Paterson point out, corresponds with Chrétien's creation and popularization of the medieval romance, suggesting that either romances played a role in

shaping the new image of knighthood or perhaps that romances were created to reflect the changing status of knights as a new social elite. Hunt also suggests that in the late twelfth century knighthood was threatened and in danger of becoming obsolete. Romances were in part created to justify chivalry and the existence of the knighthood. Hunt summarizes:

In his last two romances Chrestien is at pains to endow the chivalry of the nobility with an edifying purpose in response to numerous contemporary attacks on militarism. This idealized defense of chivalry reflects the self-justification of a threatened class attempting to meet the challenge of professional competition (mercenaries and foot soldiers), the growth of a money economy, the emergence of a prosperous bourgeoisie and a new class of parvenus, the loss of political power consequent on the rise of the territorial princes and of royal authority, the development of a lay culture in the urban schools, and the soaring costs of maintaining expensive equipment and a distinctive lifestyle. (1981, 7)

In any event, the armed warriors of the twelfth century began to accrue status and power and took on a variety of new functions so that by the fifteenth century the definition of knighthood could vary “depending upon whether they saw themselves primarily as soldiers, as dispensers of justice (justices of the peace or sheriffs), or as courtiers and country gentlemen” (Kennedy 1985, 1).¹⁴

Well before knighthood achieved an elevated social status, the violence of combatants began attracting attention and concern. By the late eleventh century the problem of gratuitous violence on the part of both the aristocracy and the knights was causing alarm with the Church, and presumably with other elements of society. In 1085 Pope Urban II proclaimed the first crusade, apparently not so much to free the Holy Land from the infidels as to ameliorate the recurring problem of violence among Christians. Urban II’s words are unambiguous: one source has him saying, “Until now you have conducted illicit wars and brought murder to one another,” and, according to another source he says, “You tear each other to pieces and fight one another, conduct wars and kill yourselves with mutual wounds. Let this hatred cease amongst you, let the conflict die away and your weapons rest” (Green 1978, 13, Keen 1987, 96).¹⁵ The violence which concerned Urban II and the Church came in two guises. First, there were the wars, many of which were small, private wars and feuds waged by the aristocracy. The nobility clung

¹⁴ For a brief discussion of the emergence of chivalry, see also Richard Barber’s 1996 essay, “Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*.”

¹⁵ A similar attitude is expressed by Saint Bernard who in *Sermo exhortatorius ad milites Templi*, argued for the introduction of military orders primarily as a method of reforming a perverted nobility: “you will find very few men in the vast multitude which throngs to the Holy Land who have not been unbelieving scoundrels, sacrilegious plunderers, homicides, perjurers, adulterers, whose departure from Europe is certainly a double benefit, seeing that people in Europe are glad to see the back of them, and the people to whose assistance they are going in the Holy Land are delighted to see them!” (Shichtman 1994, 164).

to their “right” to violent recourse, should justice or diplomacy break down, with the same tenacity that many Americans cling to their “right” to own guns, with tragically similar results. Jackson comments:

It should be emphasized that warfare was different in its political and social dimensions in the Middle Ages from the twentieth century in Europe. Whereas today the right to use armed force lies with the state, not the individual (save in certain limited situations such as self-defense), the bearing of arms was a hereditary right of the medieval aristocracy. In the German empire, as in many other parts of Europe, individuals still had the right to settle disputes by military means, in the process of feud, in the thirteenth century and later. (1999, 160)

Kaueper concurs with this analysis:

A mark of privileged status was the capacity to respond to any challenge to honour, status, or wealth by means of violence. The biographer of the famous knight William Marshal complains that this cherished right to violence is endangered; in the time he wrote (in the early thirteenth century) stalwart tourneyers and knights errant were being reduced to mere courtroom pleaders. (2000a, x)

Indeed, all three of the works examined in this thesis contain examples of private wars, a disproportionate number of which are sparked off by our other themes of love and sex.

Chivalric games such as jousts and tournaments formed a second category of violence which concerned the Church and secular authorities.¹⁶ These chivalric games were linked to the violence of warfare in what appears to have been a cycle: frequent warfare required that knights maintain their prowess through the exercises provided by jousts and tournaments, and jousts and tournaments in turn insured that there was always a class of men whose primary *raison d'être* was combat.¹⁷ In literature intended for the knightly class tournaments held a prominent position, and just as all of the works examined in this thesis discuss warfare, so too they provide examples of tournaments and jousts, frequently linking them to wars and, again, to sex and love. We know that Arthurian romances such as the ones examined in this work shaped at least some of the tournaments which actually took place. The following description of one of the earliest tournaments modeled on Arthurian legend is provided for us by Philippe de Novare, who was describing a tournament in 1223:

¹⁶ Regarding the attitude of secular authorities towards tournaments, Barber states, “Most central governments would have preferred neither wars nor tournaments among their barons, but accepted the latter as the lesser of two evils” (1974, 183).

¹⁷ The close relationship between warfare and the chivalric sports is evident in Barber’s argument: “Real war and tournaments are never very far apart throughout the history of chivalry. Tournaments begin as mimic wars in the twelfth century; wars take on the appearance of mimic tournaments in the pages of Froissart in the fourteenth century. In both, the knight seems to be the sole protagonist” (1974, 193).

A cele chevalier fu la plus grant feste et la plus longue qui fust onques
desa mer que l'on sache. Mout i ot douné et despendu, et bouhordé, et
contrefait les aventures de Bretaigne et de la Table ronde, et moult de
maniere de jeus.

The festivities at this knighting were the greatest and longest ever known
overseas. There was much giving and spending, much tourneying and re-
enacting the adventures of Britain and of the Round Table and all manners of
games. (Kennedy 1994, 72).

The Church's official attitude to tournaments was extremely complex and changed
over time to match the different personalities of the popes as well as changes in the
technology of tournaments, which permitted combat less likely to result in death. Green
points out that the Church's initial denouncement of tournaments was based on the
undeniable fact that tournaments "entailed the death of knights and peril to their souls as
homicides" (1978, 13). Green's argument is supported by the fact that in "1130, with the
decree of the Council of Clermont, the Church had formally banned tournaments, denying
those who died at tournaments Christian burial" (Vale 2000a, 152. See also Benson 1976,
167). The Church's ban, however, was impossible to enforce, and the aristocracy
apparently decided to ignore the dire warnings of the Church on this subject. Larry Benson
cites the example of Sir William and Sir Roger de Gaugi who participated in tournaments
on the Continent between 1177 and 1179 and in less than a year defeated 103 knights
(1976, 164). Undoubtedly the failure on the part of the Church effectively to eliminate
tournaments was a factor in the Church's gradual change of attitude. By 1316, Pope John
XXII went so far as explicitly to condone tournaments (Vale, 2000a, 152), and by "the
fifteenth century, chivalry had become respectable in the eyes of both Church and state, and
the chivalric code of Arthur's knights had become the ideal of an important segment of
society" (Benson 1976, 208).

The Church leaders recognized the problems associated with the knightly class,
and, although the Church's attitude towards knights and chivalry shifted over time, the
Papacy for the most part followed a policy of trying to curb the worst excesses of the
knightly class. The Church's behaviour, however, was much more complex than simple
antagonism towards chivalry. Church leaders did not want to eliminate chivalry or the
kighthood, and such a goal would have been unfeasible. Rather, the Church leadership
attempted to claim control of chivalry and reform kighthood through the concept of the
miles Dei (God's knight), but also through providing knights with an appropriate *raison
d'être* as servants and defenders of the Church and as Crusaders fighting to retake the Holy

Lands. The extent to which these ideas were promoted is evidenced by the emergence of several military orders, most notably the Poor Knights of the Temple, who were officially recognized by the church in 1128 at the Council of Troyes (Shichtman 1994, 164).

Ironically, in attempting to reform chivalry through the promotion of the concept of the *miles Dei* the Church “contributed crucially to the development of a chivalric identity and solidarity and of a lay ethic which purported to reconcile secular and religious values” (Ashcroft 1981, 70-71). The Church created a religiously acceptable type of knighthood in form of the crusader. As Green points out:

[The crusader’s] warfare is given a moral justification: his journey to Jerusalem is felt to be an *imitatio Christi*, his readiness for martyrdom redeems him from his earlier, worldly sinfulness and he devotes his military service to God since, in fighting the pagans, he is engaged not merely in a physical conflict (with the flesh and blood) but also in a spiritual struggle (with the sins or demons these pagans are meant to incorporate). (1978, 15)

Evidently the internecine violence which was so soundly condemned among Christians was justified when used against non-Christians, and Saint Bernard even argued that Templar knights escaped the sin of homicide because they were not killing humans so much as wickedness in the form of humans (Green 1978, 15-16, Kaueper 1999, 70). Yet in spite of the fact that the Church lent its authority and support to certain forms of chivalry and even certain forms of violence, there was evidently tension between the perceived virtues of Christianity and the values of Chivalry. This tension was at least partially addressed by Honouré Bonet in his *The Tree of Battles* written in 1387. He raises the serious question of what happens to a knight’s soul when he dies at war:

I ask now whether the soul of a knight killed in battle is saved. It would appear not, for according to one opinion a knight cannot follow arms and war without sin. Further, if a knight die in battle he must not be buried in sacred ground, such as a church or cemetery. The chief reason on which we base this supposition or opinion is that any mortal man who is killed while in anger or evil intention is held to have died in mortal sin, and we may consider this knight to be in such state.

Notwithstanding this argument I will draw three conclusions: The first is: if a knight die in war ordained by the Church, as in the case of war against the unbelievers or enemies of the Pope or of the Faith, and is not otherwise in mortal sin, his soul goes forthwith to Paradise, for thus the decree stands. The second conclusion is: that if a soldier die in battle in a just war and to maintain a just quarrel, he similarly, will be saved in Paradise. The third conclusion is: if he die or be killed in unjust warfare he is in the way of damnation, for we hold according to our Faith that the souls of those who die in mortal sin go to hell. (Bonet 1949, 156)

John Gower, however, seems uncomfortable even with the concept of holy war, and states his disapproval in *Confessio Amantis*, written in the late fourteenth century:

Sone myn.
To preche and soffre for the feith,
That I have herd the gospels seith;
Bot forto slee, that hiere I noght.
.....
Fro first that holi church hath weyved
To preche, and hath the sword received,
Wherof the werres ben begonne,
A gret partie of that was wonne
To Cristes feith stont now miswent. (Gröller 1987, 141)

Along with violence, the sexual mores of chivalry were a topic of contentious debate during the Middle Ages. The nature of sexuality and love advocated by chivalry is, in fact, a contentious topic even now, with scholars debating the authenticity and accuracy of the term “courtly love,” a term which came into vogue well after the Middle Ages.¹⁸

Part of the confusion that exists regarding the nature of sex and love in the Middle Ages can be blamed on the fact that scholars were too willing to accept the historical significance and veracity of literary texts, thus leading to such mistakes as believing that Andreas Capellanus’s *De arte honeste amore* described accurately the behaviour of knights and ladies at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and of Marie de Champagne. Margaret Reid, C. S. Lewis and John Jay Parry, the translator of Capellanus’s *De arte honeste amore*, adhered to the literal interpretation of the book, but as Benson has pointed out, “modern scholars have proved that there probably was no actual court of love in twelfth-century Champagne” (1976, 156). Benson hastens to add, however, that just because there was no actual court of love in twelfth-century Champagne does not mean that there were never courts of love – indeed in the year 1400 Charles VI established a real Court of Love under the assumption that he was re-instituting an accepted tradition from the “golden age” of chivalry (1976, 156).

Evidently we can not accept *De arte honeste amore* at face value, and yet Capellanus’s work does reveal some of the contemporary aristocratic attitudes towards love and sex. The sheer volume and variety of texts dealing with these topics suggests that even if Andreas Capellanus’s court of love was a product of his own imagination, love was an

¹⁸ “Some critics have denied that such a concept ever existed and point to Gaston Paris’s coining of the term *amour courtois* in 1883. More widely held is the view that some such variation of romantic love was discussed and existed as an ideal, if not as a historical fact, from the 12th century onwards, though usually called fine (or *verai* or *bon*) *amour*. Definitions of it have varied according to literary fashion and have proliferated in the 20th century, when increasingly specialized knowledge of the Middle Ages has also resulted in scepticism and an unwillingness to make grandiose hypotheses.” (Ousby 1993, 213) See also Barber 1970, 81-82.

extremely popular topic of discussion among aristocratic society, and though Capellanus's descriptions appear to be caricatures of reality, we can still recognize modes of behaviour that really must have occurred. Capellanus, for example, delineates in great detail the proper etiquette for courtship between members of different classes, and, in the case where a noble man becomes infatuated with a common woman, he advocates raping the woman, with no suggestion that any wrong should be attached to this. Surprisingly, the continuity of the concept that rape of a common woman was acceptable, at least within literature, is evidenced by the fact that Wolfram von Eschenbach has a commoner excuse Gawain of all culpability in what the commoner assumed was the rape of his daughter, and, three hundred years later Malory includes a similar reference to rape in his book "Torre and Pellynor":

Anone the wyff was fette forth, which was a fayre houswyff. And there she answered Merlion full womanly, and ther she told the kynge and Merlion that whan she was a mayde and wente to mylke hir kyne, 'there mette with me a sterne knyght, and half be force he had my maydynhode[...].'

Sir Torre seyde unto Merlion, 'Dishonoure nat my modir.'

'Sir', seyde Merlion, 'hit ys more for your worship than hurte, for youre fadir ys a good knyght and a kynge, and he may ryght well avaunce you and youre modir both. (Malory 1948, 1:101 ll. 4-19)

Apparently King Arthur's injunction against "enforcing" "ladyes, damsesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes" only applied to women of the aristocracy (Malory 1948, 1:120 ll. 5-6).

Not only does Andreas Capellanus provide us with some idea of the different attitudes towards sex and love that were accepted (undoubtedly with much discussion) among the aristocracy, he also provides us with examples of how the Church responded to illicit love and sexuality. He states, possibly with some mockery as well as some seriousness that:

we know beyond a doubt that God Himself is the fountainhead and origin of chastity and of modesty, and from Scripture we know that the Devil is really the author of love and lechery. And so because of their sources, we are bound to forever observe modesty and chastity and to shun lechery completely, because we agree that which the Devil has given rise to cannot be at all wholesome for men or give them anything that we can praise. (1959, 194-195)

The views expressed by Andreas Capellanus at the end of his book match precisely with the teachings of the Church. Since the time of Saint Paul Church doctrine officially promoted celibacy as a spiritual ideal, or, if the person was unsuited for celibacy, then marriage was recommended. Marriage among the aristocracy in the Middle Ages, however, was first a matter of political, social or economic expediency and secondly a matter of love, so it is not surprising that at least within literature, the idea of adulterous

love received some attention.¹⁹ Indeed, in *De arte honeste amore* Capellanus even suggests that love within marriage is impossible, and he has one of the higher nobility make his case in these words to a woman of the simple nobility:

I admit it is true that your husband is a very worthy man and that he is more blest than any man in the world because he has been worthy to have the joy of embracing Your Highness. But I am greatly surprised that you wish to misapply the term 'love' to that marital affection which husband and wife are expected to feel for each other after marriage, since everybody knows that love can have no place between husband and wife. They may be bound to each other by a great and immoderate affection, but their feeling cannot take the place of love, because it cannot fit under the true definition of love. (1959, 100)

Adulterous love was, of course, completely at odds with the Church's position, and the Church's animosity to the concept of *fin' amor* was exasperated by the fact that love was often portrayed in religious terms.²⁰ Furthermore, both courtly society and the Church associated love with combat – from the courtly perspective love was a great incentive for proving one's prowess in the battlefield and in tournaments, but from the Church's perspective adulterous love simply created more gratuitous violence. As Capellanus says in his role as Church spokesperson,

Love, moreover, regularly leads men to deadly, inescapable warfare and does away with treaties of perpetual peace. Often too it overthrows great cities and mighty fortresses and the safest of castles and changes the good fortune of wealth into the evil fortune of poverty. (1959, 196)

Obviously the Church and courtly society had rival ideologies. The Church had its focus on celibacy while courtly society of the time was focusing on *fin' amor*. The Church was also supposed to be, at least in theory, a promoter and supporter of peace, while the aristocratic society at that time was both in theory and practice extremely martial in nature. Through the monks the Church encouraged contemplation. Knights, by contrast, were men of action. The Church and courtly society even had rival orders: monasticism and knighthood.²¹ The absolute pull of these blatantly divergent ideologies is best seen, perhaps, in the various attempts to unite them through things like the Templar knights and the adoration of the Virgin Mary. Later authors of the Grail legend attempted to provide

¹⁹ See Poag, James F. 1972. *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. 17-18.

²⁰ For examples of love being portrayed in religious terms, see *The Romaunt of the Rose*, *Troilus and Criseyde*.

²¹ The competitive relationship that existed between knighthood and the clerical orders is attested to by several medieval writers. One medieval authority, Ramón Lull, says the following in his *The Book of the Order of Chyualry*: "Many there ben / that haue offyces whiche god hath gyuen to them in this world / to thende / that of hym he shold be serued / & honoured / but the most noble & the most honourable offyces that ben / ben thoffyces of clerkes & of knyghtes / And therfor the grettest amytye that shold be in this world / ou3t to be bitwene knyghtes & clerkes" (1926, 26)

some sort of synthesis between the opposing ideologies, culminating in the creation of Galahad who is clearly an attempt to bring together what was “best” in both knights and clergy. It is with this tension between secular and sacred, the Church and aristocratic lay society, and the pull of masculine concepts in chivalry in mind that we will now turn to examine three of the most significant versions of the Grail legend.

CHAPTER II

Chrétien de Troyes' Angelic Killers

Tu as veü au mien espoir
Les angles don les genz se plaignent,
Qui ocient quant qu'il ataignent.
(Troyes 1990, ll. 370-372)

You have seen, I believe, the angels men complain of,
who kill whatever they come upon. (Troyes 1991, 386)

Le Conte du Graal not only introduced the Grail matter into medieval Arthurian literature and ensured its enduring popularity, it also created a new, more introspective romance genre, where the ideals of chivalry were scrutinized and compared, not always favorably, against the values presented by other social forces, particularly the Church. Chivalry, its relationship to Christian ethics, and its relationship to the values of social groups outside the knightly class, were sources of continual dialogue throughout the Middle Ages, and *Le Conte du Graal* became the catalyst for a continued discussion in Grail literature about the nature of ideal knighthood. Starting with *Le Conte du Graal*, Grail literature broke from other Arthurian literature in that it ceased to be primarily a vehicle for the narration of knightly adventures and became more consciously a means of analyzing knightly behaviour, so that by the time of *Le Morte Darthur* the Grail story was explicitly trying to answer the question: What constitutes the perfect knight? *Le Conte du Graal*'s active participation in the dialogue on knighthood is suggested in the conversation between Perceval and his mother:

Filz, dit ele, si con je croi,
Tu as veü au mien espoir
Les angles don les genz se plaignent,
Qui ocient quant qu'il ataignent.
—Non ai, mere, voir non ai, non!
Chevalier dient qu'il ont non. (Troyes 1990, ll. 369-374)

“Fair son, I commend you to God, for I am most afraid on your account: you have seen, I believe, the angels men complain of, who kill whatever they come upon.”

“Not at all, mother. No, not at all! They say they are called knights.” (Troyes 1991, 386)

This conversation suggests the ambiguity that knighthood held in the medieval mind, for knighthood possessed a dual nature which was both beautiful and “angelic,” as the mother suggested, and yet also demonic in the deaths and waste it caused. Knights, to people who did not belong to that social elite, were a source of awe and fear. Perceval had already

discovered that knights were neither demons, as he initially thought when he heard their approach, nor angels, as he believed when he saw them, but simply men who through nobility of birth and by the granting of kings became knights. As Chrétien shows, though, in the hierarchy of the universe humans, including knights and ladies, exist somewhere between angels and demons and partake of both natures. Yet whether the conduct promoted by chivalry tended to elevate knights or lower them was not a question that Chrétien chose to answer with any certainty.

Although *Le Conte du Graal* provides no concrete answers regarding the questions raised by chivalry, its impact on the ongoing reassessment of knighthood during the Middle Ages should not be underestimated. When Chrétien de Troyes created *Le Conte du Graal* in the late twelfth century, he already had an established reputation as the pre-eminent romance writer of the period, and his earlier romances had contributed greatly to the development of chivalry. It is impossible to prove a direct correlative relationship between Chrétien's earlier romances, and the rise of knighthood in society, but, as Tony Hunt points out:

There can be no doubt that the romances of Chrestien de Troyes represent the turning point in the evolution of the terminology of chivalry and the conferment of the irresistible prestige on the *milites* which so impressed the *nobiles* by the end of the twelfth century. (1981, 6)

Chrétien's romances may or may not have played a role in creating this change, but the very fact that his romances and this shift do coincide suggests that he was at least closely in tune with the *Zeitgeist*. Based on his previous record as a writer then, we must consider the possibility that, in *Le Conte du Graal*, Chrétien was either amending an image of chivalry that he helped create, or, more likely, that he was presenting concerns about the newly empowered knights. Either way, *Le Conte du Graal* retains its value to our examination of the themes of conflict, sex and affective relations.

Five of Chrétien's Arthurian romances have survived; *Erec et Enide*, *Cligés*, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, and *Le Conte du Graal*.¹ The last of these, *Le Conte du Graal*, differs considerably from the earlier ones, which deal primarily with love and its social implications. *Le Conte du Graal*, by contrast, has comparatively little to say on the topic of love, and a great deal more to say regarding combat and adventure. As Brigitte Cazelles points out, "A characteristic of Chrétien's last romance is that it appears to play down the value of love in contributing to the emergence of the hero

¹ We know that at least one of Chrétien's Arthurian romances is missing, because he tells us in *Cligés* that he wrote one romance on the theme of King Mark and Isolde the Blonde. (Interestingly enough, he makes no mention of Tristan.)

as a fully realized individual” (1996, 27). Peter Noble supports this view of the text, adding, “The nature of the love is barely analysed and the beloved remains a very minor character” (1982, 91). According to Noble, this change in thematic interest can be explained by the fact that Chrétien was writing *Le Conte du Graal* for a new patron and a new audience. It does seem likely, given the rather lengthy dedication of the poem to Philip of Flanders, that Chrétien was tailoring his romance to suit the interests of his new patron, and it is quite possible that Chrétien’s new patron, and the new audience he was writing for, were simply not as interested in questions of love as had been the case in the court of Marie de Champagne. Noble supports this argument, stating:

He was no longer writing for a court where sophisticated and intelligent women were important, whose interest in the problems of love and the relationship of men and women is well attested. Count Philip seems to have been an altogether sterner figure, much more interested in religion, and perhaps the more masculine atmosphere of the court would also militate against a great interest being taken in sentimental matters. (1982, 83)

This argument is plausible, though Noble’s gender-based assumption that a female audience would have been interested in the love aspects of a story while a male audience would have been interested in either acts of combat or spirituality may be an oversimplification of the matter.

Not only does *Le Conte du Graal* differ from its predecessors by marginalizing the theme of love, it also breaks from the earlier romances by including Gawain as a major character. Gawain is present, of course, in all of Chrétien’s Arthurian romances, but in none of the others is he anything more than a minor character who, like Arthur, functions primarily to frame the romances in the context of Arthurian culture. He is a supporting character who provides advice to the king (*Erec et Enide*), represents the bachelor knight free of marital responsibility (*Yvain*) and acts as a foil for other knights (*Yvain* and *Lancelot*). In *Le Conte du Graal*, however, Gawain usurps the position of main character, and the unfinished tale ends in the midst of his adventures. The abrupt transition from the adventures of Perceval to those of Gawain has led a number of scholars, in particular D. D. R. Owen, to speculate that *Le Conte du Graal* is in actuality two separate poems started by Chrétien which were connected after Chrétien’s death and that the hermit episode near the end of the tale, where Perceval is briefly reintroduced, was written at a later date by a less skilled author (1968, 12). This theory, however, is not widely accepted. Norris Lacy very briefly makes the case for the opposite argument:

Critics have demonstrated, to the satisfaction of most, that specific links relate episodes of the second half to those of the first, providing evidence

that it was Chrétien, rather than a clumsy editor or *remanieur*, who attached the Gauvain story to that of Perceval. (1983, 155)

Peter Haidu (1968) supports Lacy's defence by showing that there are simply too many parallels between the Gawain and Perceval episodes for the 'two poems' theory to work.

In addition to making love a peripheral theme and providing Gawain with a significant role, *Le Conte du Graal* is marked out from the earlier romances by its development of new themes. It is the only version of the "fair unknown" story that we have from Chrétien, and it is also the closest Chrétien comes to writing a *Bildungsroman*. There is also some evidence to suggest that *Le Conte du Graal* has a spiritual theme which the other romances do not, though I think that this has been overly emphasized. Identifying *Le Conte du Graal* as a "spiritual" romance, as some scholars have insisted on doing, is, as Cazelles (1996) points out, premature. The work, after all, is unfinished, and Chrétien, apparently intentionally, left much of the *sen* of *Le Conte du Graal* in obscurity, intending no doubt to reveal everything at the end of his tale. This sense of mystery also separates *Le Conte du Graal* from Chrétien's other works: in the other works very little is left unexplained.

There has been endless speculation regarding why Chrétien decided to depart from the successful formula he had developed for writing Arthurian romances. Armel Diverres (1990) suggests that *Le Conte du Graal* was written primarily as a description of Count Philip of Flanders' relationship to the Kingdom of Jerusalem and as propaganda for the crusades. His evidence is impressive, but arguably somewhat strained because it requires Chrétien's original audience, not to mention Chrétien himself, to be erudite on all manner of things concerning the court of Flanders, Philip of Flanders' familial history, the court of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and its connection to the court of Flanders, as well as the crusades. We know, however, that medieval audiences were able to pick up subtle references to contemporary events, so it is not entirely impossible, though Diverres takes extreme liberties in finding correlations between every literary detail and social fact. Cazelles, by contrast, sees *Le Conte du Graal* as "a displacement to the past of a contemporary interest in rivalry," namely the rivalry between Philip Augustus and the aristocracy (1996, 7). For Cazelles the Grail story represents the failure of chivalry particularly in its all too violent rivalries, which she finds expressed in the tension which, in her view, exists between the courts of Arthur and the Fisher King. Her arguments are also fairly impressive, but it seems somewhat questionable that Chrétien would be so openly critical of the very social class that provided his patronage. As Noble (1982) states, "As a professional writer, presumably, dependent on his writing for his living and therefore

bound to please his patrons, Chrétien used the vocabulary, the ideas and the attitudes which were in vogue at the time” (8). Obviously, open criticism of chivalry would not have been a particularly good way to win the favor of his patrons, and if Chrétien was attacking chivalry, none of his near contemporaries who took up the story appear to have noticed.

Chrétien’s work, however, can not be seen entirely as merely a product of either his creativity or of historical and social shaping. Another likely factor in the development of *Le Conte du Graal* is the obscure source material. Chrétien tells us that he began composing the poem at the request of Philip of Flanders, who lent him a book with the story, apparently in prose, in it. We have no reason for not believing Chrétien’s statement, but, unfortunately, we have no idea what Chrétien’s source was. It is possible that Chrétien combined in his story two separate tales, one dealing with Perceval and the other dealing with the Grail. It is also possible that, as a number of scholars have maintained, the tale was based on Celtic mythology.² Suffice it to say that opinions about the meaning and inspiration for Chrétien’s *Le Conte du Graal* abound.³

It seems to me that the true answer to *Le Conte du Graal*’s peculiarities lies somewhere in the midst of all of these explanations. Undoubtedly Noble is at least partially correct in arguing that Chrétien’s new patron and new audience influenced the creation of his latest romance and it is at the same time possible that Chrétien was influenced by the crusades, the tensions between the nobility and the king, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, or any of the other contemporary issues of which he was undoubtedly aware. Also Chrétien’s source material, whether or not it was of Celtic origin, was undoubtedly a factor in determining the form of *Le Conte du Graal*.⁴ There are, however, other even simpler explanations for the singularity of *Le Conte du Graal*. An obvious solution lies in the unfinished nature of the poem. Had Chrétien been able to return to his poem, he may well have modified it to fit in more with his earlier works. Certainly Chrétien might have made a few minor emendations to his text, but because he put such a large portion of *Le Conte du Graal* into writing, I find it difficult to believe that Chrétien envisioned making any major changes to the text. It is highly unlikely that a gifted author in the Middle Ages would have wasted valuable parchment on a poem that

² Roger Sherman Loomis, W. A. Nitze, D. D. R. Owen, Joseph Vendryes, Jean Marx, and Jean Frappier have all to some extent supported the Celtic claim to the ur-Grail legend.

³ For the reader interested in the origins of the Grail legend, I would recommend Glenys Witchard Goetinck’s essay “The Quest for Origins”, and for further synthesis of the major critical interpretations of the *Le Conte du Graal* I would recommend Harry William’s essay “Interpretations of the *Conte del graal* and Their Critical Reactions”(1983).

⁴ Chrétien’s sources almost certainly influenced how he structured his narratives and some attempt should be made to determine what those sources were, as far as that is possible, but Loomis’s insistence that no interpretation or understanding of Chrétien’s work can be reached without knowledge of this source material is patently insupportable (1982, 4).

was not already thoroughly thought out. My own opinion is that along with some combination of the factors already discussed, much of the uniqueness of Chrétien's final poem owes itself to the initiative of Chrétien, who, as a skilled writer, decided to challenge himself by freely adapting his source material to achieve his own ends. The actual interpretation of Chrétien's final poem, however, has to be found on a number of different levels, and can be accessed by considering Chrétien's intended audiences.

Chrétien's audience was composed of a variety of social groups within courtly society: his audiences encompassed the literate and the illiterate, men and women, knights and clerics. The obvious challenge must have been to provide a work that appealed to all of these different groups while offending none of them. Ad Putter suggests in his perceptive study of the relationship between knights and clerics that the romance could appeal to both of these groups because the two apparently opposed groups were moving closer together with the result that "the *clerici militares* and the *milites clericales* [who] constituted his ideal audience" had started sharing similar ideals (1994, 264). There is undoubtedly some truth to this, and yet it seems as likely that underneath the surface there must have been animosities and tensions between these two particular groups. Knighthood was, in one sense, just emerging as a powerful political and cultural institution. Likewise, clerics also claimed a degree of social superiority because of their greater education and higher refinement, and, indeed, as Putter shows, members of the clerical class looked down on knights for their lack of education. Kaeuper has also shown that there must have been a fair amount of tension between the two groups:

[The knights] always had the clerics to contend with as social rivals. The issue was complicated [...] by the clerics' sacredotal role and by the close link they claimed with their supernatural chief. Yet thinking in pragmatic and worldly terms, knights could never forget that the clerks often came from the same social levels, even from the same families as they themselves. (1999, 199)

The gap between the clerics and the knights may indeed have been closing, but their interests, values, and mores still remained intrinsically different. Chrétien appears to have wisely avoided offending any of his potential audiences by refusing to be bound strictly to any one ideology, and instead wrote with an ambiguity that permitted a variety of different readings depending on who did the reading. For the knights there was plenty to attract their attention and to lead them to believe that the romance was essentially an affirmation of the chivalric life. The clerics, on the other hand, would have detected the irony in Chrétien's romances and undoubtedly enjoyed many a quiet chuckle over the absurdities in the antics of prestigious knights such as Gawain and Lancelot. The ladies may well have appreciated

the power vested by Chrétien in the female characters of his romances. The fact that Chrétien apparently attempted to present his romances as all things to all people, however, raises difficulties for modern critics trying to get at the *sen* of Chrétien's works, and indeed, the number of interpretations offered up by critics are legion. The problem lies in the attempts of scholars to find out what Chrétien meant, and on their insistence on claiming one interpretation for the romances, when in fact there are levels of interpretations, many of which appear contradictory while at the same time being valid.⁵ To appreciate Chrétien fully the reader must avoid oversimplifying the text by binding it to one interpretation. Simply stated, Chrétien's works, in that sense, do not harmonize internally. This rule particularly holds true for Chrétien's last work, *Le Conte du Graal*. It has been argued that, had Chrétien lived to finish this work and oversee its revision, he would have smoothed away the ambiguities and paradoxes within the text. That is a possibility, but I believe that Chrétien intentionally created them with the purpose of allowing his audience to determine how they wished to interpret the text. Thus Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal*, like most great literary works, lends itself to a variety of readings and interpretations, and while some readings might be more valid and tenable than others, it would be presumptuous to choose one to the exclusion of the others.⁶ Even in dealing with the knightly themes of sex, love and conflict, Chrétien is ambiguous, forcing us, his readers, to consider a variety of complicated, frequently contradictory interpretations of knighthood.⁷ Perhaps in this way Chrétien was hedging his bets, making his work as pleasing as possible to as much of his audience as possible.

Among the many possible readings of *Le Conte du Graal* one reading affirms chivalric values and the newly obtained social status of the knightly class. In this interpretation of the poem, Perceval is the chivalric saviour of his family, which had lost its

⁵ Jacques Ribard presents a strong argument for the multiplicity of meaning in medieval narratives: "First, the authors of that time were clerics, deeply rooted in Christendom in full bloom and trained, intellectually as well as spiritually, to practice easily a narrative writing with double meaning, on the very model of the gospel parables" (1999, 61-62). Jean Frappier also provides support for this view by stating, "Medieval authors did not have access to our modern theories of unity. Even the notion of *sen* implied a method of multiple interpretations, prompting an educated cleric-romancer to harbor, on the level of linear simplicity, adumbrated, complex, and layered designs" (1982, 66).

⁶ Harry F. Willian, in his article "Interpretations of the *Conte del Graal* and Their Critical Reactions", provides this sound advice on developing readings of *Le Conte du Graal*: "I would add that, before beginning with the text of the *Conte del graal* the prospective exegete should first know intimately the other works of Chrétien. His last romance is not utterly divorced from his others, despite contrary opinions from some scholars. Ultimately, we should show how the Grail story fits into the author's total production.

Also, the student of the present problem should keep in mind mistakes of previous interpreters and should not (1) seek the sense of *Conte del graal* in other Grail texts, (2) bend the text to fit external ideas, (3) seek the key in accessory themes, (4) explain the Perceval part and ignore the Gauvain part, (5) regard sources or analogues as the necessarily key to the sense of Chrétien's story" (1983, 150).

⁷ Barber also seems to support the argument that Chrétien intentionally leaves his work ambiguous, stating, "Beneath the perhaps deliberate obscurities of the adventures, Chrétien found a new direction. *Perceval* is the moral tale of a knight's education, both worldly and spiritual" (1974, 110).

much valued knightly social status. In so far as the story is about the rise of Perceval to the peak of courtly fame and the redemption of his fallen family, love and combat can be seen as positive and necessary elements in the story. Chrétien, unlike Wolfram, provides his audience with very few details about Perceval's family, and the sparse family history he does provide contradicts much of what Wolfram says in his own rather effusive family history. Because of Chrétien's brevity, Perceval's family history tends to be ignored as unessential to the tale as a whole, and many scholars prefer to think of Perceval as the "fair unknown" or the self-made knightly hero. Given the fact, however, that Chrétien has chosen to be sparing in his rendition of Perceval's family history, the reader must consider the possibility that what little information Chrétien did see fit to include is essential to the story, and indeed may even hold the key to at least one valid interpretation of attitudes towards knighthood within *Le Conte du Graal*. It is entirely appropriate for this reading then, that Perceval's tale begins in the Spring time at dawn (Haidu 1968, 117), for just as Spring suggests a new beginning after the pale death of winter, and dawn suggests a new day after night, so too does Perceval, naïve and young, suggest a re-birth of fortune for his troubled family, and he symbolizes the rise of knighthood as a social order.⁸

Chrétien narrates Perceval's family history through the voice of the bereaved mother, who tells her son of how, because of chivalry, she lost first her husband, and then her two sons. Her husband "was wounded through his thighs and his body maimed in this way" (Troyes 1991, 356).⁹ Nothing is revealed about how Perceval's father was wounded or how this maiming affected his life and the lives of those around him beyond the mention of the fact his lands and fortune were lost, but it is possible to speculate about what happened to Perceval's father by considering the case of the Fisher King as it is related by another lady, Perceval's cousin. She informs Perceval:

Biax sire,
Rois est il, bien lo vos os dire,
Mais il fu en une bataille
Navrez et mehaigniez sanz faille
Si que puis aidier ne se pot.
Si fu navrez d'un javelot
Parmi les anches amedeus,
S'en est encore si engoiseus

⁸ I suspect, but cannot prove, that *Le Conte du Graal* is something of an origins myth for the knightly class. The emergence of Perceval from his rustic upbringing, through the uncontrolled aggression of his encounters with the maiden in the tent and the Red Knight, on through his education and final establishment at Arthur's court and then moving beyond to be lost in the mists of the Grail narrative suggests the socially upward movement of the warrior class as they separated themselves from their own common origins, established themselves as warriors, and learned to control their aggression in courtly society. The Grail element of the myth seems to point, however, not backward, but rather forward to the next stage of knightly development.

⁹ "Fu par mi les anches navrez / Si que il mehaigna do cors (52, ll. 408-409).

Qu'il ne puet sor cheval monter.
 Mais quant il se velt deporter
 O d'aucun deduit antremetre,
 Si se fait an une nef metre
 Et vait peschant a l'ameçon,
 Por ce li Rois Peschierres a non,
 Et por ce ensin se deduit
 Qu'il ne porroit autre deduit
 Por rien soffrir ne andurer. (Troyes 1990, ll. 3445-3461)

Good sir, I can assure you that he is a king, but he was wounded and maimed in the course of a battle so that he can no longer manage on his own, for he was struck by a javelin through both thighs and is still in so much pain that he cannot ride a horse. Whenever he wants to relax or to go out to enjoy himself, he has himself put in a boat and goes fishing with a hook: this is why he's called the Fisher King. And he relaxes in this way because he cannot tolerate the pain of any other diversion. (Troyes 1991, 424)

From this we can extrapolate that Perceval's father was wounded in battle and that he was completely incapacitated. Surely it is more than coincidental that Perceval's father and the Fisher King, whom we are later told is Perceval's uncle on his mother's side, are both wounded between the thighs. Being wounded through the thighs is almost certainly in this context a euphemism for emasculation. Emasculation would have necessarily curtailed the two activities by which knights won renown: fighting and love making. Indeed, the Fisher King could barely stand, let alone ride a horse, so the possibility of him engaging in chivalric combat, which usually was mounted, was entirely impossible, and it seems equally evident that engaging even in *fin' amor* would not have been a possibility for either the Fisher King or Perceval's father. Perceval's father and the Fisher King had lost their ability to participate in chivalric activities, and as such they remained knights only in name. The social implications of emasculation, in the Middle Ages, not merely on a sexual level, but on a social level, are addressed by Bullough:

Quite clearly, male sexual performance was a major key to being male. [...]maleness was somewhat fragile, and it was important for a man to keep demonstrating his maleness by action and thought, especially sexual action. It was part of his duty to keep his female partners happy and satisfied, and unless he did so, he had failed as a man[...]. Failure to perform, however, was a threat not only to a man's maleness but to society. (1994, 41)

Bullough's assertion that "Failure to perform[...] was a threat not only to a man's maleness but to society" is born out in the fact that Perceval's father loses his land and is forced to abandon society after his "emasculation," and in the fact that because of the Fisher King's wound "ladies will lose their husbands, lands will be laid waste, and maidens will remain

helpless as orphans; many a knight will die” (Troyes 1991, 438).¹⁰ Masculinity, evidently, is essential to both chivalry and society.

Significantly Perceval’s other uncle is a hermit, and thus has chosen to withdraw himself from this masculine and patriarchal world order. The hermit, apparently of his own free will, rejected the life style that the Fisher King and Perceval’s father had lost through their injuries. Perceval’s mother also reveals that Perceval had two brothers, who evidently were no more skilled in knighthood than their father. Both brothers, on the council of their father, received formal training as knights and were armed, but both of them were killed in combat before they could return home (Troyes 1991, 387). The fact that both of them were quickly killed in combat raises questions about their abilities as knights. Their own failure contrasts markedly with Perceval’s successes. Remembering her two elder sons, Perceval’s mother wonders what will become of the youngest.

Mais quant vos vanroiz a essai
D’armes porter, commant ert donques?
Ce que vos ne feïstes onques
N’autrui ne lo veïstes faire,
Commant en savroiz a chief traire?
Malveisement, voire, ce dot.
Mal seroiz afaitiez do tot,
N’il n’et merveille, ce m’et vis,
S’an ne set ce qu’an n’a apris. (Troyes 1990, ll. 480-488)

But when you start trying out those weapons, how will it go then? Since you’ve never used weapons nor seen anyone else using them, how will you manage? Poorly, to be sure, I fear! You will lack all the skills, and it’s not surprising, I think, since no one can know what he hasn’t learned. (Troyes 1991, 387)

The mother’s statement points out that Perceval is an outsider deprived of the training that might have made it possible for him to survive within a courtly world. Unlike Wolfram, Chrétien never suggests that Perceval’s exile from court has been purposefully chosen by his mother. Instead his exclusion has been created to some extent by the failure of the masculine members of his family to live up to the expectations of chivalry. None of the men in Perceval’s family seem to be great lovers or great fighters, and it remains for Perceval to re-establish the good name of his family. The mother’s concern for her son is not merely due to his ignorance of combat; she remembers all too well how her two sons, who were trained, died shortly after being knighted.

¹⁰ “Dames en perdront lor mariz, / Terres en seront essilliees / Et puceles desconseilliees, / Qui orferines remanront, / Et maint chevalier en morront.” (Troyes, 1990, ll. 4608-4612)

Perceval quickly proves that his mother's worries are unnecessary and that he is indeed the man and knight that his father, uncles and brothers never were. Unfortunately his first two encounters, one with a potential love relationship, and one in combat, are disasters from the courtly perspective. Perceval's wooing of the lady in the tent comes dangerously close to rape, and his killing of the red knight is, by the ideals of chivalry, without honour. Yet even within these disasters Chrétien seems to be pointing out the intrinsic knightly nature of this jewel in the rough. After all, for however badly handled the wooing is in the tent, there can be no doubt of Perceval's masculinity, and in spite of the shame involved in the killing of the Red Knight, there can be no doubt of Perceval's prowess. Perceval has the natural makings of a knight and all that remains is for Perceval's potential to be harnessed.

Significantly, although Perceval's victory against the Red Knight is without honour, in the mind of Arthur it is this extraordinary event that endows Perceval with knighthood. Ywonet, who comes in to inform the king of Perceval's victory, engages in a necessary falsehood: "Sire, be cheerful, for your knight who was here sends back your cup to you" (Troyes 1991, 396).¹¹ Arthur is confused by the statement, for he has not made Perceval a knight, and cannot conceive of which knight Ywonet is referring to. Ywonet is forced momentarily to drop the charade of Perceval's knighthood and remind Arthur of "the boy who left here a short time ago" (Troyes 1991, 396).¹² Even then Arthur refuses to believe that the "Welsh boy" could have defeated the Red Knight. The battle scene between Perceval and the Red Knight must be accepted with some incredulity, and Arthur, even when faced with the evidence of the returned cup, has difficulty believing that the untrained and nearly unarmed boy could bring down a fully armed knight. Having eventually accepted the fact, however, that the boy has indeed done the impossible, Arthur from then on ceases to refer to Perceval as the "Welsh boy" and instead refers to him as a knight, even though Perceval has not in actuality received either the training of the knight or the conferral of knightly status. Turning to Kay, Arthur roundly rebukes him, "Ha! Kay, what harm you've caused me this day! By your venomous tongue [...] you've driven from me a knight who has today done me a great service" (Troyes 1991, 396).¹³ Arthur's recognition of Perceval's knighthood is necessary for maintaining the myth of knightly hegemony and sustaining courtly society. To admit that a *vilain* has killed a knight would be to suggest the vulnerability of this supposedly elite fighting class and would blur the

¹¹ "Sire, or faites joie, / Que vostre cope vos envoie / Vostres chevaliers qui ci fu." (Troyes 1990, ll. 1161-1163)

¹² "do vallet di, / Qui orandroit parti de ci." (Troyes 1990, ll. 1167-1168)

¹³ "A! Keux, com m'avez fait hui mal! / Par vostre laingue l'enuieuse[...]. M'avez tel chevalier tolu / Qui molt m'a hui ce jor valu." (Troyes 1990, ll. 1190-1191, 1193-1194)

boundaries between courtly society and the rest of lay society. Ultimately, such an event would have unraveled the social structure of Chrétien's overtly idealized Arthurian world. Given this alternative, Arthur decides to embrace the knighthood of the stranger, and confer the honour, as it were, after the fact and in absentia.

Perceval, meanwhile, having proved that he possesses both the virility and prowess necessary for knighthood, is ready to move to the second stage of his progression towards a courtly ideal: the instruction provided by Gornemant. Perceval's training under Gornemant supported the popular notion that knighthood was inherited, for Chrétien informs us:

Lors lo fist li prodom monter
Et cil comança a porter
Si a droit la lence et l'escu
Con s'il aüst toz jorz vescu
En tornoiemanz et en guerres,
Et alé par totes les terres
Querant bataille et aventure,
Car il li venoit de Nature
Et quant Nature li aprant
Et li cuers do tot i entant,
Ne lie puet poine estre grevaigne
La ou Nature et cuers se paine. (Troyes 1990, ll. 1423-1434)

Then the gentleman had him mount and he began to carry the lance and shield as properly as if throughout his life he had frequented the tournaments and wars, and wandered through every land seeking battle and adventure, *for it came naturally to him*; and since Nature was his teacher and his heart was set upon it, nothing for which Nature and his heart strove could be difficult. (Troyes 1991, 399-400 emphasis mine)

Indeed, Chrétien had already shown his audience that virility and prowess did come naturally to his young hero. Gornemant's task was simply to divert that natural skill into socially acceptable behaviour, and this he does with such success that in Perceval's next two encounters, first in love with Blancheflor, and then in combat with Anguingueron and Clamadeu, Perceval behaves with the courtesy and restraint of a courtly knight.

Perceval has progressed greatly both as a lover and as a warrior, so that, although he fails the test at the Grail castle, he rapidly redeems his failure in knightly terms by first showing his prowess in battle by defeating the Haughty knight and making amends to the maiden of the tent, and then by showing his devotion as a lover by being lost in contemplation of his love as he gazes at the three drops of blood on the snow. The image of Perceval raptly contemplating the memory of his love for hours bares a striking resemblance to the *fin' amor* presented by Andreas Capellanus, and Chrétien's audience may have recognized it as a sign of Perceval's refinement as a lover. While thus occupied,

Perceval also manages effortlessly to defeat both Sagremor and Kay in rapid succession, and it is only Gawain, the paragon of courtly behaviour, who is able to understand Perceval's behaviour in terms of love, and bring him back to court where he is received as befits the renowned knight that he is. When Perceval proudly responds to Arthur's question about his name, "I'll not hide it from you, noble King [...]. I am Perceval the Welshman" he is in fact asserting that his family's name has been cleared of its shame (Troyes 1991, 437).¹⁴ We do not know, of course, how the tale ends, but we can assume that Chrétien intended to have Perceval return to the Grail Castle and heal the Fisher King, thus making possible love and combat for the king and restoring knighthood to his family.

Significantly, in pursuing the courtly world of King Arthur, and the lost honour of his father, uncles and brothers, Perceval is choosing to reject the world of his mother, which is, perhaps, in Chrétien's view a passive matriarchal world order void of the creative and life giving forces of conflict and sex. Cazelles goes so far as to say "Perceval's forest constitutes a sanctuary[...]. Although she [his mother] is aware that Perceval, as heir to a noble family, is destined to enter chivalric society, she is also determined to prevent him from adhering to the self-destructive world of martial fraternity" (1996, 184). As Cazelles states, "as heir to a noble family" Perceval is foreordained to become a knight and redeem the family's lost honour. To achieve his proper status as a knight, however, Perceval will have to gradually break away from his mother's control. Perceval's almost violent rejection of the passivity that his mother tried to impose is implicit in how he interprets his mother's permission to kiss a maiden. This permission is transformed by the virile Perceval into a command (Haidu, 1968, 132), which he enforces so that he kisses the maiden not once, as his mother had suggested, but repeatedly. Then, as if not satisfied that he has proven his virility, Perceval compares the lips of the maiden to the lips of the serving wenches in his mother's service: "I'll go now quite contented, because your kiss is much better than that of any chambermaid in all my mother's household, since your lips are sweet" (Troyes 1991, 390).¹⁵ Perceval's assertion proves that even before he dreamt of being a knight he was already involved, undoubtedly clandestinely, in romantic relationships, and at the same time reveals how far removed he is in his natural state from the "higher" virtues of chivalry. A knight, after all, would not consider a relationship with a serving wench appropriate, and certainly would not pass comparisons between a serving wench and a maiden in front of the maiden. It is an example of the worst social *faux pas*.

¹⁴ "Par foi, ja no vos celerai, / [...] biaux sire roix. / J'ai non Percevaus li Galois." (Troyes 1990, ll. 4492-4494)

¹⁵ "C'or m'an iré je bien paiez, / Et molt meillor baisier vos fait / Que chanberiere que il ait / En tote la maison ma mere, / Vos n'avez pas la boche amere." (Troyes 1990, ll. 686-690)

The fact that Perceval kisses the maiden repeatedly, and without her consent can be understood as either a misinterpretation of his mother's command, or a blatant disregard for her instruction. Similarly the mother's advice about not going further than a kiss can be seen either as simply a concerned mother's attempts to prevent her only son from getting involved with just any woman, or it can be read as an attempt to keep Perceval from entering the chivalric world of courtly love by having him act with the same circumspection as his emasculated father and uncle. At the tent, however, Perceval appears to be on the verge of completely abandoning the restraint his mother has tried to impose. Perceval's physical position in relation to the tent maiden suggests the extent to which his sexual passion has gained control of him.

Li vallez avoit les bras fors,
 Si l'enbraça molt nicemant,
 Qu'il ne le sot faire autremant,
 Mist la soz lui tote estandue
 Et cele s'et bien desfandue
 Et gandilla quant qu'ele pot,
 Mais desfanse mestier n'i ot,
 Que li vallez tot de randon
 La baissa, vosist ele o non,
 vint foiz, si com li contes dit,
 Tant c'un anel en son doi vit
 A une esmeraude molt clere. (Troyes 1990, ll. 664-675)

The boy had strong arms and embraced her clumsily because he knew no other way; he stretched her out beneath himself, but she resisted mightily and squirmed away as best she could. Yet her resistance was in vain, for the boy kissed her repeatedly, twenty times as the story says, regardless whether she liked it or not. (Troyes 1991, 389-390)

As Haidu (1968) points out it was not necessary for Perceval to lie on top of the maiden in order to kiss her (133), and it was probably only the glittering ring on the maiden's finger and Perceval's own naiveté that prevented him from raping her. Had Perceval raped the maiden, he would have presumably been unsuitable as the hero of the Grail quest, and would also not have been a fitting candidate for knighthood. Having come as close to rape as possible, however, Perceval has reinforced chivalric ideals about masculinity and broken with the emasculation of the Wasteland without actually having crossed the line into socially unacceptable behaviour. It is not until the castle of Belrepeire that Perceval finally separates himself from his mother's admonition against romantic involvement, and the family curse of emasculation, by becoming Blancheflor's lover.

The other protagonist of *Le Conte du Graal*, Gawain, is the chivalric model Perceval so desperately strives to emulate. Gawain's reputation as the flower of Arthur's

court preceded him through Chrétien's earlier romances, and Chrétien's audience would have expected Gawain to portray the proper etiquette of a courtly knight. Like Perceval, Gawain can be interpreted as vindicating the values of love and combat. Unlike Perceval, who must restore honour to a decidedly unchivalric family, Gawain and Gawain's family already possess a reputation as lovers and fighters, but Gawain's reputation suffers a serious setback when Guinganbresil accuses Gawain of treacherously slaying an unsuspecting man. Significantly the shame attached to the deed is not the killing itself, but rather the unchivalric manner in which the lord is killed. Gungabresil's challenge is the catalyst for Gawain to leave Arthur's court, where his reputation is established, and to begin the process of establishing his reputation outside of Arthur's realm. From the moment he leaves Arthur's court, Gawain's reputation as a knight is questioned, and it is only by repeatedly proving either his prowess or his skill as a lover that Gawain is able to vindicate himself and prove his knightly status. Because Gawain, already represented in Chrétien's other romances as the paragon of chivalry, acts in both the domains of love and combat to clear his good name as a knight, he tacitly lends credibility to the exalted position of those two "virtues" in chivalry.

In Gawain's first adventure his social position as a knight is literally called into question. Gawain's honour comes under scrutiny when the ladies watching the tournament start questioning his identity. "He's a merchant," states one, "don't say any more about his participating in the tournament," and all of the ladies, with the exception of the Maiden with the Small Sleeves, unanimously agree, "though he may seem to be a knight, he isn't" (Troyes 1991, 443).¹⁶ Evidently, it is not enough merely to look the part of a knight; one must also act the role both through combat and love. Even Gawain agrees that it "might be considered wrong and shameful" not to participate in the tournament, but explains that there are extenuating circumstances excusing him from involvement (Troyes 1991, 446).¹⁷ Gawain, however, eventually determines that his honour as a knight is more important than the considerations of the quest, and agrees to fight on behalf of the Maiden with the Small Sleeves. His success on the battlefield proves his prowess, while his gallant conduct towards the Maiden with the Small Sleeves proves his excellence in the refined art of love.

Gawain's second adventure also requires skill as a warrior and a lover. Gawain commences talking with the sister of the King of Escavalon, and Chrétien informs us that "The two of them spoke of love, for had they talked of other things it would have been a

¹⁶ "Marcheanz est, no dites mes / Qu'il doie a torneier entendre," (Troyes 1990, ll. 4988-4989). "S'il lo samble, ne l'est il mie." (Troyes 1990, l. 5010)

¹⁷ "Et il ne li a pas noié / Que il n'i aüst lait ne honte." (Troyes 1990, ll. 5234-5235)

waste of time”(Troyes 1991, 452).¹⁸ Moreover, Gawain is so successful in his wooing that the lady grants him her love, and it is only the untimely interruption of a vassor who recognizes Gawain that prevents them from consummating that love. Gawain is then left with the task of defending himself and the lady as best as he can with makeshift weapons. Chrétien’s knightly audience may well have thrilled at the erotic encounter and the action packed combat scene that followed.

Gawain’s third adventure reiterates the chivalric values of combat and love described in the previous two adventures. Gawain serves, and finally succeeds, through completing a number of tests of his masculinity, including fighting several knights and leaping a dangerous gorge, to win the hand of the proud lady. At the same time as he is involved in these adventures, Gawain is also engaged in the freeing of the Marvellous Castle, whose inhabitants do not follow the code of chivalry because there are no lovers within and none of the men are knights. The inhabitants await a knight who will “come there to protect them, to restore their inheritances to the ladies, to give husbands to the maidens, and to make the squires knights” (Troyes 1991, 474).¹⁹ Gawain successfully breaks the spell of the castle, and having done this, his first act is to invite Arthur’s court to a tournament. Arthur’s court is the model of chivalric decorum, and while the story ends here rather abruptly, we can assume that when Arthur visits Gawain, Gawain will restore the practices of chivalry by providing the maidens of his court with husbands and by knighting the squires and having them participate in the joust. Thus Gawain installs his own roles as a lover and a fighter as the new paradigm governing the land that he now rules.

It is important to note that while prowess was a cardinal virtue for both Gawain and Perceval, and indeed all of the other knights presented in *Le Conte du Graal*, that virtue was modified, albeit only slightly, by the Church’s official stance on violence. The Council of Clermont had, in 1130, banned tournaments and ordered that those killed in tournaments should be denied Christian burial. The good knights of the *Le Conte du Graal*, like their historical counterparts, acted as if the ban did not exist, and indeed Chrétien does not suggest anywhere that tournaments or other conflicts might have created a moral dilemma for his knights. The fact that he is aware of the ban, however, is suggested by his treatment of the one tournament he describes in detail: the tournament in front of Tiebaut’s castle. Tiebaut’s counselor, in listing the advantages that the castle

¹⁸ “D’amors parolent amedui, / Car s’il d’autre chose parlissent, / De grant oisouse se meslassent.” (Troyes 1990, ll. 5750-5752)

¹⁹ “Qu’eles atendent que ça veigne / Uns chevliers qui les mainteigne, / Qui rande as dames lor enors / Et as pucels doint seignors / Et des vaslez chevaliers face.” (Troyes 1990, ll. 7501-7505)

forces have over the attackers states, “you have[...] good archers who’ll kill their horses” (Troyes 1991, 441-442).²⁰ No mention is made of the possibility of the archers killing knights, and indeed, at the end of the first day of the tournament Chrétien simply states, “many a knight had been captured and many a horse killed” (Troyes 1991, 444).²¹ Implicit in Chrétien’s statement is the idea that no knights died, even though Benson (1980) has shown that in reality it would have been highly unusual for knights not to get killed in those early tournaments. Chrétien, by virtue of the fact that no knights die in his tournaments, evades the issue of whether or not they would receive Christian burial. Still, the generally accepted Christian condemnation of killing lurks behind Chrétien’s depiction of knighthood, for, while knights — including Perceval — do kill and are not overtly condemned for those deaths, the best knights in *Le Conte du Graal* are victorious without killing. The virtue of violence without killing is expressed in Gornemant’s instruction to Perceval: “if you gain the upper hand and he is no longer able to defend himself or hold out against you, you must grant him mercy rather than killing him outright” (Troyes 1991, 402).²² Perceval conscientiously follows this precept and throughout the rest of the romance manages to defeat sixty knights, all of whom he sends as prisoners to Arthur (Troyes 1991, 457). If he killed any other knights during his career, Chrétien makes no mention of the fact. The fact that Perceval and Gawain do not kill knights does not imply that there are not times when killing is a condoned and even a positive act. Gawain, for example, kills the first peasant who attacks him in Escavalon, but the peasant is not of the knightly class and thus not protected by chivalry, and Gawain is justified because he is acting in self-defence. The other justification for killing mentioned in *Le Conte du Graal* reminds us of the Church-sponsored violence of the crusades. A penitent knight explaining salvation to Perceval, refers to “the wicked Jews, whom we should kill like dogs” (Troyes 1991, 458).²³ Violence, in other words, is essential for defining knighthood, yet great knights could prove their prowess without endangering their souls by killing, and only in particular situations was killing acceptable. Chrétien, by describing his protagonists as active knights who manage not to kill, is arguing that the aggression of knights could be

²⁰ “vos avez[...] / [...] bon archiers / Qui lor chevaus lor ocirront.” (Troyes 1990, ll. 4869-4871)

²¹ “Mais chevalier i ot pris maint / Et maint cheval i ot ocis.” (Troyes 1990, ll. 5086-5087)

²² “Se vos en vaignez au desus / Que vers vos ne se puisse plus / Desfandre ne contretenir, / Ainz l’estuise a merci venir, / Qu’a escient ne l’ociez.” (Troyes 1990, ll. 1601-1605)

²³ “Li faux Juif por lor envie, / Qu’an devroit tuer comme chiens.” (Troyes 1990, ll. 6218-6219) It has been suggested that this crude episode was a latter addition and not written by Chrétien. The brief interlude between Gawain’s adventures does seem rather brief and rather oddly placed, suggesting that it might indeed be the work of a later, less skilled scribe. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the identity of the author makes little difference. Regardless of who wrote it, the episode expresses a prevalent medieval attitude regarding the use of violence against non-Christians, as is illustrated by the recurrent Crusades.

channeled into behaviour which would meet both the requirements of the lay society and of the Church.

The reading so far given of *Le Conte du Graal* has presented a defence of the newly empowered knightly class, and has indicated the importance of those two key values, love and combat, in designating knighthood. Without battle and sexuality we are left with the *Gaste Foret* which Perceval's mother retreats to and which imprisons Perceval's uncle, the Fisher King, or the bizarre, marvellous castle with its loverless ladies and elderly squires. A society such as the Arthurian one is carved out of the *Gaste Foret* and the marvelous castle and maintained by knighthood. Combat defends the borders of civilization from outside enemies, eliminates disruptive elements from within, imposes a social hierarchy and provides a *raison d'être* for the knightly class. Love is the motivation for defending civilization and establishes yet a second hierarchy within the hierarchy already created by prowess of arms. Perceval, through his adherence to chivalric values might, as we have seen, have cured the Fisher King and re-established civilization to the *Gaste Foret*, and in a similar manner Gawain seems destined to restore chivalry in the marvelous castle. The existence of knighthood is justified, as is suggested by the medieval ideology of the three estates, precisely because knights are the sustainers and defenders of social order in the midst of the wilderness.

Undoubtedly this reading would have been popular with the knights in Chrétien's audience, particularly the poorer ones who would have recognized in the story an almost mythic account of the historical rise of knighthood as a class. Perceval's progression from ignorance to courtly understanding would have resonated with the image that society had of the development of knighthood. At the same time, the knights may well have been pleased that the earlier values of sex and violence remained, even while they were being transformed into the more acceptable virtues of love and combat, thus reaffirming that those older masculine values were still significant, even if they were being adapted. On another level, this reading would have been interpreted to support the elitist mentality of the knights. The story suggests, after all, that Perceval intrinsically possessed the necessary qualifications of knighthood because of his family lineage. Nobility of birth would eventually reveal itself, and those who did not possess through lineage knightly characteristics could never hope to learn them. *Le Conte du Graal* evidently supported the unique and exclusive claims of chivalry as a hereditary caste.

Yet, at the same time, the more astute members of Chrétien's audience, particularly those who were not knights and thus more likely to question the "virtues" of knighthood, may have found irony interlaced through the otherwise essentially propagandistic romance.

These readers would have noticed, with good reason, that love and violence were closely linked and apparently unchecked by reason. They would have also recognized that even with the two heroic protagonists, the distinctions between love and lust, and combat and violence were very fine distinctions indeed, and that many of the knights hypocritically maintained the name of knights while acting in a very unchivalric manner. Perhaps they would have even noticed how Chrétien emphasized the violence of chivalry while downplaying the glorifying details of combat.

Andreas Capellanus in *De Amore* presents this view on the relationship between love and war:

Love, moreover, regularly leads men to deadly, inescapable warfare and does away with treaties of perpetual peace. Often, too it overthrows great cities and mighty fortresses and the safest castles and changes the good fortune of wealth into the evil fortune of poverty. (1959, 196)

Historically Capellanus's assertion that "Love[...] regularly leads men to[...] warfare" is not supportable, and yet within the idealized world of the Arthurian romance, there can be no question that the primary cause of conflict is love or lust. Of the many battles that take place in *Le Conte du Graal*, only one is motivated by something other than love or lust: the fight between Perceval and the Red Knight. Love and/or lust are the primary motivations in the other battles, and indeed the women in *Le Conte du Graal* frequently use their sexual favours to manipulate knights into fighting for them. Love and combat, in spite of their courtly façade, are the currency by which men and women transact business in Arthur's realm. Chrétien reveals the possible abuse of love in Blancheflor's seduction of Perceval:

Ne vint plorer dessus sa face,
Que que ele entendant li face,
Fors por ce qu'ele li meist
En coraige qu'il enpreist
La bataille, s'il l'ose anpanre,
Por sa terre et por li desfandre. (Trois 1990, ll. 1999-2004)

She had come to shed tears over his face for no other reason, in spite of what she pretended, than to inspire in him the desire to undertake the battle, if he dared, to defend her and her lands. (Trois 1991, 406)

Blancheflor continues to manipulate Perceval by suggesting that he lacks the strength and age to defeat her opponents. Chrétien explains:

Tel plait li a cele basti
Qu'ele lo blasme, et si lo viaut,
mais sovant avient que l'en siaut

Escondire sa volanté,
Quant an voit bien entalanté
Home de faire son talant,
Por ce que mielz li entalant
Ansin fist ele come saige,
Qu'ele li a mis en coraige
Ce qu'ele li blasme molt fort. (Trois 1990, ll. 2086-2095)

She pretended to discourage him by her words, though in fact she wished him to fight; but it often happens that one hides one's true desires when one sees someone who is keen to enact them, in order to increase his desire to fulfill them. And thus she acted cleverly, by discouraging him from doing the very thing that she had planted in his heart to do. (Trois 1991, 407)

Her plan works, of course, and Perceval bluntly states the contract reached between them: "But if I defeat and kill him, *in recompense I ask that your love be given to me; I'll accept no other payment*" (Trois 1991, 407 emphasis mine).²⁴ She accepts this condition, and when Perceval is victorious she cheerfully fulfills her side of the bargain.

The concept that violence is the price of love is born out by Tiebaut's daughter, who instructs her suitor, Meliant de Liz,

Ne puet estre an nule maniere,
[...]par ma foi,
Tant que vos aiez devant moi
Tant d'armes fait et tant josté
Que m'amors vos avra costé,
Que les choses qu'an a en bades
Ne sont si doces ne si sades
Comme celes que l'an compere.
Prenez un tornoi a mon pere
Se vos m'amor volez avoir,
Que je voil sanz dote savoir
Se m'amor seroit bien assise
Se je en vos l'avoie misse. (Trois 1990, ll. 4786-4798)

By my faith[...] you cannot have my love until you've jousted and performed enough feats of arms in my presence to *earn* my love, *for things which are had for nothing are not nearly so sweet and delightful as those for which one pays dearly*. Challenge my father to a tourney if you want to have my love, for I want to know without a doubt that my love would be well placed if it were placed in you. (Trois 1991, 440-441, emphasis mine)

Meliant, with the characteristic blindness of a knight "in Love's service," agrees to the conditions even though Tiebaut raised him and has been a father to him since his own father's death.

²⁴ "Mais se je l'oci et conquer, / Vostre druerie vos quier / En guerredon qu'ele soit moie, / Autres sodees ne gerroie." (Trois 1990, ll. 2061-2064)

Like Blancheflor and Tiebaut's daughter, the Evil Maiden, who ensnares Gawain, uses her femininity to manipulate the aggression of the knights she meets. The result, according to the boatman, is that "she's worse than Satan, for she had had many a knight's head chopped off at this port" (Trois 1991, 472).²⁵ She also convinces Gawain to risk his life unnecessarily several times. Gawain's reckless decision to leap the gorge raises the equally disturbing point that he was willing to risk his life, and presumably with it his soul, all to prove his "love" for a woman whose only attractive quality appears to have been her good looks.

The only "love relationships" in *Le Conte du Graal* not to be commercialized are Gawain's relationship with the Maiden of the Small Sleeves and Gawain's relationship with the King of Escavalon's sister. The former can hardly be considered a true relationship, because, while it conforms to the ideals of *fin' amor*, the Maiden with the Small Sleeves is still a very young (and spoiled) child and not an appropriate object for Gawain's affection. The latter, by contrast, is more appropriate for Gawain, but the relationship quickly descends into pure farce, first when the lady unhesitatingly gives her love to Gawain without knowing anything about him, then, again when Gawain is forced to defend himself and his lady, using a chessboard for a shield, and finally when the lady whom Gawain should be defending begins, in a gender reversal, to defend him with chess pieces all the while furiously inveighing against the mob.

Fin' amor, as it was envisioned by courtly society, was supposed to be an ennobling game between a knight and his lady, and not a sordid trade of love/sex for defence (as in the case of Blancheflor and Perceval), reckless prestige (as in the case of Meliant and Tiebaut's daughter), or revenge (as in the case of Gawain and the Evil Maiden). Nor was *fin amor* to be the burlesque suggested by the relationship between Gawain and the sister of the King of Escavalon. It is in precisely these terms, however, that Chrétien portrays the servitor/lady relationship, with the inevitable result that the servitor/lady ideal looks either absurd, or down right disgraceful. Not only does *Le Conte du Graal* raise serious questions about the whole charade of *fin amor*, it also exposes knighthood to accusations of abuse of power and of hypocrisy.

Perceval, having decided to become a knight, abuses his power twice in quick succession, first by attacking the Maiden of the Tent, nearly raping her, and stealing her ring, and then by killing the Red Knight for his armour. Significantly, Perceval's two failings are both associated with the forceful taking of another person's property. The knightly sins of covetousness and armed theft which we find in Perceval's first two acts

²⁵ "Ainz est pire c'uns satanas, / Care a cest port a fait tranchier / Mainte teste de chevalier." (Troyes 1990, ll.

become, as we might expect in a culture where force is a virtue, a perennial theme in *Le Conte du Graal*. Perceval's decision to attack the Red Knight is, of course, motivated by his greedy desire to claim the Red Knight's armour. While this behaviour is reprehensible on the part of Perceval, it is not so different from what the Red Knight desires, namely to wrest the land from King Arthur. The difference between the two men is only in degrees – Perceval's coveted object, armour, is relatively small compared to the Red Knight's demand for the kingdom. It appears that within Arthurian society violence is an acceptable means of obtaining desired objects. This is further implied by the neat parallelism between Perceval demanding the armour of the Red Knight, and Gawain demanding the horse of the Red Squire (Haidu 1968, 236-237). Gawain, of course, does not kill the Red Squire, and the Red Squire obviously does not have the same privileged status as the Red Knight, but the message remains the same – in King Arthur's realm might makes right, and indeed, the idea that knights will take by force whatever they desire is implicit in Arthur's angry remark to Kay:

Ahi! Ahi!
 Keus, molt m'avez hui correcié!
 Que ensaignié et adrecié
 Lo vallet as armes aüst
 Tant c'un po aidier se saüst
 Et de l'escu et de la lance,
 Bons chevaliers fust sanz dotance.
 Mais il ne set ne po ne bien
 D'armes ne de nule autre rien,
 Car neïs traire ne savroit
 L'espee, se besoig avoit.
 Or soit armez sor son cheval,
 Encontrera aucun vasal
 Qui por son cheval guaaignier
 No dotera a meaignier,
 Tot mort ou mehaigné l'avra,
 Ja desfandre ne se savra,
 Tant est nices et bestiaux
 S'avra tost fait ses anviaux. (Trois 1990, ll. 1232-1250)

Ah, Kay! How angry you have made me this day! Had someone instructed the boy and taught him enough of the weaponry that he could use his shield and lance a little, no doubt he would have made a fine knight. But he doesn't know a thing about weapons or anything else, and couldn't even draw his sword if he needed to. Now he's sitting armed upon his steed and will encounter some vassal *who won't hesitate to maim him in order to win his horse; he'll be dead or crippled before long*, because he's so simple minded and uncouth that he doesn't know how to defend himself! The other will instantly overwhelm him. (Trois 1991, 397, emphasis mine)

Arthur is a strong promoter of chivalry, and yet here, evidently entirely unconscious of the criticism he is making of the virtues he advocates, he compares knighthood with robbery, and states that a knight on a fine horse is an invitation to attack. Arthur's statement is not even conditional; there is no question in his mind that Perceval will be attacked, probably fairly soon. In stating that Perceval will "be dead or crippled before long," Arthur is reiterating the earlier concerns of Perceval's mother. Perceval's mother is, however, discussing events which are beyond her control. Arthur as king, however, should wield considerably more power than a concerned mother, particularly in his own realm, yet his statement suggests that the attack on Perceval will occur in his realm and that there is nothing that he can do to prevent it. In theory, everyone in Arthur's realm should obey Arthur's laws, but, apparently, when it comes to knightly violence, Arthur is either unable or unwilling to act against the violence which both upholds and undermines his society. Indeed, we have already seen the ineffectiveness of Arthur and his knights in dealing with the violence of the Red Knight. If Arthur can not prevent his cup from being stolen or his queen from being insulted, then there is indeed little that he can do to protect Perceval or anyone else, and in the face of a weak central authority the inhabitants of his realm are forced, if they are knights, to rely on their own prowess, and if they are women to rely on their sexuality to seduce men to fight for them.

In a society where masculine virility was highly valued, as in medieval society, women would be among the most coveted possession, and indeed, behind the guise of courtly love, Chrétien raises the suspicion that women are little more than pretty objects to be obtained, possessed and displayed. Chrétien makes an explicit reference to rape only once, but other rapes, if not acknowledged, are implied within the narrative, often in connection with violence. Gravdal, for example, shows that even within the language of the narrative rape and prowess are connected:

It is noteworthy that *esforcer* in the sense of "admirable striving" coexists in twelfth-century romances such as Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and *Le Conte du Graal*, with *esforcer* in the sense of rape. In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* and *Le Conte du Graal* we find both meanings within one and the same romance. (1991, 3)

The behaviour of the knights in *Le Conte du Graal* at times seems to confuse the dual meaning of *esforcer* as "admirable striving" and "rape," so that the reader cannot clearly tell whether knights earn their sexual favours through their "admirable striving," which is socially acceptable but may at times come close to resembling rape, or through rape itself. Gawain's assertion to Greoreas that "maidens are protected in King Arthur's land. The king

has given them safe-conduct, and watches over and protects them” (Trois 1991, 468)²⁶ seems ludicrous in light of Arthur’s apparent helplessness and the lawless behaviour of the knights within the narrative. Perceval, as we have seen, came very near to raping the Maiden of the Tent, and obviously none of Arthur’s knights were there to prevent it. As for Perceval, far from behaving courteously, as one might expect from the man destined to become the ideal knight, he treats her exclusively as an object; her wishes are apparently of no consequence to him. This can be blamed on his ignorance of courtly relationships of course, but when her lover, the Haughty Knight, returns, he too treats her as an object. The possibility that she might have been raped brings disgrace to him, and the only way he can maintain his injured male dignity is by publicly humiliating her until such a time as he revenge himself upon the person who has raped her.

In Chrétien’s Arthurian world, not only did knights fail to protect women, often they were the oppressors of women, and indeed the only men accused, either specifically or through inference, of rape in *Le Conte du Graal* are knights. Clamadeu, for example, was apparently planning to rape Blancheflor, although he seems to have justified his sexual violence by calling it “love”. The Evil Maiden’s hatred of men may also have been the result of rape by a knight, for Guiromelant, the knight in question, tells Gawain candidly:

Et la pucele fu m’amie
 Mais ensin ne fu ele mie
 Qu’ele onque me vosist amer,
 N’ami ne me daignoit clamer,
 C’a un soen ami la toli
 Qu’ele soloit mener o li,
 Si l’ocis, et li en menai
 Et do servir molt me penai. (Trois 1990, ll. 8477-8484)

The maiden was my sweetheart, not that she would ever deign to love me or to call me her lover, nor did she ever favor me in anything, for I loved her against her will after having taken her from a lover[...]. I killed him and brought her with me and strove to serve her. (Trois 1991, 485-486)

Even Gawain’s behaviour is not as entirely innocent as we might expect from this representative of Arthur’s court. When Gawain gallops up to the Evil Maiden she orders him to slow down and then explains that she knows what he was planning:

Vos me volez
 Prandre et porter ci contr’aval
 Sor le col de vostre cheval.
 — Voir vos avez dit, damoisele!
 — Je lo savoie bien, fait ele,
 Mal daez ait qui lo pansa!

²⁶ “Qu’an la terre lo roi Artu / Sunt puceles aseürees. / Li rois lor a trives donees, / Si les garde et si les conduit.” (Trois 1990, ll. 7036-7039)

Garde no te panser tu ja
Que tu sor ton cheval me metes!
Ne sui pas de ces foles bretes
Don't cil chevalier se deportent,
Qui desor lor chevaux les portent
Cant il vont en chevalerie. (Trois, 1990, ll. 6608-6619)

“You want to grab me and carry me down this hill across your horse’s neck.”

“That’s right, damsel.”

“I knew it well,” said she, “Cursed be any man who thinks that! Be careful never to try to put me on your horse! I’m not one of those silly girls the knights sport with and carry away on their horses when they go out seeking adventure.” (Trois 1991, 463).

As Haidu points out, if he did not intend to ask her permission then he was committing the same offence that he had punished Greoreas for, namely abduction and possibly rape. Rape is not in keeping with Gawain’s character, and yet this episode with the Evil Maiden shows that Gawain, like the other knights in the narrative, views women as objects that he can place on his horse like bags of wheat and simply gallop away with. Part of the humour of the scene, perhaps, is that, as the epitome of courtly behaviour, it never occurs to Gawain that a woman might turn him down, and thus it apparently does not occur to him to ask the Evil Maiden if she wants to go with him. The episode is personally embarrassing for Gawain, the consummate lover, and at the same time the Evil Maiden takes the opportunity to attack the whole ideal of *fin’ amor* by disparaging “those silly girls the knights sport with and carry away on their horses” (Trois 1991, 463). One has to suspect that Chrétien was thinking of the King of Escavalon’s sister when he wrote about silly girls with whom knights sport.

Chrétien’s critical view of *fin’ amor* is also suggested by his ironic presentation of Perceval’s behaviour with the Maiden of the Tent. Perceval, riding in search of King Arthur’s court, mistakes the beautiful tent for a church, and enters it in order to worship. Inside, however, he finds not a priest or an altar, but rather a beautiful girl asleep. Perceval’s confusion regarding the function of the tent is twofold: the tent is not a Church in the traditional sense, and yet in many romances the tent would have been Love’s temple, with the knight as supplicant and the maiden as priestess.²⁷ Perceval does not, of course, even recognize that he is in a position to participate in the religion of love, and thus does not even try to. Instead of acting the part of the courtly lover, Perceval attacks and nearly

²⁷ Comparisons between love and religion were fairly common. Andreas Capellanus suggests the idea in his work on courtly love, and Geoffrey Chaucer also compares Love to a religion when he refers to himself as the pope of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*. *The Romance of the Rose* makes a similar comparison, as does Christine de Pisan’s *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*.

rapes the girl, and then, oblivious to what he has done, fails to consummate the relationship with the maiden because he allows himself to be distracted by a ring and some food. Perceval's unintentional insult is, nevertheless, a complete one: not only has he stripped the maiden of the power traditionally accorded ladies in love relationships, he has also shown that he values a ring and food over her.

Chrétien was not a knight and, unlike Wolfram or Malory, it is highly unlikely that he was ever personally involved in combat. Undoubtedly he saw at least a few tournaments, and it is not entirely impossible that he might have seen an occasional battle, though of course we have no evidence of this, but for the most part Chrétien must have depended on the descriptions of violence provided by knights, and on his own imagination for the portrayals of violence in his own works. Surprisingly, although Chrétien, of the three authors under discussion, was the furthest removed from the realities of the violence, his depictions of violence are far more graphic and brutal than the descriptions of either Wolfram or Malory, although he is often quite brief in his description of combat itself. In several, though not all, of the manuscripts, for example, Perceval's mother, in relating the deaths of her two sons adds that, "Both died in combat, which has brought me great grief and sadness. A strange thing happened to the elder: the crows and rooks pecked out his eyes – this is how the people found him dead" (Trois 1991, 387).²⁸ The added detail of the missing eyes lends realism to the account, and makes the grief of the mother more palpable, yet at the same time, the information seems almost too gratuitous – Chrétien has just provided a detail that does not, at least at a first glance, forward his narrative or add to the *sen* of the story. Chrétien provides another graphically violent image in his description of the death of the Red Knight:

A l'oil au mielz qu'il peut l'avise
Et laisse aler lo javelot,
Si qu'il n'entant ne voit ne ot,
Lo fiert tres parmi lo cervel
Si qu'il li fet ou haterel
Saignier et la cervelle espant.
De la dolor li cuers li mant
Si verse et chiet toz estanduz. (Trois 1990, ll. 1068-1075)

With all the accuracy he could summon he let fly his javelin at the knight's eye: before he could react the javelin had pierced the knight through the eye and brains. *The Red Knight's heart failed in agony* and he tumbled forward, full-length, upon the ground. (Trois 1991, 395, emphasis mine)

²⁸ "A armes furent mort andui, / Don j'ai grant doel et grant anui / De l'ainsné avinrent merveilles, / Que li corbel et les cornoilles / Anbedeus les oex li creverent / Einsi les gens mort le troverent." (Trois 1959, ll. 475-480) This detail is not found in manuscript 354 of Bern, used for Méla's 1990 edition of *Le Conte du Graal*, but it is in MS FR. 12576 of the Bibliothèque Nationale used for Roach's 1959 edition of *Le Conte du Graal*.

Wolfram, narrating the same episode, states, “and there, where helmet and vizor leave a gap above the coif, the missile pierced Ither through the eye and then the nape, so that he who was the negation of all that is perfidious fell dead” (Eschenbach, 1980, 88). Wolfram has provided the technical details which would have interested a knight, namely how the javelin managed to pierce the armour, while at the same time carefully concealing the messy and inevitable result of a javelin piercing the red knight’s brain with the formulaic, “he who was the negation of all that is perfidious fell dead”(Eschenbach 1980, 88). Chrétien, however, is not concerned at all with the technical nuances of how Perceval managed to slay the Red Knight, nor is he willing gracefully to conceal the Red Knight’s death behind a formulaic phrase. Instead he provides the gory details of the Red Knight’s death, and, as if that is not enough to shock his audience, adds Perceval’s grotesquely comic threat to, if need be, “carve up this dead knight into scraps” to get the armour off of him (Trois 1991, 395).²⁹ Chrétien includes one other violent detail that Wolfram excises from *Parzival*: the dead knight held in the lap of Perceval’s cousin is missing his head (Trois 1991, 423).

Although Chrétien’s depicts the results of combat and violence with amazing candor, his descriptions of the actual combat are sparse, and in the case of the battle between Perceval and Anguingueron he excuses himself by saying, “I cannot describe to you in every detail what happened to each knight, nor each of their individual blows” (Trois 1991, 408).³⁰ Describing the battle between Perceval and Clamadeu Chrétien says, disparagingly, “I could tell you all about it if I made that my purpose, but I do not want to waste my efforts, since one word is as good as twenty” (Trois 1991, 414).³¹ Again, in the combat between Perceval and the Haughty knight, Chrétien dismisses the combat scene with the phrase, “The battle was long and hard, but it seems to me waste of effort to elaborate upon it” (Trois 1991, 429).³² Chrétien’s decision to emphasize the results of violence, while playing down the actual combat is something of a reversal of what we find in Wolfram, and suggests that Chrétien, from his position outside of the knightly class, may have been more prone subtly to acknowledge the failings of knights. If Chrétien’s decision to focus on the aftermath of combat while denying the knights the glory of the combat itself is a criticism of knighthood, it is a very subtle criticism that is not likely to

²⁹ “Mais ainz avroie a charbonees / Trestot esbraoné ce mort / Que nules des armes en port.” (Trois 1990, ll. 1092-1094)

³⁰ “Ne sai que plus vos devisasse / Comant il avint a chascun / Ne les cos toz par un a un.” (Trois 1990, ll. 2170-2172)

³¹ “Assez vos deïsse commant, / Se je me’en vosisse antremetre, / Mais por ce n’i voil paine metre / Q’autant vaut uns moz comme .XX.” (Trois 1990, ll. 2618-2621)

³² “De plus deviser n’ai je cure, / Que paine gastee me samble.” (Trois 1990, ll. 3862-3863)

draw the disapproval of the knightly audience while still winning the approval of those outside of knighthood who would have recognized the results of combat.

The knightly courtesy aspired to by chivalry bore little relationship to the brutal realities of violence in the twelfth century, and a number of times Chrétien quietly strips away the pretense of knighthood. Gornemant's hypocrisy, for example, is evidenced by the fact that he admonishes Perceval always to show mercy to captured knights, but when Perceval captures Anguingueron and Clamedeu neither of them is willing to go as a prisoner to Gornemant for fear that he will kill them immediately. The courteous façade masking violence also wears thin when Chrétien tells us of how, after Perceval defeated Anguingueron, "People poured out of the castle to welcome back the young knight, *but they were very disappointed that he had not taken the head of the defeated knight*" (Trois 1991, 228, emphasis mine).³³ Chrétien has decided, at least momentarily, to reveal how war brings out the worst in people.

In this second reading we have turned on its head our first reading, and have shown how Chrétien criticized chivalry and its obsessions with sex and violence. It is the possibility of readings such as this one which have led some scholars to conclude that Chrétien wanted chivalry to be either radically changed or completely demolished. Norris Lacy, for example, states:

Both Perceval's and Gauvain's stories strongly suggest that chivalry can no longer be improved: it must be undone. The hero must put behind him all that he has until now cultivated, and he must follow an entirely different way. [...] In his final romance [...] it appears—particularly if the Gauvain sequence is properly considered along with that of Perceval—that chivalry is being dismantled. (1983, 162)

Lacy has overstated his point, however. Chrétien's final romance can, rather, be read as a criticism of chivalry, and that criticism is undoubtedly intentional, but Chrétien was still a product of his times. To expect this writer, who certainly believed that society and Christianity were dependent on knighthood for protection and maintenance of order, completely to condemn chivalry, is to expect too much. Chivalry, as far as Chrétien was concerned, was as unalterable a piece of society as capitalism is to most of us today. He simply could not imagine a world without it, yet at the same time he examined it with a critical eye.

The portrayal of knightly behaviour in *Le Conte du Graal* suggests Chrétien's curious ambivalence towards chivalry. Chrétien's unusual attitude, manifested in his ambiguous treatment of the virtues of love and combat, suggests that, having played an

essential part in the creation of chivalry through his earlier romances, Chrétien was beginning to worry about the possible excesses of knightly behaviour. The subtle criticisms found even in his earlier works have multiplied and become more serious. For all of his criticism, however, Chrétien does not, of course, question the necessity of chivalry in maintaining society. There is none of the renunciation of the world in *Le Conte du Graal* that we find in *Le Morte D'arthur* or even in *Parzival*. The Grail quest has not yet become an entirely spiritual quest, and the knights involved in the story are merely knights, albeit heightened for the sake of great literature. They still reside in their unique position somewhere between the angels and the demons, and Chrétien merely raises the question of how chivalry, particularly in its primary manifestations of sex, love and violence, alters that relative position.

³³ “Et cil do chastel issent fors / Encontre celui qui retorne, / Et a molt grant anui lor torne / Do chevalier qu’il a conquis / Qu’il lo chief n’en avoit pris / Ou que il ne lor a randu.” (Trois 1990, ll. 2272-2277)

CHAPTER III

Wolfram von Eschenbach's Useful Toil

swes lebn sich sô verendet,
daz got niht wirt gepfendet
der sêle durch des lîbes schulde,
und der doch der werlde hulde
behalten kan mit werdekeit,
daz ist ein nütziu arbeit.

(Eschenbach 1998, 831, ll. 19-24)

When a man's life ends in such a way that God is not robbed of his soul because of the body's sinning and who nevertheless succeeds in keeping his fellows' good will and respect, this is useful toil. (Eschenbach 1980, 410-411)

Parzival, written in the early thirteenth century, is chronologically close to *Le Conte du Graal*, and borrows so extensively from Chrétien's work both in terms of matter and themes that a superficial examination of the shared material of the two stories might lead us to believe that Wolfram was simply translating Chrétien's work. *Parzival* differs substantially, however, from *Le Conte du Graal* in artistic style, in its details and in Wolfram's handling of themes. Wolfram's portrayal of chivalry is more pragmatic than Chrétien's. Several factors undoubtedly influenced Wolfram's depiction of knighthood. The differences between French and German culture may partially explain the differences in style.

Chrétien's French court, arguably the cultural centre of Europe at the time, was the creative nexus of *courtoisie* and of chivalry; the true home of the romance genre. Wolfram's German court, by contrast, existed on the periphery of medieval European culture. The literary themes of Chrétien and other medieval French authors gradually made their way to the Holy Roman Empire and were borrowed by German writers, who fused them with their own older Germanic narrative traditions to create something similar to the French romance, but still uniquely German. Thus Wolfram's *Parzival* has a hint of Germanic epic which is entirely absent in *Le Conte du Graal*. The history of the Holy Roman Empire during Wolfram's life also seems to have been considerably more turbulent than that of France during the life of Chrétien. Wolfram lived through, and, undoubtedly, participated in, the turbulent civil war that divided the Holy Roman Empire, and the influence of these times on *Parzival* is evident in several passages. Kratz supports this explanation for *Parzival*'s originality by stating, "The more I concern myself with *Parzival*, the more convinced I am that Wolfram's message is one pertinent to the world of his day and the conditions that prevailed in it" (1980, 139). Wolfram's status as a poor

knight may also serve to explain some of the differences between *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival*. It is clear that Wolfram identified more with the vocation of knighthood than with the art of writing, and was, in his writing, more responsive to the affairs and concerns of knights.¹ He was one of the first knights to write about chivalry and his writing suggests that he was aware of the singularity of his position and that he perceived himself as an authority on knighthood in contrast with other contemporary authors (Jackson, 1999, 159). In his persona of knight-author Wolfram is more concerned with the development of his knightly protagonist than either Chrétien, who was not a knight and thus did not identify with knighthood, or Malory, who relied heavily on source material influenced by a monastic tradition which tended to minimize the value of knighthood. The behaviour of the knights in *Parzival* is, as a result, more authentic and closer to real life than the knights in *Le Conte du Graal* and *Le Morte Darthur* and the technological detail, not to mention depth of character and plot, that went into Wolfram's account far exceeds what we find in *Le Conte du Graal* and *Le Morte Darthur*.² Wolfram's realistic descriptions of combat reflect an intimate acquaintance with violence and warfare, and suggest that he was interested in both the technological and ethical dimensions of knighthood.

In spite of the differences between *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival*, an over-arching concern with the role of chivalry in society remains central to both texts. Both authors reveal a preoccupation with the tensions that existed between courtly society, the church and the rest of lay society. Because the chivalric code remained ambiguous through out the Middle Ages and particularly during its early development, it was, as Kaeuper argues, an appropriate area for investigation and discussion by both clerics and knights:

Just what that code should be was not clear in detail, sometimes not in fundamentals. Idealist critics wanted to change much in the knightly mixture of ideals and practices; some of these idealist reformers were knights themselves. Chivalry can only be interpreted, in other words, as a mixture of ideals and practices constantly critiqued by those who wanted to change both. (1999, 4)

The investigation instigated by Chrétien into the chivalric themes of affective relations and sex on the one hand, and on conflict on the other, is taken up in *Parzival*. Early in his narrative Wolfram connects these aspects of knighthood in a description of Parzival's parents:

¹ Wolfram states in his *Apology*, "My hereditary Office is the Shield! I should think any lady weak of understanding who loved me for mere songs unbacked by manly deeds" (Eschenbach 1980, 68). "shildes ambet ist mîn art: / swâ mîn ellen sî gespart, / swelhiu mich minnet umbe sanc, / sô dunket mich ir witze kranc." (Eschenbach 1998, 117, ll. 11-14)

² Wolfram provides very detailed descriptions of armament. He also includes references to newer innovations such as the deadly "Greek fire". For a more in depth discussion of Wolfram's interest in military combat and technology, see W. H. Jackson's essay, "Tournaments and Battles in *Parzival*" (1999, 159-189).

al kleine wîz sîdîn
 ein hemde der kûnegîn,
 alz ez ruorte ir blôzen lîp,
 diu nu worden was sîn wîp,
 daz was sîns halsperges dach.
 ahzehniu manr durchstochen sach
 und mit swerten gar zerhouwen,
 ê er schiede von der frouwen
 daz leit ouch si an blôze hût,
 sô kom von rîterschaft ir trût,
 der manegen schilt vil dürkel stach.
 ir zweier minne triwen jach. (Eschenbach 1998, 103 ll. 9-20)

Over his hauberk he wore a small white silken shift of the Queen's (the one who was now his wife) as it came from her naked body. – They saw no less than eighteen pierced by lances and hacked through by swords, before he left the lady. She used to slip them on again over her bare skin when her darling returned from jousting after riddling countless shields. The love of these two expressed a deep attachment. (Eschenbach 1980, 61)

From the very commencement of the narrative, sex, affective relations and conflict are inextricably linked to each other and to chivalry. Like Chrétien, Wolfram explores the relationship of chivalry to these themes, but Wolfram moves beyond Chrétien's ambivalent criticism and proposes an ethical chivalry. The Grail, which at first seems to be the focus of Wolfram's narrative, fades in significance as Wolfram shows his audience the underlying objective of the Grail quest, and the true goal of chivalry:

swes lebn sich sô verendet,
 daz got niht wirt gepfendet
 der sêle durch des lîbes schulde,
 und der doch der werlde hulde
 behalten kan mit werdekeit,
 daz ist ein nütziu arbeit. (Eschenbach 1998, 831, ll. 19-24)

When a man's life ends in such a way that God is not robbed of his soul because of the body's sinning and who nevertheless succeeds in keeping his fellow's good will and respect, this is useful toil. (Eschenbach 1980, 410-411)

Wolfram explores the discourse of chivalry and its attendant themes of affective relationships, sex and conflict and seeks a middle road between the dangerous extremes of courtly chivalry on the one hand, and spiritual chivalry on the other, so that knights can maintain their honour and do good service without risking their souls. To this end Wolfram must first show the deficiencies of contemporary chivalry, and then show how knighthood can meet the requirements of the Church and the rest of lay society without sacrificing the ideals of chivalry.

The image created by the writers of romance of the courtly knight was problematic because elements of chivalry were exaggerated and disproportional with the realities of medieval life. The expectations created by these caricatures of chivalry could never be met. Wolfram parodies these traditional romance depictions of love and prowess and reveals their absurdity. He has Clamide, for example, mourn his lost love in terms that both reflect and parody traditional love speeches:

Pilâtus von Poncîâ,
und der arme Jûdas,
der bî eime kusse was
an der triwenlôsen vart
dâ Jêsus verrâten wart,
swie daz ir schepfær ræche,
die nôt ich niht verspræche,
daz Brôbarzære frouwen lîp
mit ir hulden wær mîn wîp,
sô daz ich se umbevienge,
swiez mir dar nâch ergienge. (Eschenbach 1998, 223, ll. 24-30; 224, ll. 1-4)

Whatever the punishment their Maker has in store for Pontius Pilate and that wretched Judas who joined the traitors with a kiss when Jesus was betrayed, I would accept their torment if only the lady of Brobarz were my wife by her consent, and I could hold her in my arms – come what might thereafter. (Eschenbach 1980, 118)

This speech is a cliché in that it mimics the overwrought speeches of other luckless lovers, but at the same time it comes dangerously near to blasphemy; suggesting that Clamide would willingly re-crucify Christ as long as he had the lady of Brobarz for wife. In a similar manner Wolfram lampoons the prowess of one of Arthur's knights, Segradors:

Beide lief unde spranc
Segradors, der ie nâch strîte ranc.
swâ der vehten wânde vinden,
dâ muose man in binden,
odr er wolt dermite sîn.
ninder ist sô breit der Rîn,
sæcher strîtn am andern stade,
dâ wurde wênen nâch dem bade
getast, ez wær warm oder kalt:
er viel sus dran, der degen balt. (Eschenbach 1998, 289, ll. 1-10)

Ever lusting for battle and at such speed that he walked not a step, Segradors ran forward with great bounds, for whenever he suspected there was fighting he had to be shackled, otherwise he would mix in. The Rhine is not so wide at any point that if he were to see fighting on the farther shore he would pause to try whether his bath were warm or cold, but, gallant knight, he would plunge straight in. (Eschenbach 1980, 149)

Segramors soon pays for his over enthusiasm by being unceremoniously knocked off of his horse by Parzival. Both Clamde and Segramors behave in a fashion fitting for romance characters, and yet Wolfram takes their traditional attitudes and embellishes them to show the absurdity of chivalry as depicted in the romances.

Although Wolfram attacks the extremes of romance literature, he remains loyal to the fundamental ideals of chivalry.³ Affective relations, sex and conflict are essential elements in Parzival's world. Wolfram does not idealize the hermit, Trevrizent; world renunciation is not necessary for achieving salvation and is antithetical to providing chivalric service and maintaining honour.⁴ Parzival, as an ideal, must thread between the Charybdis of chivalric excess and the Scylla of spiritual asceticism. Because Wolfram is seeking a moderate middle path which neither entirely rejects worldly pleasures nor heavenly virtues, he presents a balanced world view lacking in the narratives of Chrétien and Malory.

Wolfram's emphasis on moderation and balance is particularly evident in his treatment of love and sexuality. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the themes of sexuality and love in *Le Conte du Graal* are used humourously, and do not in any major way assist the hero in his quest for the Grail. Likewise, we shall see, in the chapter to come, that in *Le Morte Darthur* sexuality and "earthly" love are denigrated and revealed to be a hindrance in pursuit of the Grail. Only in Wolfram's version are these themes actually essential to Parzival's life and to his success. Wolfram neither mocks love and sexuality, nor condemns them, but he rather emphasizes the importance of love in an appropriate context. Although Wolfram affirms the importance of sexuality and love for individuals and the community, he is highly critical of affected "courtly love" which he apparently views as a caricature of natural love. This view is most evident in an authorial aside he makes about Arthur's court:

och wânde dô ein frouwe sân,
si solt den prîs verloren hân,
hete si dô niht ir âmîs.

³ As Barber observes, "The idea of *orden*, levels of achievement according to each man's power, enables Wolfram to transcend the old ideals of knighthood, and set a higher goal *without contradicting these cherished images*." (1974, 118 emphasis mine)

⁴ I do not wish to suggest, however, that Treverizent does not have his place, both in Wolfram's conception of the chivalric world, and in chivalric literature. The position of Trevrizent as a retired knight who has dedicated his remaining years to a life of contemplation is extremely common in medieval literature, and even the idea of the old hermit knight acting as a mentor to younger knights is not unique to Wolfram's *Parzival*. A fine example of this relationship between hermit and young knight can be found in Caxton's translation of Ramón Lull's *The Book of the Ordre of Chivalry*. There is also a fair amount of historical evidence proving that in real life elderly knights who were no longer able to participate in combat would frequently take vows and retire to a monastery, apparently partially in the hopes of expiating some of the sins committed during their youth, and also apparently on the basis that by taking holy orders they were merely changing from secular soldiers to spiritual ones.

ich entætes niht decheinen wîs
 (ez was dô manec tumber lîp),
 ich bræhte ungerne nu mîn wîp
 in alsô grôz gemenge:
 ich vorht unkunt gedrenge.
 etslîcher hin zir spræche,
 daz in ir minne stæche
 und im die freude blante:
 op si die nôt erwante,
 daz dienter vor unde nâch.
 mir wære ê mit ir dannen glâch. (Eschenbach 1998, 220 ll. 23-30; 221 ll. 1-6)

Then, too, a lady was apt to think she would lose esteem if she did not have her gallant there. I would most certainly not have brought my wife to such a concourse – there were so many young bloods there! I should have been afraid of jostling strangers. Someone or other would have whispered to her that her charms were stabbing him and blotting out his joy, and that if she would end his pangs he would serve her before and after. Rather than that I would hurry away with her. (Eschenbach 1980, 116)

Opposed to this image of “jostling strangers” vying through flattery and seduction for the love of women is the image of plain spoken, honest Parzival, who remains devoted to his wife. Love of Condwiramurs is, for the mature Parzival, one of the primary motivating forces in the latter part of the story, and, with the completion of the Grail quest, Wolfram reunites Parzival with Condwiramurs, thus satisfying Parzival’s two greatest desires and providing for the happy end of the tale. By tying together Parzival’s reunion with his wife and his reunion with the Grail Wolfram is implying that the two events are dependent on each other: Parzival is not worthy of his wife until he is worthy of the Grail, and he will never be worthy of the Grail if he does not remain true to his wife. The fact that Parzival’s success is dependent at least in part on his marital love is further suggested by the number of knights who love inappropriately, and thus are found unworthy of the Grail. Gawan’s multiple loves, for example, complicate his life and repeatedly distract him from more important issues. More importantly, Parzival’s success can be measured against Anfortas’s failure: Anfortas suffered his wound, and all of the consequences attached to it, because he placed the illicit love of a woman over obedience to the Grail (and thus to God).⁵ Thus, in his treatment of the romantic encounters of his characters, Wolfram reveals an appreciation for the problems of love and sexuality while coming down squarely in favour of passionate, devoted love within marriage.

⁵ Anfortas’s mistake of choosing the love of a woman over obedience to God foreshadows, as we shall see, Launcelot’s failure in *Le Morte Darthur* to choose the Grail and God over Guinivere.

Wolfram's attitudes towards love and sexuality are best understood by examining the relationships of the three protagonists in detail and then considering love and sexuality as they are presented by other knights. The first of the three characters, Gahmuret, is a ladies' man whose loyalties are divided among three women, Belacane, Herzeloide and Ampflise, Queen of France. His skills in love are such that when Wolfram compares Parzival's assault on Jeschute against the socially acceptable seduction which would have occurred had Gahmuret been the knight involved he states, "Had he (Parzival) learnt his father's noble ways, which remained with him all his life, the tilting would have been more on the mark, back there where the Duchess sat all alone" (Eschenbach 1980, 80).⁶ Gahmuret's "noble ways" lead to a scene at Kanvoleis in which the claims of his three ladies are brought into conflict, and it is only by resorting to a "court of love" resembling those described by Andreas Capellanus that Herzeloide succeeds in pressing her claim. As Poag states, "In this episode, the ritual formality of that Court of Love projects us into a very rarefied atmosphere and Wolfram's intent is surely, in part to satirize it" (1972, 77). The decision by the court to acknowledge Herzeloide's claim is suspect at best, because the court is convened in her territory and neither of the two other claimants are present. While the outcome is ultimately a happy one in the sense that both Gahmuret and Herzeloide are apparently content together and Parzival is the product of the union, one has to suspect that Wolfram is more than just a little critical of this manifestation of courtly love. Gahmuret's womanizing makes it necessary for Wolfram to add the telling phrase, "Over his hauberk he wore the small white silken shift of the Queen's (*the one who was now his wife*) as it came from her naked body" (Eschenbach 1980, 61 emphasis mine).⁷ Given the fact that Gahmuret has been loved by no less than three queens, and has married two of them, it behooves Wolfram to indicate which of the three he is referring to.

In some respects, however, the match between Parzival's parents is perfect: Gahmuret, who has used his cunning to avoid the responsibility of married life, is finally outwitted by Herzeloide, who manages to trap him into the very relationship Gahmuret seems desperate to avoid. Gahmuret, though, may well have had the last laugh, for he strikes a hard bargain with her, telling her that if she wishes to keep him she must permit him to continue jousting and adventuring as he did as a bachelor, for, as he tells her, "I have not forgotten my old trick, how once before I gave my wife the slip" (Eschenbach 1980, 59).⁸ This blunt statement by Gahmuret inverts the accepted values of courtly love,

⁶ "het er gelernt sîns vater site, / die werdecliche im wonte mite, / diu bukel wære gehurtet baz, / da diu herzoginne al eine saz." (Eschenbach 1998, 142, ll. 15-18)

⁷ "Al kleine wîz sîdîn / ein hemde der kûnegîn, / alz ez ruorte ir blôzen lîp, / diu nu worden was sîn wîp." (Eschenbach 1998, 103, 9-12)

⁸ "sô kan ich noch den alten slich, / als dô ich mînem wîbe entran." (Eschenbach 1998, 98, l. 30, 99, l. 1)

and instead of placing the woman at the centre of the relationship, confirms the centrality of the man and his need to prove his prowess. This inversion of courtly love is not uncommon, as Richey points out:

Here, and elsewhere, it is, more often than not, the woman's heart which is led captive by the heroic attributes of manhood. This is most markedly true in Herzeloide's love for Gahmuret, which is a complete surrender of herself to one who, though he loves her, cares infinitely more for the glory and stress of battle. Here, indeed, we are faced with the sternest consequence of an ideal based on the interdependence of love and war. (1957, 119)

Gahmuret's much sought after love is conditional on his freedom from responsibility, and in the end, he dies as a bachelor knight might wish to die, on the battlefield, leaving his wife and new-born son to fend for themselves. Perhaps Wolfram is attempting to make a point here regarding marriage and love as it was conceived by the proponents of courteous love. Andreas Capellanus argues that love cannot exist within marriage. Gahmuret seems to support that view and resolves the dilemma of being married by behaving as if he is not married. The relationship between him and Herzeloide remains one of lady and servitor with the significant change, however, that Herzeloide has lost the unconditional power that is supposed to belong to the lady.

Gawan, like Gahmuret, also appears as a well intentioned philander, forgetting promises of love almost as quickly as he makes them. Wolfram's depiction of Gawan's behaviour is satirical, but at the same time, as Poag observes, Gawan is representative of the chivalric code of love in its most refined form:

Gâwân is a typical representative of that same world to which Gahmuret belongs by birth and nature. Gâwân is the Arthurian paragon. Fame and love are also his major concerns. He leaves the court of Arthur and prepares for battle in order to preserve his reputation. He is ready and always at the service of a damsel or a lady in distress. Women mourn his departure; they line the route along which his adventures take him, crowding the battlements and filling the great halls. The typically Arthurian apotheosis of Gâwân's way is that Marvelous Castle, housing no less than four hundred women who wait to be saved by a knight who can successfully survive some preposterous test. (1972, 79)

Certainly this is the impression given of Gawan's romantic exploits, and yet, surprisingly, instead of affirming Gawan's position as the preeminent knight of Arthur's court, his liaisons with women actually bring his masculinity into question. Sir Kay's sarcastic statement to Gawan that, "there is no lady's hair at court so fine and fragile that would not be stout enough to tie up your hand from battle. Men who show such meekness honour their mothers too: yet from their fathers they should have mettle" (Eschenbach

1980, 156) identifies Gawan's major character flaw and adds the ultimate insult by suggesting that because Gawan is so weak when it comes to women, he himself has become effeminate.⁹ Kay, however, wrongly supposes that *amor* prevents Gawan from fighting, and Wolfram repeatedly delineates the nearly disastrous affects of Gawan's romantic and erotic impulses as they entangle him in all manner of dangerous and ethically questionable conflicts.

More than Gahmuret, Gawan reveals the potential for absurdity in *fin' amor*. Like Gahmuret, Gawan also has three ladies who have claims on him. Gawan's first "love relationship" is a mock servitor-lady relationship between himself and the child Obilot. The relationship between the knight and the child is playful and yet at the same time serves the very serious function of enhancing Gawan's reputation for courtesy and prowess on the battle field. Wolfram's portrayal of this playful relationship forces the reader to consider the triviality inherent in courtly love. Although Gawan pretends to fight in order to honour Obilot, he is in actuality fighting to preserve his own honour, and Obilot has merely provided a socially acceptable excuse for ignoring his obligation to Kingrimursel. The fact that Gawan is willing to risk his life and honour, when he is accused of high treason, by defending childish behaviour on the part of Obilot, and his own hurt pride when he hears the ladies call him a merchant, merely underscores the potential for absurdity in courtly love.

The thin veneer of respectability permitted Gawan in his "courtly" relationship with Obilot is entirely absent in his second romantic liaison. Wolfram tells us that upon first meeting Gawan and Antikonie exchanged a kiss, as was customary for guests and hostesses, but that in this case, "a kiss was given and taken such as is not customary between strangers" (Eschenbach 1980, 208).¹⁰ The speed with which Gawan precedes from there, and his apparent lack of concern for the fact that he is in an enemy castle with a lady he does not know, shows Gawan's lack of restraint and reason. The relationship developing between Antikonie and Gawan bears little resemblance to the "high love" recommended by the poets, and is entirely erotic in nature:

Ich wæne, er ruort irz hüffelîn.
des wart gemêret sîn pîn.
von der liebe alsölhe nôt gewan
beidiu magt und ouch der man,
daz dâ nâch was ein dinc geschehen,
hetenz übel ougen niht ersehen.

⁹ "Och enist hie ninder frouwen hâr / weder sô mürwe noch sô clâr, / ez enwære doch ein veste bant / ze wern strîtes iwer hant. / swelch man tuot solhe diemuot schîn, / der êret ouch die muoter sîn: / vaterhalb solter ellen hân." (Eschenbach 1998, 303, ll. 3-9)

¹⁰ "da ergienc ein kus ungastlich." (Eschenbach 1998, 409, l. 21)

des willn si bēde wārn bereit. (Eschenbach 1998, 411, ll. 3-9)

He thrust his hand beneath her cloak and I fancy stroked her soft thigh – this sharpened his torment. The man and the maiden were so hard-pressed by desire that if malevolent eyes had not espied it a thing would have been done that both were intent on. (Eschenbach 1980, 209)

Gawan and Antikonie are discovered by an old knight who recognizes Gawan, and what ensues is an extremely dangerous battle in which Gawan has to defend himself against the entire town.

Wolfram is revealing the truth behind the façade of courtly love and its conventions. Courtly love is in this case no more than lust dressed up to look fashionable, and as always, unbridled lust has its price – in this case the dignity of Gawan, and, very nearly, his life. Wolfram inverts the conventions of courtly love, and instead of Gawan protecting his lady with shield and sword from a knightly opponent, he finds himself defending himself with a chess board while his damsel in distress assists him by hurling chess pieces and vindictive words at the rabble attacking them. Wolfram's description of Antikonie and Gawan's love affair is pure parody, as Jones illustrates:

In a parodying variant of the motif of the knight drawing inspiration from the sight of his lady during combat, Gawan's courage is increased "swenne im dieu muoze geschach" (409,23= "when he has the leisure") to admire the beauty of Antikonie[...]. But the humour cannot fully disguise the fact that the situation does little for Gawan's dignity as a knight, nor can it escape notice that the convention of the knight fighting in order to win the love of a lady has been so far perverted that he and his lady fight alongside one another to ward off the consequences of having given way to their desires too quickly. Wolfram does not explicitly condemn the behaviour of either of them in any way, but it is clear that it is the opportunism of the sexual adventurer that has landed Gawan in this unflattering and dangerous position. (Jones 1999, 48-49)

Certainly this portrayal of Gawan is a parody of the traditional motif of knightly lovers, and yet at the same time, the irony involved is that this image seems much more honest than the stylized love stories of other romances. Gawan and Antikonie get carried away with their desires, and then get caught virtually in the act of making love. This, and the resulting defence, ring truer than the overwrought love stories of Lancelot and Guinivere and Tristan and Iseult.

Beyond merely parodying a traditional love story by providing a similar situation with more realistic behaviour and results, Wolfram is also undercutting the idea that love is the inspiration for loftier behaviour. Wolfram may need to do this because earlier Parzival tells Gawan, "My friend, when your hour of combat is at hand, let a woman join issue in

your stead, let her guide your hand! Let the love of one *whom you know to be modest and given to womanly virtues* watch over you there” (Eschenbach 1980, 172 emphasis mine).¹¹ Parzival’s idea that earthly love should replace divine love and that a woman may substitute for God in defending a knight is clearly wrong, but has its basis, as do most of Wolfram’s concepts of love, in earlier romance literature. Women in romance literature not only incite violence, they also inspire their knights on to victory. Ironically, Gawan is forced, in a literal sense, to follow Parzival’s advise to “let a woman join issue” in combat. Clearly Parzival never intended the advise in a literal sense, and the fact that Gawan is forced to depend on Antikonie for defense, both during the battle and afterwards, undermines his position as both a fighter and a lover. Not only has Gawan erred by being forced to follow the word and not the spirit of Parzival’s advice: he has also ignored Parzival’s injunction about choosing a woman he knows “to be modest and given to womanly virtues.” Antikonie’s “modesty” and “womanly virtues” are dubious, and a far better example of a woman possessing such virtues would be Condwiramurs.¹²

Gawan does not learn from his ill-fated experience with Antikonie, and is soon involved in a complicated relationship with Orgeluse, Duchess of Logroys. In this third relationship the lady is a distorted mirror image of Gawan: he loves women and uses his courtesy and good looks to win the favours of women, while she hates men and uses her rudeness and good looks to manipulate them in her pursuit of revenge. Together Orgeluse and Gawan conjoin the two dominant themes being examined: she is his potential sexual partner, while he is her potential warrior. Stated in these simple terms their relationship does not seem, at first glance, all that different from the early relationship of Parzival and Condwiramurs. Certainly there is a similarity between how Orgeluse and Condwiramurs manipulate their suitors into fighting for them; but there the similarity ends. Condwiramurs truly loves Parzival, and although her guile in exploiting Parzival may be reprehensible, her motives, her desire to protect herself and her people, are not. Orgeluse, by contrast, abuses the lady / servitor relationship by having knights seek revenge. Wolfram uses Orgeluse’s mercenary approach to love to strip away the courtly pretences of love, and show how love frequently degenerates into a tool to get what one desires.

It is not easy to condemn Orgeluse, however, for she is a victim of the sex and violence latent in knighthood in the same way that Jeschute and Condwiramurs are. Her husband, Cidegast, was killed by Gramoflanz who thought in that way to win her love. For

¹¹ “friunt, an dīnes kampfes zīt / dā nem ein wīp fūr dich den strīt: / diu müeze ziehen dīne hant; / an der du kiusche hāst bekant / unt wīplīche gūete / ir minn dich dā behūete.” (Eschenbach 1998, 336, ll. 9-14)

¹² Wolfram has high praise for Antikonie in spite of her apparently loose morals. Wolfram’s approbation appears to be based on the loyalty she shows Gawan in her heated defence of him both in deed and word.

Gramoflanz Orgeluse is a prize to be won through prowess on the battlefield, and it is a mystery to him when, having proven his superior prowess by killing Cidegast, she rejects him.¹³ Gawan's decision to become Orgeluse's knight means that he will have to face Gramoflanz. Gramoflanz, however, having ruined the life of Orgeluse, has fallen in love with Gawan's sister, and that love is reciprocated, which means that Gawan is now faced with the task of having to choose between the happiness of his sister and the happiness of the lady he loves. Yet, in spite of the complexity created by this relationship, in some respects Gawan can be seen as moving towards a more balanced and appropriate relationship with Orgeluse. Hatto, in his "An Introduction to a Second Reading" makes this point:

Only in his third involvement does Gawan achieve a correct and viable relationship with a member of the opposite sex; for his make-believe affair with Obilot was service without reward, his lightning wooing of Antikonie without service almost brought reward, but with Orgeluse arduous service was at last richly rewarded by her person in marriage. (Hatto 1980, 437)

While this is true, Hatto has evidently decided to overlook the complications and violence caused by Gawan's courtship. As Jones points out,

In both these instances [Gawan's relationship with Antikonie and with Orgeluse] chivalric values are adversely affected: his defense of Antikonie and himself is farcical, and each of the combats fought in the service of Orgeluse – against Lischöys, Florant, and Parzival – is made to seem questionable. (1999, 73-74)

In general we can see that Gawan's behaviour in love is reckless to say the least, and in spite of the happy ending granted to this final love episode, it is evident that Gawan's blind service to Orgeluse is less than wise.

Parzival, like Gahmuret and Gawan, has three sexually charged encounters with women. Parzival progresses from the purely animal sexuality manifested with Jeschute to the more refined longing for Liaze, and finally he achieves the ultimate expression of love with Condwiramurs, whose name etymologically means "guide to love". Significantly, although Parzival is the hero of the story and has these three relationships, he completely fails to meet the conditions for *fin' amor* as defined by Capellanus. His first encounter with Jeschute lacks the courtesy and finesse that distinguish *fin' amor* from brute sexuality. His encounter with Liaze is certainly closer to "courtly love" in that he has the refined longings common to a courtly lovers, but the relationship never moves beyond the first

¹³ Gramoflanz's violent approach to courtship may appear odd to modern readers, but it has a literary precedent in Chrétien's *Yvain* in which Yvain slays the Knight of the Fountain and then successfully woos and

stage of flirtation: Liaze grants him no favours, nor does he undertake service on her behalf. His last relationship also fails to fit the criteria of “courtly love” as presented by Andreas Capellanus, because Parzival marries the object of his affection and never deviates from fidelity to his wife. Courtly love is entirely absent from Parzival’s character, though he does at times behave in a manner consistent with the behaviour of a courtly lover.

In contrast to the rest of the characters in the romance, Parzival’s relationship with Condwiramurs is remarkably well balanced. Parzival’s restrained behaviour with Condwiramurs contrasts sharply with the lecherous behaviour of Gahmuret and Gawan. Wolfram makes clear that Parzival has ample opportunity to take advantage of Condwiramurs when she came to his bed distraught wearing only a “white silken shift” (Eschenbach 1980, 106). The “white silken shift” in this case draws the reader’s attention to the earlier “white silken shift” that Gahmuret carries into battle and that Herzloyde slips back onto her naked body after the battle, but the sexuality implicit in that act is entirely diffused in the innocent scene between Parzival and Condwiramurs. Parzival’s lack of initiative is, according to Wolfram, due to his sexual ignorance, yet given Parzival’s previous behaviour with Jeschute, sexual inexperience can not entirely explain Parzival’s behaviour. Restraint also plays a role, because Condwiramurs says, “If you will honour yourself and treat me with such restraint as not to struggle with me, I will lie in there with you” (Eschenbach 1980, 106).¹⁴

Richey quite correctly points out that Wolfram’s treatment of the relationship between Parzival and Condwiramurs is a substantial change from Chrétien’s account of the event. Richey states:

The one major change is from the casual love-relation of Perceval and Blanche-flor to the lasting marriage-bond of Parzival and Condwiramurs. From this follows the main change in the structure of the tale: Parzival does not leave Condwiramurs as Perceval leaves Blanche-flor, as soon as his task as deliverer is finished, but settles down for some time (it seems about one year) to enjoy his wedded happiness and to restore and rule over the land of which he is now king. (1957, 60)¹⁵

The differences between Perceval and Parzival are revealing, but even more revealing is the contrast between the behaviour of Gahmuret and Parzival. As Gentry (1999) has shown, Gahmuret and Parzival share a great deal in common, but their attitudes towards love and responsibility are at odds. Gahmuret values his wives less than his prowess, while Parzival clearly asserts that next to the Grail his wife is what he values most, and indeed

weds his victim’s wife.

¹⁴ “welt ir iuch êren, / sölhe mâze gein mir kêren / daz ir mit mir ringet niht, / mîn ligen aldâ bî iu geshiht.” (Eschenbach 1998, 197, ll. 29-30, 198, ll. 1-2)

¹⁵ See also Barber 1974, 115.

sometimes he appears to value her more than the Grail. Gahmuret thus evidently feels no qualms about sneaking away and conveniently abandoning Belacane when marriage no longer suits him. Parzival, by contrast, not only requests permission from his wife to leave, and receives it, he does so publicly, establishing his willingness to meet his obligations both to her, and to her kingdom.

The sincerity of the relationship and the mutual respect felt by the couple is illustrated by Parzival publicly requesting permission to leave his queen, and her giving permission for his departure. Although the two are separated for the majority of the remaining narrative, Wolfram continues to link the two of them by repeatedly stating that Parzival's two great motivations are his wife and the Grail. Initially Parzival's relationship to the Grail and to his wife is out of balance, because he values Condwiramurs more than the Grail (Eschenbach 1980, 155), but by the time Parzival sees Trevrizent, he has come to see that the Grail is more important than even his love for his wife. "My deepest distress is for the Grail," replied Parizval. 'After that it is for my wife'" (Eschenbach 1980, 239).¹⁶ The importance of Parzival's loving relationship with his wife should not be underestimated. Trevrizent provides an example of a similarly devoted relationship, "Frimutel loved his wife so dearly that no wife was ever loved more by husband, I mean with such devotion. You should renew his ways and love your spouse with all your heart" (Eschenbach 1980, 242).¹⁷

Parzival does stay true to his love to Condwiramurs and this devotion to her helps him achieve the Grail by avoiding the temptations of Orgeluse. Love for Orgeluse, we discover, caused Anfortas's wound, and eventually places Gawan in the dilemma of having to choose between the happiness of Orgeluse and his sister. Of the knights Orgeluse encounters, only Parzival, devout in his love for his wife, resists her attractions. Offered her body and her lands Parzival replies that he already has a wife more beautiful, whom he dearly loves, and adds, "I do not want your love: the Gral bids me seek other troubles" (Eschenbach 1980, 310).¹⁸ Parzival remains loyal to Condwiramurs, and Wolfram tells us "He had never received Love's aid for Love's distress elsewhere, though many fine women had offered him their love"(Eschenbach 1980, 398).¹⁹ Wolfram leaves no question as to the fidelity of Parzival:

Nu dâhte aber Parzivâl

¹⁶ "mîn hôhstiu nôt ist umben grâl; / dâ nâch umb mîn selbes wîp." (Eschenbach 1998, 471, ll. 26-27)

¹⁷ "der [Frimutel] minnet sîn selbes wîp, / daz nie von manne mêre / wîp geminnet wart sô sêre; / ich mein mit rehten triuwen. / sîne site sult ir niuwen, / und minnt von herzen iwer konen. / sîner site sult ir wonen." (Eschenbach 1998, 478, ll. 14-20)

¹⁸ "ichn wil iwer minne niht: / der grâl mir anders kumbers giht." (Eschenbach 1998, 623, ll. 11-12)

¹⁹ "sîn lîp enpfienec nie anderswâ / minne helfe für der minne nôt: / manc wert wîp im doch minne bôt." (Eschenbach 1998, 806, ll. 6-8)

an sîn wîp die licht gemâl
 und an ir kiuschen süeze.
 ob er kein ander grüeze,
 daz er dienst nâch minne biete
 und sich unstæte niete?
 solch minne wirt von im gespart.
 grôz triwe het im sô bewart
 sîn manlîch herze und ouch den lîp,
 daz für wâr nie ander wîp
 wart gewaldec sîner minne,
 niwan diu kûneginne
 Condwîr âmûrs,
 diu geflôrierte bêâ flûrs. (Eschenbach 1998, 736, ll. 1-14)

Now as to Parzival, he was thinking of his lovely wife and all her modest charm. Would he address himself to another and offer service for her love and take to unfaithful ways? From such love he refrains. His manly heart and person have been maintained by great fidelity, with the result that no woman was ever possessed of his love other than Condwiramurs, fairest flower that blows. (Eschenbach 1980, 364)

It is only appropriate then that Wolfram links the achievement of the Grail with Parzival's reunion with his wife. Having been faithful to both, he finally has proven that he deserves both.

Wolfram's disapproval of the excesses of *amor* is evident not only in his portrayal of major characters, but also in his depictions of minor characters. These minor characters, most notably Clamide, Anfortas, and Trevrizent, illustrate the extent to which "courtly love," had become a dangerous obsession which diverted knighthood and society from more important concerns. Clamide's lament is thus meant ironically, though it comes at a pivotal point of Parzival and Gawan's adventures. This episode, for the most part, is full of dark tragedy. Cundrie has just ridden up and denounced Parzival for failing to show compassion at the Grail castle, and has told him that his soul is damned. Gawan has just been accused of murder by Kingrimursel, and has been challenged to combat. Gawan's honour, not to mention his life, is at stake, and Parzival's soul is apparently lost. In to these serious matters, Clamide, the knight who lost Condwiramurs to Parzival, presses his own claim:

Clâmidê den wol geboren
 dûht, er hete mêr verlorn
 dan iemen der dâ möchte sîn,
 unt daz ze scharpf wær sîn pîn.
 er sprach ze Parzivâle
 'wært ir bî dem grâle,
 sô muoz ich sprechen âne spot,
 in heidenschaft Tribalibot,

dar zuo'z gebirge in Kaukasas,
 swaz munt von rîcheit ie gelas,
 und des grâles werdekeit,
 dine vergûlten niht mîn herzeleit
 daz ich vor Pelrapeire gewan.
 ach ich arm unsælic man!
 mich schiet von freuden iwer hant.
 hie ist vrou Cunwâr de Lalant:

.....
 ob ich an freuden sol genesen,
 sô helft mir daz si êre sich
 sô daz ir minne ergetze mich
 ein teil des ich von iu verlôs,
 dâ mich der freuden zil verkôs.
 ich hetz behalten wol, wan ir:
 nu helfet dirre meide mir.' (Eschenbach 1998, 330, ll. 15-30, 331, ll. 8-14)

It seemed to the high-born Clamide that *he* had lost much more than any there and that his pain was much too keen. 'Even though you visited the Gral,' he said to Parzival, 'I must say in all seriousness that whatever has been narrated about the wealth of Tribalot in heathendom and the Mountains of Caucaus, too, not to mention the splendour of the Gral itself, all this would not recompense me for the mortal pain I got below Belrepeire! Ah wretched, ill-fated man that I am! – and it was you who parted me from my happiness! Now here is Lady Cunneware de Lalant[...]. If I am ever to know happiness again you must help me. See to it that she honours herself so that her love makes part-amends to me for what you made me lose when I missed the pinnacle of bliss! But for you, I would have surely attained it. So now help me to this girl.' (Eschenbach 1980, 170)

Ironically, in spite of Cundrie's dire message, Clamide still does not understand the significance of the Grail, or the very real dangers faced by both Parzival and Gawan. Clamide suffers, as do most of the knights in *Parzival*, from an obsessive self-interest that does not permit him to consider the problems of others. Ironical also is the fact that Clamide, who was the aggressor against Condwiramurs, can now claim to be the victim because he, in essence, did not get to have his way with the woman of his choice. Given the fact that Parzival has interfered with his attempt to force himself on Condwiramurs, Clamide decides to settle for second best in the form of Cunneware. Clamide's phrasing of the request reveals his own vain hubris; "See to it that she honours herself so that her love makes part-amends to me for what you made me lose when I missed the pinnacle of bliss!" (Eschenbach 1980, 170).²⁰ Apparently Cunneware will be very fortunate to marry Clamide even if she is only his second choice and there to make "part-amends" for the girl he wants.

²⁰ "sô helft mir daz si êre sich / sô daz ir minne ergetze mich / ein teil des ich von iu verlôs, / dâ mich der freuden zil verkôs." (Eschenbach 1998, 331, ll. 9-12)

The irony involved in Clamide's lament is based partially on the obsession that most medieval romances have with love. "Courtly love" was frequently the main theme of romances, and Wolfram reveals a devious sense of humour by suddenly providing an appropriately "traditional" love story in the midst of Parzival's crisis. At the same time he seems to be reminding his audience that while "trite" love stories make up most romances, his is indeed a serious romance with larger issues at stake.

These larger issues are manifest in the failure of the Grail family to choose responsibility and God over love and honour. Grail knights are required to be chaste, except for the king, who may marry, but may not pursue love service. This rule, suggestive of the actual rule followed by the real Templars, is difficult to follow in a society obsessed with prowess and love, and even Trevrizent fails, as a young knight, to abide by it:

wan der kûnec sol haben eine
ze rehte ein konen reine,
unt ander die got hât gesant
ze hêrrn in hêrrenlôsiu lant.
über daz gebot ich mich bewac
daz ich nâch minnen dienstes pflac.
mir geriet mîn flæteclîchiu jugent
unde eins werden wîbes tugent,
daz ich in ir dienste reit,
da ich dicke herteclîchen streit
.....
ir minne condwierte
mir freude in daz herze mîn:
durch si tet ich vil strîtes schîn.
des twanc mich ir minnen kraft
gein der wilden verren rîterschaft. (Eschenbach 1998, 499, ll. 9-18, 22-26)

Only the King may have a spouse in wedlock, and those others whom God has sent to be lords in lordless lands. By serving a lady for her love I transgressed this commandment. My fresh and comely youthfulness and the quality of a noble lady prompted me to ride out in her service, in the course of which I fought many fierce battles[...]. Her love brought delight into my heart, and I often took the field for her sake. The great passion she inspired in me drove me to seek deeds of arms in wild and distant regions. (Eschenbach 1980, 251-252)

These lines prefigure Launcelot's confession in *Le Morte Darthur* that Guinevere inspired him to battle regardless of whether the cause was right or wrong. Love and violence were evidently linked in courtly society. Wolfram seems to have a hard time justifying this type of love – inevitably he portrays fights undertaken for the favour of women as disastrous and, frequently, as sinful.

Certainly in Anfortas's case, choosing a woman over the Grail has dire consequences. The relationship between Orgeluse and Anfortas re-enacts the fall of man by placing Orgeluse as Eve the temptress and Anfortas as Adam. Orgeluse's own poisoned relationship with men is metaphorically captured in the image of the poisoned spear which emasculates Anfortas. Yet Wolfram makes clear that love for Orgeluse is not the actual cause of Anfortas's suffering, but rather his lack of humility and refusal to let God guide him:

sîn jugent unt sîn rîcheit
 der werlde an im fuogte leit,
 unt daz er gerte minne
 ûzerhalb der kiusche sinne.
 Der site ist niht dem grâle reht:
 dâ muoz der rîter unt der kneht
 betwart sîn vor lôsheit.

.....
 swelch grâles hêrre ab minne gert
 anders dan diu schrift in wert,
 der muoz es komen ze arbeit
 und in siufzebæriu herzeleit.

.....
 Amor was sîn krîe.
 Der ruoft ist zer dêmuot
 iedoch niht volleclîchen guot.

(Eschenbach 1998, 476, ll. 27-30; 477, ll.1-3; 482, ll. 13-16, 30; 483, ll. 1-2)

'His youth and wealth and pursuit of love beyond the restraints of wedlock brought harm to the world through him. Such ways do not suit the Gral. In its service knights and squires must guard against licentiousness [...]. But any Lord of the Gral who seeks love other than that allowed him by the Writing will inevitably have to pay for it with pain and suffering fraught with sighs [...]. His battle cry was "Amor!", yet that shout is not quite right for humility.' (Eschenbach 1980, 241-244)

The newly healed Anfortas admits that it is the unhealthy relationship that existed between him and a woman, a relationship that placed women above God, that caused his suffering, but he still maintains that women are essential to chivalry:

rîchheit und wîbe minne
 sich verret von mîm sinne.

 mîn orden wirt hie niht vermiten:
 ich wil vil tjoste rîten,
 ins grâles dienste strîten.
 durch wîp gestrîte ich niemer mêt:
 ein wîp gab mir herzesêr.
 Idoch ist iemmer al mîn haz

gein wîben volleclîche laz:
hôch manlîch vreude kumt von in,
swie klein dâ wære mîn gewin. (Eschenbach 1998, 823, ll. 21-22, 26-30;
824, ll.1-4)

Possessions and love of women are far from my thoughts [...] I shall not deny my Order: I shall ride many a joust, fighting in the service of the Grail. Never again shall I fight for love of a woman. There was one who brought bitter pain to my heart [...] But I have left all hatred of women behind me. They inspire men with a sublime zest, however little I profited from them. (Eschenbach 1980, 407)

Anfortas did not profit from women and love because his relationship with them was inappropriate. Parzival, by contrast, profited immensely from his love for Condwiramurs. He, however, had, through his ignorance and failure to learn courtly ways, naturally developed the balanced and loyal relationship required by the Grail for Grail Kings.

Marriage and *fin' amor* were two models for how men and women could relate to each other. Wolfram also explores a third alternative to the issue of gendered relationships: rape and sexual assault. Chrétien and Malory also deal with these issues, but sexual violence only receives a prominent examination in *Parzival*. Wolfram apparently identified rape as a serious issue for knighthood because he introduces it into the story early on with the abduction of the maiden Imane de Beafortane, and then goes on to tell of the knight Urjans, who was “excluded from the Order of Knighthood and declared an outlaw for denying a maiden her inviolability and the protection of the law” (Eschenbach 1980, 266),²¹ and of the knight Meljahkanz, of whom a page says, “Any pleasure he ever had of woman, married or otherwise, was had by force. He should be put to death for it” (Eschenbach 1980, 178).²² There is even a rather disturbing scene between Gawan, a girl and her father which presents us with a typical view of rape, particularly if the woman violated was of a lower class than the man:

dennoch was ez harte fruo:
innen des gienc ir vater zuo.
der liezez âne zûrnen gar,
ob diu maget wol gevar
ihts dâ wære betwungen
und ob dâ was gerungen:
dem gebârt se gelîche,
diu maget zûchte rîche,
wand si dem bette nâhe saz.
daz liez ir vater âne haz.

²¹ “von schildes ambet man dich schiet / und sagte dich gar rehtlôs, / durch daz ein magt fon dir verlôs / ir reht, dar zuo des landes vride.” (Eschenbach 1998, 528, ll. 24-27)

²² “ez wære wîb oder magt, / swaz er dâ minne hât bejagt, / die nam er gar in noeten: / man solt in drumbe tæten.” (Eschenbach 1998, 347, ll. 27-30)

dô sprach er 'tohter, wein et niht.
swaz in schimpfe alsus geschiht,
ob daz von êrste bringet zorn,
der ist schier dâ nâch verkorn. (Eschenbach 1998, 559, ll. 17-30)

While it was still very early her father joined them. He would have let it pass and not upbraided him had the comely girl been forced to something or other and there had been a rough and tumble; for the modest girl was behaving as though there had been, and was sitting near the bed. 'Don't cry, daughter,' said he. 'When things of that sort happen in fun, though at first they may arouse anger, it is soon forgiven and forgotten.' (Eschenbach 1980, 281)

The scene is uncomfortably close to Andreas Capellanus's advice that desired peasant women should simply be raped. Gawain is quick to correct the father's mistaken assessment of the situation, but rape evidently occurs so frequently, and is so commonly accepted, that even he, the representative of King Arthur's court, is not above suspicion. Indeed, attempted rape is apparently so common in Arthur's realm that it even takes on a socially acceptable guise so long as the would-be rapist and intended victim are both of noble blood and so long as the language of love is used in describing the intentions of the rapist. Thus Clamide's attack on Condwiramurs's castle, Belrepeire, is not seen as attempted rape.

The closest we come to ever hearing Wolfram's own perspective on rape are the comments made by the page regarding Meljahkanz.²³ The page specifically states that Meljahkanz should be executed for the rapes, and adds that while Meljahkanz is valiant enough in battle, his skill in combat does not make up for his ethical failures (Eschenbach 1980, 178).²⁴ It is evident, both from this, and from the scenes that Wolfram chooses to include, that the persistence of rape is an indictment of the ethical failure of knights.

Wolfram recognized that while love and sexual desire were frequently cited as the cause for conflict in romances, in real life violence on the part of knights required no such excuses. He himself witnessed the destructive force of a civil war caused by two claimants to the imperial crown, the Albigensian crusade, and the Fourth Crusade (Wynn 1984, 10-

²³ Wolfram's decision to include sexual violence and the potential of rape instead of relying entirely on the language of courtly love suggests that he is dealing, not with the idealized courtly society of King Arthur's court, but with his own much more brutal society. Abduction and rape were not uncommon during the thirteenth century. One attempt was made, for example, to abduct Eleanor of Aquitaine, probably because of her wealth and political power, which could only be obtained through "marriage" to her. Her son, King John of England abducted his "bride", because she was promised to another man. Ironically, 200 years later we even find Thomas Malory, the apparent author of *Le Morte Darthur*, accused of raping the same lady twice on different occasions. Rape by knights, in other words, was not an uncommon occurrence during the Middle Ages and Wolfram acknowledges this reality in his work.

²⁴ The page's opinion that rape should be punishable with death was apparently in accordance with certain early law. Thomas of Chobam, for example, in his *Summa Confessorum*, mentions laws that required capital

85). Knights were thus placed in the dilemma of, at least in theory, recognizing the virtues of peace, while still needing to legitimize violence as a justification for their existence. It is not altogether surprising then that, as Kaeuper states, medieval literature dealt repeatedly with violence:

Almost without fail [chivalric literature] give[s] prominence to acts of disruptive violence and problems of control. Complexity characterizes the point of view: even more than in histories [...] attitudes about violence come strongly mixed. Belief in the right kind of violence carried out vigorously by the right people is a cornerstone of this literature. Yet aggression and the disruptive potentiality of violence is a serious issue for these writers no less than for historians. (1999, 22)

Wolfram was one of the writers who strongly believed that violence could be justified so long as it was administered by the right people in a just cause. The Templars in *Parzival* typify the righteous knight fighting in the just cause. They “stake their lives against others’ and give no quarter. Such penance are they given for their sins” (Eschenbach 1980, 250).²⁵ Not only is combat permissible for them; it has been elevated to penance. Penance, in the traditional understanding of the word, implies an act done in remorse for sins. The violence of the Templars seems to fit this pattern: on the one hand they are risking their lives, and on the other hand, they do not benefit from their prowess because they are not permitted to spare their opponents. This prohibition against showing mercy seems cruel and may, as Green (1978) suggests, merely reflect the harsher reality of fighting in the crusades. At the same time, however, it eliminates two major motivations for conflict among knights: profit and honour. Because the Templars kill their opponents, they can neither collect a ransom, nor send captives to court to sing their praises. For Arthurian knights combat had degenerated into something of a sport, but for the Templars, conflict is not trivial. Having to take the lives of their opponents may cause them to think twice before engaging in a meaningless fight. Like all knights, they do have to fight, but their fighting is a serious and potentially unpleasant obligation. Thus, while Wolfram concedes the necessity of combat in certain cases, he also suggests that combat is often unnecessary, and that chivalry can not achieve true greatness through violence. Wolfram recognized that while in theory aggression could be legitimate, in reality the right of knights to resort to violence was frequently abused. It is not surprising then that Wolfram concerned himself with the problems of combat:

When Wolfram was working on *Parzival* the proper use of armed force was a subject of debate, change and difference of view, and this was a

punishment for rape, and adds the Church's support to these laws (Saunders 2001, 108).

²⁵ “si nement niemens sicherheit, / si wāgnt ir lebn gein jenes lebn: / daz ist für sünde in dā gegeben.” (Eschenbach 1980, 496, ll. 8-10)

matter of immediate concern to the actual life of the sword-bearing class to which Wolfram assigns himself as narrator. (Jackson, 1999, 160)

In creating a knight who tended towards perfection Wolfram could not avoid discussing the problem of violence. In his first two introductory books, Wolfram brings knightly violence, with its attendant problems, to the foreground. The proverb, “he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword,” holds true in *Parzival*. Evident, for example, within Parzival’s patriarchal lineage is a tradition of violence. Gahmuret reveals in his letter to Belacane that Parzival’s grandfather and great grandfather both died in battle. Later Wolfram tells us that Gahmuret also dies in battle. A similar pattern is apparent in the deaths of Gurnemanz’s three sons, which leads Gurnemanz to reflect that: “such is chivalry’s reward: as a horse’s tail the crupper, so *its* latter end bears grief” (Eschenbach 1980, 99).²⁶ This proverb seems patently true, and Herzeloyde’s fears that her son will not be able to escape the violent fate which has already claimed at least three successive generations are well founded. Indeed, it is literally a miracle that prevents both of Gahmuret’s sons from dying on the battlefield, like their father before them (Eschenbach 1980, 371). It is this pattern of violence which convinces Herzeloyde to remove her son from the influence of knighthood by “concealing from him knowledge of chivalry until he could think for himself” (Eschenbach 1980, 66).²⁷

Parzival’s royal lineage, however, cannot entirely be suppressed, and instinctively the boy crafts a bow and arrows, suggesting that there is no alternative way for the boy to display his patrimony outside of violence. The image of the boy hunting the birds would not have been a new one for Wolfram’s medieval audience, but the image which may have surprised them was Parzival’s anguish over killing the birds. The scene with Parzival tearing out his hair in grief is both comic and touching. On the one hand, it is amusing to watch the boy carefully create the weapons, and then track down the birds, only to be angry when he succeeds at what he has planned all along! On the other hand, we sense that Parzival does not fully understand that his actions might have repercussions. He is a child as yet unacquainted with death, and has not reached the age of maturity.

The bird hunting scene is unique in medieval literature. Very few of the other romances tell us anything about their protagonists as children, and of those few that do, none of them suggest that their protagonists were particularly concerned with the fate of animals. Wolfram’s romance, however, is different because he is, in essence, creating a *Bildungsroman*. In order for the development of his protagonist to occur, he needs his

²⁶ “sus lönt iedoch diu ritterschaft: / ir zagel ist jâmmenstricke haft.” (Eschenbach 1998, 180, ll. 25-26)

²⁷ “man barg in vor ritterschaft, / ê er kœme an sîner witze kraft.” (Eschenbach, 1998, 114, ll. 19-20)

audience to know something about Parzival's character. Parzival's grief at the death of the birds reveals to us his innate empathy and compassion; virtues not all that common in the knights of other romances. Parzival's love for the birds also reveals the spiritual nature of his character. If God sees the sparrow fall, then Parzival, the future Grail king, should show compassion and remorse for the birds he kills.

The death of the birds is, in a small way, Parzival's fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and, for the first time, he is aware that life is prone to death and that actions have consequences. The death of the birds signals Parzival's movement away from childhood innocence and the beginning of his initiation into chivalry. The second step in this initiation reveals to Parzival that just as he hunts animals, so also there is a higher order of existence, knighthood, which permits men to hunt men. While hunting Parzival has his first encounter with such men. This deadly serious matter is partially concealed behind a series of inane questions on Parzival's part, but the apparently light humour of this scene does not entirely hide the deadly reality behind what is going on. Two knights have kidnapped a maiden with the intent of raping her. Karnahkarnanz and his companions are in pursuit of the knights with the intention of fighting them and probably killing them. This initial encounter with knights introduces Parzival to chivalry, and teaches him that according to this code violence is justifiable. In the third stage of his initiation Parzival moves from learning of knights and their violence, to actually seeing the consequences of that violence. Parzival encounters his cousin, Sigune, holding her murdered lover. As Green shows, Parzival is provided with an important lesson on the implications of knighthood:

Subjectively this scene is important for Parzival, above all because now for the first time he sees the tangible results of knighthood: death for the knight and grief for those who knew him. (1978, 47)

Parzival's ignorance about combat and death is evident in his misconception that the dead knight is only wounded, and in thinking that the knight was injured by a javelin, although javelins were banned from knightly combat. The fourth and ultimate stage of Parzival's initiation marks the end of his innocence, and occurs when he slays Ither. The killing confirms his passage from childhood into manhood and his position within chivalric society. He is henceforth referred to as the Red Knight.

The final act marking Parzival's transformation from a boy into a knight is not honourable, and suggests the moral ambiguity of knighthood. The slaying of Ither is an unjustifiable act of petty anger that springs out of the sin of covetousness. Even according to the knightly code of conduct, the act is outright murder. The murder is reminiscent both

of the treachery that kills Gahmuret²⁸, and of the infamous murder of which Gawan stands accused. Parzival's error in slaying Ither is fourfold: he is slaying a kinsman, albeit unwittingly, he is certainly not a knight at the time, so he is guilty of killing someone some one of superior rank, he is killing someone who was not ready for combat, and worst of all in Wolfram's mind, Parzival contravenes the code of knighthood by throwing his javelin at Ither. Missile weapons were not permitted to knights, a fact young Iwanet makes clear when he tells Parzival, "I will not hand you any javelins: the Order of Chivalry forbids it" (Eschenbach 1980, 89).²⁹ The inappropriateness of Parzival's behaviour is re-emphasized when the now educated Parzival rebukes the burghers of Belrepiere for behaving in much the same manner to the defenseless knights that he unhorses in combat.

The act of slaying kinsman has serious ramifications for Parzival. In dressing himself in Ither's armour, Parzival unwittingly takes on the sign of Cain, and the armour marks a turning point in Parzival's life. When he left home he was clothed in the garb of a fool; symbolic both of his ignorance and his innocence. Having murdered a knight and thus violently claimed his patrimony in a manner similar to how Ither was claiming his patrimony from Arthur, Parzival is now clothed in the armour of an aggressor. Parzival has lost his innocence, if not his ignorance, and it is something he will not regain until the end of the story. As well as taking the armour, Parzival also takes on the title of the man he slew. This is appropriate because Parzival has violently seized possession of his own knighthood, and thus has effectively become the man he killed. The red armour functions not only to remind him of the man he murdered, but also of who he is. Green impresses on us the significance Wolfram apparently placed on this idea:

This self-evident connection between Parzival's red equipment and the knight whom he had to murder in order to obtain it makes it significant that he should be referred to by the phrase der rôte ritter (or by one of its variants) no fewer than 22 times in the whole work. For all practical purposes the knight Parzival is synonymous with the murder of Ither, and we are rarely allowed to ignore this disturbing fact. (1978, 46)

This disturbing fact apparently haunts Parzival, for according to Wolfram: "Later, on reaching years of discretion, Parzival wished he had not done it" (Eschenbach 1980, 91).³⁰ In telling the tale to Trevrizent Parzival admits the wickedness of the deed:

genam ich ie den rêroup,
sô was ich an den witzen toup.
ez ist iedoch von mir geschehn:
der selben sünde muoz ich jehn.
Ithêrn von Cucûmerlant

²⁸ Gahmuret is killed after an opponent softens his helmet by dropping a leather bag of goat's blood over it.

²⁹ "ich enreiche dir kein gabylôt: / diu ritterschaft dir daz verbôt." (Eschenbach 1998, 160, ll. 19-20)

³⁰ "sît dô er sich paz versan, / ungerne het erz dô getân." (Eschenbach 1998, 164, ll. 7-8).

den sluoc mîn sündebæriu hant:
ich leit in tôten ûffez gras,
unt nam swaz dâ zu nemen was. (Eschenbach 1998, 479, 5-12)

If I ever stripped a corpse it was because I was dull of understanding.
However, I did this thing I confess myself guilty of the crime. I slew
Ither of Cucumerlant with my sinful hand, I stretched him out dead on
the grass and took what was to take. (Eschenbach 1980, 242)

Parzival's remorse for the deed is his first step towards healing, but it is important that prior to becoming the Grail king, Parzival should finally break away from the murderous identity of the Red Knight. The connection between Parzival and Ither is finally broken when God sees fit to intervene and cause Ither's sword to break, thus preventing Parzival from being responsible for killing an even closer kinsman. God's intervention, however, seems less based on a disapproval of violence per se, than on disapproval of the Grail king wielding the sword of a murdered man.

Wolfram uses the murder of Ither to explore the ambiguous nature of chivalry. The tale of Ither begins before Parzival's arrival, when Ither rides into Arthur's court to claim his inheritance, and, as a symbol of his claim, seizes a cup of wine and accidentally spills the wine on the queen. Then he rides out and waits for someone to come and fight him. No one comes to challenge Ither, however, which prompts his sarcastic question:

ez sîn künge od fûrsten,
wes lânt se ir wirt erdûrsten?
Wan holent sim hie sîn goltvaz?
ir sneller prîs wirt anders laz. (Eschenbach 1998, 150, ll. 5-8)

Kings or princes, why do they let their host go thirsty, why do they not
fetch his golden cup for him? If they do not, their bounding fame will
lag behind. (Eschenbach 1980, 85)

Even after the message is relayed, only Parzival, an unarmed lad, comes to challenge the knight. The apathy of the knights of the Round Table is hardly what the reader would expect, and the reader has to wonder about the evident lack of respect the knights show for Arthur and Ginover. Perhaps the knights do not challenge Ither because they know he is right and Arthur is wrong, and they do not want to fight for the wrong cause. Certainly the scene raises the question of why Ither had to challenge Arthur in order to receive his patrimony. Ither's claim is disturbing, for he is claiming Britain, Arthur's homeland, as his own, which implies that Arthur, as King of Britain, may be a usurper. The accusation casts Arthur, who is supposedly a paragon of virtue and the guardian of courtly civilization, in a

very negative light. It is quite telling that Ginover, after Ither is conveniently dead, and through no fault of Arthur's, in her grief says:

ôwê unde heiâ hei,
Artûss werdekeit enzwei
sol brechen noch diz wunder,
der ob der tavelrunder
den hœhsten prîs solde tragn,
daz der vor Nantes lît erslagn.
sîns erbeteils er gerte,
dâ man in sterbens werte. (Eschenbach 1998, 163, ll. 3-10)

'Out and alas! This strange and dire event will shatter Arthur's noble fame! – That he who by rights should bear the palm before all at the Table Round should lie slain here in sight of Nantes! He did but acclaim his heritage and was accorded – death!' (Eschenbach 1980, 90)

Ginover's lament reveals several things – first, Arthur's fame is at stake, even though he did not encourage Parzival to go out and kill Ither; secondly, it is tragic that Ither should lie slain *in sight of Nantes*, in other words it would have been more convenient if he had been slain out of sight of Nantes; and thirdly, his claim to the inheritance was apparently legitimate.

It is also remarkably strange that the knights allow an unarmed boy to go, rather like David against Goliath, to face Ither. Certainly Arthur expresses concern about the safety of Parzival, but Kay, who in spite of his tendency for being sharp tongued usually reveals the thoughts of the court, expresses this less than ennobling opinion:

und lât in zuo zim ûf den plân.
so iemen bringen uns den kopf,
hie helt diu geisel, dort der topf:
lâtz kint in umbe trîben:
.....
er muoz noch dicke bâgen
und sôlhe schanze wâgen.
Ine sorge umb ir deweders lebn:
man sol hunde um ebers houbet gebn. (Eschenbach 1998, 153, ll. 14-17, 19-22)

Unleash him on Ither out there in the field. If anyone can bring back the goblet, here stands the whip, there the top. Let the boy flog him round [...]. He must face odds in many a tussle yet. I am concerned for the life of neither. To win a boar's head one must sacrifice the hounds. (Eschenbach 1980, 86)

Evidently Kay sees the boy as an opportunity to get rid of one of two problems. If the bothersome lad is killed, then Arthur does not have to honour his promise to knight him.

If, on the other hand, Parzival, through some stroke of good luck, kills Ither, then Arthur is rid of a major dilemma without having to risk or dishonour any of his knights.

The actual combat scene between Ither and Parzival is comic. A boy, on a nag, challenges a knight in full armour on his charger, and, in a fit of rage strikes one blow with a javelin and kills him. The image contrasts sharply with the descriptions in other romances of knightly combat. Here we do not see any repeated charges, any lances being broken, or any involved sword play – we just see a boy taking a lucky swing and killing a knight. This should raise serious doubts about the value of knights in combat, and indeed, perhaps Wolfram was thinking of the decisive role played by non-knightly combatants in medieval warfare. Certainly the reader has to ask what purpose knights, with all of their expensive armour, served if they were so easily killed. The absurdity of the situation is further heightened by Parzival's inability to get the armour off the corpse. Parzival may be destined to become one of the best knights of the Round table, but he isn't even a knight yet, let alone a good one. Jackson explains the humour of the situation and what it reveals about Parzival's understanding of knighthood:

The armour and weapons of the knight had become so complex by Wolfram's day that they could not be used effectively without training. The young Parzival's inability even to unlace the dead Ither's helm and knee guards marks with dark humour the cultural gap between Parzival's rustic upbringing and the world of chivalry. (1999, 164)

His complete ignorance of knights and combat is brought home when Iwanet comes out and has to show him how to put on the armour, how to draw his sword and use his shield.

The fact that Parzival, a non-knight, defeated Ither is shown to be tragic:

Ithêrn von Gaheviez
er jæmerlîche ligen liez.
der was doch tût sô minneclîch:
lebende was er sælden rîch.
wær ritterschaft sîn endes wer,
zer tjost durch schilt mit eime sper,
wer klagte dann die wunders nôt?
er starp von eime gabylôt. (Eschenbach 1998, 162, ll. 5-12)

He [Parzival] left Ither of Gaheviez lying in a pitiful state. Ither looked so handsome for all that he was dead. Alive he was Fortune's darling. Had he met his end in chivalrous combat with a lance-thrust through his shield who would then lament a tragedy?

HE DIED OF A JAVELIN.

(Eschenbach 1980, 90, editor's

emphasis)

The death of Ither in both a very serious matter and at the same time almost farcical. Ither's death, on the one hand, will follow Parzival throughout the story and will be repeatedly pointed out as a major sin. On the other hand, Ither's death reveals the façade of courtly society: Arthur is shown as a potential usurper, Ginover as a possible hypocrite, Sir Kay as extremely callous, the knights as cowards, and the whole idea of knighthood as something pretentious and of little protection against death.

Even under the best of circumstances killing was problematic. Green (1978) argues in his essay, "Homicide and Parzival" that Wolfram had difficulty reconciling knightly combat and killing with his Christian ethics, and as such rarely showed Arthurian knights killing people. Green points out that although Gahmuret and Gawan are frequently victorious in single combat, they always spare their opponents, and even Parzival is only guilty of killing Ither in single combat (1978, 27-28). These heroic knights do seem to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, and Gawan even goes so far as to say, when challenged by Kingrimursel, "I do not know why I must fight, nor do I much care for dueling" (Eschenbach 1980, 168).³¹ Gawan's hesitancy about combat, however, should not be misconstrued as a view commonly held by the majority of Arthur's knights. Just a little earlier we are told that Arthur, on the march in search of Parzival, had to give strict orders to prevent his men from engaging in combat, and we are told of Sir Segradors who, whenever he thought there was to be a fight, had to be shackled to keep him from joining in (Eschenbach 1980, 147, 149).

Ignoring this bloodlust, however, Green states that, "Wolfram's picture of Arthurian chivalry therefore involves a career of knighthood which miraculously avoids (at least, to go by what his narrative actually depicts) the sin of murder" (1978, 31). This argument, however, is weak at best. While it is true that the three main characters of the tale, Parzival, Gahmuret, and Gawan, do avoid unnecessary bloodshed for the most part, the possibility of murder always lurks behind their actions. What prevents these knights from killing other knights is quite frequently the intervention of God or fortune, and not their good ethics. Parzival, for example, nearly repeats the sin of killing Ither, a kinsman, by fighting Gawan, and later Feirfiz. Green, in any event, can only make the statement that "Arthurian chivalry [...] involves a career of knighthood which miraculously avoids[...] the sin of murder" by arguing that the knights mentioned in *Parzival*, who do kill people, are simply not Arthurian (1978, 31, 58). This division of knights into Arthurian knights and non-Arthurian knights, however, is an artificial one which does not bear up under close

³¹ "ine weiz war umbe ich strîten sol, / ouch entuot mir strîten niht sô wol." (Eschenbach 1998, 327, ll. 27-28)

scrutiny. It is much safer to say that there are knights who attempt to behave ethically and knights who inevitably behave unethically. In either case, all of the knights are still linked with violence and at least the possibility of murder. In addition, although Wolfram does not portray his heroes as killing their enemies in single combat, it would be hard to argue that they avoided killing anyone in collective combat.

Far more devastating than single combat was collective warfare, and it would have been impossible for Wolfram to provide a critique of knighthood without examining the various aspects of collective war. Collective warfare appears more frequently in *Parzival* than in any of Chrétien's romances, and according to W. H Jackson, "collective warfare also plays a larger part in *Parzival* than it does in the Arthurian romances of Hartman von Aue" (1999, 169). Not only does Wolfram present warfare more frequently than his contemporaries, he also describes it in grimly realistic terms. His understanding of the whole process of warfare is illustrated by his detailed descriptions of the battles, and the technology involved in siege warfare, and he carefully avoids romanticizing the combat or the combatants.³² In describing one army on the march, he mentions the accompanying prostitutes and criminals:

Gâwân fil li roy Lôt
 sach von gedrenge grôze nôt,
 mûl die harnasch muosen tragen,
 und manegen wol geladen wagen:
 den was gein herbergen gâch.
 ouch fuor der market hinden nâch
 mit wunderlîcher pârat:
 des enwas et dô kein ander râ.
 ouch was der frouwen dâ genuoc:
 etslîchiu'n zwelften gürtel truoc
 ze pfande nâch ir minne.
 ez wârniht kûneginne:
 die selben trippâniersen
 hiezen soldiersen.
 hie der junge, dort der alde,
 dâ fuor vil ribalde:
 ir loufen machte in müede lide.
 etslîcher zæm baz an der wide,
 denne er daz her dâ mêrte
 unt werdez volc unêrte. (Eschenbach 1998, 345, ll. 11-30)

Gawan fil li roy Lot also saw a terrible welter of mules carrying paraphernalia and a train of well-laden wagons hastening to their quarters. The sutlers followed after in indescribable confusion – how could it be otherwise? 'Ladies' were not wanting either: some were wearing their

³² The verisimilitude of Wolfram's warfare descriptions is born out in the detailed instructions given by Christine de Pizan regarding warfare in her manual *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry* (1999 see in particular 37-77 for field maneuvers and combat and 104-139 for siege warfare).

twelfth girdle as gage for their favours. No queens they, these drabs were what you call 'soldiers' sweethearts'. There, too, were a crowd of vagabonds both young and old, their limbs weary from trudging. Some would have better graced the gallows rather than swell the ranks of any army and dishonour worthy people. (Eschenbach 1980, 177)

Chrétien, describing the same scene, has it as a tournament instead of a siege, and never suggests that the knights are accompanied by this disreputable band. Perhaps this omission was due to Chrétien's ignorance about the realities of warfare, or perhaps he simply presented a sanitized image because he felt it was more in keeping with the noble tone of Arthurian romance. Wolfram, by contrast, certainly knew from personal experience the nature of armies, and he apparently had no qualms about juxtaposing Arthurian knights with mercenaries and prostitutes. In all three of the major battles described by Wolfram he remains uncompromisingly scrupulous in his detailed descriptions.

Wolfram's three battles, corresponding to each of his three main characters (Jackson, 1999, 196), are all handled slightly differently, but a brief examination of one, the battle of Belrepeire in which Parzival participates, will suffice to show the deadly impact of warfare during the Middle Ages. Parzival's first encounter with collective warfare comes shortly after his first encounter in single combat but, thanks primarily to Gurnemanz, who trained him in the etiquette of knightly behaviour, Parzival behaves considerably better than he did in his fight with Ither. The behaviour of the individual combatants, however, is not as of great concern to Wolfram as it was in the conflict between Ither and Parzival. Wolfram chooses not to focus on the guilt of any particular party, but rather on the consequences of warfare. Wolfram's description of the suffering is grimmer than anything we find in the other romances:

der zadel fuogte in hungers nôt.

.....

die wambe in nider sunken:
ir hüffe hôch und mager,
gerumphen als ein Ungers zager
was in diu hût zuo den riben:
der hunger het inz fleisch vertriben.

.....

Hin von den zinnen vielen
und gâhten zuo den kielen
daz hungere her durch den roup.
si möhten vliegen sô diu loup,
die magern und die sîhten,
von vleische die lîhten:

in was erschoben niht der balc. (Eschenbach 1998, 188, ll. 7, 12-16; 204, ll. 17-23)

Famine had reduced them to starvation [...]. Their bellies were sunken, their hips gaunt and lean and their skin lay shrivelled and shrunk over their ribs like Hungarian shagreen – famine had chased their flesh away [...]. The famished crowd poured at great speed from the fortifications down towards the ships to pillage them. They could have sped like leaves before the wind, these people so lean and shrunk and scant of flesh, they had so little stuffing in their hides. (Eschenbach 1980, 102, 109)

The war evidently is going so badly that people are dying of starvation and so many men have been lost in the conflict that even the merchants have armed themselves with axes and are going out to fight. Implicit in Wolfram's description of the suffering is a criticism of the abuse of knightly power that has caused the suffering: Clamide's desire for Condwiramurs. Clamide's own analysis of the situation shows a complete disregard for the suffering he has caused on both sides:

der sprach 'ich pin ze schaden geborn.
ich hân sô wirdic her verlorn,
daz muoter nie gebôt ir brust
dem der erkante hôher flust.
mich enriwet niht mîns heres tôt
dâ gegen: minne mangels nôt
lestet ûf mich sôlhen last,
mir ist freude gestîn, hôhmuot gast.' (Eschenbach 1998, 223, ll. 15-22)

'I was born unfortunate,' cried Clamide. 'I have lost so fine an army that no mother gave suck to any man who new a greater loss! But my loss of my army is nothing to this: my anguish for the love which I forego so weighs me down that joy and high spirits are now strangers to me.' (Eschenbach 1980, 118)

As I have shown in my first chapter, warfare in the Middle Ages belonged as much to the private domain of aristocrats as it did to the public domain of kings and nations.

Understandably then, Clamide bewails his loss as a private loss, but, at the same time Wolfram, through his sympathetic portrayal of the beleaguered town, has ensured that his audience is aware that more is at stake than Clamide's joy.

Not only does Wolfram reveal the unjustifiable use of violence on the part of the privileged class, he also suggests the brutalizing affects that the violence has on every aspect of society. Given, for example, the extreme suffering that the citizenry has undergone, it is not surprising that some of them go out and kill the defenseless knights who have been knocked off their horses by Parzival. The unchivalric murder of the knights by the commoners is most certainly an authentic depiction of the horrors of medieval

warfare, and yet it also recreates Parzival's murder of Ither, but this time, and symbolically permits Parzival to undo his own thoughtless act by preventing further killings.

Parzival's own role in the violence is less evident. Although it is not explicitly stated that Parzival killed anyone during the battle, it is insinuated by the very nature of the conflict. No blame, however, is attached to Parzival for the deaths he causes in this battle because the killings are justifiable. Wolfram does not, however, condone every example of collective warfare. He is critical, for example, of Gawan's decision not to inform Orgeluse of Arthur's approaching army: "Truly, my lord Gawan ought to have informed the Duchess that an ally of his was in her territory! Then there would have been no fighting" (Eschenbach 1980, 333).³³

Because of the dangers inherent in combat several medieval writers suggested that the duties of knighthood were on par with, or even superior to, the tasks required of the clergy. Combat was favourably compared with other religious activities, and, as Kaeuper points out, in chivalric literature "the Almighty is pictured as a fine judge as well as a general approver of prowess" (1999, 49). Wolfram, as we have already seen, was willing to make fighting an act of penance for his Templars, but at the same time he recognized that the value of violence was limited. The excessive value placed by knights on their skill in combat is twice expressed in *Parzival*, once by Parzival, and once by his brother, Feirfiz. Parzival expresses his mistakenly high opinion of knightly prowess in these terms:

Mac rîterschaft des lîbes prîs
unt doch der sêle pardîs
bejagen mit schilt und ouch mit sper,
sô was ie rîterschaft mîn ger.
ich streit ie swâ ich strîten vant,
sô daz mîn werlîchiu hant
sich nêhert dem prîse.
ist got an strîte wîse,
der sol mich dar benennen,
daz si mich dâ bekennen:
mîn hant dâ strîtes niht verbirt. (Eschenbach 1998, 476, ll. 1-11)

'If knightly deeds with shield and lance can win fame for one's earthly self, yet also Paradise for one's soul, then the chivalric life has been my one desire!' said Parzival. 'I fought wherever fighting was to be had, so that my warlike hand has glory within its grasp. If God is any judge of fighting He will appoint me so that the Company there know me as a knight who will never shun battle.' (Eschenbach 1980, 240-241)

Parzival evidently is of the opinion that he deserves the Grail simply because of his skill in combat. Repeatedly Parzival has mistakenly assumed that the relationship between God

³³ "och solte mîn hêr Gâwân / der herzogîn gekündet hân / daz ein sîn helfære / in ir lande wære: / sô wære

and knights is grounded on feudal obligation. This assumption has led Parzival to believe that he has fulfilled his religious duty simply by being a good knight. Feirfiz similarly misunderstands the relationship between religion and knightly prowess, saying when he is told he must be baptized, “If one gets Baptism by fighting, send me there at once [...]. I have always liked the music of splinter flying in jousts and swords ringing on helmets” (Eschenbach 1980, 404).³⁴ Of course it is humility and compassion, not combat, which eventually make Parzival worthy of the Grail; and it is baptism by water, and not by blood, that earns Feirfiz the right to marry Repanse and see the Grail. Both brothers have overestimated the importance of combat.

Wolfram, like Chrétien, raises serious questions about chivalry and the attendant themes of love, sex and conflict. The astounding narrative that Wolfram gives us is like nothing else in either Grail literature or Medieval literature. Sandwiched between the Grail myth as written by Chrétien, a clerk, and Malory, a knight adapting a tale influenced by Cistercian monks, *Parzival* is the only account of the Grail legend which is truly told from a knight’s perspective. The result is a serious tale which deals explicitly with the social and spiritual dilemmas of the thirteenth century. In Wolfram’s account the traditional values of chivalry are, as Parzival learns to his sorrow, inadequate to the task of achieving the Grail. Against the twin values of combat and love Wolfram has instead imposed two other values which he believes are necessary for living in harmony with society and God. “Unless he defect from the Office of the Shield I would remind him further of what he owes his helmet and the whole code of chivalry. Chivalry” he tells us “is endowed with two rich revenues: a true sense of shame, and noble loyalty” (Eschenbach 1980, 167).³⁵ These two attributes ultimately bring Parzival to the Grail.

Wolfram is, in essence, arguing for an ethical chivalry in which a proper balance is maintained between the demands of courtly society, the Church, and the rest of lay society. The excesses of chivalric combat and love need to be controlled so that instead of being destructive elements within society, they become constructive elements that protect and maintain social order. In this ethical chivalry, Wolfram does not demand his audience to choose, as Malory will later do, between the spiritual and secular. His work extends beyond a simple duality. He has shown the value of knighthood, of combat and of love. He has also shown knighthood, combat, and love misused, and how knighthood, combat, and

des strîtes niht geschehn.” (Eschenbach 1998, 669, ll. 25-29)

³⁴ “holt man den touf mit strîte, / dar schaffe mich bezîte / [...] ich hôrte ie gerne solhen dôn, / dâ von tjoste sprîzen sprungen / unt dâ swert ûf helmen klungen.” (Eschenbach 1998, 818, ll. 25-26, 28-30)

³⁵ “kan sîn lîp des niht verzagen, / ern welle dâ schildes ambet tragen, / sô man i’n dennoch mêre / bî des helmes êre / unt durch ritter ordenlîchez lebzn: / dem sint zwuo rîche urbor gegeben, / rehtiu scham und werdiu triwe.” (Eschenbach 1998, 325, ll. 23-29)

love have their limitations in the face of greater spiritual mysteries. Wolfram has not rejected chivalry. Instead he has shown how a knight made mistakes because of his adherence to traditional chivalry, but how he then went beyond that chivalric view to a new form of chivalry which transcended that of Arthur's court. The view that Wolfram presents us with is a uniquely balanced one – one that accepts the necessity of knights, but not uncritically, and one that sees the importance of spiritual development, but in the context of lay people leading their normal lives.

CHAPTER IV

Thomas Malory's Parting of the Ways:

The Roads to Sarra and Avalon

and than every knyght toke the way
that hym lyked beste. (Malory 1948, II:872, ll. 29-30)

The history of the Grail presented by Malory in *Le Morte Darthur* is substantially different from the tales created by Chrétien and Wolfram. Malory, who wrote over two hundred years after Chrétien and Wolfram, appears to have been unaware of *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival*, and his work, which traces its lineage through *Le Queste del Saint Graal*, is essentially independent from theirs.¹ Malory's account differs from the Grail stories of Chrétien and Wolfram not merely because he follows a different Grail tradition; he is separated from them historically, chronologically, linguistically and culturally. Although Chrétien and Wolfram wrote in different languages, they shared a similar cultural and historical *Weltanschauung*. Malory, writing more than two hundred years after them, lived in a distinctly different world. Whereas Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal* was written as a nascent knighthood was gaining power, Malory was writing as entrenched knighthood was beginning to lose some of its power and prestige. The feudalistic world view which was an essential element of Chrétien's and Wolfram's political world was by Malory's time giving away to nationalism. As feudalism became less tenable, military service increasingly became the domain of salaried professionals instead of knights who served from feudal obligation. Scottish, Swiss and English armies had successfully used infantry to defeat mounted attacks, thus proving that knights were no longer supreme on the battlefield.² Even knighthood, which had in the time of Chrétien and Wolfram been synonymous with the warrior class, was increasingly bestowed as an honorary title on non-combatants either to raise revenues for the crown, or as a reward for services rendered. Attitudes towards things such as love, tournaments and crusades were changing.³ Even the literary culture

¹ Richard Barber in "Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*" briefly discusses some of the parallels between Wolfram and Malory and adds the following very important observation. "Although this poem [*Parzival*] had no direct influence on or connection with Malory's work it offers a picture of chivalric achievement touched with humanity which Malory would have found entirely sympathetic" (1996, 28).

² The exact extent of the change in warfare and knighthood that occurred during the late Middle Ages has been the cause for a great deal of discussion among scholars. This discussion unfortunately falls out of the scope of this study, but interested readers should also see Richard Kaeuper's *War, Justice and Public Order: England and France in the Late Middle Ages*, 1988, Raymond Rudorff's *The Knights and Their World*, 1974 and Malcom Vale's *War and Chivalry: Warfare and Aristocratic Culture in England, France and Burgundy at the End of the Middle Ages*, 1981.

³ Margaret Reid's argument that, "by the time of Malory's *Morte Darthur*[...] the forms of chivalry were outworn" (1938, 246), is not entirely supportable, but there can be little doubt that the chivalric mindset was slowly giving way as new developments made it less and less tenable.

had changed so that by the time of *Le Morte Darthur* there was a much larger literate audience and a greater number of literate, non-aristocratic readers who could afford books. The prevalence of the Arthurian romance genre was waning, and Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* was one of the last to be written in the Middle Ages. Malory further distinguished himself from his predecessors by his choice of genre: he adapted his work from prose romances and created his work in prose, while Chrétien adapted his work from an unknown source and wrote a verse romance, which Wolfram then adapted for his own verse rendition of the Grail narrative. Malory's story also has to be fitted into the larger context of the Arthurian world, which he found in his French sources and recreated, whereas Chrétien's and Wolfram's Grail stories, aside from sharing characters from the Arthurian world, exist independently from their other Arthurian tales. Even the protagonist of the story changes in Malory's telling so that Perceval no longer has the place of preeminence and is overshadowed spiritually by Galahad, and in earthly deeds by Lancelot.

The fundamental difference between *Le Morte Darthur* on the one hand, and *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival* on the other, however, is that spiritual knighthood as it is formulated in this Grail story is consciously and expressly contrasted with secular Arthurian chivalry. Although Kaeuper has argued that chivalry in *Le Morte Darthur* is divided "not between earthly and heavenly, but between right and wrong chivalry in the world" (1999, 296), an examination of Malory's source material, *Le Queste del Saint Graal*, as well as his own repeated affirmation that the Grail quest is a spiritual quest, leads me to conclude that the tension between spiritual and secular values is indeed the crux around which the narrative revolves. Dhira Mahoney supports this view by stating, "[Malory] faithfully transmits the central dichotomy of the *Queste* between worldly and spiritual chivalry, whereby the traditional chivalric standards are reinterpreted in light of spiritual values" (2000, 380).⁴ The schism between the virtues of spiritual knighthood and secular knighthood is evidenced by both the similarities and differences between Galahad and Arthur. Malory consciously parallels these two representatives of chivalry. Both Galahad and Arthur are conceived by means of a deception. Arthur is presented to the court by Merlin, Galahad by a nameless hermit. Both men draw a sword from a stone, marking them as set aside for a special task. Arthur and Galahad both receive, under circumstances involving water, a second sword which has a remarkable scabbard. Both men found fellowships: the fellowship of the Round Table by Arthur and the fellowship of the Grail by Galahad. Arthur gathers around him men as ambitious and self-centred as himself; men like Gawain, who is not above murder to maintain honour, and Tristram, who

is willing to betray his king in adultery. It is these men, flawed and sinful, yet at the same time great in deeds of chivalry, who become the fellowship of the Round Table. Around Galahad, however, gather the very few spiritual knights, Sir Bors and Sir Perceval – men who value chastity and take serious their spiritual well being. It is these men, flawed and sinful, yet at the same time spiritually powerful, who become the Grail knights.

Having created these parallels, Malory also points out the differences between Arthur's secular chivalry and Galahad's spiritual ideal. Arthur's secular chivalry is best symbolized by Excalibur, the magical sword. The newer spiritual chivalry is symbolized by the Grail, a dish associated with the death of Christ. With the death of Arthur, Excalibur is lost and along with it, Arthurian chivalry. In the same way, with the death of Galahad the Grail is lost thus ending spiritual chivalry. Arthur is fatally wounded in battle with Mordred, the product of his own uncontrolled sexuality. The virginal Galahad dies in prayer. Arthur is taken to Avalon, to be healed of his wounds, while the soul of Galahad ascends to heaven. Thus Malory establishes his two forms of chivalry. It would be wrong to argue that Malory favours one over the other. Malory accepts that Galahad is the spiritually superior character, and refers to him as the greatest knight in the world, and yet Malory's sympathies seem to lie entirely with Lancelot, the best of earthly knights. It is perhaps unfair to expect Malory to judge between these two representations of knighthood and decide which is to be preferred. Malory may not like the implications of the Grail story as depicted in *Le Queste del Saint Graal*, and certainly he makes some effort to ameliorate the worst criticisms of Launcelot, the archetypal Arthurian knight, but even with his concern regarding the Grail story, Malory recognizes that the story, by now a indisputable element of Arthurian folklore, must be dealt with. He retells the story carefully, trying as often as possible to remove elements critical of chivalry and to abbreviate the allegorical and more didactic episodes. Even with his reservations, however, there can be little doubt that Malory reveres the Grail tradition. As a knight Malory understands Arthur's chivalry better, and has a greater appreciation for its ethos, but, as a Christian, he recognizes that Galahad's spiritual knighthood is actually to be preferred. Certainly Malory pays more attention to Arthur and his fellowship than to Galahad and the other Grail knights, but this comes as no surprise: an imperfect group of men striving to make a better world makes a better story than a nearly perfect group of men striving to abandon this world.

The dichotomy Malory borrows from *Le Queste del Saint Graal* partially explains why Chrétien and Wolfram created their own independent stories of the Grail quest while

⁴ On Malory's conception of the Grail narrative and his fidelity to his sources, see Mahoney's "The Truest

Malory placed his firmly within the context of the greater Arthurian tale. Neither Chrétien nor Wolfram were suggesting that their heroes were spiritually perfect and in their narratives Perceval and Parzival are not separated from the earthly world of chivalry in the same way that Galahad is. Perceval and Parzival make mistakes, so it is not necessary to attach to them other sinful characters to show the mixed nature of humanity. In and of themselves they contain all that belongs to humanity, which can not be said for the saintly Galahad. It thus becomes necessary to include others in the story to show all the different varieties of knighthood, and as Jeffrey Helterman points out, Malory “focuses on five knights to explain the options open to man” (1994, 265). Malory is more successful than the two earlier writers at showing a multitude of approaches towards knighthood, because, as Kennedy suggests, Malory addresses the problem “that not every man will have exactly the same notion of what it means to be a ‘good’ or ‘noble’ knight” (1985, 55). In his Grail quest Malory shows the pinnacle of spiritual perfection, Galahad and the great reprobate Gawain, and between those two poles, the three knights Bors, Perceval and Lancelot. Because *Le Morte Darthur* permits the reader to follow and sympathize with each of these knights, it exemplifies the type of chivalric literature where the “hard questions keep coming to the to surface, sometimes allowing for multiple points of view, always emphasizing the difficulty of finding solutions to problems associated with knighthood in the real world” (Kaeuper, 1999, 253).

One might well wonder what value is to be found in comparing two such disparate accounts as that found in Malory, and the accounts provided by Chrétien and Wolfram. But all is not changed – Arthur’s realm, symbolic of Christendom, remains the departure point for all of the stories. Achieving the Grail, albeit a different Grail in each story, remains the goal of all of the tales and, for all of its changes, the Grail remains a symbol of the highest possible spirituality. More importantly, as far as this study is concerned, the main characters are all knights. Knighthood had, of course, changed in the three hundred years between when Chrétien wrote his verse romances and when Malory completed his prose cycle. Knighthood had evolved from referring simply to wealthy, mounted warriors with certain limited duties and privileges to referring to a prestigious upper class, responsible not only for warfare, but also for the guidance of society and for the development of a “cultured” ethos. Yet even as knighthood and culture changed, the primary concerns of knighthood remained constant: conflict, love and sex.

In Malory’s Grail narrative love and lechery become dominant themes, and the attitude Malory presents towards sexuality in this segment of his Arthurian cycle differs

substantially from his attitude towards sexuality in his other Arthurian tales, and from the attitude presented by his predecessors, Chrétien and Wolfram. Malory's sudden puritanical stance on sexual purity seems hypocritical given the uncondemned sexual laxity of his characters in other tales and his own possible criminal record as a repeat rapist.⁵ His sudden reversal can only be explained by referring back to his source: *Le Queste del Saint Graal*. Malory's emphasis on sexual purity is particularly odd when contrasted with traditional chivalric values. These are described by Dean in the following manner:

In the chivalric world, prowess properly controlled and directed to society's benefit is the highest virtue; in the pursuit of the Grail, chastity is the one absolute requirement. While prowess and chastity are not opposites, they are not naturally companions, either. Each is a virtue but in entirely unrelated ways. The code that sees one as its highest virtue has nothing to do with the way of life that celebrates the other. (1987, 96)

Malory in the rest of his Arthurian tales shows a strong preference for the virtue of prowess, and the most cursory reading of *Le Queste del Saint Graal* will reveal that the substitution of chastity for prowess is the source of the Grail story's moral overtones. The earlier author appears to have been one of those few chivalric reformers who, according to Kaeuper, "harboured futile hopes of substituting another quality" in place of prowess (1999, 159).

The irony of using sexual purity as the standard for measuring the worthiness of knights is not lost in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Galahad, the paragon of sexual purity, is conceived in an adulterous liaison between Lancelot and Elaine, who has seduced Lancelot in the guise of Guinevere. The scene of the seduction evidences the hypocrisy so prevalent in Arthurian chivalry, for as Helterman points out, we are treated to the spectacle of "a knight – who has just deflowered a maiden when in fact he intended to commit adultery against the best man in Christendom – indicting the deflowered virgin with whom he thought he was betraying his best friend" (1994, 263). In the world of courtly love, as described in ironic tones by Andreas Capellanus, Lancelot's immoral behaviour would have only received slight condemnation because Lancelot permitted a physical consummation of what ideally should have been a chaste love. Indeed, within the broader context of his Arthurian tales, Malory is careful not to criticize his knights for their sexual laxity. Malory's tales are replete with sexual encounters which the Church condemned – Uther tricking Igrayne into sleeping with him, Arthur sleeping with his sister, Pellynor's

⁵ Comments made regarding Malory's life are based on the assumption that Malory was indeed Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel in Warwickshire. In his book *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* P. J. C. Field has produced enough credible evidence to make any other candidate for the position of author of *Le Morte Darthur* seem highly unlikely.

rape of the milk maiden, Merlin's infatuation with Nyneve – and while Malory sometimes shows the negative consequences of these acts he rarely suggests that the acts are sinful or that the perpetrators are immoral. Malory's attitude in the Grail quest changes, however, and comes remarkably close to the attitude expressed by a fictitious nobleman in Capellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love*:

It seems to be generally agreed that to serve God is a very great and an extraordinary good thing, but those who desire to serve Him perfectly ought to devote themselves wholly to His service, and according to the opinion of Paul they should engage in no worldly business. Therefore if you choose to serve God alone, you must give up all worldly things and contemplate only the mysteries of the Heavenly country, for God has not wished that anybody should keep his right foot on earth and his left foot in heaven, since no one can properly devote himself to the service of two masters. (Capellanus 1959, 111)⁶

This is the extremely rigorous morality advocated by Galahad and his cohorts in the Grail quest: they will succeed because they have chosen to serve God alone, particularly through their sexual purity.

Galahad's loyal devotion as Christ's servant and lover is never questioned in the narrative, but both Bors and Perceval undergo sexual temptations as a test of their spiritual loyalty to their Heavenly master. Perceval's loyalty is particularly tempted in a manner that suggests the feudal obligations of a knight to his overlord. In a dream the devil appears to him as a woman and accuses Perceval of breaking loyalty with 'her':

Truly ye were never but my servaunte syn ye resseyved the omayge of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. Therefore I you ensure, in what place that I may fynde you withoute kepyng, I shall take you as he that somtyme was my man. (Malory 1948, II:914, ll. 12-15)

Shortly thereafter Perceval is seduced by a lady who requires that he promise to "be my trew servaunte" before she will grant him her love (Malory 1948, II:918, ll. 19-20). Perceval makes the promise and is about to climb into bed with her when he catches sight of the cross in the pommel of his sword. Instinctively Perceval crosses himself, and immediately the demon (for such the woman was) disappears in smoke. The penitent Perceval shows his remorse by stating, "Sitthyn my fleyssh woll be my mayster I shall punyssh hit" and taking his sword, with its cross-shape, stabs himself in the thigh (Malory 1948, II:919, ll. 12-15). The gesture physically reinforces the division between worldly and

⁶ It should be noted that the fictitious nobleman is using this extremely rigorous argument to convince a lady that she does not wish to be entirely in God's service. The nobleman also later suggests that God is not as opposed to earthly love as has been argued, and that love affairs are acceptable to God. Andreas argues against this view in his final book, but it is impossible to tell from the material provided what Andreas actually believes.

spiritual chivalry and reveals the sharp difference between the attitude expressed in Malory's Grail story towards sexuality, and the attitudes expressed *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival*. In the earlier two accounts Perceval is supposed to heal the Fisher King of a wound between the thighs, but the story has reversed itself, so that instead of restoring masculinity, the Grail knights are rejecting their masculinity, and sacrificing it, like monks and hermits, to God.

Like Perceval, Bors' loyalty to God is tested through sexual temptation. The temptation that faces Bors, however, has an added ethical dilemma: the jilted lady threatens to commit suicide with twelve of her gentlewomen, and a false priest tells Bors that the lady's relatives will kill Launcelot in revenge and adds that "Than ys hit in thy defaughte if sir Launcelot, thy cousyn, dye" (Malory 1948, II:964, ll.12-13). Bors is loaded with responsibility for the deaths of fourteen people including one of his own kinsmen. One of the gentlewoman, calling down to Bors from the battlement which they intend to leap from, says, "And if ye suffir us thus to dye for so litill a thyngge all ladys and jantillwomen woll sey you dishonoure" (Malory 1948, II:965, ll. 33-34). Within the context of Arthur's court the woman's statement makes good sense: sex, far from being denounced as a sin, is viewed as an essential element of knighthood, and any knight not already sworn to the service of another lady can hardly turn down a sexual offer without being shamed. The stigma attached to not taking a lover is evident in Malory's tale of Gawain, Ywain, and Marhalt, where twelve ladies spit on Marhaus's shield and throw mud on it, and also in his tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake, where a lady says to Launcelot:

But one thyng, sir knyght methynkes ye lak, ye that ar a knyght wyveles, that ye woll nat love som mayden other jantylwoman[...] But hit is noyesed that ye love quene Gwenyvere, and that she hath ordeyned by enchauntemente that ye shall never love none other but hir. (Malory 1948, I:270, ll. 18-24)⁷

Within this context, the gentlewoman's threat that Sir Bors will be shamed as a knight is legitimate, not merely because he is permitting deaths which he could prevent, but also because by simply rejecting a love suit he is rejecting the role of knightly lover. Neither can Bors argue, as could Perceval or Galahad, that he wishes to maintain his virginity, for he has already lost it. In addition Bors is in jeopardy of forswearing himself because his oath as a knight of the Round Table requires him to defend ladies and gentlewomen. Bors, however, has rightly assessed that in the new spiritual chivalry chastity is the foremost

⁷ It was not uncommon within courtly literature for the beloved to be held culpable for causing the death of the beloved. Christine de Pisan's *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*, for example, contains a scene reminiscent of Sir Bors' dilemma where the beloved is informed of the imminent death of her lover: "Then

virtue, and “he was nat uncounceyled in hymselff that levir he had they all loste their soules than he hys soule” (Malory 1948, II:966, ll. 3-5). Bors’ internal debate reveals a surprising development in the morality of *Le Morte Darthur*: for the first time one of Malory’s characters suggests that illicit sex is a damnable sin. If this is true, then which of the great Arthurian figures can hope for salvation? Yet Sir Bors’ very success in the Grail quest proves that the Grail and salvation are obtainable for all of Arthur’s knights, even Gawain. Sir Bors, after all, is not entirely pure, unlike Galahad and Perceval. In the vision of the bulls, Bors is the white bull with the black spot; the Grail knight who has sinned through sex. What differentiates Bors from Gawain is his honest acknowledgment of his failings; what differentiates him from Launcelot, who shares his good intent, is his stability. Like Launcelot, Bors will eventually return to Arthur’s court, but he will not return to his old sin.

Sexual purity is repeatedly emphasized as the primary criterion for success in the Grail quest. The contrast between the sexual mores of Arthur’s court and the quest is evidenced by the old knight in religious clothing who forbids the knights embarking on the Grail quest from taking their ladies with them because, “hit ys nat to do in so hyghe a servyse as they laboure in.” The knight adds, “For I warne you playne, he that ys nat clene of hys synnes he shall nat se the mysteryes of our Lorde Jesu Cryste” (Malory 1948, II:869, ll. 2-4). Implicit in the knight’s warning is a condemnation of worldly love: a knight who would take his lover would not be ‘clene’ and thus would not be worthy of the high spiritual mysteries embodied in the Grail. The knight’s warning, however, is more than a mere admonition against the dangers of sexual licentiousness. The prohibition of women in the quest is also a reinforcement of a hostility towards women that pervades Malory’s Arthurian tales, and is not found in the Grail story as told by Chrétien and Wolfram. More often than not Malory portrays the female characters in his tales as, like Eve, being the cause of evil and suffering, and within the Grail story, women, when they do appear are, with the exception of Perceval’s sister, portrayed as malign forces bent on thwarting the spiritual progression of the knights. Given the characterization of woman as Eve, it is appropriate that Galahad and his companions, as the new Adam, in imitation of Christ, separate themselves from women. Those knights who remain chaste are also following the precepts established by St. Bernard regarding spiritual knighthood and the example of the great spiritual orders like the Knights Templars and the Knights Hospitallers.⁸ Like these

he counseled her that, for God’s sake, she should not suffer one so young to be placed in peril of death by reason of too great love of her, and that she would be to blame if she were the cause of my death” (1966, 59).
⁸ The latter group may particularly have played a role in Malory’s formulation of the new chivalry, for, if P. J. C. Field (1999) is correct in his identification of Malory, Sir Robert Malory, the prior of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England, would have been Malory’s uncle.

religious orders, Malory's successful Grail knights seem to have merged the clerical and knightly classes, matching spiritual prowess (as established through sexual purity as well as through repeatedly overcoming temptations by the devil) with physical prowess.

In the Grail quest, virginity and chastity become equated with sinless living as evidenced by the tournament between the knights in black and the knights in white. A recluse explains the symbolism to Launcelot:

Of thes the erthely knyghtes were they which were clothed all in blake,
and the coveryng betokenyth the synnes whereof they be nat confessed.
And they with the coveryng of whyght betokenyth virginité, and they
that hath chosyn chastité. And thus was the queste begonne in them.
(Malory 1948, II:933, ll. 25-30)

It is, as the recluse has explained, with sexual purity that the Grail quest actually begins, and it is the sexual licentiousness of Arthur's knights that mark them out as sinners doomed to fail.

Indeed, the two greatest 'earthly' knights of Arthurian chivalry, Tristram and Launcelot, fail to achieve the quest of the Grail precisely because of the sin of loving out of measure. Tristram wisely does not even attempt the Grail quest, but instead retreats to his castle to spend his days with Isolde. Launcelot comes close to achieving the Grail, but in the end is only temporarily able to conquer his passion for Guinevere. During the Grail quest Launcelot is finally able to acknowledge to a priest the passion he has harboured for Guinevere for fourteen years. Unlike Gawain, who refuses to accept culpability for his failure in the Grail quest, and has to be repeatedly told that he is a sinner, Launcelot knows from the very beginning that he is a sinner, and he knows without being told or prompted that his sin is the sin of loving the "quene unmesurably and oute of mesure longe" (Malory 1948, II:897, l. 16). Malory has, however, permitted some ambiguity regarding the nature of the sin – has Launcelot sinned simply by loving the queen, or because he loves the queen 'unmesurably' and 'oute of mesure longe'? Mahoney has convincingly argued that the actual sin that stands between is "idolatry rather than adultery," and goes on to state, "It is not the extra-marital relationship but the abandonment to the flesh, the enslavement by the world, that is the sin by Cistercian standards" (2000, 388). This view is supported by Launcelot's admission that his pride and his desire to engage in the world, whether rightly or wrongly, are bound up with his love for the queen (Malory 1948, II:897, ll. 15-22). The real barrier, however, between Launcelot and the Grail, is not his sins, which he may confess, as do Bors and Perceval, but rather his spiritual instability. "Stableness" is a term frequently used in the Grail quest, and according to Mahoney "it

means perseverance in the pursuit of holiness, and connotes withdrawal from the world” (2000, 390). Launcelot, for all of his good intentions during the Grail quest, does not have the moral fortitude to resist the queen, or, more importantly, the call to worldly glory. At the very commencement of the quest Launcelot tells the grieving Guinevere, “A, madam, I pray you be nat displeased, for *I shall com agayne as sone I may with my worship*” (Malory 1948, II:872, ll. 12-13. Emphasis mine). Launcelot’s promise to come again as soon as he honourably can shows a lack of determination on his part. The reader senses that Launcelot now wishes that he had not undertaken his vow so quickly and that it is only his overwhelming fear of dishonour which keeps him on the quest. Once he has embarked, however, and distanced himself from the influence of Guinevere and the praise and expectations of Arthur’s court, he makes true spiritual progress and seems to desire change. The various hermits and recluses he meets, however, all recognize that while his intentions are good, he will revert to his former behaviour upon returning to the court. Galahad also recognizes this weakness in his father, which prompts him to send back an admonition with Sir Bors: “as sone as ye se hym bydde hym remembir of this worlde unstable” (Malory 1948, II:1035, 11-12).

As in *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival*, *Le Morte Darthur* links sex and violence. The connection is repeatedly revealed within the narrative. The maiden rescued by Bors from rape, reveals the connection in her statement, “Sir knyght[...] ye have bettir spedde than ye wente, for and I had loste my maydynhode fyve hondred men sholde have dyed therefore” (Malory 1948, II:962, ll. 6-8). Presumably the cause of all of this bloodshed on behalf of the maiden would have been the ensuing war of revenge. In this scenario, the major concern seems to be similar to that found by Gravdal in early medieval laws on rape in that it emphasizes “one overriding concern: that of maintaining peace among men” (1991, 8). The maiden’s grateful thanks places a far greater emphasis on Bors’ role as a peace maker and preventer of bloodshed, than on his role in saving her from ravishment. The maiden’s focus on the well-being of the men instead of on herself merely reiterates and reinforces the emphasis placed on masculinity through the Grail story, where sexual purity is emphasized not in the women, who, with the exception of Perceval’s sister, cannot participate in the Grail quest, but rather on the men, who are portrayed as victims of female seduction. The implications of falling victim to sexual temptation are, as the knight who abducted the maiden painfully learned, both moral and physical. Andreas Capellanus argues that:

Love, moreover, regularly leads men to deadly, inescapable warfare and does away with treaties of perpetual peace. Often too it overthrows great cities and mighty fortresses and the safest of castles and changes

the good fortune of wealth into the evil fortune of poverty [...] and it drives many to commit crimes, which they must atone for, but for which neither they nor their relatives are by any means guilty. (1956, 196)

The logic of Capellanus's argument seems inescapable in the Arthurian world where so much fighting is caused either by love or, as is more often the case, lust. To a certain extent Malory seems to have taken into consideration Capellanus's modifying statement: love "drives many to commit crimes, which they must atone for, but for which neither they nor their relatives are by any means guilty" (1956, 196). In *Le Morte Darthur* sexual gratification often has to be recompensed in violence, and yet while the violence may be deplorable, Malory holds those who act violently under the influences of "love" as being guiltless. Launcelot, for example, is condemned for loving the queen, and not for the violence that this illicit love has engendered. Lancelot admits that there is a correlative link between his sexual desire for Guinevere and his violence saying,

And all my grete dedis of armys that I have done for the moste party was for the quenys sake, and for hir sake wolde I do batalye were hit ryght other wronge. And never dud I batayle all only for Goddis sake.
(Malory 1948, II:897, ll. 17-20)

Because Guinevere is the motivating force behind the violence, Launcelot is freed somewhat from having to take responsibility for his actions. The onus for the bloodshed is placed on the queen, and indeed, more than in *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival*, women are held responsible for violence.

The role of combat in both traditional chivalry and in the new spiritual chivalry is never questioned. The criticisms that are raised focus entirely on the motivating factors involved: combat to increase chivalry or for the love of a woman is condemned because it is rooted in the ego of the knight; combat to enact justice or for the glory of God is permissible because the knight, although he is the agent of the deed, is not directly the recipient of the benefits. Both the spiritual knights and the earthly knights do participate in combat, as is made clear by the tournament that Launcelot attends between the black knights and the white knights, but their motivations are different. Launcelot's own motivation for joining with the black knights is "to helpe there the wayker party in incresyng of his shevalry"(Malory, 931, ll. 24-25). No thought is given by this representative of Arthurian chivalry to determining which side has the moral high ground, and, as a result, Launcelot suffers an embarrassing defeat. Launcelot's failure even to consider that one side might be morally superior is understandable: tournaments, after all, unlike battles, are games which usually do not imply any particular ethic, and in all of the former tournaments attended by Launcelot, the participants on both sides were spiritually

equal, thus making the side that Launcelot fought on insignificant except as it enhanced his own glory. Tournaments in the past had been morally ambiguous so it is not surprising that Launcelot, who had won so many of them, is confused: “For never or now was I never at turnemente nor at justes but I had the beste. And now I am shamed, and am sure that I am more synfuller than ever I was” (Malory 1948, II:932, ll. 15-18). The connection Launcelot draws between his defeat and his sinful nature is a logical one by medieval standards: in combat God sides with the righteous. Launcelot’s sin, according to a recluse he meets, is the sin of wrong motivation:

Than thou behelde the synners and the good men. And whan thou saw the synners overcom thou enclined to that party for bobbaunce and pryde of the world and all that muste be leffte in that queste, for in thys queste thou shalt have many felowis and thy bettirs, for thou arte so feble of evyll truste and good beleve [...]. But anone thou turned to the synners and that caused thy mysseaventure, that thou sholde know God from vayneglory of the worlde; hit ys nat worth a peare. And for grete pryde thou madist grete sorow that thou haddist nat overcom all the whyght knyghtes. Therefore God was wrothe with you, for in thys queste God lovith no such dedis [...]. Now have I warned the of thy vayneglory and of thy pryde, that thou haste many tyme arred ayenste thy Maker. (Malory 1948, II:933 ll. 30-32; 934, ll. 1-20)

“Vayneglory of the worlde” has been substituted for God in Launcelot’s life, and in his pursuit of glory and in his pride, Launcelot has sinned against God. God’s ire against Launcelot is not, however, roused by his engagement in the tournament, or even entirely by his pride. Rather, God is angry because during this particular quest, which is the highest quest possible, deeds done with a selfish motivation are unacceptable.

The tournament itself, of course, is no sin, and Malory’s frequent use of them in his narrative reflects the fact that both the Church and the monarchy had not only accepted tournaments but embraced them. As Larry Benson has pointed out, in the thirteenth century, when *Le Queste del Saint Graal*, Malory’s source, and *Parzival* were being written:

The Church itself remained opposed to chivalric activities such as tournaments, and it had little sympathy with any form of knighthood that was not clearly in its own service. By the fifteenth century, chivalry had become respectable in the eyes of both Church and state, and the chivalric code of Arthur’s knights had become the ideal of an important segment of society, that to which Malory and his noble readers belonged. (1976, 208)

That tournaments had been accepted both by the Church and society in the fifteenth century is evidenced by Katharina Tucher, a fifteenth century mystic who described Christ holding

a tournament (Rose-Lefmann 1999, 152).⁹ Along a similar line, Launcelot's participation in the tournament, far from being sinful, in fact becomes symbolic of the struggle between good and evil. Even Galahad, the figure of Christ, participates in a tournament. While both *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parzival* included tournaments, neither Chrétien nor Wolfram were so bold as to suggest that tournaments represented the conflict between good or evil, nor were they so bold as to have a knight directly equated with Christ, as Galahad is, participate in the tournaments. Chrétien and Wolfram included tournaments in spite of the Church's views, while Malory included and praised tournaments both because he knew that the Church had accepted them and because of their resurgent popularity in his own country. As Richard Barber points out Edward IV, whose reign quite probably corresponds with Malory's writing of the Grail story, loved the sport:

Between 1462 and 1467 tournaments were very much on the court agenda. Edward regarded them as the ultimate knightly pastime[...]. the reappearance of tournaments as a regular court activity in the mid-1460s corresponds very well with Malory's attitude towards tournaments when he came to select that material from which he created *Le Morte Darthur*. (1993, 143, 146)

With the good will of the Church and the support of the monarchy, there was no reason for Malory to condemn this immensely popular pastime even within the setting of the Grail quest so long as the participants were shown to have the appropriate spiritual attitude.¹⁰

Although Grail knights could participate in tournaments without violating their spiritual quest, tournaments properly belonged to the court of Arthur. Several factors made the tournament more appropriate as an expression of Arthurian chivalry. Simple logistics required that a king or wealthy lord be present to fund the tournament, while an entire court of servants, squires, knights, and ladies would be required to organize and facilitate a tournament. Within the context of Arthurian civilization such a logistical feat was both possible and desirable because it revealed the wealth, magnanimity, and power of the hosting ruler and realm. The Grail quest took place primarily within the vast stretches of uncharted forest untouched by Arthur's civilizing forces. The locus of power in Arthur's

⁹ "Wol auf, der her let dich zu eim stech hof in ewig Gerusalem. Der ist aus gerust in ewig leben zu eim stech hof[...]. Ez wirt ein stech hof und tantzen und herlichkait got zu loben, dez su nie gesehen hast." "Come, the Lord invites you to a tournament in the eternal Jerusalem, which is outfitted in the eternal life for a tournament[...]. There will be a tournament and dancing and splendor to praise God, Such as you have never seen." (Rose-Lefmann 1999, 152-153)

¹⁰ *Le Queste del Saint Graal* includes, of course, the same references to tournaments as the Grail account in *Le Morte Darthur*. Written in the thirteenth century when the Church was adamantly opposed to tournaments, it seems odd that the rather monastic author of *Le Queste del Saint Graal* would have included tournaments, or permitted Galahad to participate in them. I have not come across any adequate explanations, but perhaps two explanations may suffice: the author was writing for a knightly audience who would have expected tournaments as part of the normal fare in romances, and the author may well have felt that the tournaments were allegorized sufficiently as to warrant their inclusion.

court, the Round Table, required the collective effort of its constituents to maintain it; the locus of power in the Grail quest, the Grail, required each knight individually to go out seeking it. Such an arrangement all but precluded chivalric sports. At the same time, a tournament without a crowd of female admirers and the chance to accrue glory and renown lacked purpose. Having already been instructed by the hermit Nacien to leave their ladies behind, Arthur's knights had much less reason for participating in tournaments.

With the beginning of the Grail quest, Arthurian civilization faced a serious threat, both because the quest took away Arthur's best men, and because the very virtues of the quest seemed to run counter to the ideals of Arthur's court. Arthur, faced with the dissolution of his fellowship, decides that the appropriate ending is in a show of combat. The Grail quest, he knows, has supplanted the Round Table as the measure of all things, so, in memory of what was, he orders a final joust.

‘Now,’ seyde the kynge, ‘I am sure at this quest of the Sankegreall shall all ye of the Rownde Table departe, and nevyr shall I se you agayne hole togydirs, therefore ones shall I se you togydir in the medow, all hole togydirs! Therefore I wol se you all hole togydir in the medow of Camelot, to juste and to turney, that aftir your dethe men may speke of hit that such good knyghtes were here, such a day, hole togydirs.’
(Malory 1948, II:864, ll. 5-12)

Given one final opportunity, as Arthur sees it, to make a lasting statement about his realm and the fellowship of the Round Table, he decides that combat will be the finest way to ensure that the glory of his knights is not forgotten. This final tournament expresses the gap between Arthur's chivalry and spiritual chivalry. Arthur is concerned that his knights, as a collective group “hole togydirs,” leave an impression so that “aftir your dethe men may speke of hit”; the new spiritual chivalry is for the most part an individual experience, and the importance is placed not on being remembered by men, but in being remembered by God. In this the purpose of knighthood has changed from bringing glory to the knight to bringing glory to God. Yet, while Malory is aware of this change in knighthood, he acknowledges both traditional Arthurian chivalry and the new spiritual chivalry by stating that in the tournament only Perceval and Launcelot were not defeated. Perceval's success was based on the fact that he, like Galahad, was a virgin and destined to achieve the Grail. Launcelot, on the other hand, was spared defeat presumably because he was the still the best of ‘erthly’ knights, and also because, in Malory's narrative, although Launcelot is not the “hero” of the Grail quest, he is still its primary protagonist.

Combat was as acceptable in the new spiritual chivalry as it was in the traditional Arthurian chivalry. The very number of weapons divinely provided for Galahad, two

swords and a shield, indicate that God is not an opponent of prowess. The various weapons are not merely tools: they are also symbols of the new knighthood.¹¹ The sword in the stone signifies both the excellence of Galahad as the new “BESTE KNYGHT OF THE WORLDE”, but also the effective end of Arthur’s power as an earthly king and Launcelot’s position as the best knight on earth. The passing of power from the old order of things to the new order is represented by Launcelot’s and Gawain’s attitudes towards the sword. Launcelot will not even attempt to draw it, for he knows he is not worthy, while Gawain, in spite of Launcelot’s warning that harm will come to him if he makes the attempt, rashly tries to pull forth the sword. The shield, which is the next armament granted to Galahad, in particular signifies the nature of the new quest. White with a red cross on it, the shield is the sign of a crusader. Such an emblem is appropriate because the quest for the Grail is essentially a crusade, both in that the knights undertake to find this relic of Christ’s passion and in the process wage war against demonic forces and evil knights, and also in that the quest takes the knights to Sarras in the Middle East.¹² The second sword granted to Galahad near the end of his quest reiterates the change of power between Arthur/Launcelot and Galahad. The sword originally belonged to David, but was refurbished and set aside for the Grail knight by Solomon. The imagery reminds the reader of the story of David and Solomon, and how David, because of his continual fighting, was not permitted to build the temple, and instead that task was given by God to his son Solomon. Similarly, Arthur and Launcelot are, because of their sins, not permitted to achieve the Grail quest, and the task is instead handed over to Launcelot’s son, Galahad. The granting of the sword on the ship also reminds the reader of how the young Arthur rowed out in a boat to receive Excalibur from the hand of the Lady of the Lake, and the two swords share similar properties of protection for their bearers.

While God apparently does not oppose combat, spiritual knights are expected to refrain from gratuitous killing. This emphasis on avoiding killing is evidenced in a narrative difference between Malory’s account of the story and the stories told by Chrétien and Wolfram. Galahad, like Perceval and Parzival in the earlier narratives, is the knight of the red armour, but a major change has been made: Galahad does not have to slay another knight to obtain his armour. Malory and *Le Queste del Saint Graal* make no mention of where the armour comes from, but presumably the armour is either provided by the nuns

¹¹ In *Le Queste del Saint Graal* and even to a certain extent in *Le Morte Darthur* Galahad’s armour also corresponds with St. Paul’s concept of Spiritual armour.

¹² I have not found any references to the etymology of the name “Sarras”, but I can not help wondering if the name might not be connected to the word “Saracen”. Certainly the conquest and conversion of Sarras would be in line with what the Christians hoped would occur to the Muslims and Jews. In any event, the location of

who have raised Galahad, or God has once more intervened to insure that His champion is properly armed without having to shed blood. Yet, although God provides the arms for Galahad so that Galahad does not have to shed blood to obtain them, all of the weapons, with the exception of the red armour itself, have an appropriately violent past. The sword in the stone is the sword Balyne used to skill his brother Balan; the sword of David wounds both Nacien and King Pelles. As for the shield, it nearly causes the death of King Bagdemagus. The weapons are real instruments of war, suitable for inflicting damage, just as Galahad is a real knight, capable of prowess, but the function of both the Grail knight and his weapons is different from the function of traditional Arthurian knights. The weapons invariably inflict damage on knights who act out of hubris. Balyne, in spite of dire warnings, insists on carrying the sword until it takes the life of his brother. Nacien uses David's sword in his time of need, even though he knows that he should not, while King Pelles draws the sword in spite of the writing advising him not to. Sir Bagdemagus knows that he is unworthy of the shield, yet takes it anyway before he is struck down by a heavenly knight. Through repeatedly humiliating Arthur's knights, Galahad and his arms serve as a reminder that God has found them unworthy.

Dennis Green (1978) has argued that in *Parzival* Wolfram conscientiously avoids having his great knights actually kill, so that Parzival's slaying of Ither is exceptional. Parzival and the other true knights are permitted to win their battles without committing the sin of murder. Malory likewise attempts to maintain the innocence of his Grail knights in contrast to the violence of the other Arthurian knights. As Beverly Kennedy comments:

The causal connection between sin and manslaughter is a major premise of the *Queste del Saint Graal*. Time and again we are told that sinful men will be killers. Malory accepts this premise, but he then goes farther than his source to accept the corollary with equal seriousness: if sinful knights are killers, then virtuous knights should be able to conquer without killing (1985, 117).

The contrast between sinful knights and virtuous knights is evident in the rebuke one hermit administers to Gawain after he, with the aid of two companions, has killed seven evil knights:

For sertes, had ye nat bene so wycked as ye ar, never had the seven brethirne be slayne by you and youre two felowys: for sir Galahad hymself alone bete hem all seven the day toforne, but hys lyvyng ys such that he shall sle no man lyghtly.
(Malory 1948, II:892, ll. 2-6)

The rebuke may well confuse Gawain: he and his two companions were attacked, and thus could justify the slayings as self-defence. Perhaps even more bewildering for Gawain, and for Malory's audience, is the inversion of knightly beliefs; it was commonly held that in combat God aided the righteous, so that the killings, according to a traditional understanding, should have vindicated Gawain and his companions. The hermit, however, insists that sin is the cause of those deaths, and adds an important comment on Galahad: "he shall sle no man lyghtly". Galahad is not incapable of killing or even prohibited from killing. His attitude is fundamentally different from the attitude of most Arthurian knights, who take life lightly, yet even he is not entirely immune from the potential of killing an opponent by accident. Galahad's sinless life, however, seems to prevent accidental killings. In the combat between Perceval and Galahad, God or Fortune prevents a great disaster so that "had nat the swerde swarved sir Percyvale had be slayne" (Malory 1948, II:893, ll.2-3). Galahad also comes very near to slaying Gawain when he "smote hym so sore that he clave hys helme and coyff of iron unto the head" (Malory 1948, II:981, ll. 25-26), but once again God or Fortune prevents this unnecessary killing.

The tension between licit and illicit violence is evidenced after one crucial battle in which Galahad, Perceval and Bors kill a multitude of people. Malory states, "Than whan they behelde the grete multitude of the people that they had slayne, they helde themselves grete synners" (Malory 1948, II:997, ll. 3-4). This passage is one of the rare examples in chivalric literature of regret for violence done, and it suggests that although violence is an acceptable evil in a just war, the violence so frequently practised by Arthur's knights can no longer be condoned. Sir Bors, however, attempts to find an explanation for this massacre by speculating, as do many victors as they gaze on the carnage they have caused, that the slaughter actually reveals the approval of God:

"Sertes," seyde sir Bors, "I wene, and God had loved them, that we sholde nat have had power to have slayne hem thus. But they have done so muche agayne oure Lorde that He wolde nat suffir hem to regne no lenger." (Malory 1948, II:997, ll. 5-8)

Such an interpretation of the events fits, as we have already seen, the popular medieval belief that God sides with the righteous. This belief legitimized violence in the minds of knights as God's means of enacting divine retribution on a sinful people. If God did not desire the righteous knights (and the victors were always righteous) to slay so many people, then why did He not intervene? Yet Galahad is quick to point out the presumption behind this argument: "'Yee say nat so,' seyde Galahad. 'First, if they mysseded ayenst God, the vengeance ys nat owris, but to Hym which hath power thereof'" (Malory 1948, II:997,

ll. 9-11).¹³ The dialogue between the two knights is representative of the dialogue that occurred during the Middle Ages between the Church and chivalry. Bors presents the chivalric position which argues that knightly violence is not only acceptable to God, but is even a means of implementing God's will, while Galahad presents a position more in line with the Church's attitude, that an omnipotent God does not need men to implement his will and further, that killing may be an act of presumption on the part of knights, who are acting both as judges and as executioners. The fact that the earlier killing of the seven knights by Gawain and his companions is denounced as sin, suggests initially that Bors' position is untenable. The argument, however, is eventually settled by a priest who informs the knights that no sin has been incurred, and that indeed the killings could be considered an act of alms because the slain were not Christians. Thus, in the only combat where Galahad actually kills people, he is conveniently fighting against non-Christians. Faced with the clerical support of the slaughter, the fact that the slain are not Christians, and the sheer number of the slain, Galahad finally concedes to Bors' point of view: "Sertes,[...] and hit had nat pleased oure Lorde, never sholde we have slayne so many men in so litill a whyle" (Malory 1948, II:998, ll. 10-12).

Sir Bors's argument, and then the priest's rationalization of the massacre both have credible support from no less an authority than St Bernard of Clairvaux, who states:

The knight of Christ, I say, may strike with confidence and die yet more confidently, for he serves Christ when he strikes and serves himself when he falls. Neither does he bear the sword in vain, for he is God's minister, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of the good. If he kills an evildoer, he is not a mankiller, but if I may so put it, a killer of evil. (Kaeuper, 1999, 70)

Galahad and his companions are vindicated because they have killed evil in the guise of men. The rationale provided by the priest, however, leaves three factors which must be considered. The first point is the questionable reliability of priests as interpreters of God's will. Sir Bors' earlier encounter with the false priest has proved that the appearance of a clergyman does not necessarily signify an accurate or unbiased explanation of events. The priest who rationalizes the slayings could, like the false priest, be a demon in disguise, trying to tempt the knights into sin, and it is only the confirmation by a voice on high that assures the knights that their actions are in accordance with God's plans. The second point to consider is that while killing non-Christians is apparently permissible, and even pleasing to God, killing Christians presumably is not. The majority of the combat mentioned earlier

¹³ Galahad's sentiment is similarly expressed by Christine de Pizan in *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*: "Likewise, vengeance is reserved for God alone, and in no way does any man have the right to carry it out" (1999, 17).

in *Le Morte Darthur* is between Christians, and any killing that occurred in that combat would have been sinful. It is small wonder then that the hermits continually denounce Arthur's knights as sinful men. Also, as Galahad's concern about the massacre has emphasized, it is impossible to tell the Christian from the non-Christian, and so there is always the risk of inadvertently murdering fellow believers. The third point worthy of consideration is the additional stress placed on the knights: unless a cleric conveniently happens by to tell them how God views their violence, or God speaks for Himself, knights can never know whether they are acting to the glory of God, or whether they have in fact sinned. The difference between Malory's portrayal of the battle between Gawain and the seven knights at the Maiden's Castle, and his portrayal of the battle between the Grail knights and these sinful knights is non-existent. Within a battle a knight cannot safely judge the righteousness of the cause for which he fights. Even the assurance given by Bors and the priest that this slaying is God's punishment upon the people is, as Galahad points out, questionable, for it is God's prerogative alone to dispense punishment for sins. Bors, the priest, and a voice from heaven all confirm the goodness of the deed; and yet a few pages later God personally intervenes with a storm to destroy a castle for the sin of murdering maidens. God evidently does not always need His knights to fight His battles, and His attitude towards violence seems highly variable. When Gawain kills the seven knights God condemns the act through the words of a hermit. By contrast, the massacre inflicted by Galahad, Bors, and Perceval is repeatedly affirmed as a good and righteous deed. Eventually, however, God Himself intervenes to punish the wickedness of a castle, but only after Galahad, Bors, and Perceval had proved their own prowess and Perceval's sister had willingly given up her life.¹⁴ The knights of Malory's day had participated in the Wars of the Roses, and must have appreciated the dilemma faced by Arthur's knights as they tried to differentiate between justifiable and unjustifiable violence. The psychological stress induced by the tension of not knowing whether fighting was right or wrong must have been a cause for angst among real knights.

The priest, along with revealing the fact that the slain men were not Christians, reveals something of their sins:

Here was a lorde erle whos name was Hernox, nat but one yere. And he had three sonnys, good knyghtes of armys, and a doughter, the fayrist jantillwoman that men knew. So tho three knyghtes loved their syster so sore that they brente in love. And so they lay by her, magré her hede. And for she cryed to hir fadir they slew her, and toke their fadir and put

¹⁴ The entire episode where Perceval's sister gives up her life for the sick maiden is particularly troubling. One cannot help but wonder why God permits Perceval's sister to make such a sacrifice, only to turn around and strike the inhabitants (including presumably the recently healed maiden) dead for the sin of murder. The story only makes sense if the emphasis is placed on the sacrifice of Perceval's sister.

hym in preson and wounded hym nye to the deth[....] And than ded they grete untrouthe, for they slew clerkis and prestis, and made bete down chapellis that our Lordys servyse myght nat be seyde. (Malory 1948, II:997, ll. 28-36; 998, ll. 1-2)

The sins these knights are accused of, lust, incest, rape, murder of kinsmen and priests, and sacrilege, must possess a particular abhorrence for the Grail knights, who revere virginity and chastity, do not kill lightly, and honour the clergy and the sacraments. The sins of these knights are serious sins, but medieval readers must have noted that Arthur and his knights were guilty of similar sins, which Malory had not condemned. Arthur was guilty of incest and of murdering infants. Mordred would plot against his king and father and eventually kill him on the battlefield. Balyn killed his brother Balen, and Lyonell killed both a defenseless priest and an innocent knight in attempting to kill his brother, Bors. The imagery, with fathers against sons and brothers killing brothers, is apocalyptic, and suggests that for Arthur's court judgment day is coming. The three sinful brothers killed by the Grail knights serve only as a reminder of the hypocrisy in Arthurian chivalry. Charles Moorman has argued that "much of the *Morte Darthur* is thus concerned with revealing the corrupt reality beneath the fair chivalric surface[...] the book reveals the failure of chivalry to provide in fact the standards it in theory advocates" (1965, 73). Moorman's argument may, in fact, not be entirely valid for most of *Le Morte Darthur*, but it certainly has a ring of truth to it within the context of the Grail quest. At the same time, the criticism of chivalry is leveled not only at Arthur's fictitious knights, but at chivalry as a whole, for real knights, particularly during the fratricidal Wars of the Roses, were no less guilty of rape, murder, and the destruction of churches.

Arthur's knights repeatedly reveal that both licit and illicit violence are the bedrock of chivalry. Gawain is repeatedly accused of murder, and indeed, along with killing the seven knights, is also guilty of killing a fellow knight Uwayne. The dying Sir Uwayne sums up the disaster that has befallen them: "And now forgyff the God, for hit shall be ever rehersed that the tone sworne brother hath slayne the other" (Malory 1948, II:945, ll. 3-4). Gawain's response to this statement is to bewail the fact "that ever this mysadventure befelle me" (Malory 1948, II:945, ll. 5-6). The medieval meaning of the term "misadventure" somewhat extricates Gawain from the guilt of murder. As Kennedy has pointed out, "the term 'misadventure' is still the term used in English law for killing unintentionally while in the performance of a legitimate action" (1985, 273). However badly Gawain may feel about this killing, the actual combat which resulted in the slaying is, in his mind, a legitimate action. Bernard of Clairvaux, however, indicates that this type

of senseless combat is, far from being a legitimate action, a serious sin. Bernard implicates not just Gawain, but also Uwayne and nearly every other knight of the Round Table when he states:

If you happen to be killed while you are seeking only to kill another, you die a murderer. If you succeed, and by your will to overcome and to conquer you perchance kill a man, you live a murderer[....] What an unhappy victory—to have conquered a man while yielding to vice and to indulge in an empty glory at his fall when wrath and pride have gotten the better of you. (Kaeuper, 1999, 76)

This strict definition of murder explains why Nacien says to Gawain, “ye bene an untrew knyght and a grete murtherar” (Malory 1948, II:948, ll. 17-18). The fact that Gawain’s murdering is indeed killing in combat is testified to by the extra information the hermit gives regarding Launcelot:

For I dare sey, as synfull as ever sir Launcelot hath byn, sith that he wente into the quest of the Sankgreal he slew never man nother nought shall, *tyll that he com to Camelot agayne*; for he hath taykn upon hym to forsake synne. (Malory 1948, II:948, ll. 19-23. Emphasis mine)

Nacien’s statement reveals two important points: killing is sin, even if it is done by a knight in combat, and Launcelot will not kill anyone until he returns to Camelot. In Camelot, the centre of chivalry, avoiding the sin of killing will be nearly impossible, particularly for Launcelot, who as the hermit observes, lacks spiritual stability.

Although Gawain is sharply criticized for his sins, other knights behave much worse than he does. The aggressive attitude of Lyonell towards Bors for choosing to save the maiden rather than saving him is particularly astounding given the strong emphasis placed by Arthurian knights on protecting women. Lyonell’s anger, however, reveals how limited the ‘restraining virtues’ of chivalry actually are, for not only is he outraged that a woman should be valued over him, he also attempts to kill his brother, and in the process kills first a priest, and then a fellow knight. In each case the victim has the opportunity to reason with Lyonell and point out the sin he is going to commit, and each time Lyonell makes a conscious decision to kill the man. Finally, when it appears that Bors must defend himself against Lyonell or die, God directly intervenes with a clap of thunder and a voice saying “Fle, sir Bors, and towche hym nat, othir ellis thou shalt sle hym” (Malory 1948, II:974, ll. 1-2). In spite of the evident sins of Lyonell, it is not God’s intent that a brother should slay a brother. The scene is reminiscent of the less spectacular divine intervention between Parzival and his brother Feirfiz in *Parzival*.

Although Arthur and the fellowship of the Round Table survived the crisis of the Grail quest, the powerful pull of the chivalric ideal was effectively broken, and whatever

enchantment had surrounded Arthur and his knights had been destroyed by the soul searching of the Grail quest. Yet in spite of the lost honour, as many critics have pointed out, Malory's sympathies lie almost entirely with Launcelot, the best knight of Arthurian chivalry. Sandra Ihle argues that:

Galahad does not draw Malory's interest; perfect and distinct, Galahad soars above earthly men. However, through Lancelot, earthly sinner but the best that human chivalry has to offer, Malory can present the possibilities for worthiness within ideal—yet secular—knightly conduct. Lancelot has faults—he has fought the wrong battles and has forgotten to thank God—but his sincere attempts to repent and overcome these faults occupy Malory more than do the knight's failings. (1983, 151)

In a similar argument Jeffrey Helterman has suggest that “as usual, Launcelot has the most interesting story of all of the knights in the book. He is the only one of the worldly knights who is capable of achieving the Grail, but he does not” (1994, 265). Given this general agreement among critics that Launcelot is still the favourite knight, it is imperative to consider the possibility that Launcelot, in spite of his failure to achieve the Grail, is the real protagonist of the Grail quest. Malory makes it clear all along that Launcelot can be the Grail knight if he resists sin, or at least puts sin behind him, as does Sir Bors. Beverly Kennedy has convincingly argued that Merlin's prophecy about Galahad's sword shows that Launcelot is not predestined for failure. Merlin's prophecy that “there shall never man handyll thys swerde but the beste knyght of the worlde, and that shall be sir Launcelot other ellis Galahad” is conditional (Malory 1948, I:91, ll. 28-31). As Kennedy explains, Merlin's prophecy means:

[that] either Lancelot will be the successful Grail knight, or Galahad will be, and thereby implies that the choice is up to Lancelot. If he will avoid loving Guinevere ‘out of mesure’ (that is more than he loves God), then he may be worthy to achieve the Grail. If he will not, then he must beget a worthier successor. (1985, 9)

Launcelot's ultimate moral failure, however, makes him unsuitable for such a high calling. Like King David, whose adulterous affair with Basheeba, and warlike nature have made him unsuitable for building the temple, Launcelot is forced to concede this highest honour to his son. However much Malory may favour Launcelot to Galahad, he is obliged to remain faithful to his sources: Galahad will achieve the Grail, and Launcelot will sin with Guinevere thus precipitating the downfall of Arthurian civilization. Launcelot may be the more interesting knight, but Malory was aware that Launcelot did not provide the role model that chivalry needed.

Spiritual chivalry, as Arthur clearly saw, was antithetical to his own concept of chivalry. Ideally, of course, the Grail and the Round Table should have been complementary. The Round Table, we are told in *Le Queste del Saint Graal*, was built as a successor to the Grail Table, and the perilous seat, the seat claimed by Galahad, was intended from the Round Table's founding as the seat for the perfect knight, who would complete the fellowship, find the Grail, and bring to an end the adventures of Arthur's realm. By sitting in that seat Galahad completed the circle and the preordained purpose of the Round Table was achieved. Paradoxically at the very moment of its completion, the fellowship of the Round Table was doomed to disintegrate. The paradox of the simultaneous completion and disintegration of the Round Table is mirrored by the presence of the two most perfect knights in the world: Galahad and Lancelot. Galahad, if the old man who introduced him to the court is to be believed, superseded Lancelot. Yet, in what way did Galahad supersede Lancelot? Certainly not through military prowess, for Galahad had had no military experience prior to his investiture at the Round Table, whereas Lancelot was already a seasoned veteran. Nor could Galahad, a virgin raised in isolation by nuns, claim to be a better lover than Lancelot, who had the love of Guinevere, not to mention the adoration of all of the other women in the realm. Instead, Galahad's claim to superiority rested in his rejection of traditional chivalric virtues and in his spiritual superiority, just as the Grail's claim to superiority over the Round Table rested in its heavenly establishment and spiritual superiority. In an ideal world, the Grail and the Round Table would have been one; Galahad and Lancelot would have been one. Somewhere along the way King Arthur and the chivalric virtues which he and his knights stood for had failed. The image of the divine rejection of Arthur's chivalry would have made an impression with medieval readers, who would certainly have found a parallel in the medieval concept of God's rejection of the "hypocritical" Jews and Old Law in favour of Christians and the New Law.

Arthur was right to see that the ideal of moral perfection would subvert the pursuits of the Round Table. Arthur's realm could not be maintained by mystics, penitents and virgins. Yet Arthur's concerns that the spiritual chivalry represented by Galahad would destroy the Fellowship of the Round Table in his realm were unfounded. The majority of his knights found that they simply could not live up to the higher expectations, and, while half of the knights died in the Grail quest (primarily from killing one another) those who survived quickly resumed their former roles in Arthur's court. The rivalry with the spiritual chivalry which Arthur so feared failed to destroy the Round Table, and instead it was the two chivalric values of love, as represented by Lancelot and Guinevere, and

violence, as represented by Gawain's insistence on vengeance, which destroyed the kingdom. In spite of the failings of traditional chivalry, Malory's sympathies lie with Arthur's knights, and not with the spiritually perfect Galahad. Malory is two things beyond question: an author and a knight. As an author he realizes the limited narrative potential in perfect knights. As a knight he knows that the lofty spiritual heights achieved by Galahad and his companions are unobtainable, and perhaps even undesirable, in his world. Indeed, Galahad's spiritual chivalry essentially requires a renunciation of chivalry as Malory and his readers understood it. The roads to Sarras and Avalon were parting, and while the monkish author of *Le Queste del Saint Graal* may have been quite satisfied pursuing the perfection he had envisioned in Galahad, Malory, the knightly author, chose instead to follow the road to Avalon. As Mahoney states:

For the French author the 'chevalerie cestiel' was to replace the 'terriene,' to invalidate and supersede it. For Malory it is a separate pursuit, of equal validity, in which success is fully achievable only by withdrawal from the world, either into the reclusive life, like Perceval and the hermits at the end of the *Morte*, or into death, like Galahad. (2000, 391)

Chivalry's enduring vitality was dependent on its participation in the world, where acts of prowess and love could be seen and praised. It is not surprising then, as Kaeuper states, that "the perfection of Galahad, much though it must be admired, is not for most men, and so is not really a practical model for knights trying to live in the world. It is to encourage and steer these noble knights living in the very real world that Malory wrote" (1999, 296-297). Christopher Dean presents an even clearer explanation of why the ideals of the Grail quest and those of chivalry were opposed:

Under chivalry, a knight is directed to an active life of deeds of prowess, aimed at the protection and betterment of society; under the Grail code, he is required to turn aside from society and its concerns, to cease being a man of action and follow a mystic vision, to obey dreams, and to heed strange commands. In the last resort, the Grail code is not even a knightly one for there is nothing to prevent anyone from undertaking the quest. The search for the Grail ultimately declares the knightly vocation to be unimportant. Inevitably, therefore, knights must reject the vision of the Grail, as Lancelot in the end consciously does. Galahad's success in the Grail quest does not contradict this, for he never was a knight of this earth, subject to its pull and its attractions. As a divinely sent figure, he merely emphasizes how alien the code is to the chivalric life practiced by the knights of the Round Table. (1987, 96-97)

Dean's analysis, however, is only half right—he idealistically believes that chivalry directed knights to an active life for the benefit of society, while Malory has repeatedly shown that chivalry more often than not directed knights to an active life that served and

protected their own interests in the guise serving and protecting society. At the crossroads of chivalry, where “every knyght toke the way that hym lyked beste” Malory recognized that while the chivalric concerns of conflict and love were frequently abused and could, as happened in his own fifteenth-century English society as well as in the fictional society of Arthur’s court, lead to self destruction, a chivalry without these traits would not long endure.

CHAPTER V

The Roads Leading to the Grail

O ye knyghtes of Englonde where is the custome and vsage
of noble chyualry that was vsed in tho dayes / what do ye now /
but go to the baynes & playe att dyse And some not wel aduysed
vse not honest and good rule ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode /
leue this / leue it and rede the noble volumes of saynt graal of lancelot /
of galaad / of Trystram / of perse forest / of Percyual / of gawayn /
& many mo / Ther shalle ye see manhode / curtosye & gentylnesse.

(Caxton's epilogue to *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*. Lull,
1926, 122)

Identity can be defined in opposition to other identities. As I explained in my first chapter, this was certainly true for knighthood, which contrasted itself against the clergy on the one hand and the commoners on the other. The distinguishing traits that differentiated knights, as we saw in the introduction, from the two other estates were the legitimization of force and of romantic love. Both the clergy and the peasantry were, at least in theory if not always in practice, denied recourse to violence, and romantic and erotic love were also, again in theory, proscribed for the clergy, who were totally given over to divine love. By contrast, it was accepted that the peasantry could experience lust and carnal love, and even marital affection, but the highest form of earthly love remained reserved for knighthood.

These attributes of knighthood brought their own complications and ambiguities. Having a social caste whose main function was to provide warriors only tended to promote further conflict. Certainly the actual importance of violence within society seems to have not been questioned.¹ The vast majority of intellectuals in the Middle Ages accepted without hesitation Honouré Bonet's surprising dictum:

Thus we must understand that war comes from God, and not merely that He permits war, but that He has ordained it[...]. Further, we say that our Lord God Himself is lord and governor of battles. And for this reason we must accept and grant that war comes from divine law, that is, the law of God. (1949, 125)

Warfare was, according to the medieval mindset, divinely instituted, and yet even the most staunch supporters of chivalry recognized that not all of the violence perpetrated by knights could be considered legitimate. For society to function, for farmers to be able to cultivate their lands, housewives to weave cloth, merchants to sell their goods and priests to preach and pray, there had to be a certain amount of peace and order. As Kaeuper has pointed out, all of this raises questions about violence:

¹ See Barber 1974, 202.

Working to create and sustain the order, the regularity, the acceptable degree of peacefulness that makes civilized life possible is, of course, a fundamental need of all societies. The effort will always raise significant questions. What violence is licit or even sanctified? What violence is considered destructive of necessary order? Who has the power to decide these questions and how are such decisions actually secured? (1999, 12)

That medieval intellectuals and authorities were seriously concerned with these issues is evidenced by the number of papal bulls, royal edicts and manuals on warfare and chivalry written to answer these questions. The questions addressed in these various documents included: When was warfare justified? Who had the right to wage war? Could a vassal wage war on his lord? If a knight were a vassal to two lords at war with each other, with whom should he side? How should a knight treat his defeated opponents? Could a knight engage in trial by combat, and if so, under what circumstances? And, most importantly, what happened to the souls of knights killed in combat?

Similar questions were also raised about the role of love and sexuality in knighthood. In wealthy and powerful families in the Middle Ages marriages were arranged political and economical unions first and foremost, with romantic love being only an incidental consideration. These arranged unions frequently occurred when the couple were still children, and it was common for a betrothed couple not to meet until shortly before the actual ceremony. While most of the firstborn sons of nobility could expect to marry, younger brothers from poorer nobility could not necessarily expect such a fortuitous match and might be expected either to enter the clergy, or if they were unsuited for that, to go seeking their fortunes as bachelor knights. Sexual tension for these young unmarried knights could be satisfied either through bedding a prostitute, as is implied by the number of prostitutes mentioned in Wolfram's description of an army, or by raping a peasant woman, as mentioned again by Wolfram and facetiously recommended by Andreas Capellanus. While the knights might be free to seek sexual release in relationships outside of marriage, sexual promiscuity among aristocratic ladies could not be tolerated in a society grounded on hereditary rights and patrimony. At the same time, human nature cannot be forced to conform entirely to relationships dictated by practical matters. Thus an ideal began to develop around the concept of non-sexual love relationships. These idealized relationships grew into a serious social game which permitted knights, particularly poor unmarried knights, to enter into relationships with women while still in theory upholding the sexual purity necessary for maintaining social order. Chaste love relationships, however, were no more the rule of the day then than they are now, and knights, beyond the idealism of this play love, were expected to prove their virility. At the same time, however,

the Church both tended to denigrate women and uplift the spiritual virtues of celibacy and chastity. The complex and frequently conflicting ideologies and needs of social order, knighthood, the Church and individual people were a potent brew that raised many troublesome questions. Should a knight be sexually active and thus prove his masculinity, or should he prove his holiness by remaining celibate? Did love and marriage, as some romances suggest, hamper a knight's prowess in conflict, or did love, as other romances maintained, merely whet the knight's appetite for violence as he looked for more ways to win the favour of his love? If a knight married, what should be the nature of his relationship to his lady, and did marital obligations supersede knightly obligations? If extramarital love affairs were permitted what was socially permissible behaviour within these affairs, and what was simply uncondonable? Furthermore, what should be the attitude of society and of other knights to socially unacceptable sexual behaviour?

Such questions about love, sexual relationships, and violence raised then, as now, a great deal of controversy. Corinne Saunders has pointed out that certainly in questions regarding sexuality, for example, there was no consensus:

Medieval thought and writing, then, are by no means monolithic: systems of thought, and particularly approaches to sex and gender, differ widely. From discourse to discourse, writer to writer, attitudes vary between abstract and concrete, sympathetic and condemning, objective and subjective. (2001, 318)

The same statement could unquestionably be applied to conflict: the medieval mentality towards combat varied depending on who was doing the talking. Yet at the same time people in the Middle Ages were, as Barber (1974) has suggested, obsessed with codifying and ordering the universe, so it comes as no surprise that medieval writers attempted to articulate the laws that governed love, sex and violence. Some of these ideas were expressed explicitly, as in books of chivalry like Geoffroi de Charni's *The Book of Chivalry* and Ramón Lull's *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*. Other models for behaviour were presented through the examples of historical personalities, such as Richard the Lionheart and the Black Prince or through the fictitious characters of the romances. The didactic role romances were to play in the development of knighthood is explicitly pronounced by Caxton who tells his readers to "rede the noble volumes of saynt graal of lancelot / of galaad / of Trystram / of perse forest / of percyual / of gawayn / & many mo / Ther shalle ye see manhode / curtosye & gentylnesse (Lull 1926, 122). As Caxton's command shows, stories about the Grail and the Grail heroes were a significant part of this didactic literature.

As I have shown in Chapter 1, in addition to being entertainment, *Le Conte du Graal*, *Parzival*, and *Le Morte Darthur* were intended for the edification of their audiences. In spite of the fact, however, that these three narratives all claimed to tell the true story of the Grail, the moral lessons and ethical virtues presented in each narrative, and the emphasis placed on aspects of chivalry, differed. The differences in each narrative were dependent on a variety of factors including the social position of the author, the source materials from which the tales were constructed, and the historical, social and cultural milieu within which each account was told. The impact of the social status of each author clearly influences the shaping of the various Grail stories. Chrétien, writing as a cleric viewing knighthood from the outside, creates a story that on the one hand flatters his knightly audience while on the other hand is subtly ironic and disparaging of knighthood. His narrative swings between being a traditional romance with plenty of combat and love scenes, a mythic narrative of the emergence of knights as a class, to being nearly a fabliau, mocking and questioning the very elements that constitute chivalry. Wolfram, by contrast, is a knight, and thus writes about chivalry with considerably more sympathy and understanding than Chrétien while still being honest about the problems that beset chivalry. In Wolfram's hands the narrative gains an ultimate purpose – to exemplify how ordinary knights can gain honour on earth and salvation in Heaven by living a balanced life. Malory, also a knight, clearly appreciates the predicament of chivalry in his own age as knighthood gives way under the pressure of social change and gradually becomes obsolete. The Grail quest in his telling has almost ceased to be relevant to knighthood in the same way that knighthood has almost ceased to be relevant to society.

It is evident that social status influenced each author's treatment of the Grail narrative, but social, historical and cultural factors also played a major role in altering the presentation of the story. Considerable changes occurred to knighthood between the creation of *Le Conte du Graal* and *Le Morte Darthur*, and these changes are evident in the texts. One example of how these social, historical and cultural factors are reflected in the narratives is revealed by how each author deals with the process of becoming a knight. Chrétien's and Wolfram's protagonists do not go through the traditional initiation of knighthood, though that is their stated purpose for going to Arthur's court: to see the king who makes knights. Instead Perceval and Parzival, through a show of prowess, violently lay claim to the title of knight; a claim acknowledged by Arthur even though the knighting ceremony itself does not occur until later in the texts. Notably, these two heroes have usurped their knightly status without proving their aristocratic lineage, and the actual determination of knighthood seems to rest on two very practical considerations: has the

candidate in question managed to kill another knight in combat, and is the candidate wearing the armour of a knight. These two simple requirements suggest an affinity with an earlier warrior society that would have indeed judged warriors competent by their ability to kill and their possession of arms. In contrast Malory's Galahad is initiated into knighthood prior to his arrival at Arthur's court, and this without having proved himself either as a lover or a warrior. The sparsely described initiation ceremony is formulaic: the knighting ceremony is performed by Launcelot, witnessed by two other knights and occurs on a religious feast day. The reasons for the differences in how the initiations are portrayed in the narratives are relatively simple: both Perceval and Parzival are manifestations of earlier knighthood, where the identities of knights were wound up in their abilities as warriors and lovers. The knighting ceremony had still not received the full development it would in the later Middle Ages and was consequently less significant for Chrétien and Wolfram than it was for Malory, who places a heavier emphasis on knighting stories. Knighthood for Chrétien and Wolfram is an active position where physical proof of the candidates' eligibility for the status of knighthood is more important than a ceremony. Galahad, unlike his predecessors, could not prove his knightly status through combat or love making, both of which would have been viewed as inappropriate for a knight so expressly drawn as a Christ-figure. Instead, legitimacy has to be lent to his status by having a proper knighting by a knight who had already proved himself as a warrior and lover: Launcelot. Launcelot's recognition of Galahad as a knight spares Galahad the necessity of proving his worth through deeds. The later pulling the sword out of the stone and sitting in the perilous seat do not prove Galahad's knightly status; but rather prove his elect status as the Grail knight, the best knight in the world.

The fact that Perceval and Parzival aggressively claimed their status as knights through combat while Galahad was appointed to the position by Launcelot suggests a changing attitude towards knighthood. Malory's Grail narrative reveals knighthood in its decline. The changing world had usurped the power of knights: the clergy had consolidated their authority over spiritual matters, bureaucracies were taking over the responsibility of government, and, perhaps most damaging of all, salaried infantry now predominated on the battle field. Nowhere is this final blow clearer than in Christine de Pizan's *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*. This book, written in the late Middle Ages, is a practical guide to warfare, and yet nothing in the book, unlike Geoffroi de Charni's *The Book of Chivalry*, suggests that knights play an essential role as combatants. The advice is geared strictly for managing a professional army, and no thought is given to glorious charges or single combat. Christine does not even bother referring to romances or

the world of Charlemagne or Arthur, and instead takes her wisdom from accounts of the Roman wars.² This loss of military prestige, along with the monastic nature of his sources, explains why Malory was willing partially to concede both violence and love in his description of the Grail knights: his Grail knights are celibate and they even question their own authority to use violence. Such attitudes are not demonstrated by either Chrétien or Wolfram, who saw that love and violence were indispensable aspects of chivalry, even if they caused a certain amount of ethical concern. In Malory's defence, he certainly prefers Launcelot, who upheld the traditional values of warfare and love, over Galahad, but when Malory created his image of Launcelot, he was, particularly in his portrayal of Launcelot's prowess, creating an anachronism. Galahad, of course, was even worse than an anachronism; he was a fantasy who had never existed and never would. Malory, in other words, was writing a story that came dangerously close to being mere escapist fiction, a nostalgic remembering of chivalric glories that were, and a hope for a revival of those glories. Malory in that aspect was writing less of Arthur, once and future king, and more about once and future knighthood. The stories created by Wolfram and Chrétien, by contrast, were grounded in the real world, and there is certainly something more human in the behaviour of Perceval and Parzival than that of Galahad.

As the Grail narratives shifted to fit variable social realities and changing attitudes towards knighthood, depictions of love, sex and violence also changed in each story. The emphasis placed on love and sex within each of the Grail legends is particularly significant. Of the three authors Wolfram explores gender relations the most, while the relationship between the sexes is given much less consideration in *Le Conte du Graal* and the Grail story in *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory's account in particular differs entirely from the two earlier works in its approach to sexuality. The knights in both Chrétien's and Wolfram's accounts are almost always portrayed as the active agents, while the women are the passive recipients of their attention regardless of how little it is desired. In Malory's account this order has been inverted, making the women the predators and the men the hapless prey. Saunders quite accurately describes the twofold manner in which woman affect knights in the *Morte*:

Throughout the *Morte*, men judge each other through their success or failure in upholding the ideal of the protection of women; women provide the measure of male achievement not only as objects and instigators of quests, but also through their sexual menace. (2001, 263).

² Earlier writers would also not have used romances as models for conducting warfare, but they would have probably paid lip service to the glory of romance knights, as do both Geoffroi de Charny and the Herald of Chandos.

The women who victimize the men in *Le Morte Darthur* are of the latter category; powerful creatures who threaten knights with their sexuality. These are not ordinary women either, for frequently they are demons in disguise. The closest parallel to this literal demonization of women in the two earlier stories of the Grail is the statement of the boatman in *Le Conte du Graal* who compares the Evil Maiden with Satan (Troyes 1991, 472).

Chrétien does not demonize his female characters the way Malory does, but his portrayal of women and love relationships is, at best, a shallow one. None of the characters appear to establish lasting relationships and the temporary alliances that do develop between the sexes are virtually all created out of self-interest, whether it is to gain defense, revenge or honour on the part of the ladies, or to gain either honour or access to, and control over, women on the part of the knights. Although having love relationships is essential to being a knight, even in the case of Perceval, love interests frequently hinder knights in the performance of their duties. Women may inspire the knights to greater acts of prowess, but Chrétien never suggests that they contribute in any significant way to the achievement of the Grail.

Women in *Parzival* receive a more balanced treatment and are portrayed as a vital element in the success or failure of each knight. Wolfram creates his balanced depiction of women in the same way that he creates his balanced portrayal of knights. Just as there are knights who are varyingly good or bad, so too there are women who are varyingly good or bad, and just as the knights are provided motives for their behaviour, so too are the women provided with authentic motives for their behaviour. On the one hand, for example, Orgeluse is portrayed as evil. She manipulates Gawain, causes the deaths of knights, and, most importantly, causes the wounding of Anfortas. Her evilness, however, is forgivable because it is a direct result of the abuses of knightly power. Condwiramurs, on the other hand, is an example of Wolfram's ideal of a woman who is "modest and given over to womanly virtues" (Eschenbach 1980, 172), even though she uses feminine wiles to convince Parzival to save her kingdom. She, of course, contributes to Parzival's ultimate success and shares the honour with him by becoming the Grail Queen. From these examples we can see that Wolfram places a premium on appropriate relationships between the genders, and he spares no pain showing the disastrous results of inappropriate relationships. Anfortas, like Launcelot in *Le Morte Darthur*, proves unworthy of the Grail because of an unbalanced love affair that makes him rebel against God. Anfortas's failure illustrates a new ethical standard for knights which is entirely absent in *Le Conte du Graal* and only present in a perverted form in *Le Morte Darthur*. The ethical ideal of love

articulated by Wolfram through the tales of Anfortas and Parzival is that love should be marital love and that the authority of love is always superseded by the authority of God as vested in the Grail. Hugh Sacher describes the implications of this new ideal:

The implication of Anfortas's disastrous attachment to Oregeluse is that the best and highest goal of a knight of the Round Table is yet sin and shame for a Grail King. Arthurian chivalry is not hereby disparaged, but the vocation of the Grail is higher, and for a Grail King to prefer a lower way of life is sinful. (1963, 150).

Sacher is wrong, however, in assuming that Wolfram is not criticizing Arthurian chivalry and in assuming that Wolfram intended his audience to see the Grail as a higher vocation. On the contrary, Wolfram was explicitly showing that a knight like Parzival, who was happily married, would succeed where a knight following courtly ideals about love would fail. Parzival's triumph at the Grail is the triumph of the ordinary "common sense" knight who has a wife and a family, not the triumph of a knight errant always seeking battle to prove his unrequited love.

Along with the socially condoned forms of love presented, each author also deals, however briefly, with the concerns of sexual violence. The concern these authors show in dealing with this topic is not entirely unexpected if, as Saunders and Gravdale maintain, sexual violence, either through abduction and the implied threat of rape, or less frequently through rape itself, functions in romances as a *raison d'être* for knighthood:

The threat of rape in romance, however, and the repeated emphasis on ravishment, allows for the proof of chivalric structures – the order of the land, the knight as chivalric individual, and the need to uphold and protect women. (Saunders 2001, 317-318)

This is undeniably true, but it must also be pointed out, as the Grail stories of Chétien, Wolfram and Malory show, that while the protection of women creates the necessity for knights, knights are also the primary threat to women. Chivalry becomes a cycle in which "good" knights defend ladies against "bad" knights. Women are passed between these "good" and "bad" knights as goods proving the knights' prowess; the goal of both the "good" and the "bad" knights being to demonstrate their masculinity, both as warriors (as defenders or predators of women) and as virile males (as either lovers or rapists). In *Le Conte du Graal* little consideration is given to the ethics of gender relations: women are a commodity upon which all knights, even Perceval, act out their masculinity. *Parzival*, by contrast, makes the virtuous relationship of Parzival with his wife an essential element in achieving the Grail quest: women, depending on the knights they are paired with, become to a greater extent partners with the men in chivalric society. In *Le Morte Darthur* women are either removed from the equation, marginalized by being portrayed either as demonic

seductresses or insignificant objects to be saved, or, in the rare case of Perceval's sister, "neutered" so as to be fitting company for the unworldly Grail knights.

Although attempted rapes are described and past rapes are alluded to, none of the three authors ever portrays the act of rape. Chrétien's references to rape are so slight that a reader could almost fail to notice them. Rape seems not to be a major concern in Chrétien's world. Likewise, rape is only mentioned once in Malory's Grail narrative, and then quite briefly. Malory's narration of the events, however, reveals two rather surprising details. First, Bors' decision to rescue a maiden in distress instead of saving his brother's life suggests that rape might have been considered a more serious crime than even murder. Repeatedly he is reassured that the decision he made was the best decision, and that he would have made a major blunder had he instead tried to save his brother. Secondly, the potential price of that blunder is revealed when the maiden tells Bors that not only would five hundred knights have been killed because of it, but both her soul and the soul of her would-be rapist would have been lost had Sir Bors not intervened (Saunders 2001, 258). Although no explanation is provided about why the maiden's soul would have been damned, it is tempting to speculate that she is held partially responsible for the attempted rape because she has acted as the seductress. Certainly the vast majority of women in Malory's narration of the Grail legend are seductresses who endanger knights' souls. This attempted rape in Malory's Grail narrative is, however, unique. Rescuing maidens is, surprisingly given Malory's earlier Arthurian stories, not a major element in the Grail account, perhaps because the monkish Grail knights cannot be bothered with such explicitly sexual concerns. Finally, of the three authors studied, only Wolfram condemns rape in no uncertain terms. This comes as no surprise, because Wolfram is also the author most dedicated to the principles of social restraint and order. Unlike Malory, however, Wolfram makes no assumptions regarding the final destination of the souls of either the victims or their rapists. His concern is first and foremost social, and instead of worrying about damnation he deals with the social consequences of rape.

Chrétien, Wolfram and Malory are in far more accord about their attitudes towards violence than they are about love and sex, however. All three agree that warfare and combat are essential to knights, even those knights pursuing the spiritual goal of the Grail. Each of the authors, however, also reveals certain reservations about the violence that inevitably accompanies chivalry. Chrétien's qualms about knightly violence are evident in his unwillingness to linger on actual combat while still always revealing the consequences of that combat. Chrétien, in his earlier romances, has shown himself to be apt at describing detailed battle scenes, but in *Le Conte du Graal* he can not seem to be bothered with battle

scenes, except in the shameful slaying of the Red Knight. Instead of using fight scenes to keep the interest of his knightly audience, Chrétien glosses over them, usually saying that it would be a waste of time to describe them in detail. Wolfram, by contrast, describes battles with the loving detail of a knight, and yet at the same time he almost always interjects a note of concern for both combatants, hoping that God will see fit to spare both knights, which is almost inevitably what happens in his fictitious world. Thus, although there is plenty of combat, actual killings are far and few between. Like his character Gawain, Wolfram probably does not much care for fighting, but accepts it as a necessary part of knighthood (Eschenbach 1980, 168). The fact that Wolfram's Templars consider combat a form of penance further suggests the weight that Wolfram attaches to fighting. In the right cause, under the direction of God, fighting can be a sacramental act. But, just as any religious act can be profaned in the wrong hands and become sacrilege and sin, so also can fighting be a sin when done for inappropriate reasons. Wolfram provides several examples of knightly violence becoming sin: the slaying of Ither for his armour, and the wounding of Anfortas as he fought for the love of Orgeluse both exemplify the serious consequences of the misuse of violence. Malory's approach to the issue of combat in his Grail narrative is similar to Wolfram's: fighting is unquestionably a necessary element of knighthood, but there are good and evil causes for which a knight may fight. This truth is acknowledged repeatedly. Launcelot states, for example, that he has fought in both good and evil causes for love of the queen. Likewise, Gawain's slaying of the seven wicked knights is a direct result of sin, while the massacre inflicted by Galahad, Bors and Perceval on the sinful inhabitants of a castle is direct proof of God's approval. For Malory the crux of the issue seems to revolve around the point that combat undertaken for the sake of God is good, while combat done for selfish reasons is evil. Given this general view of combat, it is not surprising that most of Arthur's knights lack the proper motives for fighting.

This thesis has argued that chivalry and its attendant concerns of love, sex and conflict were the source of serious debate during the Middle Ages. The Grail stories, as I have attempted to show, provide us with a glimpse into the inner-workings of that debate, and certainly suggest the tension that must have troubled knights who found themselves pulled between the frequently conflicting values of Christianity, secular society and chivalry. Repeated attempts were made to find an answer which, to paraphrase Wolfram, would permit knights to gain honour on earth while not robbing God of their souls. Honour, and the very existence of this warrior caste, required the knights to prove their masculinity through military prowess and through their virility, but in doing so they ran the serious risk of losing their souls. This perplexing dilemma created a great deal of

discussion and compromise between the Church, courtly society and the knights as they attempted to define socially acceptable behaviour. Some behaviour, as we have seen in our three Grail narratives, was approved of by Church and state, while other behaviour was entirely beyond the pale, and was roundly condemned, but much more behaviour remained morally ambiguous. Each of the Grail authors dealt with these problems and offered his own unique vision of knighthood. Not surprisingly, none of these visions harmonizes exactly. Chrétien's vision of knighthood is sharp and cynical. He sets forth the problems of chivalry without suggesting solutions. Wolfram's view is more optimistic in that while he acknowledges problems with knighthood, he believes that knighthood can be reformed and he sets forth a fairly realistic programme for implementing the necessary changes. His ideal knights, in essence, must separate themselves from the superfluous elements that had accumulated around chivalry and weighed it down. Knights might love, but in moderation, as God directs, and preferably under the sanction of the Church through the rite of matrimony. Combat could and should be practised, but again, in moderation, and for the glory of God instead of vainglory. The final vision of knighthood provided by Malory is, of the three perspectives, the most tragic. Ordinary knights, for the most part, cannot achieve the Grail. Only by renouncing the very things that have made them Knights of the Round Table, may a select few approach that mystical union with God, and then most of these disappear forever from the world of Arthur. Wolfram's vision of an enlightened knighthood existing in the world is lost in Malory's account, and instead knights are faced with the parting roads to Sarra and Avalon. They may either follow the Grail and leave the world behind or return to Arthur's court for the final destruction of the golden age of chivalry.

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