

A Companion to the
**LANCELOT-
GRAIL CYCLE**



Edited by
CAROL DOVER

ARTHURIAN STUDIES LIV

A COMPANION TO THE *LANCELOT-GRAIL CYCLE*

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A COMPANION TO
THE *LANCELOT-GRAIL CYCLE*

Edited by Carol Dover

D. S. BREWER

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Abbreviations

<i>BBIAS</i>	<i>Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society</i>
<i>BL</i>	British Library
<i>BNF</i>	Bibliothèque nationale de France
<i>Lacy</i>	<i>Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation</i> , ed. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols. (New York and London, 1996)
<i>LK</i>	<i>Lancelot do Lac: the non-cyclic Old French Prose Romance</i> , ed. Elspeth Kennedy, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1980)
<i>LM</i>	<i>Lancelot: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle</i> , ed. Alexandre Micha, 9 vols. (Geneva and Paris, 1978–83)
<i>MHG</i>	Middle High German
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>

A Note on the Lancelot-Grail Cycle

The title *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, as used in this volume, refers to the ensemble of five prose works consisting of the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the *Estoire Merlin* and its continuation (*Suite*), the *Lancelot*, *Queste del Saint Graal*, and *Mort Artu*. Together they correspond to the seven-volume *Vulgate Cycle of the Arthurian Romances* published by H. Oskar Sommer in 1908–13, excepting the *Livre d'Artus* which Sommer included but which belongs to the *Post-Vulgate Cycle*. The name *Vulgate Cycle*, invented by Sommer, is still in common use and is used occasionally in this volume where circumstances require it (Sommer's is still the only edition of the complete *Cycle*), but generally it has been replaced by *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. The full complement of five works was achieved with the composition of the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire Merlin*, the last components to be included. They were added to form the prequel to an existing trilogy consisting of the *Lancelot – Queste del Saint Graal – Mort Artu*, which is also sometimes referred to as a cycle and also called the *Prose Lancelot*. To add to the confusion, *Lancelot*, the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*'s huge centerpiece, has also been called the *Lancelot Proper* to differentiate it within the trilogy and to avoid confusion with Chrétien de Troyes' Lancelot verse romance (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*) which critics and readers habitually referred to as the *Lancelot*. In this volume, *Lancelot* is the prose story of Lancelot that forms the centerpiece of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* and corresponds to volumes III–V of Sommer.

Introduction

CAROL DOVER

The early thirteenth-century French *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (or *Vulgate Cycle*) brings together the stories of Arthur with those of the Grail, a conjunction of materials that continues to fascinate the Western imagination today. It is a vast compendium of Arthurian literature whose importance for the development of European fiction is finally being appreciated. Representing what is probably the earliest large-scale use of prose for fiction in the West, it also exemplifies the taste for big cyclic compositions that shaped much of European narrative fiction for three centuries. Dante admired the meandering seductiveness of the *Cycle's* storytelling, Malory relied on it in large part for his fifteenth-century *Arthuriad*, and it spawned a progeny of adaptations in other languages. Despite its impressive medieval pedigree, the *Lancelot-Grail's* sixteenth- and seventeenth-century critics pronounced it soporific, boring, worthless, while it fared no better with 'scientific' nineteenth-century critics who berated it for being repetitive, derivative, unfocused, and prosaic. Scholarship on the work was hampered until recently by the complexity of its manuscript tradition, the compilatory nature of the *Cycle*, its gigantic size, and its complex artistry. However, modern critical editions of all five branches of the *Cycle* have fanned scholarly interest in this vast text, while on a broader front the recent English translation of Sommer's *Vulgate Cycle* under the general direction of Norris J. Lacy (*Lancelot-Grail: the Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 5 vols. [New York: Garland, 1993–96]) opens up this medieval bestseller to a much wider audience of scholars, students, and general readers.

This volume attempts to convey to modern readers the appeal that such an unwieldy text must have had for its medieval audiences, and the richness of composition that made it compelling. The *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* could be described summarily as an anonymous text comprising at least five different works, possibly by five different authors, a text with no clear provenance although the majority of its manuscripts come from the north-east corner of France and what is now Belgium and Flanders. This description of the *Cycle* in terms of what it does not have, has the advantage of compelling us to focus largely, though not exclusively, on the text itself as our primary source of documentation.

Manuscript evidence suggests that the *Cycle* existed initially as a mini-cycle, the *Lancelot – Queste – Mort Artu* trilogy, which narrates the biography of Lancelot and the glory and downfall of the Arthurian kingdom. The subsequent addition of the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire Merlin – Suite*, however, gave

the mini-cycle a new historical and religious foundation. The manuscript context of the *Cycle* is an evolving field of investigation made more complex by the enormous size of the *Cycle* (it was rarely contained in a single manuscript book), manuscripts totaling more than a hundred, and the considerable variance among them; all of which has complicated the task of reuniting the *membra disjecta* and determining the relationships among them. Exciting ongoing research on all the known manuscripts (whole or partial) of the *Cycle* promises to fill large gaps in our current knowledge, as well as opening up fresh areas of investigation concerning, for example, the relationship between text and image, for many of these manuscripts are richly and profusely illuminated.

Modern scholarship has investigated the links between genre and time, and underlined the difficulty of distinguishing between history and story, since these were designated by the same word (*estoire*) and seemed to be interchangeable in the early thirteenth-century. However, the distinction is sharpened by the fact that the *Cycle's* historical perspective is not that of dynastic succession and power but the time-line of universal history, beginning with Christ's Passion and ending with the Revelation and the Apocalypse. It embraces the beginning and the end of all things. The work retains the mystery essential to romance writing while revealing the starkness of known history, for if Galahad takes the secrets of the Revelation with him at his passing, the apocalyptic end of Arthur's kingdom is poignantly and powerfully narrated.

Epic in scope but decidedly romance in tone and artistry, the *Cycle* exploits its audience's familiarity with characters, landscapes, and motifs from twelfth-century Arthurian verse romance, and we might well ask how accessible its prose narrative would be without the support of such a cast of 'reappearing characters.' It is this laudable medieval process of re-writing – recycling existing material, polishing it to produce something new and better, with a subtle dose of subversion – that the *Cycle* exemplifies. The variety of its sources reflects its project of combining a Grail story and an Arthurian story: Robert of Boron's trilogy of Grail romances (*Joseph–Merlin–Perceval*), Arthurian romances by Chrétien de Troyes and others, Celtic Merlin legends, 'historical' works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*, and the Bible (Old and New Testaments, the Apocrypha) and perhaps other works that were 'in the air.' But recent attention to the *Cycle's* rewriting, allied with its intertextuality, has shifted scholarly attention to the realm of poetics and opened up to view some of the imaginative creative processes that went into fashioning such a complex opus.

The popularity of King Arthur and Arthurian chivalric romance in the twelfth century can be attributed to their promotion by Henry II of England, who claimed Arthur as a worthy ancestor, but countervailing forces underpin the production of the *Cycle* with narratives that progressively question the viability of Arthurian chivalry as a role-model. If Arthurian chivalry has indeed lost its moral compass and is reduced to slaughter, as Perceval's mother claims it has in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*, the *Lancelot-Grail* pursues this perspective. The contribution of Arthurian chivalry is insufficient to complete the new challenges, its image of perfection is steadily undermined through moralization and contrasted unfavorably with a new, spiritual chivalry, but the one is nevertheless

generated by the other, like father and son. As the earthly quest gives way to the spiritual quest for the Holy Grail, the *Cycle* offers a new Gospel for chivalry.

For many readers the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* is synonymous with interlaced narrative and prose for large-scale fiction, its two signal innovations. Recent scholarship has traced the complex interlacing of key themes, and further insights into the choice of prose and interlace suggest the two are strange bedfellows indeed. If the prose exploits the medium's connection with didactic narrative, truth-telling, and historiography, it is a richly poetic prose that works in concert with interlace to harbor secrets within the fragmented narrative.

The *Companion* is, to my knowledge, the first comprehensive volume devoted exclusively to the entire *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. This first step is therefore intended to introduce today's reader to the greatness of the *Cycle* in an accessible and systematic form. The volume is divided into three sections. The first section offers perspectives from which to understand the social and ideological contexts that gave rise to the work, to its stages of growth, its literary and cyclic environments, the interconnections between its time, genre, and history. The second and largest section provides a sense of the rich diversity of the five texts, as stories for pleasurable reading and as texts to be delved into for further investigation. Each one of these central chapters brings out important structures and developments within one of the five works, while an additional chapter is reserved for the *Lancelot* and one chapter is devoted to manuscript illumination. The third and final section testifies to the remarkable reception and influence of the *Cycle*, measured by efforts to re-create all or part of the work in different areas of medieval Europe. A further important chapter traces the movement of manuscripts of the *Cycle* in England and Wales, and the section closes with a glance at the modern use of *Cycle* material in film. There is in addition a select bibliography and an Index. I wish the reader much pleasure in delving into this fascinating and elusive medieval text known as the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*.

PART I

THE *LANCELOT-GRAIL CYCLE* IN CONTEXT

1

Chivalry, Cistercianism and the Grail

RICHARD BARBER

The *Queste del Saint Graal* is a remarkable feat of the imagination. It is a deeply religious story, yet it has little basis in the received history and teachings of the Church, and is embedded as an integral part in a series of romances which have quite other, secular values. Despite the unofficial nature of its material, the theology it contains is complex and subtle; yet at the same time it succeeded in appealing to the courtly audience for whom the romances were created. We may well wonder how these disparate themes of chivalry, mysticism and apocryphal stories of the Crucifixion were welded into one.

Chivalry itself was of course a primarily secular movement. The rise of the knightly class in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the emergence of a specific ethos attached to the concept of knighthood, is a vast and difficult theme in itself. Who or what a knight was depended on the language you spoke: the Latin *miles* means soldier, the German *Ritter* and the French *chevalier* a horseman, the English *knicht* a man who serves a lord. Only in English can we distinguish between chivalry and knighthood.¹

What we can say is that the knights were key players in the evolving feudal world of this period, and that somehow, from the newly developed arms and tactics of the period, an *esprit de corps* emerged which came to transcend immediate social rank. It can be seen in the conduct of war and in the introduction of restrictions aimed at mitigating the risks of war for the knightly classes.² There is evidence for organized training in the use of knightly weapons on horseback – spear, shield and sword – developing from the early eleventh century onwards into a violent form of sport, mock fights where war to the death was prevented by a series of rules and restraints. This in turn developed in the mid-twelfth century into a spectator sport, with distinguishing badges and commentators: heralds and heraldry were needed to make it possible for the onlookers to make out what was going on, and the emblems of opposing sides in war became individual coats of arms marking the prowess of the single knight.³

- ¹ The main general works on chivalry are: Maurice H. Keen, *Chivalry* (London and New Haven, 1984); Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, Eng., and Rochester, NY, 1995); Jean Flori, *L'Essor de la Chevalerie, XIe–XIIe siècles* (Geneva, 1986).
- ² Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066–1217* (Cambridge, Eng., and New York, 1996), pp. 330–4.
- ³ Noël Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry, 1254–1310: A Study of the Historical Value of the Rolls of Arms* (Oxford, 1965), p. 5.

The primacy of the individual over the concept of the order of knighthood is probably the defining moment of chivalry, making it possible for the anonymous knight to become the named hero, and thus to join the ranks of those celebrated in literature. Great warriors had always been thus commemorated, but only for their deeds in actual warfare. Now it was possible to earn fame off the battlefield, and for the poets to create a world where the court and the knight became synonymous, and where fighting mock-battles won not only fame, but also women's hearts.

These concepts, widely differing in origin, converged in the mid-twelfth century to produce the first secular romances of chivalry. The romance genre was not new; late classical literature had a flourishing repertory of such stories, and they were to be found in contemporary Byzantium. But the vital element was provided by yet another genre, the troubadour love lyrics of southern France.⁴ The complex secular ideology contained in these poems, drawing on concepts from religion, philosophy and the Arab world to create images and arguments which ranged from the dazzlingly simple to the deeply obscure, came through into the romances in a much simplified form: the idea of love-service. Just as a knight served his lord in the political world, so in the world of the emotions, he should serve his lady. His lord would reward him with lands and riches; but – and here the subtlety of the troubadours creeps in – the question of physical reward from the lady was much more ambiguous. Where the troubadours had been able to conceive of love almost as an intellectual game, and the question of its physical consummation, let alone marriage, was not their central concern (if indeed it was ever envisaged), the writers of romance addressed a less sophisticated audience.

The result was that the early romances were either about the winning of a bride or are frankly adulterous, and later writers try to evade the issue – the love potion becomes an excuse for Tristan's love for Iseult, while Lancelot's love for Guinevere is justified because it is never consummated. The driving force behind the stories is clear, a kind of Darwinian selection which matches the most accomplished (and handsome) knight with the most courtly (and beautiful) lady.

But a simple framework of tournaments and battles as the background to these love-stories would never have captured the imagination of a knightly audience sufficiently. The last element in the secular romances is that of the quest and its adventures. There is evidence that the idea of setting out to seek adventures was an early component of knighthood: a Norman knight declared to the Byzantine emperor in 1099, during the First Crusade:

I am a pure Frank and of noble birth. One thing I know; at a crossroads in the country where I was born is an ancient shrine; to this anyone who wishes to engage in single combat goes, prepared to fight; there he prays to God for help and there he stays awaiting the man who will dare to answer his challenge. At that crossroads I myself have spent time, waiting and longing for the man who would fight – but there was never one who dared.⁵

⁴ See Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Eng., and Rochester, NY, 1996) for an overview of the lyric.

⁵ *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 416.

The framework and setting for such episodes within the romances came from an unexpected source, the world of Celtic folktale and myth, with which the Norman conquerors of Britain had come into contact by the early twelfth century. The transmission of these tales to continental France is an enigma equal to that of the origins of the concept of courtly love. But the marvels and magic of the Celtic tales combined admirably with the quest for prowess; only the best knight in the world could break this or that spell, and the ultimately repetitive victories in tournaments or single combat could be given variety by these magical tests, which added a vital element of suspense and drama as well. In the hands of an artist such as Chrétien de Troyes, the stories become not only psychologically convincing, but they hold our attention as the hero encounters new terrors and dangers at each turn. By comparison, the contemporary chansons de geste, with their endless accounts of feuds and battles, seem heavy going indeed.

The Church's Attitude to Knighthood

The rise of a secular ethos such as knighthood, with its own set of values, particularly when combined with an exaltation of the individual and a fondness for violence, even under controlled conditions, was viewed with alarm by the Church. The values that the new 'order' promulgated seemed conducive to pride and adultery, and tournaments – called 'detestable fairs' by the Council of Clermont in 1130⁶ – could lead to manslaughter or worse. Yet there were positive moral elements about knighthood. It had, at least in part, its origins in the Church's attempts to involve itself in all elements of secular life, in the services of blessing when a new warrior received his arms.⁷ These had originally been little more than a variant on the blessings accorded to the tools of each trade, but the ambivalent nature of the knight's weapons led the Church to take more interest where the knighting ceremonies were concerned, particularly in view of the rank of those involved. The prayer on the occasion of giving of arms involved the idea that such power should only be used in a just cause:

Hearken, we beseech Thee, O Lord, to our prayers, and deign to bless with the right hand of Thy majesty this sword with which this Thy servant desires to be girded, that it may be a defence of churches, widows, orphans and all Thy servants against the scourge of the pagans, that it may be the terror and dread of all evildoers, and that it may be just both in attack and defence.⁸

This particular prayer may in fact have been used at the investiture of a lay lord who pledged himself to defend a particular monastery, and became its *advocatus*;

⁶ Karl Joseph von Hefele and Henri Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles, d'après les documents originaux* (Paris, 1912), 5.i,729.

⁷ Flori, *L'Essor de la Chevalerie*, pp. 90–2.

⁸ *The Pontifical of Magdalen College, with an Appendix of Extracts from other English MSS. of the Twelfth Century*, ed. H. A. Wilson (London, 1910), p. 255.

but it illustrates exactly the Church's problem in harnessing violence to its own ends.

The idea that warfare could in some way be restrained, as exemplified in the distinction between tournaments and real war, also owed something to the Church's influence; the movement known as the 'truce of God' attempted to limit the timescale of warfare by excluding holy days and indeed much of each week, and to regulate its conduct. It originated in southern France in the late tenth century, and spread throughout western Europe during the eleventh century. As local warfare diminished, and secular rulers established their authority, its usefulness decreased, but a principle had been established, that warfare could be controlled and its excesses curbed.

From controlling warfare, and setting certain ideals for the warriors who fought in it, the Church turned to harnessing the power of the knights for its own ends. The interplay of forces which led to the First Crusade is still much debated by historians: did the crusaders respond piously to an appeal by the pope, were they landless adventurers in search of territory to conquer, or were they even part of a popular movement fired by religious enthusiasm which the Church later brought under its aegis?⁹ In whatever way the movement began, the First Crusade brought the Church and knighthood together in a fashion which neither had foreseen. The scenes of religious exaltation – and religious excess – at Antioch and at the fall of Jerusalem in 1099 were to have practical results, in the foundation not only of the largely secular and colonial Frankish state in Palestine, but also of the military orders, who combined the ideals of monasticism and the ideals of knighthood.

The impetus for the creation of the military orders was in the main secular: the first of them was devised for the purely practical purpose of defending pilgrims on the journey to Jerusalem, and the knights' function was not unlike that of the *advocati* of a monastery, sworn to defend a religious institution. It was only when the search for a more formal basis to the enterprise began that the idea of forming an order seems to have come into play. The initial impetus was undoubtedly from the secular side: in about 1120 Hugh of Payns and a group of companions took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience under the auspices of the patriarch of Jerusalem, but very much at their own instigation.¹⁰ The political situation in the kingdom meant that they were rapidly enlisted not simply to defend pilgrims, but the state itself. When, in 1127, Hugh of Payns came to the West to seek support for his order, he was able to persuade the prelates assembled at the Council of Troyes to approve a formal rule. Among his supporters was Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom he may have been related, but it was only after some hesitation that Bernard wrote his famous epistle in support of the new institution, *De laude nove militie* (In praise of the new knighthood). The

⁹ On the idea that the crusade began as a popular movement, see Jean Flori, *Pierre l'Ermitte et la première croisade* (Paris, 1999).

¹⁰ Alan Forey, *The Military Orders from the Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Centuries* (London and Toronto, 1992), pp. 6–17; Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge, Eng., and New York, 1996), p. 49.

stumbling-block, even after the events of the first Crusade, was the Church's attitude to warfare: put simply, opponents of the new idea held that 'to devote oneself to fighting against the enemies of the faith was wrong,' an attitude which stemmed from the eternal debate over the question of a 'just war.'¹¹ But, after three requests from Hugh of Payns, Bernard overcame his reservations on this score, and his hesitation about such an innovative idea. *De laude nove militie* was to be the defining text of Cistercian attitudes to knighthood; if the military orders are seen as one way of harnessing the energies of the warrior in the service of religion, the implication is that there could be others.

Cistercian involvement with the military orders was not limited to propaganda on their behalf and letters of support. The Templars made an immediate impact in Spain, where their potential usefulness for the wars of the reconquista was realized; Alfonso I of Aragon named the order as one of three heirs to his kingdom in 1131. The Templars, however, wanted revenue and resources for the Holy Land, not new commitments. When, in 1158, the frontier fortress at Calatrava was in danger of being abandoned, it was the nearby Cistercian monastery at Fitero who took over the task of organizing its defense in response to an appeal from the Archbishop of Toledo, a move which led to the establishment of a new military order bearing the castle's name.

The traditional story of the foundation of Calatrava relates that the King of Castile offered the castle to anyone who would hold it, with sufficient lands to pay for its defence. The heralds proclaimed the offer three times, without success. At court, there was a monk of Fitero, Fray Diego Velazquez, who had once been a soldier; and it was he who persuaded the Abbot of Fitero to undertake the enterprise.¹² What this episode underlines is the close contact between the Cistercians and the knightly class; indeed Bernard of Clairvaux came from a knightly family and may have been related to the founder of the Templars. The Cistercians continued to draw their recruits from the nobility; in the twelfth century, the order seems to have had a special relationship with, and fascination for, the nobility.

The foundation of the military orders and Bernard's writing on knighthood are, however, only an extension of the monastic ideal. For evidence that the Cistercians were interested in attempting to influence the attitudes of secular knighthood, we have to look elsewhere. They were well placed to do so, as they recruited from this class, understood its mentality, and through ties of family, had continuing contact with knights and nobles to a greater extent than any other contemporary order. In the early thirteenth century, one of the leading Cistercian preachers, Caesarius of Heisterbach, wrote a *Dialogus miraculorum*, a series of sermon examples based on miracles, dreams and visions.¹³ In it, there are a large number of stories, some perhaps based on oral tradition, relating to

¹¹ Forey, *The Military Orders*, p. 17.

¹² Joseph O'Callaghan, 'The Affiliation of the Order of Calatrava with the Order of Cîteaux,' *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*, XV (1959), 180-3 [161-93].

¹³ *Caesarii Heisterbachensis. Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange (Cologne, Bonn, and Brussels, 1851).

the fate of knights who have sinned in some respect connected with their status, vivid verbal pictures which are clearly aimed at reforming the morals of the knightly class.

It is however in the *Queste del Saint Graal* that the link between Cistercianism and secular chivalry is at its most striking. To appreciate the implications of the *Queste*, we first need to look briefly at the history of the Grail romances and the concept of the Grail from which the anonymous author of the *Queste* worked.

The Grail first appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte du Graal*; it is called 'a grail' when first described, but in a later passage becomes 'the Grail.' Initially, its function is as an object of mystery, in a scene which is designed to arouse the audience's curiosity, and which deliberately sets out to conceal rather than reveal. The appearance of the Grail is presented entirely from Perceval's viewpoint, and tells us what he sees; as he does not ask the crucial question, 'Whom does the Grail serve?', he is as ignorant of its purpose and meaning at the end of the scene as at the outset. The Grail passes in and out of a room in which a feast is being held, carried by a girl and accompanied by brilliant lights. In essence, it is neither religious nor symbolic at this point: it is simply a focus for Chrétien's desire to show how Perceval has taken literally Gornemans' injunction not to ask questions. It enables the author to hold the audience in suspense, to create an atmosphere of tension and expectation. As such, it fulfils its dramatic function superbly; so superbly, that it has haunted our imagination ever since.

It is only later in the romance that we learn that this dish (*gradalis* in Latin) is 'a holy thing'¹⁴ in which a Mass wafer was served to the sick king who lay in a chamber off the hall, unseen by Perceval. Chrétien is echoing the legends of the Mass in which a single Eucharistic wafer is enough to sustain life. From this explanatory passage there evolved the legend of the 'Holy Grail.' It was given a powerful religious emphasis in the work of Robert de Boron, writing in the last decade of the twelfth century,¹⁵ who specifically identified the Grail with the dish used by Jesus at the Last Supper, and, drawing on the apocryphal versions of the New Testament, linked it to Joseph of Arimathea, who begged Christ's body from Pilate and arranged for its burial. In creating this pre-history of the Grail, he also invented the concept of a dynasty of the Grail, whose destiny was bound up with the sacred relic. But his work, which we admittedly only have in incomplete form, has no other agenda than to link this episode of Arthurian romance with a Biblical past, and perhaps to echo some of the Eucharistic ideas of his time. There is no moral in his version from which secular knighthood might profit.

The author of the *Queste* took the physical history of the Grail as described by Robert de Boron, and turned it into a spiritual history, the history both of the Grail and of the three knights who 'achieve' the quest. In so doing, he picked up one of Chrétien's major themes, Perceval's moral and spiritual development. Furthermore, he provided a new hero, Galahad, descended not only from the

¹⁴ 'Tant sainte chose': Chrétien de Troyes, *Le roman de Perceval, ou, le conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Keith Busby (Tübingen, 1993), line 6425.

¹⁵ Francesco Zambon, *Roberto de Boron e i segreti del Graal* (Florence, 1984), pp. 16–17.

lineage of David and of the guardians of the Grail, but from Lancelot, the peerless secular knight. The new hero has Lancelot's baptismal name, Galaad. The name Galaad occurs in the *Song of Songs* (mount Galaad), and a Cistercian commentary says of it, 'This mountain is the head of the church.'¹⁶ We are in a world where the haphazard excitements and adventures of the earlier romances are replaced by carefully orchestrated symbols. But why should we assume that the *Queste* is Cistercian? Any religious writer could on the face of it have reworked the romance in this symbolic vein, but there are good reasons which argue for a Cistercian author. At the most obvious level, the order itself – whose habit was white – is prominent in one respect; as the knights pursue the Grail quest and come to different abbeys, those which are identified as belonging to a specific order are always named as being houses of white monks.

More important, however, is the demonstrably Cistercian element in the theology behind the *Queste*. Etienne Gilson analysed the ideas put forward in the romance, and showed that the crucial doctrine of grace is couched in terms used by the Cistercian theologians of the period.¹⁷ In his words, 'we acknowledge that the *Queste* is an abstract and systematic work, to the extent that we can hardly promise to find ten consecutive lines written simply for the pleasure of telling a tale.'¹⁸ There are none of the gratuitous adventures found elsewhere in the romances – of which the first appearance of the Grail itself in Chrétien is a prime example. Each scene is composed as a symbol, and the whole romance is infested by hermits, whose function is to explain both to the protagonists and the reader the spiritual import of the events that unfold before them.

In Chrétien's romance, Perceval moves from untutored simpleton to some degree of self-knowledge and maturity before the text breaks off. In the *Queste*, by contrast, any odyssey is purely spiritual, and even then Galahad does not progress from innocence to a state of grace so much as lead the way for his companions, Perceval and Bohort, the two other heroes of the story. Galahad is perfect from the start, and possesses spiritual qualities which both set him apart and enable him to guide the others. The quest adventures merely set the seal on what we already know: that he is perfect, and is indeed a type of Christ himself.

But this does not mean that there is nothing to be learnt from his example. Gilson argues that the *Queste* is about approaching God through feeling (sentiment) rather than intellectual knowledge, and that the keynote of the adventures is grace and its action on the soul. One of the innumerable hermits explains a dream, in which Lancelot attempts to drink from a spring which disappears as he kneels to slake his thirst, by saying that the spring which 'can never be emptied, no matter how much one might take from it . . . is the Holy Grail, the grace of the Holy Spirit' (*Queste*, Lacy 159). Lancelot cannot drink from it, because he has sinned.

The Cistercian doctrine of grace provides the dramatic tension of the romance because, in Bernard of Clairvaux's analysis, free will can co-exist with grace:

¹⁶ Albert Pauphilet, *Etudes sur la Queste del Saint Graal attribuée à Gautier Map* (Paris, 1980), p. 137.

¹⁷ Etienne Gilson, *Les Idées et les Lettres* (Paris, 1932), pp. 59–91.

¹⁸ Gilson, *Les Idées*, pp. 60–1.

although in a sense Galahad, Perceval and Bohort are predestined to achieve the Grail – and there are signs and symbols to remind us of this – each is ultimately a free agent, possessing free will. As another hermit tells Bohort, who has likened a man's heart to the helm of a ship, 'the helm has a master who holds and guides it . . . making it go where he wants. It is the same with a man's heart. His good deeds come from the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit; his evil deeds are instigated by the Devil' (*Queste*, Lacy 165).

The adventures, therefore, are seen as a series of tests, in which the Grail knights must accept the action of grace if they are to succeed. The dramatic tension lies in the choice, the question of whether the hero will perform the right action. This fits well with the traditional adventures of chivalric romance, but substitutes a moral choice for the often arbitrary key to the secular versions of such episodes.

But to portray the *Queste* as a relentless sermon by example is to do it an injustice. The author is by no means rigid in his approach: a subtle theologian might detect the operation of grace in an episode such as Perceval's escape from the temptress. As he gets into bed with the lady, 'he happened to catch sight of his sword, which the servants had ungirded earlier, lying on the floor. As he stretched out his hand to grasp the sword, intending to rest it against the bed, he saw the red cross engraved on the pommel. That brought him to his senses. He crossed himself, and watched the tent fall away as smoke and fog surrounded him; it was so thick, he could see nothing, and such a strong odor emanated from everywhere that Perceval thought he was in hell' (*Queste*, Lacy 36). Equally, there is direct divine intervention, as when God prevents Bohort from fighting his brother Lionel; and we have already touched on the way in which Galahad is shown as a kind of Christ-figure. On the other side there are varying degrees of sinfulness, from Gawain's refusal to repent and Lionel's obdurate violence against his own brother, to Lancelot's efforts to free himself from Guinevere.

The author of the *Queste* is not simply using the framework of romance to put across a religious viewpoint. His grounding is in Cistercian theology, and in some ways both the weakest and strongest passages in the book stem from this: at one extreme are the sometimes laborious expositions of the meaning of the knights' adventures, and at the other the mystical vision of the scenes at Sarras when the Grail is finally achieved.

The *Queste* is carefully integrated into the cycle of romances, yet, as Malory sensed when he came to translate it, it does not confront entirely the problems that this causes, notably in the case of Lancelot. Galahad's birth is wrought by magic, and he is illegitimate; and at the end of the *Queste*, Lancelot goes back to his old sin. This makes the *Queste* seem like a journey into a different world, and the problem of the relationship of this highly religious and symbolic text to the rest of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* has not yet been satisfactorily analysed. The concept of using the romances to put across a theological viewpoint is not unique to the *Queste*. The *Perlesvaus* is equally concerned with theology, if of a cruder and less subtle sort: the topos here is not grace, but the role of the warrior in enforcing God's law, and bringing about the triumph of the New Law of the New Testament rather than that of the Old Law of heathendom and Judaism. The contrast between the two romances is instructive: *Perlesvaus* is the product

of a baroque, violent, even grotesque imagination; the author's failure to think through his material leads to weaknesses of structure and uncertainty as to his intentions. It is a darker and wilder vision, in which the Grail plays a minor role. The disciplined world of the *Queste*, on the other hand, reflects closely both the spiritual world of the Cistercians and their links with the secular aristocracy, and enshrines the supreme vision of the Grail itself as the mystery of the Eucharist, a moment which is the spiritual climax of the Arthurian stories.

The *Estoire del Saint Graal* forms a 'prequel' to the *Queste*; it is almost certainly by another, later hand. It is often dismissed as of relatively little merit or interest and the events it recounts are hardly the stuff of romance; but, seen as an attempt by a religious writer to mold a secular form to his own ends, it has some remarkable features. The *Estoire* is full of religious echoes and images, and yet its religious milieu is not easy to establish. Stylistically it is not by the same hand as the *Queste*, but it is arguably also a work with a Cistercian background.

Its function is to provide a kind of Old Testament to the New Testament of the *Queste*, in that its narrative prefigures the events of the *Queste* in the same way that medieval theologians read the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of the New. It also provides the history of some of the objects central to the Grail quest, such as the ship of Solomon which carries the chosen heroes on their journey towards Carbonek, the Grail castle, at the end of their adventures. In terms of prefiguration, we find Josephus wounded in the thigh, like the Fisher King (*Estoire*, Lacy 49); Evalach undergoes a version of Perceval's temptation by the devil in female form (*Estoire*, Lacy 62–3); and there is a spiritual version of the love of Lancelot and Guinevere (*Estoire*, Lacy 162). The name of the Fisher King is explained (*Estoire*, Lacy 140), and we learn how Mordrain, whom Galahad releases from his pain in the *Queste*, came to be struck down with paralysis (*Estoire*, Lacy 138).

The concept of prefiguration is a commonplace of medieval theology, but there are a few other indicators. Much play is made of the virginity of Mary, and Lucian, a pagan philosopher who denies the possibility of the virgin birth, is struck dead (*Estoire*, Lacy 125). This emphasis on the role of Mary in the preaching of Joseph and his followers when they attempt to convert pagans to Christianity could arguably be due to Cistercian influence. Bernard of Clairvaux and other writers from the order (including Hélinand de Froidmont, to whom we owe the one reference to the Grail in medieval theological literature) were ardent champions of the Virgin. The vision of Josephus (*Estoire*, Lacy 23–28) might also indicate something of the author's background: it belongs to a mystic and apocalyptic tradition, and it has been argued that this is related to the writing of Joachim of Fiore, the Cistercian visionary of the late twelfth century.¹⁹ The *Estoire* also contains an account of the first Eucharist, celebrated by Joseph of Arimathia, and the description of the service includes the ritual of 'ostentation,'

¹⁹ Myrrha Lot-Borodine, 'Autour du Saint Graal,' *Romania*, 56 (1930), 526–57, examines the arguments of Eugène Anitchkof (*Romania*, 55 [1929]), who sees a strong Joachimite and Cathar influence; she admits that there are elements of Joachimite writings in the *Estoire*, but places the work in a more general Cistercian milieu. I would not go as far as she does in tentatively attributing the work to a Templar (556), given that there is very little evidence of literary activity of any sort among the religious orders of knighthood.

officially introduced by the Lateran Council in 1215, which implies some degree of special theological knowledge.

But the *Estoire* remains, despite its close relationship to the apocryphal Gospels, very much a romance. One of the most striking episodes is at the outset, when the book of the Grail, which has been given to a hermit by an angel, vanishes. The hermit sets out like a knight errant in quest of the book, guided by a strange creature, part sheep, part dog, part fox, with a lion's tail (*Estoire*, Lacy 6-9), and his adventures are typical of a knight-errant's adventures. Likewise, when Josephus is instituted as the first bishop, the text echoes the speech of the Lady of the Lake on knighthood when Lancelot is knighted, and the instruction given by Merlin to Arthur when he is crowned.

In the *Estoire* and the *Queste*, the knightly conventions of the romances are transmogrified into something as hybrid as the strange beast of the hermit's adventure; we are left wondering if we are reading the work of a monk with a lively secular imagination, or that of a devout layman wishing to adapt his favorite reading to a higher purpose. Perhaps the latter is not such a remote possibility; the mystical tradition which inspires the pages relating the culmination of the Grail quest was one in which the laity partook, and which, like the legend of the Grail, was sometimes an unofficial cult, at one remove from the official teachings of the Church. Equally, the Cistercians were the one monastic order with a special involvement in secular knighthood, and whether we are looking for a monk or a layman as author, it is to this milieu, at once chivalrous and religious, that he is most likely to have belonged.

The Making of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle

ELSPETH KENNEDY

The *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* as we know it was not fully planned from the start. It is generally acknowledged that the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire de Merlin* were later additions to the *Cycle*, carefully presented to prepare the way for later events.¹ However, the development of the romance from the account of the childhood of Lancelot, beginning 'En la marche de Gaule et de la Petite Bretagne' (LK 1) [In the borderland between Gaul and Brittany],² to the death of Arthur has given rise to greater controversy. In contrast with some early scholars such as Brugger and Bruce who ascribed a major role to vanished cycles or interpolators,³ Ferdinand Lot stressed the careful links made between the various branches and argued that a single author wrote the *Cycle*, apart from the *Merlin*,⁴ Jean Frappier maintained that an 'architect' had planned the *Cycle* from the account of Lancelot's childhood to the death of Arthur.⁵ Micha too argues for the unity of the *Cycle*.⁶

One of the remarkable features of the *Cycle* is indeed its complex interlacing structure, achieved by creating links between its various branches; but there are

- 1 See *L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, ed. Jean-Paul Ponceau, 2 vols. (Paris, 1997). In the introduction, pp. x–xlv, the date of this branch and its relationship with the rest of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* is discussed. The *Estoire de Merlin* branch of the *Cycle* consists of a prose version of Robert de Boron's *Merlin* followed by a *Merlin Continuation*. For a discussion of the Robert de Boron part of the text, see Robert de Boron, *Merlin: Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Geneva, 1980). For the whole text, see *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, 7 vols., ed. H. Oskar Sommer, vol. II: *L'Estoire de Merlin* (Washington, D.C., 1908–1912).
- 2 For the translation of the Old French texts I have based myself, where possible, on *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols. (New York, 1993–96). LK: see n. 7 below.
- 3 Ernst Brugger, 'L'Enserrement Merlin: Studien zur Merlinsage,' *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, 29 (1906), 169–239; 31 (1907), 239–81; 33 (1908), 145–94; 34 (1909), 99–150; 35 (1910), 1–55. J. D. Bruce, 'The Composition of the Old French Prose *Lancelot*,' *Romanic Review*, 9 (1918), 241–68 and 353–95; 10 (1919), 48–66 and 97–122. J. D. Bruce, *Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Göttingen and Baltimore, 1928).
- 4 Ferdinand Lot, *Etude sur le Lancelot en prose* (Paris, 1918).
- 5 Jean Frappier, *Etude sur la Mort le roi Artu*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, 1968), esp. the appendix, 'Genèse et unité de structure du *Lancelot* en prose (essai de mise en point).' Jean Frappier, 'Plaidoyer pour "l'architecte" contre une opinion d'Albert Pauphilet sur le *Lancelot en prose*,' *Romanic Philology*, 8 (1954–55), 27–33. Albert Pauphilet, *Le Legs du Moyen Age* (Melun, 1950), pp. 212–27.
- 6 Alexandre Micha, 'L'esprit du *Lancelot-Graal*,' *Romania*, 82 (1961), 357–78; 'Sur la composition du *Lancelot en prose*,' in *Mélanges Lecoy* (Paris, 1973), pp. 417–425; *Essais sur le Lancelot-Graal* (Geneva, 1987).

problems in relation to the theory of an uninterrupted development of the story of Lancelot, with a son Galahad designed from the beginning to be the chief Grail hero. This can be clearly shown through a study of the manuscript tradition in relation to a passage to be found early in the account of Lancelot's childhood and which lists the three most beautiful women. The first was Guinevere, and the second Helene san Per, who figures in an adventure of Hector before Lancelot becomes a knight of the Round Table. In MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 768, the third is described as follows:

Et l'autre fu fille au roi mehaignié, ce fu li rois Pellés qui fu peres Perlesvax, a celui qui vit apertement les granz merveilles del Graal et acompli lo Siege Perilleus de la Table Reonde et mena a fin les aventures del Reiaume Perilleus Aventureus, ce fu li regnes de Logres. Cele fu sa suer, si fu de si grant biauté que nus des contes ne dit que nule qui a son tens fust se poïst de biauté a li apareillier, si avoit non Amide en sornon et an son droit non Heliabel.⁷

[And the other was the daughter of the maimed king, that was Pelles who was father of Perlesvaus, of the man who witnessed the great wonders of the Grail and passed the test of the Perilous Seat of the Round Table and brought to an end the adventures of the danger-filled Perilous Kingdom, that was the land of Logres. She was his sister and was so beautiful that none of the tales name anyone at that time whose beauty could be compared with hers; she was called Amide, but her true name was Heliabel.]

BNF fr. 768 is not isolated here: in the majority of manuscripts it is Perceval/Perlesvaus, not Galahad, who is identified as the achiever of the Grail adventures and the Perilous Seat.⁸ The allusion, which appears to be to a past event, presents a combination of elements from Chrétien's *Conte del Graal*, where Perceval seems clearly destined to be the Grail winner and has a maimed, unnamed father, and Robert de Boron's *Joseph* and *Merlin*, where there is a Perilous Seat at both the Grail Table and the Round Table.

A number of manuscripts attempt to change the reading in various ways to prepare for the *Queste*, which, of course, gives Galahad as chief Grail winner and achiever of the adventure of the Perilous Seat. This includes MS British Library, Additional 10293, the manuscript on which both the edition of Sommer and that of Micha vols. 7 and 8 are based and which reads as follows:

Et l'autre fu fille au Roi Mahaignié, che fu li rois Pellés qui fu peires a Amite, meire Galaat, chelui qui vit apertement les grans mervelles del Graal et acompli le siege perillous de la Table Reonde et mena a fin les aventures del roialme

⁷ *Lancelot do Lac: The non-cyclic Old French Prose Romance*, ed. Elspeth Kennedy, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1980), henceforth abbreviated to LK (vol. 1 unless otherwise indicated). The passage is on p. 33. The equivalent passage, but with a different reading, is at 7:59–60 in the edition of Alexandre Micha, *Lancelot: roman du XIIIe siècle*, 9 vols. (Geneva, 1978–83), henceforth abbreviated to LM.

⁸ Twenty-two manuscripts give Perlesvaus/Perceval as seeing *apertement* the marvels of the Grail and achieving the adventure of the Perilous Seat (two of these have corrections inserted over the original reading); this reading is not confined to one or two groups of manuscripts but goes across all groupings except one, that to which MS Paris, BNF fr. 110 belongs (see n. 9 below). For details, see LK 2:89.