

E. Jane Burns

# ARTHURIAN FICTIONS

Rereading the Vulgate Cycle



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*E. Jane Burns*

Professor Burns's rereading of the medieval French prose romance is to be understood in two senses of the term. She questions, in the first place, the premises that have shaped our understanding of the highly repetitive Arthurian tales of the five-story corpus known as the Vulgate Cycle, and suggests, in the second, a new model of reading based on precisely that repetition.

To reread these prose texts, she points out, is to put aside considerations of narrative coherence, authorial control, and linear development, and to embrace instead the digressive and often illogical narrative path suggested by the text's typed episodes. The Vulgate's individual tales are composed, in large measure, of narrative redundancies, elements that give the impression that the text is retelling itself constantly, always introducing new protagonists whose actions only repeat with some variation what other knights have already accomplished. In contrast to a more linear kind of reading that might attempt to forge logical links of cause and effect among disparate *aventures*—thereby making sequential sense of what is essentially and perhaps purposefully a nonlinear narrative structure—Professor Burns proposes a reading that will do just the opposite.

Reminding us that writing in the medieval period was, above all, a process of continual rewriting, and that the medieval "text," as a result, has little of the narrative autonomy and coherence that we ascribe to, and expect of, printed works by named authors, Professor Burns advances an aesthetic for reading the prose romance that relies precisely on what have heretofore been considered its deficiencies: redundancy, ellipsis, and self-contradiction.

Once we accept these features of composition as given, as forms of repetition that par-

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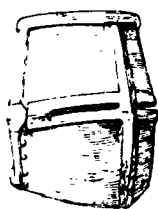




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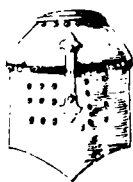




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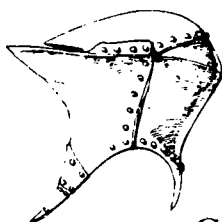
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FOR ELIZABETH DILWORTH  
AND ELIZABETH MAROOTIAN  
MY MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER





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## Introduction

This study offers a rereading of the medieval French prose romance in two senses of the term: it first questions the premises that have shaped our understanding of the highly repetitive Arthurian tales of the five-story corpus known as the Vulgate Cycle,<sup>1</sup> and then suggests a new model of reading based precisely on that repetition. To “reread” these prose texts is to put aside considerations of narrative coherence, authorial control, and linear development, and to embrace instead the digressive and often illogical narrative path suggested by the text’s typed episodes. The Vulgate’s individual tales are composed, in large measure, of narrative redundancies, elements that give the impression that the text is retelling itself constantly, always introducing new protagonists whose actions only repeat with variation what other knights have already accomplished. In contrast to a more linear kind of reading that might attempt to forge logical links of cause and effect or consequence between disparate *aventures*—making sequential sense of what is essentially and perhaps purposefully a nonlinear narrative structure—the kind of reading I propose will do just the opposite. By rereading we can examine the ways in which the *récit* of the Vulgate Cycle is systematically displaced from a straightfor-

ward narrative path, exploring how this text constantly shifts our attention away from the narrative at hand to other portions of the tale. Here logical sequence is consistently undermined by many different kinds of repetition.

The approach used in this study is conditioned by the narrative framework of the tales in question and qualified by the processes of textual composition and transmission that prevailed in the High Middle Ages. When we consider that the Arthurian prose romance was typically recorded in many manuscript versions, that the story committed to writing was subsequently reproduced on multiple occasions by a reciter reading aloud before an audience, and that the written version of any tale was subject to frequent rewriting and recasting by different authors across several centuries, it becomes clear that the medieval "text" shares little of the narrative autonomy and "coherence" that we ascribe to printed works by named authors.

Writing, in the medieval period was, above all, a process of continual rewriting, and the kind of textuality that results from this literary system presents a special problem for the modern reader. The five lengthy and rambling tales that make up the Vulgate corpus all but defy the constraints of artful composition generally associated with the well-wrought tale. Yet it is clear, judging from the number of extant manuscripts, that these prose romances were immensely popular in the Middle Ages. If we accept the flagrant discontinuities of narrative sequence as given, as forms of repetition that accompany the fundamental pluralism of the manuscript tradition in the Middle Ages, we can then advance an aesthetic premise for reading the prose romance that relies precisely on what have heretofore been considered its deficiencies: redundance, ellipsis, and self-contradiction.

However, the model of rereading proposed here is not guided by formalist concerns alone, for the Vulgate's pronounced tendency toward narrative repetition raises significant questions about the very nature and function of textuality in medieval vernacular romance. Within the broader cultural context of Neo-Platonic theology, repetition occupies a priv-

ileged place when it corresponds to the act of representation in the chain of being. Through a kind of vertical repetition the Divine Idea is made manifest; and each reenactment of an event is valued as a concrete revelation of the abstract form that precedes it. In vernacular romance, however, repetition operates on a horizontal plane generating a seemingly limitless number of narrative elements. Grounded in self-reference, this repetition necessarily undermines the hierarchy essential to Neo-Platonic thought.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the predominance of rewriting in the Vulgate romances bears witness to a longstanding medieval controversy between Scripture and Rhetoric, a rivalry between two competing concepts of textuality that is played out on the field of Arthurian romance as the notion of the Divine text that copies sacred truth struggles against the tendency of literary texts to invent their own truths.

Rather than suggesting the possibility of transcendence through literature, the Vulgate tales use repetition to underscore the very immanence of the fictional text. In fact the cycle's abundant supply of narrative *ressorts*, which provides the most blatant example of literature's bold divergence from the theological model, is echoed in different volumes of the cycle through other aspects of rewriting. In the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire de Merlin*,<sup>3</sup> multiple authorial voices generate overlapping narratives which echo and augment one another; as the tale is constantly recast, so too is the voice that recounts it. The putative allegorical structure of the *Queste del Saint Graal* participates in yet another type of rewriting since each Arthurian adventure is reformulated by a hermit who recounts analogous events taken from other tales. Here "interpretation" of narrative segments produces a whole series of highly fictionalized retellings.

Consideration of the role of repetition in the Vulgate texts leads, then, inevitably to questions regarding the function of authorship and authority on the one hand, and the role of interpretation and meaning on the other. These are issues of profound theological significance in the Middle Ages and, like the process of representation, they are posited in the Vulgate



romances only to be undermined by different instances of literary rewriting. We will see in the following pages that although these prose narratives purport to offer authoritative, truthful, and definitive accounts of the Arthurian past, the systems of coherence that they espouse are systematically undercut within the tales themselves. Successive chapters of this study will demonstrate in particular how the Vulgate's claims to single authorship, allegorical *senefiance*, and historical authenticity are narrative fictions firmly grounded in literary repetition.

We will begin by examining the manner in which textuality is conceptualized within the Vulgate Cycle considering especially how medieval textuality is anchored in an aesthetic of pluralism that governs the role of author and text alike. Chapter 2 focuses more specifically on the question of authorship, demonstrating how the proliferation of narrative voices in the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire de Merlin* both mimics and undermines the medieval system of writing based on *auctoritas*. By advancing a wholly vernacular version of "authority" derived from the citation of fictional texts and fabricated authors, the prose romance deftly subverts the process of textual authentication that the Church Fathers claimed to be theirs alone. Chapter 3 investigates the medieval reading system of interpretative allegory showing how the *Queste del Saint Graal* effectively mocks theological interpretation by offering a wholly vernacular version of Christian typology.

These initial chapters provide a prelude to discussion of the most obvious aspect of rewriting in the Vulgate romances: the recurrence of stock motifs in the *Lancelot*. The issue at stake in this volume of the cycle is not authority or meaning but representation, both historical and theological: the accurate recording of past events in fiction, and the accurate reproduction of a transcendent signified. Although this cycle of tales is said, on the one hand, to result from the oral deposition of King Arthur's knights, and to descend, on the other, directly from the "bouce de la veritet," the predominance of narrative *ressorts* within the text suggests a wholly literary provenance based on allusion to former incidents in the tale. These events are shown

systematically to be devoid of historical referent or theological significance. Rather, it is through narrative repetition that the Vulgate texts proclaim boldly if indirectly the importance of literary creation, legitimizing the role of vernacular romance by underscoring through a sheer mass of words the significance of the *verbum* as opposed to the *Verbum*.

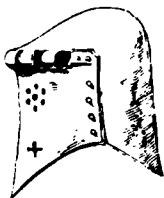
The final chapter on *La Mort le roi Artu* indicates how the last tale of the cycle participates in rewriting of yet another sort, by closing the series without providing a definitive narrative ending. This volume offers in fact the possibility of rewriting in the largest sense by leaving open the chance to continue the narration at some later date.

In each tale of the Arthurian Vulgate Cycle, what we hear stressed repeatedly is the conviction that the “lie” of literature forcefully rivals the Truth of Scripture, that the order of Poetics here strives boldly to gain the authority previously accorded only to Theology. It is precisely to the degree that these texts are rewritten that they proclaim their forcefulness as literary works distinct from, and in competition with the “force des escriptures.” This literary rewriting invites in turn a rereading on our part.

At the same time that the issues of authority, interpretation, representation, and closure raise significant questions about the role and function of the vernacular text in the Middle Ages, they also serve to question the ways in which we have read or might read Arthurian romance. The medieval controversy between Rhetoric and Scripture can be seen in this way as a staging ground for more contemporary issues of literary significance. As the tense and tenuous rapport between Divine Text and its literary rival is orchestrated within the Vulgate romances through many kinds of repetition, we are encouraged at every turn to reconsider the importance we accord to concepts of textual autonomy, authority based on authorship, or the attempt to find coherent meaning in medieval literary texts.

Although the analysis offered here is based on individual volumes of the Vulgate Cycle, it has broader implications for Arthurian romance in general: for the verse romances as well as

those in prose, and for the non-Arthurian prose texts. Whereas the specific patterns of repetition and mechanisms of narrative rewriting discussed here do not pertain directly to other medieval prose texts, the issues of textuality, authorship, and the status of the vernacular tale as well as the problem of how to read the repetition in medieval works are germane to the widest spectrum of texts: to tales ranging from the *oeuvre* of Chrétien de Troyes to the verse continuations of his romances, from the *Perlesvaus* to the prose *Tristan*.



## Chapter One

### The Poetics of Rewriting

If we take at face value the textual genealogy that is advanced in the five-story corpus of Arthurian tales known as the Vulgate Cycle, we might understand these texts to be the result of the oral deposition of King Arthur's knights. Having returned from their individual heroic adventures, the knights of the Round Table are said to have recounted their feats aloud to the inhabitants of the court in the presence of Arthur's scribes. The scribes, in turn, committed the tales to writing, creating thereby the text we read. Indeed, throughout the prose *Lancelot* we are reminded that Arthur's knights ride all day in search of adventures that might be told, often finding no deeds worthy of this honor, "si chevalcha tote jor sans aventure trover qui a conter face."<sup>1</sup> Just why certain adventures are worth recounting, recording, and remembering is never made explicit. The texts in which they are preserved cannot be taken as documentary accounts of events in either the sixth century or the High Middle Ages, for the incidents recorded here are extremely stylized and repetitive. A typical chivalric encounter is one in which a knight comes to a castle where he must vanquish a guard on a bridge and swear to deliver the castle inhabitants. Once inside,

the potential liberator comes upon a garden containing a pine tree with a horn hanging from it that he must blow before subduing a knight who exits from a tower.<sup>2</sup> The details of this event are not significant in their realistic precision; indeed they offer a generalized and unspecific view of the prison locale. But they become important through repetition, through the fact that they recur typically in similar scenes throughout the lengthy volumes of the prose texts. We are rarely told how one castle differs from the next, or what distinguishes a particular garden, tower, or pine tree from the others. These repeated adventures appear, in fact, to refer more to one another than to any external, mimetic structure.

Could this, then, be what makes an adventure worth recounting in the Vulgate romances: the degree to which it conforms or can be made to conform to other adventures that have already been told? If so, we are confronted with a textual tradition that is doubly fictional: those who tell the tale are active, creative protagonists in their own narrative. And what these hybridized author-heroes recount has already been told to some extent by other knights whose adventures serve as models for later narratives. Each knight's choice of the exploits he will undertake is thus not made on chivalric grounds alone; as authors of their own tales, the heroes of the Vulgate Cycle select those chivalric deeds that fit the mold of established narrative episodes. The strategic scenario that is acted out on the field of literature, as on the field of battle, originates in repetition.

The kind of episodic repetition delineated here is but one example of the ways in which the Vulgate tales are continually rewritten. The narrative *reprise* characterizing incidents of capture and release in this corpus finds a structural counterpart of wider scope when whole segments of the Vulgate texts are retold in other volumes of the cycle. The *Estoire del Saint Graal*, which describes the transfer of the Grail from the Holy Land to Great Britain, contains several lengthy tales that are also recounted in the *Queste del Saint Graal*.<sup>3</sup> Although these stories are linked through the repetition of common subject matter, it is not immediately apparent whether they are designed to stand



alone as independent tales, or whether they must be taken together as interdependent narratives. A related question can be asked of certain segments within individual volumes of the cycle: should the "Agravain" section be considered part and parcel of the *Lancelot*, or should the "Livre d'Artus" be read as inherently tied to the *Merlin*?

From these few examples it becomes apparent that any inquiry into what constitutes an episode in the Vulgate texts inevitably gives rise to a much larger question: what are the boundaries of textual autonomy or what constitutes a text within this prose cycle? This is a problem common to Arthurian tales in general, and it is symptomatic of the peculiar medieval propensity for inventing continuations of existing narratives. Within fifty years of the composition of Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte du Graal*, four major rewritings of the Perceval story appeared in verse: the anonymous First and Second Continuations, followed by those of Manessier and Gerbert de Montreuil. And through a parallel phenomenon of narrative elaboration Robert de Boron's *Roman du Graal* was recast in three successive prose versions: the *Didot Perceval*, the *Perlesvaus*, and the Vulgate's *Queste del Saint Graal*. Similarly, Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charrette* was expanded into the Vulgate's *Lancelot*, and the Tristan legends by Bérout and Thomas were reformed into the prose *Tristan*. And the rewriting that typifies these medieval romances is reinforced on the most basic level by the tradition of medieval manuscript copying famed for generating numerous versions of any one tale.

Thus it is clear that in many different ways the tendency to rewrite was a basic feature of medieval vernacular composition. But this propensity for narrative repetition calls into question the fundamental notions of individual creation and interpretation that we, as post-Romantic heirs to an ideology of originality, often take for granted. The modern concepts of narrative coherence and the well-wrought tale, which imply the assurance of a writer's idiosyncratic authority, are thoroughly undermined in the earlier medieval system. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century view that literary creation was grounded in

the continuous order of repetition offers a challenge to the Romantic order of discontinuous, unique inventions. Whether the Vulgate romances are, in fact, the result of oral storytelling (by Arthur's knights or someone else) is then entirely beside the point. In a tradition that self-consciously erases "points of origin" to dictate points of confluence, the reader's responsibility shifts from the search for a putative "fixed" meaning to the careful assimilation of narrative repetition and exchange.

This is precisely what the seemingly odd textual genealogy presented in the *Lancelot* suggests. When this tale of adventure describes, on repeated occasions, how conformity between narrative episodes is more important than the telling of individualized events, the reader is initiated into the logic of medieval vernacular poetics: a literary system in which rewriting is *de rigueur* and joint authorship outranks original creation. There are, in fact, a series of textual genealogies in the Vulgate romances that serve as a helpful guide for decoding the aesthetic system at work in these tales. By examining them we can see how the process of writing is conceptualized in this corpus of narratives, and can then better understand how to read the repetition to which these tales cling so tenaciously. However, before explicitly mapping out the medieval model of reading, we should consider the way in which the Vulgate's definition of textuality relates to the cultural context of the High Middle Ages. We will then be able to weigh the aesthetic premises of the cycle specifically within the prevailing theological and rhetorical theories of what a text should be. As the first step to developing a poetics of reading for the medieval prose romance, this chapter will investigate how the comments on authorship and textuality contained within the cycle of tales compare with the views of vernacular textuality advanced by the church fathers on the one hand and the precepts of thirteenth-century rhetoricians on the other.

## THE AUTHOR IN THE TEXT

Traditionally, scholars have tended to base their evaluations of the Vulgate tales on Romantic notions of the masterwork and

authorial genius. Viewed from this perspective, the Vulgate texts have been read either as degenerate continuations of their laudable predecessors in verse, the well-wrought tales of Chrétien de Troyes, or, alternately, as the literary ancestors of the nineteenth-century novel called by the same name, *roman*. Yet the conventions of repetition and digression that play a central role in the Vulgate Cycle are clearly not those in force in the novels of Balzac or Zola. By reading the prose romance in line with the later *roman*, critics have, in fact, generated a host of false assumptions. The search to find within these texts a continuous referential plotline or coherent narrative development has invariably forced the amorphous and rambling medieval tale into an anachronistic nineteenth-century narrative mold.

Using Chrétien as an anticipatory model for subsequent texts is equally problematic since the deft handling of characters and the individualized authorial voice that punctuate Chrétien's works cannot be considered typical of vernacular literary production in the High Middle Ages. To be sure, this is what studies that take Chrétien as a model have proved indirectly: that the aesthetic criteria behind *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain* are not those in force for the Vulgate Cycle.<sup>4</sup> The exemplary choice of Chrétien by critics is determined, in large part, by the relatively early dating of his *oeuvre*, but perhaps more importantly by the fact that he, like authors in the nineteenth century, is known to us by name. It remains a curious fact that the judgments of those who find the prose romance wanting because of its narrative discontinuity turn ultimately on the question of authorship.<sup>5</sup>

Already in the seventeenth century, the epic poet Chapelain contended that the prose *Lancelot* was a *fumier* in which one might locate a few literary diamonds; his inevitable conclusion was that the text had been written by a barbarian.<sup>6</sup> In our own century, Pauphilet, Bruce, and Jeanroy have pursued a slightly less offensive tack, attributing the disunity of the cycle of tales to the unmonitored succession of several authors and subsequent redactors.<sup>7</sup> However, in each instance the digressive text is assumed to be the consequence of a lack of authorial control. This focus is maintained in the counter arguments proposed in

recent times by Lot, Frappier, and Vinaver, all of whom posit the existence of a conceptual plan that they attribute to the well-ordered mind of a hypothetical author.<sup>8</sup> Vinaver's comment is typical of this view: "The author of a fully interlaced cyclic composition has the entire development in mind, knows where the point of departure is for each ramification — or digression — and how to take us back, if necessary, to the line or curve we previously followed."<sup>9</sup> Although these arguments are designed ostensibly to explain the structural composition of the Vulgate Cycle, to reveal the way in which consistent chronology, *entrelacement*, and architectural design play a major role in the creation of the long and episodic tales, they are arguments that depend in reality on the function of authorship. What is considered to be an unacceptably repetitious and monotonous narrative structure is validated by the hypothesis that this structure is not the haphazard consequence of textual transmission, but the willed result of an ingenious master.

And yet the voice of this master is nowhere to be found in the Vulgate narratives. The problem is complex because we know so little about the real-life author(s) of these anonymous tales. But if we examine the role of authorship and the process of storytelling as they are portrayed within the Vulgate's tales of adventure, we find an elaborate narrative strategy that suggests authorial control while simultaneously diffusing the possibility of single authorship. The example cited earlier from the *Lancelot* is a case in point. In this scenario of oral deposition, the original "author" of the tale we read, the authorial subject inscribed within the text, is clearly not limited to a single individual. Indeed, the narration of chivalric *hauts faits* can be undertaken by any number of Arthur's knights whose prowess on the battlefield qualifies them as courtly storytellers. In the *Queste*, on the other hand, the process of storytelling seems, at first, to be circumscribed by the actions of a single named author, Walter Map. At the close of the tale we find the standard description of a compositional process involving knight and scribe extended to include a fictitious author-translator:

Quant il orent mengié, li rois fist avant venir les clers qui metoient

en escrit les aventures aus chevaliers de laienz. Et quant Boorz ot contees les aventures del Seint Graal telles come il les avoit veues, si furent mises en escrit et gardees en l'almiere de Salebieres, dont MESTRE GAUTIER MAP les trest a fere son livre del Seint Graal por l'amor del roi Henri son seignor, qui fist l'estoire translater de latin en françois.<sup>10</sup>

However, in the final line of this text, the authority of its pseudohistorical author is undercut by the ambiguous and wholly fictionalized voice of *li contes*: "Si se test a tant li contes, que plus n'en dist des AVENTURES DEL SEINT GRAAL." It is clear from this closing line that the narrative of the *Queste* ends when the *conte* stops speaking, when the tale has no more to tell of the Grail adventures. A similar narrative voice accompanies the fictive scenario of oral deposition in the *Lancelot*:

Einsi comme Lancelot disoit sez aventures furent elles mises en escrit, et pour ce que si fait estoient greignor que nus de ceues de laiens, lez fist le roys mettre par lui seul, si que des fais Lancelot trova l'en j. grant livre en l'aumaire li roy Artu après ce qu'il fu navrés a mort en la Bataille de Salesbieres, si comme *cils contes le devisera cha avant* (Sommer 5:332, my emphasis).

If the *Queste* and the *Lancelot* portray author-heroes who are neatly embedded in the fictional world of romance, both texts also take the process a step further by fusing the teller with the tale itself. Although in the *Queste*, written documentation derived from the knight's oral accounts is associated with a single (if bogus) author, Walter Map, Map's contribution to the process becomes evident only in the epilogue that mentions his name.<sup>11</sup> In the body of this text, as in the *Lancelot*, it is not an authoritative "je" but the voice of *li contes* that speaks to us directly. The epilogue itself reiterates this schema of oral communication between the original author of the tale (Bors) and his audience—whether medieval or modern—effectively reducing Map's role to that of *scriptor*. When Bors speaks to the entourage of listeners at Arthur's court, and *li contes* relates the same tale to later readers, it appears that Walter Map merely records the voice of Bors so that it can be reproduced at a later date by yet another voice.<sup>12</sup> The potential authority that we

might attribute to the cycle's named author is thus greatly attenuated by the overtly fictionalized voice of *li contes* which accompanies and encloses it.

A similar configuration of authorship characterizes *La Mort le roi Artu*, a volume of the Vulgate corpus that places particular emphasis on the process of recording information in written form.<sup>13</sup> Yet even this written documentation is relayed to the reader by the voice of the tale: "Lors se part li vallet de Lancelot et s'en va seur son roncín la plus droite voie qu'il pot vers Kamaalot, et fet tant qu'il vient a la cort le roi Artu. Mes atant lesse ore li contes a parler de lui et retorne as trois freres monseigneur Gauvain Or dit li contes que "14 Here again, it is neither King Arthur's knight nor the ostensible author-translator who speaks to us from the pages of the written record, but the vaguer, noncorporeal voice of *li contes* itself.

The concerted displacement of the Vulgate's supposed author becomes particularly clear in the *Estoire del Saint Graal* where the tale is said to assume all the characteristics of a live storyteller. *Li contes* is described as speaking, becoming silent, beginning a subplot, returning to an earlier narrative thread, and leaving one character to turn to the adventures of another.<sup>15</sup> In short, this *conte* serves as both source and teller of the story that we read, usurping thereby the roles that are generally played by the author of a work and the narrator who recounts it. Here, as in the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu*, the act of literary creation is ascribed to a tale that tells itself, and the ostensible author is shown, like Bors in the *Lancelot*, to be only one of several textualized voices.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the *Estoire*, in fact, the first-person narrator, *je* (alternately *jou*) and *li contes* are presented as interchangeable narrative voices sharing one literary plan.<sup>17</sup> When we read, for example, "Or dist li contes a celui point que Syméons en fu portés ensi comme jou vous ai deviset" (3:235), or "Mais or se taist à tant li contes de la ducesse et retourne sour les messages dont jou vous avoie commenchiet à conter" (2:427), it is clear that the voice of the tale intervenes repeatedly in the

narrative that the authorial "I" has begun.<sup>18</sup> Yet in the end, references to *li contes* far outnumber the few comments made by *je*, with the result that the voice of the tale effectively replaces that of its author-narrator.<sup>19</sup>

This is the most overt example of a phenomenon that manifests itself in different ways throughout the Vulgate corpus. Taken together, the textualized author-heroes, the fictitious named author, and the intrusive voice of *li contes* provide ample evidence that the "author" of the Vulgate Cycle exists first and foremost "in the text."<sup>20</sup> Although the name(s) of the cycle's creator(s) have disappeared, their presence is supposed only through the elaborate narrative fictions that the historical author(s) devised for the purpose of hiding or effacing the traces of individual invention.

As a result it becomes impossible to trace a clear textual genealogy from an original author to his translator to the medieval public. If "je" is the author of the original record of Bors's speech, to what extent did Walter Map appropriate this narrative voice and its textual material when he used these records to "fere son livre," and to what degree did he rewrite the preceding tale? Of further difficulty: if Map was working for King Henry "qui fist l'estoire translater de latin en françois," did he, Map, compose a narrative that was later translated at Henry's request or was Map's job that of translator alone?<sup>21</sup> This supposed record of textual transmission is actually based on a complex conflation of many "authors" and several texts. The plural authorial voice that results echoes, to a large degree, the plurality of textual *ressorts* in the romance storyline. On the issues of both textuality and authorship then, the Vulgate romances invent narrative scenarios that obfuscate logical explanation. In place of a linear story line and the defense of single authorship that we have come to expect from postmedieval fiction, these texts advance a dynamic strategy of textuality that is anchored in repetition, fragmentation, and diversity, a type of writing that cultivates narrative *reprise* and authorial reduplication in place of unity and univocity.

## THE THEOLOGICAL MODEL COLLAPSED

This is nowhere more evident than in the third textual genealogy offered in the Vulgate tales. In this case the theological model of univocal truth and original creation is posited only to be undermined by a series of authorial voices, much in the manner that Bors's invention and Walter Map's authority are shown, in the other tales, to be fragmented and partial. In the *Estoire* the author of the tale figures as a character in the narrative whose role it is to copy a book that was written previously by Christ.<sup>22</sup> When the *grans maistre* hands the author a book containing the story of the Holy Grail, he directs this writer specifically to "escrire le livre que jou t'ai baillet" (2:38). The verb *escrire* is used here in the sense of transcribing a text that has already been committed to writing. The author is to copy a book that was begun by God, "et ne t'esmaie de chou que tu ne fèisses onques tel mestier que nul oeuvre ne puet estre mal faite ki par moi est commenchié" (2:38). Since this author is merely a vehicle for the transmission of a sacred text to an audience, he claims to be nothing more than an invisible scribal hand and insists that his name be withheld from his text, "ne velt que ses noms soit de tot en tout descouvers" (2:5). His task is to reveal and relate (*il descouverra et dira*) a story that has been revealed to him by the supreme creator, God, "que Diex éust par lui descouverte si haute cose et si haute estoire com est cele del Graal" (2:4).

This is the traditional medieval view of literary invention according to which God is conceived to be the only true author and all creation is accomplished in accordance with the singular voice of Divine authority. In this system, which emphasizes unity at the expense of diversity, the appropriate role of literary endeavor is limited to the faithful copying of an officially-sanctioned work.<sup>23</sup>

However, when we are advised repeatedly in the course of the *Estoire* that the source of this narrative is not Christ or the *grans maistre* but the secular voice of *li contes*, it becomes impossible to read this text as an inscription of the Sacred Word.



Distinct from *li livre* that Christ asks the "author" to copy, *li contes* is presented, in the other volumes of the cycle, as the incarnation of a narrative voice whose function overlaps repeatedly with the equally ambiguous voices of *je*, Bors, and Map. In place of the singular Word of God, we are confronted throughout the cycle with the plural and often contradictory voices of vernacular textuality. Within the *Estoire* itself the dilemma is articulated specifically in terms of a tension between the Divine voice of God and the secular voice of romance.

If, through this narrative tension, the *Estoire* raises some very pointed questions about the appropriate function of literary texts in the Middle Ages, the *Merlin* carries the process even further by deftly transferring the role of the master Creator to Merlin, the master of artifice. As a new version of the author-hero seen previously in the character of Bors and Arthur's other knights, Merlin dictates his story to Blaise who combines, in a single volume, tales from the Bible and events from Merlin's own life. Blaise records "les amors de Jhesu Crist et de Joseph tot einsi com eles avoient esté" along with the tale of Merlin's conception:<sup>24</sup>

coment deables, après ce que ces choses furent toutes avenues, prinrent conseil de ce qu'il avoient perdu lor pooir qu'il soloient avoir seur les homes, et coment il prophete lor avoient mal fait, et por ce avoient porpalé et acordé ensemble coment il feroient .I. home (p. 74).

The true story of Christ's miracles is thus joined with the true tale of Merlin's marvels,<sup>25</sup> and the resultant book is compared with the authority of the apostles. As Merlin explains to Blaise:

Et toz jorz mais sera ta poine et ton livre retrait et volentiers oïz en toz leus. Mais il ne sera pas en auctorité, por ce que tu n'ies pas ne ne puez estre des apostoles, car li apostole ne mistrent riens en escrit de Nostre Seingnor qu'il n'eussent veu et oï, et tu n'i mez rien que tu en aies veu ne oï, se ce non que je te retrai (p. 75).

Here nominal deference is paid to the eye witness apostolic account which is said to carry more weight than a tale that is told (*que je te retrai*). But the very terms of the comparison belie a

desire to grant equal authority to the fictional mode, a desire that is borne out by a host of statements like:

"Et t'oeuvre sera toz jorz mais, tant com le siecle durra, retraite et volentiers oïe" (p. 99)

"et tu avras tant de bonnes oeuvres faites que tu devras estre avec els [Joseph of Arimathea and his followers] en lor compoignie" (p. 100)

"Et saiches que tes livres sera encores molt amez et molt prisiez de maintes genz qui ja ne l'avront veu" (p. 100)

"si avra non toz jorz mais, tant com li mondes durera, tes livres li LIVRES DOU GRAAL et sera molt volentiers oïz" (p. 101)

As the "author" of this long-lasting and popular fiction, Blaise is clearly not the faithful scribe who reverently copies Scripture: instead of recording the Word of God he transcribes the words of Merlin. The univocal authority of the sacred text is thus countered by a clear emphasis on the power of the vernacular tale; *li contes*, not God, is proclaimed as the source and guide used by the narrative *je* in this text. When the narrator digresses from his tale he explains how the *contes* itself leads him back to the tale at hand: "De ces .II. enfanz ne vous doi je plus parler tant que li contes m'i ramaint" (p. 82).<sup>26</sup>

The theological model of literary creation that is advanced in the *Estoire* is thus systematically subverted throughout the Vulgate romances by a host of "authorial" figures. Merlin and the other author-heroes of King Arthur's court, the bogus author-translator Walter Map,<sup>27</sup> the vernacular *scriptor* Blaise, and the richly ambiguous voice of *li contes* all compete for a portion of the authority traditionally reserved for the medieval Godhead or accorded, in later centuries, to the inspired genius.

## TEXTUALITY AS REWRITING

Taken together, the constellation of fictional voices in the Vulgate romances provides a clear outline for the textual program of these prose narratives. In contradistinction to the evocation of sacred writing as originary creation, the vernacular romance repeatedly characterizes its own writing in terms of re-creation. Writing is here presented essentially as rewriting since the source of the narrative we read is not a transcendent or

transparent body of absolute truth but yet another "text." For Arthur's knights the intertext or antecedent story that guides the creation of their tales lies in those episodes previously recounted at King Arthur's court. For Walter Map it is found in the written record of chivalric deeds housed in the archive at Salisbury. Blaise composes his text from Merlin's dictation, and even Merlin's oral account draws intermittently on Biblical material. There is, in this scheme of things, no claim to creation *ex nihilo*; all literary invention is depicted as the recasting of other tales.

From this perspective one might be tempted to characterize the textuality of the Vulgate romances as a system of intertextuality in line with the model proposed by Michael Riffaterre.<sup>28</sup> However, the kinds of rewriting that typify individual volumes of the Vulgate corpus form a narrative system of much broader scope: rewriting is here not limited to the simple *reprise* of previous texts but includes repetition of material within a single text. It motivates the recurrence of typed episodes, generates multiple authorial voices within one tale, and initiates the *Queste's* restructuring and renarration of Biblical material. Although there is, in each of these cases, a certain intertextual dynamic, the semiotic function of rewriting in the Vulgate romances remains fundamentally distinct from the function of intertextuality in Riffaterre's scheme. Whereas Riffaterre's intertextual readings seek to uncover an invariant hypogram hidden within given literary texts—that is, a metatext that can be used to solve the riddle of the text—the process of rewriting in the Vulgate romances admits no such form of literary closure. On the contrary, the role of successfully decoding the agrammatical or illogical surface of a literary text in order to reach its hidden message, belongs, in the Middle Ages, to the theological tradition. As exponents of the secular sphere, purveyors of pluralism and literary diversity, the Vulgate romances call into question the very principle of accuracy in the decoding of texts and the possibility of finding a metatext that subsumes the totality of conflicting textual details. In fact, one of the functions of the constant rewriting in the Vulgate corpus is to

remind us at every turn that the role of the vernacular text in the medieval period is not to convey a single, hidden message. These are texts, as we have seen, that continually eschew the kind of absolute authority that might make such a message possible.

Within the medieval scheme of things, the Vulgate tales chart instead a move from Theology to Rhetoric, a shift from Augustine's notion of signs as arrows pointing to something else (*aliud aliquid*) to a validation of signs per se where the "arrows" curve around and point to themselves.<sup>29</sup> But they do so in a very special way. When Riffaterre asserts that signs refer only to other signs, his purpose is to show how we can extract meaning from an extended semiotic network. When the Vulgate romances defer our reading from one typed episode to the next, or from one authorial voice to another, they constantly displace the current narration onto a series of fragmented and partial intertexts that can never be added up to make a coherent whole. If we combine all the parts of Merlin's supposed dictation to Blaise: the stories of Christ, of Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail, of the reign of Uther and Pendragon, and of Merlin's exploits and his prophecies, we do not come up with what should logically result. The *Livres du Graal* they are said to compose is of very different composition.<sup>30</sup> There are many false clues in this literary puzzle and all of the parts do not fit. Similarly, the proposed process of textual transmission from Bors to an anonymous scribe to Walter Map cannot be made to account for the ambiguous and overlapping voices of *je* and *li contes*. Whereas Riffaterre's use of intertextuality serves to unlock the secrets of a hermetic text, the Vulgate's process of rewriting shows instead how any reading of these texts is necessarily problematic because the hidden message they are said to contain is continually displaced from one textual fragment onto the next. Although the *Estoire* promises to follow Divine authority, it calls attention, through the use of multiple voices, to the impossibility of reproducing God's word in fiction. Similarly, the *Lancelot*, which purports to tell the history of King Arthur, reveals, by a series of narrative *ressorts*, the largely fictional

nature of this pseudohistory. The *Queste* in like manner claims to offer definitive allegorical interpretation but actually provides no more than a series of narrative analogues, some Biblical and some contemporary.

In all of these cases, the use of literary repetition serves to validate the notions of sign, image, and appearance in the Vulgate narratives, proclaiming the significance of literary displacement over and above the fixed theological truth that these texts mimic and continuously transform. Textuality in the Vulgate romances is thus a complex process that advances systems of theological significance—the phenomena of authority, interpretation, and representation—and systematically dismantles them, substituting words for the Word and books for the Book. The process of rewriting here counters the notion of the definitive sacred Text with the more relative and subversive concept of many partial texts or intertexts.

#### THE CHURCH FATHERS

The rivalry suggested in the Vulgate romances between Merlin's book and that of the apostles—that is, the implicit discrepancy between Blaise's copy of Merlin's marvelous tales and the hypothetically true account of the religious *copiste* in the *Estoire*—bears witness to a medieval controversy over the distinction between Rhetoric and Scripture which extends from the third through the thirteenth centuries. Generally formulated in terms of the contrast between *Verbum* (the Word of God) and *verbum* (the word of man), the issue of two distinct strategies of textuality is made particularly clear in St. Thomas's discussion of the book. Evoking the unbridgeable gap between words, which are likenesses of something else, and the Word of God, which is an essence, Thomas asserts in *De veritate* that God's uncreated nature can never be called a book.<sup>31</sup> There is an essential distinction to be made between the preverbal existence of God and a linguistic system that necessarily involves mediation. This distinction is used typically to explain why only God has the power to create, whereas the artist using words can merely represent. St. Thomas gives the example of human

speech in which the vocalized, material word represents the mental word that precedes its utterance. But there is no such mediation between the Eternal Word and the Incarnate Word, which are said to be one and the same. In the theological tradition, the Son is thus not a figure of the Father, according to Thomas, in the same way that writing is a figure for its referent. Whereas the former system is based on presence, the latter connotes absence. Literature, consequently, can never attain the plenary status of the Word.

Within the medieval Neoplatonic tradition, the literary artifact is seen, moreover, as posing a threat to the Truth of Scripture.<sup>32</sup> This fear of the *verbum* is evident from the time of the early Church apologists, who renounce the entire Graeco-Roman tradition of profane letters in favor of ecclesiastical truth.<sup>33</sup> In the twelfth century, this sentiment is echoed in the works of such writers as Alain de Lille who denounces poetry as a craft that cloaks falsehood with a pretense of credibility, or as an art that hides a kernel of truth beneath a false exterior.<sup>34</sup> Typical of the early Christians, Lactantius decries pagan literature as "sweets which contain poison"<sup>35</sup>; Alain recasts these words when claiming that poets bewitch their listeners with a "melody of honeyed delight."<sup>36</sup> In both cases the battle between language and Truth is presented in terms of words that deceive and seduce the reader as opposed to words that point toward transcendent meaning. Here, the essential danger in reading the vernacular text results, in the main, from the arbitrariness of signs that can have many meanings and the lack of a standard against which to interpret them.<sup>37</sup> To read a text literally is to embrace the plurality of its words rather than privileging a single, hidden sense. This dilemma is given its most succinct formulation in Augustine's recasting of St. Paul's argument that the letter kills but the spirit gives life.<sup>38</sup> A similar devaluation of the *verbum* becomes commonplace among religious thinkers in the High Middle Ages. It finds expression, for example, in St. Bernard's *ministerium verbi*, his admonition that the Christian rhetorician always put human speech to the service of Divine speech, making sure not to allow words to betray the Word.<sup>39</sup>

The controversy between Rhetoric and Scripture is wide-ranging and cannot be discussed here in detail; however, it encompasses three issues that are especially pertinent for our study of textuality in the Vulgate romances: (1) the concept of textual idolatry as a trap or a prison; (2) the notion that language seduces; and (3) the belief that the creation of literary artifice constitutes an infraction of the natural order of things. When Augustine denounces textual idolatry in *De doctrina christiana*, he does so by suggesting that St. Paul's condemnation of idols should be applied to imaginary signs,<sup>40</sup> and by condemning the love of all things in and of themselves.<sup>41</sup> The former statement clearly applies to words in general. The latter concerns both literature and sophistic discourse: those "fables, falsehoods, and lies" that delight men instead of leading them beyond the text to the Word,<sup>42</sup> and the kind of speech in which truths are "ornamented with a frothy nexus of words."<sup>43</sup> Both types of discourse exploit the power of the *verbum* in order to seduce the reader into loving words instead of loving the truths they represent. Thus Augustine warns repeatedly in *De doctrina* against the "sweetness of discourse," which he associates with the transitory joy of temporal things, the very attractive but "perverse sweetness" of enjoyment.<sup>44</sup> Whence the assertion that taking a text literally amounts to a kind of "carnal understanding,"<sup>45</sup> since all words are conceived by a desire that is never satisfied. Only the Word of the Creator is conceived by a love that sustains (*caritas*).<sup>46</sup> Undue enjoyment of the literary artifact amounts, then, to idolatry, an assault on the theological system in which the love of temporal things must be kept subservient to the love of the Divine Word. Literature threatens this hierarchy by seducing its readers into preferring the temporal to the eternal.

This is what prompts Hugh of St. Victor to call the work of the artificer "adulterate,"<sup>47</sup> that is to say, deceptive or tricky. But Hugh takes the process one step further, denouncing literature's attack on the natural order of things. Whereas the work of Nature brings forth and actualizes the work of God, according to Hugh, the work of the artificer only imitates Nature.<sup>48</sup> This is

because things contain within them a resemblance of the Divine Idea, but words are merely the signs of man's perceptions.<sup>49</sup> For Hugh and many of his contemporaries, the danger in reading is that of wandering from the straight path of spiritual meaning into the error of *grammatica* or literature.<sup>50</sup> To take the text literally is to commit an error against both the work of Nature and the Divine work.

In the view of these medieval theologians, then, the vernacular text lays a dangerous trap through its tendency to idolize signs that necessarily deform truth, deceive and seduce the reader, and ultimately subvert the natural hierarchy of creation. Not surprisingly, all of these traits are personified in Merlin, the master artificer and fictional paradigm of authorship in the Vulgate romances. Not only does Merlin assert that his fancifully "deceptive" tale of Arthurian adventure has the authority of Scripture, he conspicuously elevates the fictional narrative to the level of a sacred text on two occasions: once by proclaiming that his book will combine his own life's story with that of Christ as we have seen (Mer, 73–74), and a second time by asserting that this same book will fuse the story of Joseph and the Holy Grail with the secular exploits of King Arthur:

celui Joseph cui il fu donez en la croiz. Et quant tu avras bien travaillié por lui et por ses encessors et por ses hoirs qui de sa lingniee sont issu et tu avras tant de bonnes oeuvres faites que tu devras estre avec els en lor compoignie

Et saiches bien que onques nule vie de genz ne fu plus volentiers oïe de fols ne de saiges que sera cele dou roi qui avra non Artus et des genz qui a ce tens regneront. Et quant tu avras ce tout accompli et lor vies retraites, si avras deservi la grace que cil ont qui sont en la compoignie dou vaissel que l'en apele Graal (pp. 99–101).

Merlin's text represents an overt deformation of God's Truth, a recasting of Biblical material into the mold of Arthurian *merveilles*. And the "author" of this marvelously "truthful lie" is shown to break the natural order in a significant way.

Analogous to Christ who is born of woman alone — his father being God — Merlin is also born of woman alone; but his father is the Devil. From this origin in deviant sexuality, Merlin



generates what would have been viewed by medieval theologians as a distinctly perverse text, a text born literally of an error that makes it stray from the straight path of Divine Truth onto the more digressive and dangerous path of plural narrative truths.<sup>51</sup> Yet the kind of textuality that Merlin as the "adulterate" artificer creates is not condemned in the Vulgate romances but glorified in the extreme; it is hailed as a new truth. Merlin can, in effect, be seen as a master artificer who proclaims the triumph of Rhetoric over Scripture. As such, his performance is symptomatic of the revolution in literary theory that took place in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, just prior to the composition of the Vulgate Cycle (1220–35). At this time the controversy between Scripture and Rhetoric took a decisively secular turn with the publication of the *ars poetriae*, a series of six treatises on literary composition that privilege the eloquence of words maintaining only minimal regard for the Word.<sup>52</sup>

## THE RHETORICIANS

Whether these rhetorical treatises, which pertain specifically to composition in verse, letter writing, and preaching, exerted a direct influence on vernacular prose writers of the thirteenth century cannot be ascertained. What is clear, however, is that the ideas presented by the medieval rhetoricians were current in literary works from the twelfth century on.<sup>53</sup> The significance of the *ars poetriae* derives from their return to an emphasis on rhetoric that had dominated the trivium after the Fall of Rome; this shift of interest helped to foster the climate of literary inventiveness in which French vernacular composition flourished. In the works of Matthew of Vendôme, Gervase of Melkley, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and John of Garland in particular, the guiding principle for both reading and writing is not Truth but artifice. As literary theoreticians these men instruct medieval authors how to cultivate beauty of expression in order to induce pleasure in the reader.<sup>54</sup> The essential ingredient stressed here is the mode of expression rather than the message to be conveyed. Matthew and Geoffrey both specify that the

criteria for arranging and embellishing a tale (*dispositio* and *elocutio*) should depend principally on the aesthetic effect that the author wishes to produce.<sup>55</sup> As the art of Grammar changed in the High Middle Ages from the descriptive enterprise of Priscian and Donatus to the prescriptive studies of thirteenth-century rhetoricians, the mainstream of medieval grammatical instruction focused on methods of ornamenting a narrative through the use of figures and tropes.<sup>56</sup> All writers of the *ars poetriae* urge authors to go beyond the "ordinary usage" of language by employing "colors of rhetoric," which are also termed "permitted faults."<sup>57</sup> Purposeful deviations from the norm of language usage thus became acceptable. By the end of the twelfth century, grammarians distinguish actual grammatical "faults" (barbarisms and solecisms) from the lesser vices of figures and tropes that are justified as useful to eloquent expression.<sup>58</sup>

The significance of the *ars poetriae* for our study of the Vulgate romances is twofold. Within the elaborate slate of techniques that are suggested in these treatises as means of developing a narrative, *amplificatio*, the method of expanding a tale, plays a major role and includes various kinds of repetition.<sup>59</sup> What is perhaps more important, however, is that these rhetorical texts are anchored, to a large degree, in principles of deviation. Whereas the theological tradition stresses the importance of copying the sacred Word exactly, rhetoricians valorize individual invention, explaining how to take source material (generally in Latin) and transform it through expansion, abbreviation, and ornamentation. Invention is thus based on the rewriting and reworking of previous texts. The task of the author is not to respect the autonomy of his source but to tamper actively with its contents.

In this light the Vulgate romances can be seen to lie at the nexus of two opposing medieval traditions that define the role and status of the vernacular text. With the development of the *ars poetriae* early in the thirteenth century, former denouncements of literary creation as a medium of falsification are

countered by the assertion that poetry possesses an aesthetic authority all its own. In the Vulgate romances, the tension between these opposing views is thematized in stories that purport to tell biblical truth, valorizing all the while the subversive creation of secular narrative.

The focus of these textual contradictions falls alternately on competing poles of authority and invention or tradition and change, and the solution proposed by the prose romance lies squarely between the extremes. It finds its essence in re-creation, in the varied process of rewriting that eschews exact copy without embracing unique invention. By emphasizing authorial reduplication and textual pluralism, the complex process of rewriting found in the Vulgate romances insistently calls attention to repetition with a difference.

### MEDIEVAL TEXT PRODUCTION

This kind of literary repetition is symptomatic of the larger phenomenon of text production in the Middle Ages and as such must be read against the cultural backdrop of two related processes: the method of recasting texts that develops out of the tradition of *translatio studii*, and the *mouvance* of medieval manuscripts. It is well-known that the majority of vernacular authors in the High Middle Ages based their writing on some preexisting *materia* in either Latin, French, or another language. Their texts also contain frequent comment on the very process of literary borrowing, explaining how their work either copies dutifully or diverges purposefully from its *texte-origine*.<sup>60</sup> Whereas the earliest French romancers base their narratives on Latin sources—on Statius' *Thebais*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, an account of the Trojan War by pseudo-Dares and pseudo-Dictys, or various accounts of the life of Alexander the Great—Marie de France turns to Breton *lais* explaining that her choice is conditioned by the lack of available classical material:

. . . començai a penser  
D' aukune bone estoire faire  
E de latin en romaunz traire;

Mais ne me fust guaires de pris:  
 Itant s'en sunt altre entremis!  
 Des lais pensai, k'oïz aveie.<sup>61</sup>

What is significant here is that both Marie and the authors of the *romans antiques* see their literary task as one of adapting a previous text, of transforming an existing narrative into something new. This practice, as we have already noted, had the widest currency in the Middle Ages. It is evident in Chrétien's reworking of Ovidian texts to create his *Philomena*, parts of *Cligès*,<sup>62</sup> and his lost Ovidian poems, as well as in the recastings of Ovid's tale of Narcissus found in the *Roman de la Rose* and Chrétien's *Perceval*.<sup>63</sup> The constant tendency to rework previous narratives can thus be further understood as an extension of the classic form of *translatio studii* as described in the prologue of *Cligès*: that is, the explicit transfer of knowledge from the ancients to medieval France.<sup>64</sup>

However, the kind of literary borrowing that occurs in the transposition of classical texts into medieval French is but one example of a much more generalized process of rewriting that takes many forms. A different sort of narrative recasting is enacted in the transformation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* into Wace's highly elaborated "translation," the *Roman de Brut*, which is then reworked into Layamon's heavily revised English version. Rewriting occurs in a more concentrated form when it does not involve translation from one language to another, when, for example, epic songs are rewritten from assonance into verse in the thirteenth century and subsequently reworked in prose in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In yet another type of recasting, many twelfth-century verse romances are transformed into lengthy prose versions in subsequent decades. Several volumes of the Vulgate Cycle, the *Lancelot* and the *Queste* in particular, are to some degree at least rewritings of tales that were already current in the works of Chrétien, just as the prose versions of the *Estoire del Saint Graal* grow out of Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie*.

In each of these cases, successive authors generate their texts

by imitating concrete models, turning the text into something more than what it was previously but underscoring in so doing the importance of maintaining a literary ancestry.<sup>65</sup> At times this textual genealogy is made explicit as when Marie de France specifies that her rhymed tales result from Breton songs, or when Chrétien either makes reference to works that precede his texts<sup>66</sup> or explains that his *romans* are transformations of earlier *contes d'aventure*.<sup>67</sup> Whether these attributions are fictitious or accurate should not concern us. They are significant to the extent that they reveal a concept of literary creation that is specifically medieval, outlining narrative invention as a process of embellishment and amplification that allows a tale to grow and change, taking on varied forms over a lengthy period of time, but remaining somehow recognizably the same. Vernacular textuality is, as a result, necessarily grounded in plurality. Since invention is not dependent upon the originality of a single author, re-creation of a text is not considered to be a deformation of the original but an attempt to augment both the volume and the meaning of a previous work. This is, in essence, a hermeneutic process that invests writing with the capacity to reveal part of the greater sense that is locked in the language of the original text. Not only could the medieval author read between the lines of his model texts, he could write between those lines as well, adding, as does Merlin, both factual and imaginary material to his source.<sup>68</sup>

It is through this process that the text becomes, to a degree, the author's own invention without ever really losing its former character. When Chrétien boasts in *Erec et Enide* that his version of this tale is superior to all others,<sup>69</sup> or when Bérout insists that *his* version of the Tristan material is best,<sup>70</sup> we can hear the pull between individual invention and traditional re-creation. The authority proclaimed by these writers is, to a large extent, a fiction of authorship much like the role of unique creator ascribed to Walter Map in the Vulgate texts. And, as was the case with Map, these twelfth-century writers' claims to authorial invention are consistently attenuated by the reality of re-writing that characterizes their *oeuvres*. In addition to overt

references to the author's *matière*, which underscore the use of antecedent stories,<sup>71</sup> frequent mention of the patron for romance texts serves similarly to defer the burden of literary creation from a single author to a wider group of "inventors."<sup>72</sup> In many cases the patron is designated not only as the recipient of the work in question, but as an unofficial coauthor who either provides the author's source material or whose taste and wishes indirectly condition the manner in which the new tale is cast. The connection is made overtly in the prologue of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charrette* where the extent of his contribution to the writing of the text is never clearly distinguished from that of his patron, Marie de Champagne.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Chrétien's text is linked enigmatically to that of his continuator, Godefroi de Leigni (vv. 7098–7112).

In fact Marie, Chrétien, and Godefroi participate ambiguously in the creation of a somewhat amorphous *texte en devenir*, an ongoing narrative that can be coauthored by several minds simultaneously, or initiated by one writer and later taken up by another. To a degree this process is characteristic of all medieval tales that are rewritten over time. When Béroul's *version commune* of the Tristan legend is remodeled by Thomas, for example, the original narrative is not divided between two authors as in Chrétien's *Lancelot*; rather, two texts are bound together through the mechanism of a tale retold, a narrative repeated with variation so that it bears a distorted resemblance to the predecessor that it both recalls and leaves behind. As with Chrétien's *Charrette*, no single author has unique claim to the Tristan material, and the conglomerate text enjoys no distinctive or sacred autonomy. Although Godefroi insists that Chrétien has authorized his continuation of the *Lancelot*, and Béroul proclaims the authority of his version alone, these statements that appear to validate authorial control actually belie the prevalence of a literary tradition in which constant rewriting is *de rigueur*. The vernacular text is regularly viewed as an open-ended document, always capable of being "continued."<sup>74</sup> The relation between Béroul's *Tristan* and Thomas's text cannot be seen as a relation of source and copy or one of original and

sequel. Within this system of literary rewriting, the very distinction between original and copy is radically undermined: Thomas's *version courtoise* is both a copy of Bérout's *Tristan* and the original used for Gottfried's later rewriting of the tale. The same holds true for many medieval texts; Marie's "Fresne," which comes from a Breton *lai*, is in turn transformed in *Galeran de Bretagne*, just as the *Queste*, which grows out of Chrétien's *Perceval*, serves subsequently as the impetus for the Vulgate's *Estoire*. Literary invention in this period typically looks to the past while preparing the future. Merlin's task in the Vulgate romances is not dissimilar: his text recounts past deeds that also foretell those to come.<sup>75</sup>

It should be emphasized, however, that the general process of recasting tales that characterizes the production of vernacular texts in the Middle Ages is not synonymous with the system of rewriting that we have charted in the Vulgate romances. The two phenomena are related to the extent that each involves the reformulation of a literary narrative. However, whereas *translatio* constitutes a form of literary borrowing that takes a pre-existing *texte-origine* and recasts it into a contemporary *récit*, rewriting in the Vulgate romances involves the more localized displacement of the current *récit* onto a series of subsequent narrative analogues. Thus, when chivalric adventures in the *Queste* are "glossed" by hermits who recount parallel tales from historical and biblical sources, these episodes are first written in a chivalric mode, and then rewritten in another, textual register. The authorial voice of Bors as Arthur's official storyteller is similarly displaced onto the analogous, accompanying voices of Walter Map, *je*, and *li contes* as we have seen, just as any knight's attempt to free prisoners from captivity in the Vulgate corpus is recast in a series of stock narrative feats. Whereas *translatio studii* and the more general phenomenon of narrative recasting that surrounds it in the Middle Ages deal with narrative *reprise* between two independent narratives, rewriting in the Vulgate Cycle exists primarily within a single text or textual corpus. It is, in short, a method of weaving a tale through repetition, either through the recurrence of typed episodes, the

*reprise* of authorial voices, or the telling of an adventure and its subsequent, interpretative retelling. What the Vulgate's rewriting shares with the more general medieval phenomenon in which narratives are reworked from one author to the next is an understanding that the text is never fixed or finished: elements of the prose narrative can be reformulated regularly, just as an individual version of a tale is *only* one version, only *one* of many possible renditions.<sup>76</sup> In both cases the predominant aesthetic is one of pluralism.

### MOUVANCE

This brings us to the process of documentation in the High Middle Ages, for pluralism is also the hallmark of medieval textual transmission, a system that itself assures that textuality cannot, in most cases, be reduced to the definitive state of a single, authored work. Editors of medieval texts are well aware that the literary artifact in this period lies somewhere between the plurality of manuscript versions available to us on the one hand, and the lack of a complete textual genealogy for any one tale on the other. That these manuscripts are often from different time periods, different hands, and different geographical locations is complicated further by the inevitable and sometimes considerable gap between the suggested date of a text and that of the manuscript in which it was recorded. Two questions come into play here. One involves the loss of documentation that has not survived through the years, manuscript versions that are no longer extant and that could potentially tell us a lot about the historical transmission of an individual text. The other issue has been largely obscured by the first; it centers on the fact that any text in the medieval period was, by nature, fragmentary.<sup>77</sup> Even if we had access to all the manuscripts that existed in the Middle Ages, we would not necessarily be better able to define the parameters of *the* text of any one literary work. Rather we would be reminded all the more of the extent to which there was generally no definitive version of the medieval tale. This is the phenomenon of *mouvance* as Paul Zumthor has described it, a kind of textual variability resulting from the



method of disseminating documents in a manuscript culture.<sup>78</sup>

In line with this reality, text editors have begun to question the ground rules of their *métier* that traditionally have led to the search for a hypothetical Ur-text, an archetypal manuscript from which everything descends, or to the privileging of a single manuscript deemed to be the best and oldest copy.<sup>79</sup> Both approaches are based ultimately on authentication through origin—whether on the desire to reconstruct the author's original version or on the insistence that early copies are *perforce* superior to later ones.

An alternative approach, which has been suggested recently for Provençal lyric, is to abandon the effort to establish the authenticity of a given text, strophe, or version of the poem and accept every text of every poem in every manuscript as valid. Although variants that are paleographically insignificant can be dismissed as scribal error, there are, in this view, no poetically insignificant variants. Every version should be considered as an individual poem bearing its own meaning.<sup>80</sup> From this vantage point, questions of authenticity are replaced by an interest in maintaining the textual diversity of the manuscript tradition. And in point of fact this kind of investigation suggests that the authorship of the medieval text is less single-minded than we sometimes assume. In the case of Jaufré Rudel, for example, the presumed existence of a single holograph is doubtful; it appears more likely that Jaufré authored several distinct versions of a given poem.<sup>81</sup>

The process of medieval text production itself then demonstrates how, on a purely mechanical level, the authenticity of a given text is consistently undermined. Although the scribe can add sections to the text he copies, becoming in a sense an author in his own right as he recasts his model into an "original" version of the tale,<sup>82</sup> the author himself can redo his own work without distinguishing the original from the rewrite. These features of textual transmission simply underscore the degree to which the medieval text tends toward plurality at all levels: in terms of documentation, authorship, and narrative configuration. They stress as well how the subversion of single author-

ship and textual autonomy, which are thematized within the tales of the Vulgate corpus, are firmly anchored in the *realia* of medieval narrative production.

To grasp the slippery and elusive phenomenon that is the Arthurian prose romance we must be prepared to accept literary pluralism on its own terms, to embrace as givens what have traditionally been considered problems of composition in vernacular romance. For the Vulgate Cycle, this means beginning with the repetition that Lot and his followers would have preferred to jettison in favor of narrative unity: to discover how to reread these texts and how to read the many kinds of rewriting that typify them.

To this end each of the following chapters investigates a different sort of rewriting in the Vulgate romances, demonstrating how in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* the suggestion of authority is recast repeatedly into authorial plurality, how allegory is rewritten into analogy in the *Queste*, and how representation is transformed into repetition in the *Lancelot*. In each case we will see how specific instances of rewriting work to undermine tenets basic to both modern literary history and medieval theological Truth. Although these prose romances present a direct challenge to positivistic beliefs in single authorship, truthful interpretation, and accurate representation on the one hand, they also subvert the specifically medieval traditions of Divine Text and Divine Voice, sacred meaning, and biblical representation on the other. The different uses of rewriting in the Vulgate Cycle thus raise significant questions about the very nature and function of the vernacular text in the Middle Ages. Rewriting here serves, in short, to extoll the virtues of a romance text that has the audacity to deform fixed Truth and seduce the reader with the "delicious sweetness" of fiction.



## Chapter Two

### Fictions of Authorship and Authority

We have seen in chapter 1 how authorship in the Vulgate romances is characterized in two ways: as a tradition of writing associated with named (if bogus) authors such as Walter Map, Arthur's scribes, and the scriptor Blaise, and as a tradition of oral delivery exemplified by the tales of King Arthur's knights and Merlin's dictation, stories that ostensibly provide source material for written accounts.<sup>1</sup> And yet it is impossible to chart a textual genealogy that could feasibly include all of the *dictatores* and *scriptores* who are named as "authors" of the Vulgate narratives. The elaborate textual genealogies advanced in these tales actually constitute fictions of authority that are used to assert the validity of the Vulgate romances as accurate and truthful documents despite their literary provenance. Curiously, however, this fiction of textuality, developed through reference to the cycle's many competing subtexts, is accompanied in every instance by a fiction of orality advanced in terms of the voice. We have seen previously how the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* posit the existence of a written record used by Walter Map to "fere son livre." But these records are said to result in turn from the oral deposition of King Arthur's knights returned from battle. The *Merlin* offers a similar scenario of textual transmission

stating in the closing lines that the tale recounted by Robert de Boron is based on that of another book, the *Livre dou Graal*: "Et je Rebert de Borron qui cest livre retrais par l'enseingnement dou Livre dou Graal et einsis com li Livres le recontre me covient a parler et retraire."<sup>2</sup> Yet this book, too, has an oral source, for it is, ostensibly, the product of Merlin's dictation to Blaise as we have seen (p. 101). In the *Estoire* the joint emphasis on written and oral transmission is maintained in a slightly different way. The text is described as issuing directly from a personified voice, but in this case the oral source is the divine voice of God. A sacred text authored by Christ after the Resurrection, this romance was delivered to us, we are told, "par la bouche de la vérité."<sup>3</sup> It was given written form only subsequently when an anonymous scribe reverently copied Christ's words.

We are confronted here with several interesting linguistic anomalies. Because the *récit* of the *Estoire* is in Old French, the divine author whose voice we hear in this text appears to speak in the vernacular idiom. Even though we are told that this tale has been translated from Latin into French (3:194), the words issuing from "la bouche de la vérité" in our version of the *Estoire* have been thoroughly assimilated by a vernacular literary tradition. Merlin's tale, similarly, even though it claims to have the authority of Scripture (pp. 73–75), descends apparently from a tale recorded in French—as the *Livre dou Graal*—not from an authoritative Latin antecedent. What is more curious, however, is that Bors and Arthur's other knights who tell their tales aloud at court are said to form part of a written tradition in Latin since the record of their verbal account had to be translated subsequently into French (*Queste*, pp. 279–80). There is, thus, a dual tendency within the Vulgate's narrative genealogies to emphasize both the vernacular identity of these tales and their grounding in Latin antecedents. The strange twists of linguistic attribution that result from this two-pronged effort attest to a complex double play for textual authentication in the Vulgate Cycle and alert us to a whole set of hierarchical reversals which

characterize the narrative strategy subtly deployed in these texts.

The concerted melange of oral and written "sources" attributed to the Vulgate tales is significant because it mirrors, to a large degree, the two principal means used to authenticate theological texts in the Middle Ages. While de-emphasizing the role of individual authorship, the Vulgate romances attempt instead to situate themselves within a well-established medieval tradition of textual authority known as *auctoritas*, a process used to validate medieval Latin texts by quoting from Scriptural and patristic writings. In addition to borrowing and reformulating the system of *auctoritas*, however, the Vulgate romances also parrot the ultimate source for these documents: the sacred Word or divine voice of God. As literary accounts that embody "truth," the Vulgate texts advance both the authority of previous "Latin" texts and the sacred authority of God's voice as guarantors of their veracity.

But the role of these authenticators is subverted within the framework of literary narrative, as the linguistic anomalies cited above might suggest. For in point of fact, the "Latin" texts to which the Vulgate corpus refers are simply other romance narratives, or other segments of the Vulgate's own fictional tale. And the authoritative voice of God is similarly displaced by the wholly fictive voice of the vernacular tale cast as *li contes*. In the following pages we will examine how, in the *Merlin* and the *Estoire* in particular, the medieval traditions of Scriptural authority and the sacred voice are subtly usurped and deftly recast into a literary mold, how reference to the Divine Book is transformed into the evocation of many secular books as the Word cedes its authoritative place to words.

The kind of rewriting to be examined in this chapter involves the process that leads us from one of those secular subtexts to the next, and the allied shift that takes us from one authorial voice to another. For when we listen to the conjoined tales of Map, Merlin, and Robert De Boron, our gaze is shifted repeatedly between different segments of the Vulgate narratives, from

tales of the current chivalric exploits to prophecies of future deeds, to documentation of past feats. And the recurrent descriptions of *li contes* as turning away from the exploits of one knight to recount those of another performs a similar function. Directing our attention from Gauvain to Bohort to Lancelot, the voice of *li contes* constantly orients our reading toward new segments of narrative. Although claiming to derive authenticity from their association with specific individual authors, whether speakers or writers, the Vulgate tales actually base their authority on repeated reference to their own fictive narration.

## THE BOOK

If we return for a moment to the textual genealogy advanced in the *Merlin*, it is clear that even though this tale claims to be the product of a single author, Robert de Boron, who derives his narrative from a single ancestor text, the *Livre du Graal*, Boron's text mentions many contributors whose individual narratives conjoin to form the tale that we read. Here, as in the other Vulgate tales, a fiction of textual ancestry supersedes the emphasis on single authorship. According to the narrative genealogy that is outlined in the *Merlin*, the *Livre du Graal* is actually a combination of the Book of Joseph (the Grail story) and Blaise's book: a three-tiered story that Merlin dictated to his scribe, Blaise. This tale is said to include an account of Merlin's current deeds and exploits, a description of past events (the reign of Uther and Pendragon, Merlin's past feats, and the origins of the Holy Grail), and a record of Merlin's prophecies for the future.<sup>4</sup>

If Robert de Boron's *Merlin* were merely a copy of a single Grail Book, of Joseph's book alone, it would not contain the deeds of Merlin and Arthur's knights, which it does in fact record. Yet we are given no clear indication of the exact filiation between these written accounts which, in many cases, are shown to overlap. Rather, the emphasis is placed on a relatively ambiguous but definitely plural writing subject fed by many books. Indeed, we learn not only that the Grail material is

preserved in both Blaise's and Joseph's books, but also that Merlin's prophecies are similarly contained in yet another work: an account of his predictions that was specifically commissioned by Pendragon. This text also contains, we are told, the adventures of Arthur's knights, transcribed into written form based on the oral deposition of men returned from battle and tournament.<sup>5</sup> Again, writing and the voice coalesce to create a text derived from multiple "authors."

The same is true in the *Estoire*, where we are told twice that this work is preserved for us because Robert De Boron translated it from an original Latin text into French, "et mesire Robers de Borom, qui ceste estoire translata de latin en françois" (3:194,269). It seems at first that the role of the *estoire* is to furnish the subject matter or source material for Boron's French text, which is then retold by other narrative voices in the tale as we have it. The contents of *l'estoire* are said to be recounted by *li contes* on several occasions, *li contes* "retorne a l'estore que il avoit coumencie" (3:271), and "recoumence l'estoire et son conte ensement" (3:271). The original *estoire* is thus given a new narrative form within the French *contes* that now contains it.

However, the term *estoire* is also used to refer to the current narration, Robert's French translation. The following passage designates both antecedent text (*vielle estoire*) and the tale we are reading (*ceste estoire*) by the same word, "et mesire Robiers de Borron que ceste estoire translata dou latin en françois, si acorde bien, et la vielle estoire s'acorde et tiesmongne que issi fu-il" (3:269). Thus, in addition to functioning as a source, the *estoire* is presented at times as a credible narrative voice in its own right. And this voice "recounts" and tells its tale much in the manner that *li contes* does elsewhere in the text, "l'estoire de cest livre le dira chà avant" (2:185). In fact, Robert's text is called alternately "l'estoire dou Saint Graal" (3:269) and "li contes dou Saint Graal" (3:194), thus eliminating any distinction one might have hoped to establish between the Latin source and the subsequent French "translation." Furthermore, it is unclear whether Robert de Boron, the purported translator of this text, is to be identified with the author-narrator who

appears in the tale. Is the *jou* who addresses us merely the narrator of the original text whose voice has been translated into French, or has this *jou* been appropriated by the new author?<sup>6</sup> The trio formed by Robert, *jou*, and *l'estoire* is grounded in the same authorial ambiguity that characterizes the group of voices that recount the other Vulgate narratives: Map, *je*, and *li contes*. Throughout this corpus of tales, then, the romance text is characterized as an ambiguous amalgam of many interrelated texts. Reference to a single master creator, be he secular or divine, is eclipsed by emphasis on a more amorphous textual process grounded in multiple texts and plural voices.

## AUCTORITAS

This literary system recalls, in many ways, the medieval tradition of *auctoritas* in which authentication of a work derives from the citation of previous texts, and the validity of an author's literary contribution lies less in his ingenious rendition of the subject matter than in the ability to align his text with those of previous authors.<sup>7</sup> The word *auctor* was most commonly used in the Middle Ages as a juridical term meaning he who bears witness and thereby serves as guarantor. *Auctoritas*, then, was literally the quality possessed by a magistrate, writer, priest, or any credible witness. By metonymy, *auctoritas* came to designate as well the person possessing this quality. And through a final metonymic transformation, it was used to refer to the written document containing the words of the guarantor.<sup>8</sup> Thus the text itself came to be known as an *auctoritas* in its own right. When the medieval writer invokes the "auctoritas Gregorii, Augustini," for example, this designation has no bearing on the personal merit of Gregory or Augustine. Reference is here made less to the individual author than to the long-standing textual tradition of which his works form a part.<sup>9</sup>

It is, in fact, during the medieval period that a clear distinction begins to develop between the Latin terms *actor*, meaning author or composer, and *auctor*, meaning authority or authentic



source. This differentiation is found in French vernacular texts as early as the thirteenth century, although its origin can be located in earlier Latin works.<sup>10</sup> Many Latin writers seek to authenticate their statements by referring simply to the *auctores* without specifying their names. Latin sermons state regularly that "the authorities say" or "Scripture says."<sup>11</sup> In many instances the specific content of the work cited appears to have been of little importance; certain authors go so far as to cite *auctores* that do not in fact exist.<sup>12</sup> Here the choice of an appropriate literary source to bolster one's argument is outweighed by the simple desire to validate one's work by placing it within a textual tradition.<sup>13</sup> Spitzer gave precise formulation to this curious phenomenon in his statement that the existence of a source was more important for the medieval author than citing a particular source. In this view the listener need only be told of the book's existence, he need only be assured of its status as an objectively existing entity.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the repeated claim to authority that characterizes so many medieval Latin texts is itself actually grounded in an elaborate narrative fiction, a myth of literary power used to augment the status of non-sacred writing.

What we find in the Vulgate romances is a vernacular version of the system of *auctoritas*, a fiction of authority that is both cultivated and actively undermined. Yet the Vulgate texts incorporate a slight variation on the process of authentication; instead of citing other independent narratives to guarantee their authenticity, these romances simply refer to other portions of a single, lengthy corpus of tales. The texts derived from oral depositions of Arthur's knights, from Merlin's dictations or Blaise's book, all are said to form part of the very narrative we are reading. *Auctoritas* has here become a kind of secular intertextuality.

This is particularly evident in the *Estoire*, which offers an interesting twist on the process of literary authentication by constantly citing portions of the tale that are *not* recorded in our text. We are instructed repeatedly that *li contes* will not now speak of this subject or that:

ne parole mie li contes ichi endroit (2:321)  
 Ne parole (ore) plus li contes (2:331)  
 à tant se taist ore li contes (2:337–38)  
 à tant laist ore li contes à parler d'iaus une pièce (3:29).

Although some of the segments in question have been recounted earlier in the text, and others will be included later on, still others never appear in the narrative as we have it. The implication is that this narrative omits certain passages that have been included in previous versions of it, or that could be related on subsequent occasions. Nascien is described, at one point, as having told about the giant that he encountered. We do not hear the actual tale of adventure because “aillours en parlera bien li contes” (3:112). And yet, twelve pages later we read that the *conte* did in fact recount the incident *chà arrière* (3:124).<sup>15</sup> In this case the tale has been displaced entirely by the comments regarding its proper location. Here, as in the traditional system of *auctoritas*, reference to another tale is more important than whether that tale really exists or what it might actually say. What the foregoing statements suggest, in fact, is that the story embodied in the Vulgate romances both precedes and extends beyond this written version of it. Authentication is here not established by defining a specific, verifiable line of textual descent; authentication in the *Estoire* results simply from the insistence that the tale has been told before and that it will be told again.

This vernacular *auctoritas* serves, then, to orient our reading of the text by guiding our attention back to an earlier portion of the tale, or by pointing ahead to a future narrative segment. In place of the linear succession from divine author to lowly *copiste*, the *Estoire* is shown tangibly to rest on a more circular process of self-reference. Constant mention of what the text has recounted *chà arrière* or to what it will relate *ça avant* encourage us at every turn to re-read this text. Phrases like “issi comme li estoire le tesmongne *ça avant*” (2:49) and “Issi com li livres a conté *chà arrière*”(2:216) consistently interrupt the development storyline, turning our gaze away from the tale at hand to one of many intertexts.<sup>16</sup> And this effect is reinforced further by

the familiar refrain "comme vous avés oït," which performs essentially the same function as "chà arrière." We even find at times a future counterpart for the backward-looking "comme vous avés oït" in the form of "désoremais orrés" (2:237), or "vous orrés deviser chà avant" (2:439). All of these phrases work in concert to undermine the headlong progression of narrative time in the *Estoire*, supplementing the strictly sequential development of events with an ambiguous chronology. The entwined narratives of *jou*, *li contes*, *li livre*, and *l'estoire* serve a similar purpose. When we read, for example, that the tale "retourne sour les messages dont jou vous avoie commenchiet à conter et ne pourquant ançois que il die des messages, contera-il coument Nasciens vint" (2:427), we confront the image of a text that weaves in and out of time, alluding simultaneously to present, past, and future narrative moments. Sometimes the past is even deferred or transferred to the future, as in the case where we are told that the tale will recount later when the king was crowned previously, "l'estoire de cest livre le dira chà avant tout esclariement por quoi il fu ainsi apielés, et coument ichele onctions fu pardue quant il dut estre premièrement coronés" (2:185).

## ATEMPORALITY AND GENEALOGY

As a result of this kind of rewriting, the Vulgate text is able to push subtly against the traditional timebound framework of secular discourse. The notion of the earthly text as a faithful copy of the revealed Word of God is here replaced by its converse: a secular text that slyly appropriates for itself the timeless quality generally attributed in the Middle Ages to Scripture. When Josephé foretells Evalach's defeat in battle, he is said to understand the "force des éscriptures" (2:203), and when he predicts the future on another occasion, he is described as bringing forth "les fors mos des éscriptures" (2:292). Scripture is here associated not only with future events, but events that can be known in the same way that one knows historical details that have been committed to writing. This understanding of Scripture as portraying the future as if it were past, as being both

predictive and historical, is articulated most clearly in the medieval exegetical tradition of figuralism where the Old and New Testaments are read as narrative complements. Neither text can be seen clearly to precede or follow the other. Though the figural elements of the Old Testament embody the Truth of the New Testament, this Truth in turn clarifies the hidden essence of the *figura*. In this manner chronological sequence is thoroughly undermined since the Old Testament constitutes both a record of the church's past and the documentation of its future.<sup>17</sup>

To achieve a similar kind of atemporality, the Vulgate romances use ordinary temporal indicators to foster narrative discontinuity. "*Or laisserons a parler de lui*" (2:49), "*Mais à tant se taist ore li contes sour le roi Mordrain* (2:337–38), and "*Or lairons à tant ester del roy*" (2:162) are types of phrases that recur at regular intervals, but their function is not to link successive portions of the narrative into a smooth and even chronology. These expressions serve rather to delineate moments of rupture in the narrative line and in the genealogical succession of its characters. When we read, for example, that the *conte* stops speaking of the *lignié* of Mordrain and Nascien and Celidoine in order to return to that of Joseph and Josephé: "*mais a tant laisse onc li contes chi endroit parler de Chélydoine et d'icele lignée et retourne à Joseph et à Josephe, quar, grant pièce s'en est téus*" (3:125), or that the *conte* stops speaking of the branch of Alain and returns to Celidoine and his lineage: "*Si se traist [sic] ore li contes à parler de la brance Alain car bien a ore deviset çou que il en devoit dire, et retourne à parler de Célidoine et d'icelui autre lignage*" (3:296), it is clear that the lines of this discontinuous narrative are linked overtly to a fragmented view of genealogical heritage. The point is made especially clear when the tale is said to truncate its description of all the lines that issued from Celidoine to return to another branch that is called the story of Merlin, "*Si se taist or à tant li contes de toutes les ligniés ki de Célidoine issirent, et retourne à une autre brance qu'on apele l'estore Mellin*" (3:306–7). Ancestral

branches of the family tree are thus presented as synonymous with the episodic branches of the romance text, and both are systematically recast into a form that approximates the timeless mode of Scripture.

In the *Estoire* we are confronted with a wealth of genealogical documentation regarding the descendants of Eve and of Solomon, and concerning the ancestors of Gauvain and Lancelot (2:469 ff., 3:153–54, 269–71, 302–3). The genealogies of Galahad and Joseph are among the most important in the tale because Joseph and his son Josephé become keepers of the Holy Grail, and Galahad gives rise to a long lineage of venerable religious men (2:168). Yet the strictly chronological dimension of their heritage is accompanied by another, nonlinear sort of genealogy.

Christ explains to Joseph that there are two types of *semence*: that represented by the relation between Joseph and his son Josephé, and that which results from preaching, from sowing a seed with words. Joseph is assured by Christ that if he preaches in His name, “ançois sera ta semence espandue” (2:119–20). The *semence* of the Word that is evoked here is precisely the opposite of the chronological lineage that aligns generations of fathers and sons in predictable succession. This second type of filiation defies temporal constraints since it is based not on human proportions but on the Word, which is said to be the Alpha and Omega just as God is described as “li coumenchemens” and “li fins” of all things (2:288).

The role of Galahad is, in large part, to enable a similarly circular reading of Arthurian history. When he is referred to as a new kind of *semence*, a *noviau fruit* whose heirs will constitute a *sainte lignié*, we can understand this lineage as possessing the timelessness of sacred texts. Galahad is described, on the one hand, as the last in the genealogical line of Nascien, and yet this line of descent is also presented as a process of cyclical return. Just as Nascien was the first to see the marvels of the Grail in the past, Galahad will be the last to view them in the future: “Et chil qui ces merveilles verra, si sera li daarrains hom dou lignage

Nascien et tout autressi comme Nasciens a estet li premiers hom qui les mierveilles dou Graal ait véues, autressi sera chil daarains hom qui les verra" (2:312-13).

The relation between these two men is not simply that of ancestor and descendant; the genealogical link between them is given a distinctly analogical cast, reminiscent of the Vulgate's definition of the atemporal Godhead. Standing at the nexus of past and future moments, Galahad will succeed in putting an end to the Grail adventures in Arthur's realm precisely because of his special ties to Solomon and the past: "Lanselos Galaad, ichelui buen chevalier qui mist à fin les aventures de la Grant-Bretagne et pour çou se chil fu concéus em péchiet, ne resgarda pas nostres sires à çou, ains regarda à la haute brance des preudommes et à la buenne vie et au buen pourposement que il avoit" (3:296).<sup>18</sup> As the quintessential Arthurian hero, Galahad is expected to surpass in his task all those who came before him and all those who will come afterwards, "si passera de son mestier tous chiaus qui devant lui auront estet et qui après lui venront" (2:448; 3:117). He is hailed as one who will not only put an end to the adventures that precede his arrival, but also to those that occur subsequently: "chil metra à fin les aventures qui avenront en la terre ù aventure et sa voluntés li conduira" (3:117). Galahad's identity rests, in a sense, on his ability to span past and future historical moments, much in the manner that the text of the *Estoire* is characterized by its persistent reference to past and future narrative incidents.

In fact the plurality of temporal modes that is ascribed to Galahad is characteristic of the whole notion of textuality as it is advanced in the *Merlin* and the *Estoire*. The composite text formed from the contributions of Merlin, Blaise, Arthur's knights, and various scribes encompasses three historical periods in a systematic destructuring of chronological sequence. The text prepared by Arthur's scribes is a chronicle of the present exploits of the knights of the realm. Yet it is destined for "our heirs" (*nostre hoir*) and becomes, as such, a documentation of current events that is designed to serve eventually as a record of the Arthurian *past*. Pendragon's collection of Merlin's proph-

ecies, on the other hand, is an account of the future made in the present, a record placed at the disposal of current readers concerning events that will take place later. Blaise's book contains both types of narrative mentioned above, both chronicle and prophecy, and combines them with history. Although Merlin dictates present events to Blaise, and includes predictions for the future, he also recounts incidents from the pre-Arthurian past: the origins of the Grail and of Merlin, and the reign of Uther and Pendragon.

The function of these plural narrative voices is to downplay individual authority by transcending the chronological constraints that might otherwise delimit the text—either by associating it with a specific historical author or by classifying it as a particular link in the genealogical succession of texts concerning the Holy Grail. One might wonder, for example, why the anonymous romances of the Vulgate corpus mention only the names of bogus authors while thoroughly effacing the real historical writers who produced the tales. Or, why these narratives insist on positing fictional ancestor texts such as the *estoire* in King Henry's archive, or the sacred *livre* copied by the "author" of the *Estoire* while obscuring their literary debt to Chrétien's *Lancelot* and *Perceval*.<sup>19</sup> But if these romance texts are in fact vying for the authority of Scripture, they cannot be restricted by the limitations that typify the *verbum*, by single authorship or historical time. Instead, the plural authorial voice in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* enables the Vulgate narratives to break away from the bonds of the historicized "work" in the Barthesian sense of the term.<sup>20</sup> They allow the vernacular tale to record both past events and future occurrences in their mutual complementarity, much as Scripture foretells events in the New Testament which in turn elucidate Old Testament parallels. Rather than establish their worth by citing biblical *auctoritas*, these romance texts try to become an *auctoritas* in their own right.

Yet the notion of textuality that is advanced in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* borrows only selectively from the biblical tradition. Whereas it aspires to the ambiguous chronology ascribed to the

reading and interpretation of Scripture, this vernacular textuality eschews at the same time the deference to genealogical hierarchy that accompanies the writing and copying of a sacred text. That is to say that the text which is presented in the Vulgate romances rejects those qualities of Scripture that were used traditionally to denounce literary expression as inferior to the creative work of divine authority. It sidesteps the textual hierarchy that ranks the Truth of the revealed Word of God far above the deceitful posturing of man's fictive creation.

### LITERARY TRUTH

What we find instead is a fiction that proclaims itself as True, competing for the distinction of *vérité* that is traditionally reserved for the truly authoritative text. Although the *Estoire* asserts at times that what it recounts is accurate because it duplicates a Scriptural tale, "car çou dist la vérités de li'escriture" (2:388), this romance contains other "truths" that are established on the authority of the *conte* alone. The fact that Nascien was imprisoned on an island that could spin around magically is presented here as an indisputable truth whose validity parallels that of biblical accounts, "car il est verités que ele tournoie, mais pour çou que la manière de son tournoement ne est pas counéue de tous chiaus ne de toutes celes qui parlé en ont oï, et pour çou est-il raisons que cis contes en démontre la vérité" (2:428). In this manner, the *Estoire*, characterized overtly as a sacred text that issued from "la bouce de la vérité" (2:439), is accorded clearly superior status to the untrustworthy "enlacemens de paroles" of tales that have simply been heard from others (*oï as autres*, 2:428). This is indeed a curious claim for a text which itself puts such strong emphasis on the spoken word, a text composed of numerous authorial voices each of which does nothing other than *conte*, *raconte*, *parole*, and *dist*. And yet we are told repeatedly that the "truthful" words of this narrative somehow carry more weight than the idle *paroles* of other tales.



## THE VOICE

This brings us to the fiction of orality that is employed throughout the Vulgate Cycle and made especially manifest in the *Estoire*. We have seen, in chapter I, how the voice of *li contes* is said both to record and recount the events that we are reading, thereby effectively displacing the roles generally played by a text's author and narrator. Yet, if the author of this cycle of tales is Christ, as one of the Vulgate's fictive genealogies contends (2:439), it is his power as the ultimate writer-creator that is challenged directly by these tales of mock truth. When we are reminded at regular intervals in the Vulgate corpus that the tale is telling itself, that *li contes dist, se taist, raconte, laist a parler de*, it is not the divine voice of Scriptural Truth that is presented to us, but the rival voice of fiction.

If the textual genealogies that are propounded in the Vulgate Cycle can be seen as mimicking, to a degree, the written documentation of medieval *auctoritas*, the insistence throughout these romance narratives on the voice that produces them affects a parallel hierarchical reversal of the plenary Word. Whereas the medieval monastic tradition posits writing as an act of copying the voice of God,<sup>21</sup> the romance tradition of the Vulgate texts obscures this sacred voice replacing it with a wholly literary process of telling a story. And this is nowhere more evident than in the recasting of the typical refrain "Scripture says" or "the authorities say" into the more vernacular formulation of "*li contes dist*." In line with our previous assertion that the "author" of the Vulgate romances exists "in the text," we could thus state further that the voice which speaks to us from the manuscript pages is, quite literally, the voice of the text.

In fact the *conte* is not the only narrative voice that is described as telling the tale of the Vulgate romances. The *estoire* is also said to *conte* and *raconte* the narrative we read, and *li livre* is presented in equally animated terms: "*li livre a conté*" (2:216).<sup>22</sup> The relatively static text encoded on the written page of the



Joseph qui se gist en son lit" (2:162) offer a similar portrait of speaker and listener as collective "readers" who follow the lines of the story together, leaving one character for a moment in order to learn about the exploits of another.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, at times the *Estoire* carries this process even further by displacing the voice of the text's putative author onto a series of textualized narrators. Of the fifteen occasions where *nous* is invoked, four of them distinguish clearly between the listening public (*vous*) and an authorial voice that remains plural (*nous*). When we read, for example, "Si vous dirons du roy Evalach" (2:155), or "Or vous lairons de Tholomer et si vous conterons del roy Evalach" (2:222), it is clear that a collective audience (*vous*) is here interacting with a collective speaker.<sup>27</sup> In these cases *nous* does not derive its plurality from the association of a single reciter with his group of listeners. This second kind of *nous* is composed instead of the plurality forged from *je*, *li contes*, and other textualized voices working together as companion storytellers. In the latter two-thirds of the *Estoire* in fact, *nous* disappears entirely as an authorial voice and is replaced by an alteration between *je* and *li contes*. We have seen previously the extent to which these two voices perform parallel functions in recounting the tale of this romance. In this case they also combine forces with *li livre* and *l'estoire* to create a plural author addressing a distinctly separate public.<sup>28</sup>

Whether the voice of *nous* incorporates the members of a listening audience or allies itself with other speaking voices, the significance of this literary construct lies in the illusion of orality that it creates. It serves, in this sense, the same function as the repeated evocation of *li livre*, *li contes*, and *l'estoire* as "texts" devoid of specific titles or authors. Both of these narrative strategies emphasize the voice of the text rather than any written source,<sup>29</sup> and they suggest, thereby, the more fluid process of oral presentation apart from strict authorial control. When *li livre* is said to tell the tale or *nous* is described as recounting events, we are given a picture of the act of reading, of the creation or more accurately the re-creation of a text through speech.

## ORAL PERFORMANCE

From what little we know of textual delivery in the Middle Ages, it appears that the recitation of a written text could, in fact, have been accomplished by any number of persons; the performance of a single manuscript was, we assume, undertaken by a series of individual reciters over time. The success of each performance did not depend ultimately on the name or character of the original writer, nor on the authority of the material recounted. Successful delivery depended, rather, on the appropriate conjunction between reciter and listener.

In fact the medieval reader who presents the text to his audience enjoys a more concrete and immediate presence with that audience than does the author of the tale.<sup>30</sup> Although the reader may "play" the author's part when reciting a prologue or epilogue that makes reference to this tale's superiority over other versions by less well-qualified writers,<sup>31</sup> it is only through this pseudoauthor, this acting voice or dramatic filter, that the text makes contact with its public. It was, of course, possible for a medieval author to read his own works, in which case the distance between author and audience would be greatly reduced. And yet, we can safely assume that even the author would give different color to the voices of individual characters on different occasions, creating thereby a series of interpretations that diverge somewhat from the fixity of the words written on the manuscript page. In this case the form of the original tale is subtly recast in each successive performance of it. Radically different from the fixed words of Scripture, the orally-delivered text is grounded, to a large degree, in changeability. It is this very changeability that the continual shift between textualized voices of *nous*, *je*, *li livre*, *li contes*, and *l'estoire* evokes, emphasizing the role of literary fabrication as crucially distinct from unitary theological Truth.

Indeed, when authorial insignia are obscured in the Vulgate corpus behind a textualized collective "speaker" whose voice brings the written tale to life, reading in these romances is characterized primarily as an interaction between teller and

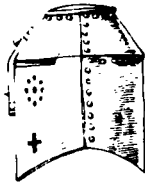
listener. Such a formulation is current in many vernacular texts of the High Middle Ages where an emphasis on the verbs *dire*, *conter*, *paroler*, and *raconter* transforms the written work into a speaker,<sup>32</sup> and the complementary use of *oïr*, *escouter*, and *entendre* casts the reader as a listener.<sup>33</sup> In this case the "text," whether Latin source, vernacular translation, or fictive elaboration is seen less as a fixed document than as a process of verbal exchange.<sup>34</sup>

In the *Estoire*, however, the characterization of textuality in oral terms is complicated by the contrary insistence that the words recounted here issue directly from the mouth of God. Repeated reference to the plural voices of *je*, *li contes*, and *li livre* serves both to imitate the authoritative Word of God and to devalue theological Truth by advancing in its stead the plural and wholly fictive voice of the vernacular tale.

To say that the author of the Vulgate romances is in the text is thus not equivalent to asserting that his identity is locked into the words on the manuscript page. This is, on the contrary, the condition ascribed to the other author, Christ, whose authority and existence are validated by their inclusion within Scripture.<sup>35</sup> For our "author," to be in the text is to have a voice in telling it. And it is in the oral pronouncement of the tale that the text's authority resides. While reproducing in vernacular form the medieval systems of authority grounded in biblical Truth and the divine voice of God, the Vulgate romances actually call into question these very processes of authentication. Through the use of temporal markers that announce what is to come and rephrase what has already been said, through reference to the overlapping subtexts of Merlin, Blaise, Robert de Boron, and Walter Map, and through the evocation of *li livre*, *li contes*, *l'estoire*, and *nous* as textualized authors, the Vulgate Cycle replaces traditional forms of authentication with the wholly literary authority of intertextual reference. In clear opposition to the fixed *vérité* of Scripture, these tales offer a kind of truth that is more ambiguous and changeable, a fictive truth anchored in the plural and secular *verbum*.<sup>36</sup>

Although it might appear that the authorial voice of the

Vulgate texts is diluted and weakened by its plurality, this voice remains extremely powerful. For in its dissolution it has appropriated the force of the Godhead, he who created the world with the Word, and first established truth and authority by dictating the law to Moses. Whereas the individual voices of Bors, Lancelot, or Merlin cannot reconstruct the whole of the Grail adventures—there are demonstrable lapses in their accounts—this task is successfully performed by *li contes*. And although all of Arthur's world might be preserved in the archive at Salisbury, it does not come alive until it is recreated by the voice of the tale. As scriptural Truth gives way to fictive truth, it is ultimately the voice of *li contes* that serves as author and authenticator of these romance texts. As readers of a voiced tale, we witness the transformation of the theological model of writing into a literary process of rewriting. The closed theological system based on the revealed word that must be transcribed precisely is replaced here by an infinitely open-ended system: that of the vernacular text that refers constantly and in many different ways to itself.



## Chapter Three

### Fictions of Meaning and Interpretation

The *Queste del Saint Graal* is perhaps the most problematic of the Vulgate romances because its episodic narrative line is accompanied by a second textual layer, an overlay of elaborate interpretations offered by resident hermits for each successive adventure. The telling of the adventure story is systematically interrupted by a retelling of the preceding event in more Christianized terms. This dual narrative structure leads Albert Pauphilet to conclude in his *Etudes sur la "Queste del Saint Graal"* that the *Queste* is a "renversement du monde romanesque," a text that makes sense only when read allegorically. Beneath its deceptive chivalric appearance, the story of the *Queste* follows, according to Pauphilet, a didactic plan that alone lends unity to the narrative episodes. To understand this romance properly, the reader is obliged to extract its hidden "sens réel," a meaning derived from the monastic doctrine and practice of Cîteaux, for the *Queste* is seen here as a novelized version of the military metaphor used by Christianity to express its conception both of the world and of individual destiny. This is a tale, we are told, that belongs to the tradition of the adventure story, but the world it presents is not *romanesque*. The presence of the second textual layer, that of the interpretations, cancels the function of

the Arthurian story and transforms the romance into a moral treatise such that "le monde des idées est le seul qui existe vraiment et qui soit décrit dans *la Queste*."<sup>1</sup>

## VÉRITÉ

Is this, then, a narrative that has escaped the error of textual idolatry as Augustine describes it?<sup>2</sup> Can the interpretative passages in this romance, which are themselves firmly anchored in the realm of the *verbum*, serve to lift the romance *récit* out of textuality toward a more transcendent spiritual or theological message? The *Queste*'s interpretative segments are introduced typically in one of two ways: they are advanced as *vérité*, statements designed to explain the *truth* of the preceding adventure, or as *senefiance*, declarations that are supposed to decode the *meaning* of exploits undertaken by Arthur's knights. In most cases, however, the interpretations claiming to offer *vérité* serve less to explain events than to provide a historical context for each Arthurian adventure. The first incident to be interpreted in the *Queste* is the trial of the shield, a trial that Galahad completes successfully after Bademagu has failed.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent explanation given by the mysterious white knight near the *blanche abeie* simply tells the shield's history (pp. 32–35): how it was marked with a cross by Josephé, son of Joseph of Arimathea, and given to the Saracen Evalach who used it to defeat his rival Tholomer; how Evalach took the Christian name Nascien and traveled to England in order to free Josephé from prison; how he received a shield a second time from the dying Josephé who marked it with a cross in his own blood and proclaimed that it would be used by no one but Galahad, "Li Bons Chevaliers, li darreins dou lignage Nascien" (p. 34). Although the white knight was asked by Galahad to reveal the *vérité* of his encounter with the shield, to tell both *how* and *why* these events took place ("que vos m'en deissiez la verité et coment et por coi ce est avénu" pp. 31–32), the explanation provided is devoid of religious or allegorical significance. What appears to be an interpretation is actually historical or pseudo-historical documentation that allows the reader to re-



construct the linear story of the shield, to understand how it was passed on through the centuries from Josephé to Evalach to Galahad. The narrative function of this "interpreter's" tale is not, in the most immediate sense, to derive a moral lesson from the secular event, but to locate the Arthurian adventure in a fictive historical context. The white knight responds only to the first part of Galahad's request, relating *coment* without explaining *por coi*. In terms of the proposed narrative struggle between moral truth and fictional narrative, his discourse falls squarely in the second camp.

The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the relation between text and interpretation in the *Queste*, investigating in particular how the "allegorical" discourse presented here is grounded in a thoroughly literary process of rewriting. For when the chivalric exploits that compose this tale are "interpreted" by the *Queste*'s resident hermits, they are not so much glossed in abstract language as simply retold in a different narrative register, recast in yet another literary form. As this text unfolds, the adventure story that forms its core is slowly dispersed into a series of intertexts which, like the plural authorial voices in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin*, result from a combined process of proliferation and repetition. What we will examine here is the way in which this process of writing propels the text forward while constantly guiding the reader away from the developmental storyline toward other, related textual fragments. Despite the hermits' elaborate efforts at explanation, this text's hidden meaning is never revealed clearly, but systematically displaced from one textual segment to the next.

We have seen in chapter 2 how the Vulgate tales work to undermine the medieval tradition of *auctoritas* by creating an analogous and rival system of vernacular authority within the romance text. In the *Queste*, it is not the process of writing but that of reading which is at issue. Through the creation of its multiple interpretative intertexts this romance offers, in a sense, a vernacular version of medieval typological interpretation. Instead of proceeding through a set of fixed levels of meaning toward an ultimate and definitive exegesis, this tale

leads the reader through a series of fictional analogues whose meaning remains ambiguous. Rather than moving closer to a transcendent sense or a moment of spiritual understanding, the *Queste's* "interpretations" serve the opposite end. With each explanatory fiction, each intertextual *reprise*, we dig ever deeper into what medieval theologians considered the idolatrous realm of literary discourse.

## ALLEGORY

The kind of allegory that Pauphilet ascribes to the *Queste* conforms to the nineteenth-century definition of the genre that has come to be recognized generally as "substitutive" or philosophical allegory, a system in which one seeks the particular for the general, such that the particular serves as an example for a concept that precedes its creation and governs its development.<sup>4</sup> Following this model Pauphilet explains that the author of the *Queste* composes his material in the abstract and then transposes it into the format of romance. The reader performs the process in reverse, extrapolating from the chivalric tale the doctrines of transubstantiation, Grace, mansuetude, and chastity.<sup>5</sup> The *Queste*, in Pauphilet's analysis, is thus constructed as an emblematic narrative, similar, it would seem, to Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose* in which there is a reduction of meaning to image such that the code of *fin'amors* is objectified in symbols and figures.<sup>6</sup> By a somewhat paradoxical turn of terms, the text's "second" meaning actually precedes the first. In both the *Roman de la Rose* and in Pauphilet's reading of the *Queste*, fiction furnishes the literal meaning for a predetermined didactic sense.

At other times, however, Pauphilet offers a very different notion of allegorical structure in the *Queste*. In discussing the text's "composition parabolique," he explains how a moral sense is applied to an otherwise secular tale in the manner of the parables where "le sens final explique les détails parfois singuliers et disparates du récit." Even the most fanciful tale can be Christianized by an astute author-commentator who, "après avoir donné à sa narration le tour le plus merveilleux possible

s'applique à en dégager la plus claire leçon." This kind of corrective interpretation in which a narrative is made to conform to criteria distinct from those governing its storyline, is not distinguished, in Pauphilet's study, from constructed allegory in which the second sense is written into the text from its inception. In fact, Pauphilet attributes both processes to the author of the *Queste*, stating alternately that "il traduit ses idées morales en choses concrètes . . . partant du monde moral, il recompose un univers sensible qui en sera le miroir," and that "il analyse les événements, interprète chaque circonstance, explique chaque symbole" in the manner of a gloss, as if he were adding commentary to a previously existing text.<sup>7</sup> It is thus difficult to ascertain from Pauphilet's analysis just how the allegorical mode of the *Queste* functions, whether the relationship between the *Queste*'s narrative layers, between chivalric tale and moral lesson, is one of representation or explanation.

A third view is advanced by Todorov, who rejects the existence of substitutive allegory in the *Queste*, contending instead that the literal and allegorical levels of the tale are mutually referential. In many cases several interpretations are given for a single event, indicating a plurality of *signifiés* for each adventure, and demonstrating the impossibility of univocal or absolute definition.<sup>8</sup> There exists, thus, an irreconcilable division between the polysemous text and the ineffable, celestial Grail it hopes to describe. The *Queste* demonstrates, according to Todorov, that one cannot reach God through text or quest. What Arthur's knights are really searching for is the meaning of the Grail, a code that can never be revealed to them within the confines of romance.<sup>9</sup>

Yet for both Todorov and Pauphilet, the allegorical mode of the *Queste* transforms the adventure story into a nonstory. In Todorov's terms: the narrative logic is constantly retreating in the face of another logic which is ritualistic and religious, and which wins the textual battle in this romance. We are left finally with a "récit qui refuse précisément ce qui constitue la matière traditionnelle des récits: les aventures amoureuses ou guerrières, les exploits terrestres."<sup>10</sup> For Pauphilet the hermit's pro-

nouncements also destroy the romance narrative, but in the opposite manner: by creating a didactic treatise that is laden with hidden meaning and “nullement narratif.” In this case the empty narrative shell, the “forme vide” of the Celtic tale, is supplanted by interpretations that alone make the story make sense.”<sup>11</sup>

## HISTORY AND ANALOGY

And yet, as we have seen, the “interpretations” included in this text are most often simply a retelling of the romance adventure in one of several historical timeframes. In the example given earlier, the historical epoch assigned to the chivalric event coincides roughly with the era of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain.<sup>12</sup> In other instances it may reach further into the biblical past or extend only to the borders of the Arthurian era. The chronicle of the shield’s previous owners mentioned above is not dissimilar in function from the testimony of the priest at the Chastiaus as Puceles (pp. 47–51). After Galahad has fulfilled the *costume* or *aventure* (p. 47) of the castle by successfully defeating its seven defenders and liberating the female captives, the priest recounts how the women were taken prisoner (pp. 49–50). He tells how ten years earlier seven brothers killed the duke of the castle and his son in an altercation over the duke’s daughter, how they pillaged the castle, waged war on its inhabitants, and punished the daughter’s intransigence by imprisoning every young woman who happened to pass by. This portion of the explanation simply provides a record of past occurrence, situating Galahad’s adventure in Arthurian history.<sup>13</sup>

The incident of the *nef merveilleuse* (pp. 200–210) and its bed with three colored spindles is assigned a historical background that links it to biblical times. Once the questers have successfully entered the ship, understood the sword’s cryptic inscriptions, and seen the strangely colored bed, we are told how the bed came into being, “coment ce poroit avenir” (p. 210). In this case the historical account is not rendered by a religious, but by the story itself (“Or dit li contes . . .,” p. 210), a story whose claim to truth (“si dit la veraie estoire,” p. 214), resembles the

*vérité* of the shield's history discussed above.<sup>14</sup> In both instances the truthful account of the romance adventure does not involve an exposition of absolute meaning but a rendering of historical context. The "explanation" in the adventure at the *nef merveilleuse* (pp. 210–26) recounts how Eve planted the tree of life which was originally white but turned green at the birth of Abel and red at the moment of his murder, and how it bore offspring of three colors which were used by Solomon to build the special bed designed for his final descendant. Even though the tale of Eve and Solomon is biblical, it does not serve primarily to interpret the incident of the bed but to confer upon it a chronological dimension: to forge a linear link between the Authurian present and the biblical past. In the three examples discussed thus far, the explanations offered for the *écu merveilleux*, the Chastiaus as Puceles, and the *nef merveilleuse* form secondary narrative tales whose function is etiological: to document how events evolved from a distant point in time to their present state.

However, the linear construct suggested by the historical subtales does not constitute the dominant mode of composition in the *Queste*. Although it appears that we are dealing with three distinct historical periods: the biblical epoch, the era of Joseph in Britain, and the time of Arthur, these historical eras are treated in the *Queste* as thematic analogues. The relationship between them is particularly clear in the story of the three tables. The recluse explains to Perceval how "la Table Jhesucrit ou li apostre mengierent par plusor foiz" (p. 74) was succeeded by the "Table dou Saint Graal" in the time of Joseph in Britain (p. 75), and how the latter was replaced by the "Table Reonde" under the direction of Merlin (p. 76). Throughout this description the emphasis is placed not on temporal distinctions but on narrative parallels. The recluse explains that Joseph's followers sat at the Grail Table "come s'il fussent a la Ceinne" (p. 75), and that the seat designated for Joseph "avoit esté fez par essample de celui siege ou Nostre Sires sist le jor de la Ceinne" (p. 76), a trait shared by the special seat at the Round Table in which "ja mes nus ne s'i aserra qui ne soit morz ou mehaigniez" (p. 77). A

final analogy presents Christ, Joseph, and Galahad as mutual substitutes, "Vos savez bien que Jhesucriz fu entre ses apostres pastres et mestres a la table de la Ceinne; après fu senefiee par Joseph la Table del Saint Graal, et la Table Reonde par cest chevalier" (p. 78). The historical eras that provide the storyteller with a linear matrix are ultimately subsumed into an analogical construct unbounded by time or space.<sup>15</sup>

The *Queste's* historical passages, often presented under the guise of "interpretations," are thus instances of rewriting, stories that supply antecedent or parallel versions of the Arthurian adventure without apparent didactic purpose.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the text could be described as an elaborate retelling of the Arthurian adventure cast in different historical registers: the register of Christ, the register of Joseph, and the register of Galahad. The very existence of the analogical paradigm provided by the sequence of the three tables encourages a second reading of those incidents which seem purely chronological. Once the equivalence has been established between Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, and Galahad, any mention of one of these heroes calls to mind the other two. If we apply the paradigm retroactively to the instances of historical lineage discussed above, Galahad's twofold association with Joseph of Arimathea is seen to serve a single purpose. Galahad will inherit Joseph's shield and become his historical successor, because he will perform the same function as *mestres et pastres*. Regarding the marvelous bed, Galahad alone will understand the color code of the bed because, in the historical sense, it was destined for him by Solomon, and because analogically, like Christ, he will know the difference between Good and Evil (both personified in Eve: destroyer and creator of humanity). In the incident at the Chastiaus as Puceles, the historical dimension does not extend beyond the Arthurian era in which Galahad himself is the central figure. His actions will constitute a reversal of historical tradition, of the failure of previous knights attempting the tomb adventure. Galahad will triumph as the liberator both because he succeeds the other knights chronologically and because of his resemblance to Christ. In all three instances, historical

considerations are cast within a system of narrative analogues that transform history into fiction. As we have seen previously, historical veracity is equated, in the *Queste*, with the *veraie estoire*, as history becomes just another story used to spin the tale of the chivalric savior.

### SENEFIANCE

This brings us to the function of *senefiance*, the second kind of "interpretation" in the *Queste*. In these cases the rhetorical terms used by the *preudoms*, or the textual interpreter, seem to indicate more clearly than in other examples the presence of substitutive allegory because they promise to divulge a hidden meaning. The *senefiance* of the adventure at the tomb (pp. 35–40) in which Galahad hears a mysterious voice, lifts the tombstone, and removes the body as instructed appears at first to serve a tropological function, to deduce a moral sense from the Arthurian adventure. The body in the tomb is equated simultaneously with the physically hellish state of man imprisoned in the world before the coming of Christ, "li anemis les emportait en enfer tout pleinement" (p. 38), and with the sinners' spiritual hardness, "il les trova toz endurciz en pechié mortel, si que ausi bien poïst len amoloier une roche dur come lor cuers" (p. 38).<sup>17</sup> The same *senefiance* is attributed to Galahad's victory at the Chastiaus as Puceles by the *preudoms*, who explains to Gauvain, "Par le Chastel as Puceles doiz tu entendre enfer et par les puceles les bones ames qui a tort i esoient enserrees devant la Passion Jhesucrist; et par les set chevaliers doiz tu entendre les set pechiez principaus qui lors regnoient ou monde" (p. 55).<sup>18</sup>

In these examples the chivalric adventurer and uninitiated reader are instructed to substitute a revealed meaning for the literal event in the narrative sequence. However, these "interpretations" provide nothing more than a biblical analogue for Galahad's action, an analogue cast in the Christological register. Christ freeing the sinners from Hell performed the same function as Galahad freeing the body from the tomb and the woman from the Chastiaus as Puceles. The *preudoms* states this relationship clearly when he notes, "Et tot ausi come il envoia

son filz qu'il avoit devant le comencement dou monde, tout ainsi envoia il Galaad come son esleu chevalier" (p. 55).<sup>19</sup> The reader is here faced with an explanation that fails to explain, an interpretation that deduces no specific meaning. What we are asked to understand (*entendre*), to accept as the *senefiance* of Galahad's adventures, is actually another story: the tale of Christ liberating the sinners.<sup>20</sup> And this tale is itself a fictionalized retelling of its pseudo-biblical antecedent.

Rather than guiding us to a transcendent meaning, the narrative of the *Queste* immerses us in a series of interrelated texts. We are thus firmly anchored in the realm of the *verbum* and cannot help but have what Augustine would call a "carnal understanding" of this tale. For the second sense that is supposedly offered to us in the explanatory segments of the *Queste* is itself encased in a literary wrapper. We as readers are here seduced into following one narrative thread after another with the promise that they will reveal a hidden *senefiance*. But instead of leading to a mode of unitary transcendence, these narrative shifts constitute a form of pluralism similar to that evidenced in the plural authorial voices of the *Estoire* or the narrative *ressorts* of the *Lancelot*. What we witness here is a proliferation of the *verbum* that masquerades as a spiritual message.

The addition of the tropological dimension in the preceding example merely serves to enlarge the text's semantic field in the same way that the Christological and Josephan registers do. The function of the *preudoms'* tale is to shift the focus from the Arthurian hero to his biblical analogue, creating a second, anhistorical and circular construct on the moral level. Similar to the initial paradigm in which the mention of Christ suggests in turn Joseph of Arimathea who, like Christ, is like Galahad, the moral register functions to conflate the sins of the biblical past with those of the Arthurian future. Although referring the reader, on the one hand, to the moral depravity of the pre-Christian era, the account of the sinners points as well to the moral status of Arthurian contemporaries. In both cases the reader is made to come full circle in a semantic loop that moves



from one subtale to the next. And the *senefiance* of the Arthurian adventure, whether it is set in the era of Christ, Joseph or Galahad, or in the domain of the human soul can refer only to the other terms of the paradigm. The meaning presented in the *Queste* is thus not referential but analogical. Meaning is here not absent or illusively secret but wholly enclosed in fiction.

If we return to Pauphilet's analysis, it is clear that neither of the systems he posits to explain the allegorical structure of the *Queste* is applicable to a narrative founded on analogy. Pursuing the notion of parabolic composition, he explains how the author, interpreting each event and explaining each symbol, creates "une véritable glose du roman, tout à fait analogue à celle que le Moyen Age écrivit en marge des Livre Saints." Yet in demonstrating how this process works, Pauphilet resorts to a curiously inverted analysis. He begins by explaining the moral theme underlying the scene of Perceval's temptation, and then develops its application in fictional form. "En langage abstrait, cette aventure signifie à peu pres ceci: l'âme est une proie offerte au Démon et risque de se laisser conduire au mal sans s'en apercevoir; mais Dieu l'aime, l'avertit, et finalement lui pardonne ses défaillances car elles sont sans malice."<sup>21</sup> This explanation is far more abstract than any offered in the text. If it were rendered by the religious interpretant in the temptation scene, it would point conclusively to what Pauphilet terms "parabolic" composition. Yet its absence indicates the text's refusal to interpret.

What we find instead is that interpretation here lies with the critic alone; for it is Pauphilet who decodes the textual adventures of the *Queste* for us. His analysis parallels that of a philosophical allegorist seeking to extract a meaning that has been made purposefully esoteric to protect it from misuse by the uninitiated.<sup>22</sup> That this is Pauphilet's understanding of the *Queste*'s double structure is clear in his statement, "des clercs seuls pouvaient démêler d'eux-mêmes le sens de tant d'allégories et de symboles accumulés; et encore leur eût-il fallu autant d'érudition et de subtilité qu'à l'auteur lui-même."<sup>23</sup> Although asserting on the one hand that the role of the hermits'

interpretations is to make the *Queste* accessible to the lay reader, Pauphilet himself supplies the necessary glosses which are in fact absent from the text.<sup>24</sup> He functions, in this sense, as the medieval interpreter whose secondary text provides a key to the hidden meaning of its predecessor.

Part of the contradiction inherent in Pauphilet's discussion of parabolic composition results from a confusion of two distinct exegetical processes: substitutive allegory that leads directly from the text to an abstract philosophical principle, and the interpretation of parables. The problematic relationship between these two genres is clarified by J. Mazzeo in the following way:

The traditional definition of allegory was sometimes taken to apply to the New Testament parables. While to some extent the parables may be so read they are certainly not systematic allegories and are not generally concerned with matters of a theoretical or technically theological character. The parable is essentially an illustrative tale working through similitudes, and the exegesis it demands is rarely of an explicitly allegorical kind.<sup>25</sup>

## VERNACULAR TYPOLOGY

The *Queste*, as we have seen, makes similar use of analogues that do not depend on philosophical abstraction, that point to no specific external referent. Yet the mechanism used to generate the textual allomorphs is not that of the parables, but resembles more closely the system of typological interpretation developed by the church fathers. Biblical typology, generally termed "figuralism," is a kind of allegorical analogy that replaces hierarchical, substitutive discourse with a more self-referential system of terms. Rather than one thing standing for another, both terms of the comparison have equal status. The first element, the earthly event, is a figure (*figura*) or "foreshadowing" (*umbra*) of the second, which is its divine fulfillment, its clearer image (*imago*). Both terms are historical realities (*res*) and also signs (*signa*), or meanings; neither is considered a fictional or semantic abstraction of the other.<sup>26</sup> At bottom, this is an interpretative system that grants full status to textuality

since it uses one text to interpret another, reading the Old Testament in terms of the New Testament.<sup>27</sup>

Distinct from the kind of allegory that purports to extract a single, definitive meaning from the secular text, typological interpretation is polysemous, producing plural meanings from events that are themselves signifiers of further events.<sup>28</sup> Medieval theologians followed, in the main, the fourfold system established by Cassian (*Collationes*, 14.8) in which the literal meaning, the words of the text (whether figurative or not), was accompanied by three additional semantic layers: the *sensu stricto* or the "allegorical" meaning, the tropological or moral level, and the anagogical sense.<sup>29</sup> The meaning of the Old Testament was, in this manner, systematically extended to Christ (or the Church militant), to the soul, and to the heavenly sphere. Figural interpretation underlined both the historical, or temporal, nature of the religious texts and their sacred, or atemporal, character. As Mazzeo explains, "Christian allegorism remained bound to events in the conviction that sacred history was both a system of events and a system of signs, illuminating analogically both the nature of the human soul and its ultimate destiny in time and beyond it."<sup>30</sup> Biblical exegesis, as it was commonly practiced in the Middle Ages, was thus founded on a double vision of history. It posited on one hand an uninterrupted progression from events in the Old Testament to those of the New Testament, to the contemporary soul, and finally to the afterlife. Yet it established, at the same time, atemporal parallels between Old Testament figures and Christ, and between Christ's actions and those of the soul in this life and the hereafter.

Typological interpretation depends, thus, on a conflation of historical and analogical modes similar to the interaction of *vérité* and *senefiance* in the *Queste*. However, the chronological vector is necessarily reversed in the *Queste*, since the base text is not the most ancient but the most recent of those being compared. We begin with the Arthurian adventure story and retreat in time to the Arthurian era before Galahad, to the time of Joseph of Arimathea, and back to Christ. These three registers

are, however, not indispensable components to the building of the romance text, as are the successive layers in biblical exegesis. The parallel historical epochs that figure in the *Queste* are functional counterparts that may appear singly or in combination depending on the degree to which the Arthurian tale is to be elaborated. Taken together, they constitute a plural historical antecedent for the romancer's tale, much as events in the New Testament comprise a successive historical counterpart for the Old Testament. The Christian, Josephan, and pre-Galahad Arthurian eras should then be considered as a single narrative register: an historical register comprising three temporal modes. The second major register in the *Queste* is furnished by the tropological dimension, which is roughly analogous to the tropological level of medieval exegesis as it applies events in the base text (the Arthurian adventure story) to the individual soul. However, the *Queste's* two principal registers function ultimately as mutual referents or analogical mates, eschewing the hierarchical progression essential to biblical interpretation. In the case of Lancelot in the forest, for example, the hermit who consents to explain the meaning of "pierre et fust et figuiers," the words used by the mysterious voice at the forest chapel to describe Lancelot (p. 67), begins by offering a series of tropological analogues. He explains alternately that Lancelot's heart is hard as stone, preventing his reception of the Holy Spirit, and that it is like a decaying tree trunk without sweetness (*doçor*, p. 69). In the third case, the hermit recounts the tale of Christ and the fig tree, drawing an explicit parallel between Lancelot's spiritual vacuity and the tree "desgarni de fruit," "Or resgarde si tu porroies estre autiex, et plus nuz et plus despoilliez que il ne fu" (p. 70).

These analogues do not fall in direct succession in the narrative, but are interrupted by a historical passage telling of Lancelot's past folly, his misuse of God's gifts, "Ne il nes te dona mie por ce que toutes ces choses fussent en toi peries, mes escreues et amendees" (p. 68). This past laxity is presented, however, both chronologically, as the cause of Lancelot's downfall, and ana-

logically, as an exact parallel to his current behavior. A further elaboration is provided by the biblical story of Moses obtaining water from the rock, a story that is not used historically to develop a genealogical descendance (as was the case with Galahad, pp. 32 ff.), but as a reverse analogue: "Einsint peut len dire que de pierre issi aucune foiz douçor; mes de toi n'en issi onques nule, por quoi tu puez veoir apertement que tu es plus durs que pierre" (p. 69).<sup>31</sup>

Although the explanations offered by the hermit for the images of stone and tree trunk appear initially to be without intertextual referent, the association of the motif of the fig tree with Christ links its predecessors by analogy to the Christological register. In this manner the tropological dimension of the text is incorporated into the historical, which in turn is subverted into a circular pattern. Moses attempting to obtain water from the rock is like Christ attempting to find fruit on a barren tree. Both resemble the Lord searching for *douçor* in Lancelot's hardened and desolate heart, now and in the Arthurian past.

The hierarchical organization that gives biblical exegesis its authority is here radically undercut by a less rigid process of literary rewriting. Although typological interpretation avoids making hierarchical distinctions and depends instead on a double-directional movement between the Old and New Testaments, and between Christ and the soul, the relationship between the four allegorical components remains essentially linear. The interpreter follows a fixed sequence from the Old to the New Testament, to the soul, and then to the afterlife. In the *Queste*, the system of rewriting admits more variation. The narrative may develop from the Arthurian base tale through one or more historical eras (Christian, Josephan, Arthurian) and may pass, in addition, through the tropological dimension en route. In reshaping Christian typological interpretation to fit a secular narrative mode, the *Queste* replaces privileged discussions of the soul and the afterlife with a non-progressive relay from one subtale to the next, from a tale of Lancelot to a tale of Christ to another tale of Lancelot, to a tale of Moses. The

emphasis here is not placed on advancing a definitive spiritual reading for chivalric events; rather interpretation is carried out in the form of fictive elaboration.

This is particularly clear in those passages that draw solely on the Arthurian era to interpret Arthurian adventure, providing a second sense that is chivalric alone. When Gauvain dreams of a meadow in which 150 bulls eat from a feeding rack, the *preudoms* takes this image to be a metaphor of the Round Table, "Par le rastelier devons nos entendre la Table Reonde: car ausi come ou rastelier a verges qui devisent les espaces, ausi a il a la Table Reonde colombes qui devisent les uns des sieges des autres" (pp. 155–56). The meadow is then said to represent humility and patience, virtues that are also linked immediately to the Round Table by a wonderfully circular piece of logic, "Et por ce que humilité ne puet estre vaincue ne pacience, i fu la Table Reonde fondee, ou la chevalerie a puis esté si fort par la douçor et par la fraternité qui est entr'ax, que ele ne pot estre vaincue. Et por ce dit on qu'ele fu fondee en humilité et en pacience" (p. 156). The "interpretation" so far derives principally from a tale of chivalry; what follows is yet another literary reference alluding to an earlier portion of the *Queste's* own narrative. The hermit continues his exegesis by retelling the scene in the meadow that was described just a few pages before (p. 149). But he makes significant changes in this *redit*, changes conditioned by the intervening mention of the Round Table: "En cel pré avoit un rastelier ou il menjoient" (p. 149) becomes "Au rastelier menjoient cent et cinquante torel. Il i menjoient et si n'estoient pas ou pre" (p. 156). Once the association has been established between the meadow and *humilité et patience*, the prideful bulls described previously as eating from a trough can no longer be linked to this locus of virtue, "car s'il i fussent, lor cuers mainsissent en humilité et en pacience" (p. 156).

Through rewriting, then, the historical and moral pretensions of this text are deftly undercut. What the bulls actually did is recast in a tale enumerating what they should have done. The initial account retold once in terms of the Round Table, must be

remodeled again as further adjustments become necessary. In the process a past event (in this case a dream) is remoulded in the present, as moral virtue is attributed to an event from which it is lacking.

Of further significance, the anagogical element, the crowning phase of biblical interpretation, is generally absent from the hermits' pronouncements in the *Queste*. Commentary on the afterlife has been displaced from the sphere of interpretation and incorporated directly into the fictional tale.<sup>32</sup> Thus when Lancelot, having seen the Grail, falls into a death-like trance and is transported to another realm, it is *he* who describes the afterlife to us, "Tant je estoie ore plus aise que je ne seré hui mes! Ha, biax peres Jhesucriz, qui porroit estre tant bons eurez ne tant preudons que il veist apertement les granz merveilles de vos secrez, et la ou mes regarz pechierres et ma veue conchiee de la tres grant ordure dou monde fu essorbee?" (pp. 257-58). Galahad, at the close of the tale, recounts, similarly his vision of the celestial world, "Ici voi ge l'a [sic] començaillie des granz hardemenz et l'achoisson des proeces; ici voi ge les merveilles de totes autres merveilles!" (p. 278).

The meaning of the Grail and the quest leading to it is never revealed clearly in this romance text. But the closest we come to seeing the illusive venerated object is through the eyes and words of the tale's protagonists. Interpretation does not serve this purpose. The role of the hermit's pronouncements is rather to expand the Arthurian tale by providing a series of narrative analogues that retell what we have already heard. Far from transforming the *Queste* into a purely religious treatise, or cancelling its function as an adventure story, the process of rewriting here permits the conflation of text and gloss into an ever-expanding story.

## DREAMS

This is nowhere more evident than in the use of dreams and inscriptions as "interpretations" in the *Queste*. The incident of Perceval's temptation at the mysterious island provides a clear example of the manner in which *senefiance* is developed without

regard for the hierarchical narrative structure traditionally associated with allegorical composition.

When Perceval undergoes the lengthy trial of temptation he (1) puts an end to a fight between a serpent and a lion (p. 94); (2) dreams of two women: one riding a serpent, the other a lion (pp. 96–98); (3) speaks to a religious who interprets the dream: the woman riding the serpent is the Old Law, *li anemis* (pp. 99–104); (4) encounters a temptress (pp. 104 ff.); and finally (5) listens to a *preudoms* who explains the temptress' plural identity (pp. 113 ff.). She is the devil (*li anemis*), the biblical serpent who tempted Eve, and the woman riding the serpent in Perceval's dream (#2). The final explanation offered by the religious is similar in its analogical circularity to the response offered by the Recluse for the three tables. In both instances Perceval asks for historical documentation, "Si vos pri por Dieu que vos me diez qui ele est et de quel país, et qui est cil riches hons qui l'a deseritee" (p. 112), but receives an answer cast in similitudes. The *preudoms'* interpretation serves to remold the adventure with the temptress (#4) in a biblical register through the parallel with Adam and Eve, and then to refer the reader to another version of the temptation: its chimeric counterpart. Careful rereading based on this model reveals that all successive stages in the tale of Perceval's temptation function as allomorphs. Not only are the temptress and the woman riding the serpent in Perceval's dream parallel figures, additional analogues are provided by the wounded serpent (#1) and the Old Law characterized as *li anemis* (#3) (p. 103). The entire passage is based on a series of metamorphic variants such that the lion and the serpent in Perceval's initial adventure are transformed, in the dream version, into mounts for two women, then modulated into women-animal couplets representing the Old and New Law, and reduced, in the final version, to a woman-serpent combination that plays the role of the temptress.

Neither of the interpretive sections (#3, #5) offers an explanation of the temptation incident independent of its textual variants. The final explanation (#5), which links the temptress with the biblical serpent and with the serpent women in Perceval's



dream, "Li anemis qui ce li [la moillier Adam] ot conseillié, ce fu li serpenz que tu veis avant hier la vieille dame chevauchier, ce fu la damoisele qui ersoir te vint veoir" (p. 113), serves only to fold the text back on itself in multiple echoes.<sup>33</sup> For the dream to which it refers (#2) has been interpreted previously (#3) in a manner that announces the hermit's final description of the Old Law governed by the biblical serpent. The woman in Perceval's dream has been described as "la Synagogue, la premiere Loi

Ce est li anemis meismes; ce est li serpenz qui par son orgueil fu gitez de paradis; ce est li serpenz qui dist a Adam et a sa moillier: 'Se vos mengiez de cest fruit vos seroiz ausi come Dieu' " (p. 103). Thus Perceval's encounter with the temptress (#4) and his dream (#2) are locked into a kind of semantic Ouroboros through their mutual association with the biblical Fall. Although the biblical allusion is stated explicitly only in the third and fifth variants, it is implicitly transferred to the dream (#2) and to the first incident (#1) as well, through the process of analogical contamination. Any mention of the serpent connotes, by its association with the hermit's explanation, the temptation of evil. Thus all five incidents in Perceval's temptation form part of a large semantic ring that turns around the temptress-serpent couplet. A final recasting of the motif provides a sixth variant of the initial incident, shifting the focus from the biblical to the Christological and tropological spheres. The final narrative layer reinforces further the association between the temptress and the *anemis* by explaining that her pavilion is the world of sin blocked from the light of both sun and Christ (p. 114). The apparent chronological chain that would isolate these six incidents as initial event, subsequent dream, explanation, second event, and final interpretation is here replaced by a metamorphosis tending toward timelessness. "Interpretation" here serves a function similar to that of the temporal refrains of the *Estoire* where the recurrent "chà en arriere" and "chà avant" transform straightforward reading into re-reading.

Moreover, the Perceval passage further collapses the distance between text and allegorical overlay by using the dream text as

both the basis and the tool for interpretation (as *interprété* and *interprétant*). The woman riding the serpent in Perceval's dream explains the identity of the serpent killed by Perceval in the preceding incident, "Je avoie une piece norrie en un mien chastel une moie beste que len apeloit serpent, qui me servoit de mout plus que vos ne cuidiez" (p. 97), just as the religious subsequently interprets the identity of the two women in the dream, "Cele qui sor le lyon estoit montee senefie la Novele Loi, qui sor le lyon est, ce est sor Jhesucrist" (p. 101); "Cele dame a qui tu veis le serpent chevauchier, ce est la Synagogue, la premiere Loi" (p. 103). Rather than establishing clearly delineated boundaries between narrative modes, the *Queste* works toward blurring the distinction between romance adventure and dream, by allowing both of them to serve as a base text for interpretation. Yet interpretation, as we have seen, is itself not clearly distinguished from adventure and dream. Interpretation in the *Queste* is often nothing more than another tale, a story displaced in a pseudo time frame or, at times, a dream. Through its incorporation into the analogical paradigm, the dream text in the temptation scene is reshaped to conform simultaneously to both historical (biblical) and tropological registers, collapsing these narrative layers into a kind of perpetual foreground.<sup>34</sup>

Corollary to the reduction of narrative hierarchy in the *Queste* we find a dissolution of temporal distinctions as past and future are made to appear synonymous. The hermit's explanation of Gauvain's dream concerning the bulls who venture away from the field recasts the secular tale into a double Arthurian/Tropological register explaining that the bulls that wandered from the field of humility surrounding the Round Table were those knights who fell into mortal sin during the quest for the Grail. This retelling of Gauvain's dream in chivalric and moral terms transforms the narrative of the dreamed past into a tale of future adventure by equating what the bulls have done in Gauvain's dream with what the questers will do in their Arthurian homeland. "Quant il [the bulls] revenoient, si en failloient li plusor, ce est a dire qu'il [the knights of the Round

Table] ne revendront mie tuit, ainz en morra partie. Et cil qui reperoient [the bulls] estoient si megre et si las qu'a peine se pooient il tenir en estant; ce est a dire que cil qui revendront [the knights] seront si essorbé de pechié que li un avront ocis les autres" (p. 157). Hector's dream, which describes Lancelot's inability to drink from the fountain, is similarly transposed through the interpretive process from the status of preterite to predictive discourse. "Quant il venoit a la fontaine, il descendoit, ce est a dire quant il vendra devant le Saint Graal, il descendra" (p. 159).

A reverse application of this process is found in the interpretation of predictions, where a text in the future tense is retold within the framework of the past. The inscription on the sword blade which warns that no one will be able to withdraw the weapon from its sheath without being wounded or killed, "JA NUS NE SOIT TANT HARDIZ QUI DOU FUERRE ME TRAIE, SE IL NE DOIT MIELZ FERRE QUE AUTRE ET PLUS HARDIMENT. ET QUI AUTREMENT ME TRERA, BIEN SACHE IL QU'IL N'EN FAUDRA JA A ESTRE MORZ OU MEHAIGNEZ" (p. 203), narrates not a future but a past event, "ET CESTE CHOSE A JA ESTÉ ESPROVEE AUCUNE FOIZ" (p. 203). Perceval's sister, serving as guide for the chosen questers, interprets the inscription fixing the action it predicts in the past, by recounting "coment il en avint n'a pas lonc tens" (p. 204) that the Roi Varlan attempted to use the sword and was killed.<sup>35</sup> One of the inscriptions on the sword's sheath serves similarly to forecast events that have already taken place. The dual prediction that he who praises the sword most will find it most worthy of blame, and that the blade will be treacherous to whom it should be faithful, is recast, through the young woman's explanation of it, into the historical past.<sup>36</sup> She recounts how in the time of Nascien and the Roi Parlan, "ces deus choses sont ja avenues" (p. 206). The role of interpretation here, as with Gauvain's dream, is to undermine the temporal specificity of dream text and inscription, making them function as narratives of both past and future events.

## PROPHECY

In line with the detemporalization of narrative elements in the *Queste*, it is curious to note that all of the adventures that are not interpreted in this tale are predicted. Pauphilet himself noted the absence of interpretation from the first and third sections of the text, stating that in the "Départ" which precedes the actual quest (pp. 1–26) and the "Récompenses," the section from the *nef merveilleuse* to the end (pp. 201–80), there is no moral gloss.<sup>37</sup> Yet in the initial portion of the tale, three un-glossed adventures are announced as follows: the adventure of the Siege Perilleux (p. 8): "et au jor de la Pentecouste doit cist sieges trover son mestre" (p. 4); the withdrawing of the sword from the stone (p. 12): "JA NUS NE M'OSTERA DE CI, SE CIL NON A CUI COSTÉ JE DOI PENDRE. ET CIL SERA LI MIELDRES CHEVALIERS DEL MONDE" (p. 5); and the appearance of the Grail (pp. 15–16): "Del Saint Graal qui hui aparra en ton hostel et repestra les compaignons de la Table Ronde" (p. 13).

In the final section of the *Queste*, some of the adventures are interpreted historically (The "Chateau Carcelois," p. 231 ff., and the "Lepreuse," p. 239 ff.) and some tropologically ("Le Cerf Blanc," p. 236, "Lancelot au Chateau de Graal," p. 258; "Symeon," p. 264). For the majority of adventures found in this section, however, prediction replaces interpretation. Before coming to the end of the text, the reader is forewarned that Hector will be denied admittance to the Grail castle (p. 150/pp. 259–60), that Mordrain will be cured by Galahad (pp. 85–86/pp. 262–63), that Galahad alone will view the Lord's greatest secrets (*grans repostailles*) (p. 19/p. 270), and that the Roi Méhaigüé will be cured by Galahad (p. 10/p. 272).<sup>38</sup> The first and last adventures of this series are announced just prior to their occurrence: Galahad and Lancelot will set out together on the journey to Corbenic (p. 249/p. 250), and the chosen knights will end their quest in Sarras (p. 271/p. 275). All of these predictions serve to diffuse linearity by enabling the reader to have read the adven-

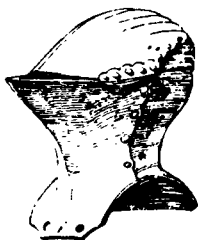
ture before it is actually narrated in the text. In this case the official narration of the event becomes, necessarily, a rewriting of it.

## INTERPRETATION

The allegorical composition of the *Queste* does not then produce a text that says one thing and means another, but a text that says the same thing over and over in slightly different form, recasting itself constantly in a series of analogical molds. This process could be termed "interpretation" in the sense that Michel Foucault speaks of it, a process that, through the compiling of linguistic layers, gives the illusion of depth, of escaping to a referent outside of the text.<sup>39</sup> It conforms more accurately, however, to the *interpretatio* of medieval rhetoricians: a technique of narrative amplification based on reiteration or the repetition of a single idea in synonymous terms—not for the purpose of adding a more lofty meaning, but to elaborate and enlarge the tale.<sup>40</sup>

The linguistic markers that seem to signal interpretation in the *Queste*, those claiming to provide *vérité* and *senefiance*, are deceptive clues, false heralds of an absent allegorical mode.<sup>41</sup> In reality, the oft-repeated "ceci senefie" or "on doit entendre" are, in a sense, linguistic hooks that lead the adventure story into a second narrative register that is either historical or tropological. Once the contact has been made, strict interpretation is replaced by the retelling of a second story or a series of stories. Announced by the term "tout ausi come," these intertextual tales are recounted as parallels to the Arthurian adventure. What they add to the base text is neither discursive nor mimetic. And the result is not a curtailment of narrative development but quite the opposite: a fecund proliferation of plural *récits*. In fact this romance text appears to remake or rewrite itself constantly; but it refuses to interpret in the modern sense of the term. The hermit's pronouncements in the *Queste* serve a function that is, in the end, more literary than allegorical. Their role is to turn the text back on itself, to expand the tale of the quest by retelling portions of it in a historical or tropological mode without explaining the *senefiance* of either one.





## Chapter Four

### Fictions of Representation

#### PART ONE: REPETITION AND THE DETOUR OF METAPHOR

In the preceding chapters we have examined the way in which the issues of textuality, authorship, and meaning are presented within the Vulgate Cycle, demonstrating how, in their conception of these issues, the *Estoire*, the *Merlin*, and the *Queste* in particular reproduce select elements of the medieval Scriptural tradition only to undermine their significance. Within this corpus of vernacular romance, textuality is firmly anchored in literary pluralism, the "author" is embedded neatly within his own fiction, and meaning is shown to reside in other stories. The Truth of Scripture is thus replaced with many competing fictional truths as the *auctoritas* of the biblical Word is overshadowed by the authoritative voice of *li contes*, and what purports to be an allegorical sense is absorbed into the fiction of romance.

The narrative strategies deployed in the Vulgate tales serve, as we have seen, to promote a rereading of the romance text, to shift our attention between its many competing subtexts, its plural and collective authors, and interpretative narrative segments. In this chapter we will see how the processes of rewriting employed here could be applied on a larger scale to offer a

model for reading all of the Vulgate romances but especially the *Lancelot* which alone occupies almost half of the corpus. The kind of rereading advanced here will enable us to come to grips with the troublesome issue of narrative repetition in the Vulgate corpus. The frequent recurrence of chivalric events which are cast specifically in conformity with their narrative predecessors in this cycle constitutes yet another kind of rewriting. In this case the narrative intertexts are smaller and more numerous than the authorial echoes in the *Estoire* or the interpretative passages in the *Queste*, but the Vulgate's episodic *ressorts* result from a type of rewriting and, like their counterparts in the other volumes of the cycle, they should be read reflexively.

The preceding chapters focused on fictions of textuality, authorship, and interpretation; the subject of this chapter is the more general fiction of representation that pervades all five of the Vulgate romances, manifesting itself in two distinct forms: as the historical representation involved in portraying the legendary sixth-century King Arthur, and as the theological representation necessary for reproducing the divine Idea in literature. What these texts show us, in the end, is how language is incapable of both tasks: God and Arthur are equally removed from the *realia* of thirteenth-century existence. And as a result, it becomes as difficult to represent the transcendental signified in literature as to revive the historical past in accurate prose. What these literary texts offer as an alternative is the fictional creation of both God and Arthur *ex nihilo*, a kind of representation that does not depend on the meaningful Truth of Scripture or the truth of historical documents, but on fictional intertexts that are more present and "real" than God or Arthur ever could be.

When theological and historical representation are recast in this manner, the result is literary repetition. And it is through this repetition that Rhetoric scores a double triumph over Theology in the Vulgate Cycle. The most commonly repeated episodes in this corpus of tales can be classified into three principal patterns. Their function, as we will see, is to thematize and thereby appropriate into fiction the derogatory judgments



advanced in the Church Fathers' condemnation of literature.<sup>1</sup> The issue of textual idolatry that centers on the text's dubious ability to seduce the reader and propagate an unnatural order in the world is thus absorbed into the romance text that mimics and diffuses the theological opposition to literary creation. In cultivating rhetorical conventions to the exclusion of Scriptural considerations, the Vulgate romances glory in the proliferation and repetition of words, extolling the *verbum* while denouncing indirectly the authority of the textual archetype represented by the *Verbum*.

In chapter 3 we saw how the supposedly "allegorical" passages of the *Queste* do not actually interpret narrative events by offering an abstract sense for chivalric adventures. The role of these interpretative passages conforms more closely to the rhetorical convention of *interpretatio*, a process of narrative amplification that relies on the repetition of a single concept in varied forms. Elaboration of the text is here based on a series of metaphoric detours that provide a method of saying more without saying anything strikingly new. This kind of literary repetition is the mainstay of medieval rhetorical treatises that offer detailed descriptions of the techniques to be used for amplifying a text. In all cases the classical insistence on *brevitas* as a controlling feature of narrative composition is combined with an interest in *dilatatio*, expansion of the narrative through the addition of variants. The most common method of expanding a text is through the use of tropes or figures in what is called difficult ornament (*ornatus difficilis, modus gravis*),<sup>2</sup> a technique so named because it involves an artistic transposition of words that hides meaning rather than revealing it straightaway.<sup>3</sup> The kinds of tropes mentioned by Matthew of Vendôme, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and John of Garland all are based on the principle of assigning an uncommon meaning to a word.<sup>4</sup> Their effect, according to Faral, is "d'éliminer le terme propre et de lui substituer un équivalent."<sup>5</sup> This *écart* between the figurative and literal senses of a word creates, of necessity, a narrative detour in the composition of a text; the use of metaphorical expression thus gives rise to textual repetition. Geoffrey of Vinsauf puts it

in the following terms: "Although meaning is one, let it not come content with one set of apparel. Let one and the same thing be concealed under multiple forms—be varied and yet the same."<sup>6</sup> This is clear advice that the medieval author should tell and retell, repeating with variation that which has already been stated, or in modern terms to create many *signifiants* for a single *signifié*. Although Geoffrey goes on to detail the use of paraphrase, comparison, apostrophe, and other forms of *amplificatio* without mentioning the kind of functional repetition we find in the Vulgate texts, the effect created by the two systems is identical: to "retard the tempo by thus increasing the number of words."<sup>7</sup>

This type of composition is promulgated in the rhetorical treatises of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the rubric of *dispositio artificialis*. The author is here encouraged to organize narrative episodes in accordance with literary purposes rather than slavishly mimicking the natural succession of events in real time.<sup>8</sup> The reader in turn does not focus his attention on the linear progression of episodes, but is led to discover in that linear succession an essential redundancy.<sup>9</sup> Putting aside the tools of logic and deferring questions of cause and consequence,<sup>10</sup> he must piece together the components of the fragmented linear sequence by means of association. This method of reading, which Eugene Vance has aptly termed "dispositio associative," has been advanced by several scholars as a model for reading the twelfth-century verse romances of Chrétien de Troyes.<sup>11</sup> It is particularly appropriate for the Vulgate texts since the repetition of allomorphs in these tales constitutes an elaborate system of references and cross-references that relate to one another independently of temporal sequence.

Previous critical response to the Vulgate romances has taken the opposite tack. Guided by the ideal of a "unified" narrative, scholars have tended either to undervalue repetition in the Vulgate texts as a mark of the cycle's "disunity," or they have attempted to cover it up, arguing that the texts are in fact "unified" despite apparent and abundant indication to the con-

trary. Those who lament the lack of coherence in the Vulgate texts explain that the cycle's discontinuity resulted from a haphazard collaboration of many authors, as we have seen. Repetition in this case is assumed to be the gratuitous, unfortunate by-product of a long and uncontrolled process of textual transmission and reworking.<sup>12</sup> Proponents of the second critical camp attempt to explain away the problem of repetition by denying its existence. To this end they invent the ingenious, hypothetical author or architect whose credibility lies mainly in his singularity.<sup>13</sup> In both cases the fictive presence of a unique craftsman is used to guarantee the coherence of a highly repetitive text. Ferdinand Lot is thus able to assert that there is "une unité de conception et de plan certaine" hidden beneath the disparate textual surface, and Eugene Vinaver can insist that in these wildly rambling tales "nothing is left to chance."<sup>14</sup> The prose texts only appear to be fraught with fragmentary episodes which, if unravelled by the able critic or trained reader, can be seen to serve a logical, coherent plan.<sup>15</sup>

Although the arguments for "disunity" lead to the inevitable conclusion that the Vulgate texts, as poorly constructed narratives, should be excluded from the literary canon of "great works," the theories favoring unity are designed to serve the opposite goal: to guarantee the literary value of these highly digressive tales. However, neither approach really deals with the problem of repetition. Each follows a circuitous path that skirts the issue of redundancy, either by branding the texts as second-rate compositions, or by attributing their authorship to a master-creator who is historically unverifiable. In reality the theories outlined above fail to confront, much less explain, the most glaring aesthetic anomaly of the Vulgate Cycle: the texts' characteristic *ressorts*, incidents that recur with almost haunting frequency at random intervals.

Yet these *ressorts* are so numerous that even Ferdinand Lot is forced to abandon his search for a "force poétique de premier ordre," in the Vulgate texts, and assent, in conclusion, that the narrative repetitions are "d'une monotonie presque offensante pour le lecteur." He concedes, ultimately, that the theory of

*entrelacement* and the phenomenon of consistent chronology, which argued for a tightly knit structure in the *Lancelot propre*, are marred by flagrant and multiple exceptions in the other romances of the cycle: *L'Estoire du Graal*, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and *La Mort le roi Artu*.<sup>16</sup> Vinaver, on the other hand, consigns the texts' *ressorts* to the category of decorative textual flourish or pleasurable embellishments.<sup>17</sup> Without renouncing the theory of *entrelacement*, in which every episode is seen to play an essential role in weaving the tapestry of romance, Vinaver supplements it with a slightly veiled disclaimer: certain adventures play a purely decorative role and are thus inessential to the development of the narrative.<sup>18</sup>

These critical hedges that Lot and Vinaver are forced to incorporate into their analyses make it clear that for them repetition in the Vulgate romances is symptomatic of a lack of consistent narrative sequence. Their qualifying statements result, in large measure, from a desire to locate within these tales what Northrop Frye has termed a "hence" narrative—one that leads us directly to the end of the story—to distinguish from a romance that offers instead an episodic "and then" structure in which the author attempts constantly to escape the inexorable chain of narrative sequence.<sup>19</sup> As Frye points out, the judgment that many romance narratives lack "unity" is actually a judgment against their lack of "hence" or causal structure.<sup>20</sup> This is clearly the case with the pronouncements of "disunity" made by early scholars of the Vulgate texts. The same critical bias can be seen, in reverse application, in Vinaver's curious assertion that the digressive amplifications of the Vulgate romances are used by the author "to make the narrative more meaningful by giving it a 'causal' perspective," and in Lot's exaggerated claim that the *Lancelot propre* is constructed on a framework of narrative threads (*ficelles*) that function just like the more conventional structuring mechanisms evident in the plays of Beaumarchais, Scribe, or Sardou.<sup>21</sup>

However, the vast majority of medieval texts defy analysis in these terms. The tendency to retell a tale in diptych formation is common for narratives of the period 1050–1200, particularly

clear examples being *La Vie de Saint Alexis*, *La Chanson de Roland*, *La Chanson de Guillaume*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.<sup>22</sup> In fact, it could be said without exaggeration that repetition in all its forms is a common mode of composition in the medieval period: be it the lexical repetition of the *laisses similaires* in the epic, the recurrent thematic “registers” of lyric poetry, the *lieux communs* of descriptive passages in romance, or the serial adventures of knights errant in Arthurian romance. There is, in much medieval literature, a desire to retell, to tell a tale or part of a tale and then to recast it in slightly altered but still recognizable form. In the case of the Vulgate romances, we are confronted with the opposite of a linear narrative that leads us point by point to the end of the story. These texts appear, rather, to rewrite or rework themselves constantly: to spin their tale largely by rephrasing something that has already been said whether through an echo between authorial voices, a relay between the chivalric adventure and its “interpretation,” or, more germane to our discussion here, the recurrence of episodic *ressorts*.

### Allomorphs

When approaching the question of narrative *reprise* in the Vulgate texts it is important to understand what we mean by repetition since repetition in this context is never exact. The kind of narrative recurrence that we find here is not the verbatim repetition that Walter Ong links specifically to alphabet cultures (cultures in which the dominant mode of textual transmission is the printed page).<sup>23</sup> Rather, it is a “thematic” reduplication resembling more closely the patterned repetition of oral-aural cultures than the post-Gutenberg concept of exact copy. If we take the phenomenon of imprisonment, for example, the motifs used to express incarceration in the Vulgate romances take on many forms, each of which participates in the creation of a recognizable, functional *topos*. The opening scenes of the *Lancelot* recounting Lancelot’s family history contain two straightforward and simplified examples of the prison motif: the first, in which young Lionel and Bohort are imprisoned in

the tower of Gannes by Claudas and later freed by Saraide (3:26, 55–57);<sup>24</sup> and the second where Pharien, the youths' guardian suspected of sympathizing with Claudas, is held in a tower until released by his followers (3:92). The prison motif re-emerges in an altered form in the two tests of Lancelot's prowess devised by the Dame de Nohaut. While crossing a narrow path, Lancelot encounters a fountain and pavilion where a woman is guarded by a cruel knight. After an initial defeat, Lancelot subdues the guard and frees the female captive (3:132 ff.). In a second test, Lancelot encounters another woman, this time chained to a sycamore tree on an island guarded by two knights. As in the preceding incident, Lancelot subdues the knights and secures the woman's release (3:134–35).

The degree of similarity between these four motifs of imprisonment varies substantially. While the tower, used as a locus of captivity in the first example, finds a close echo in the tower of the second example, the motifs of pavilion and tree in the succeeding incidents of imprisonment share few traits, and they remain morphologically distinct from the tower *loci* described earlier. For these reasons we might characterize the literary motifs mentioned here as narrative allomorphs of one another. Despite differences in detail, each one evokes the concept of captivity; taken together, they can be seen as materially dissimilar elements used to designate a single meaning. Although the role of textual allomorphs in the Vulgate narratives does not parallel precisely that of allomorphs in the linguistic sphere, the analogy is useful in explaining the intricacies of repetition in these prose tales. The motifs of tower, pavilion, and tree cited above, for example, can be understood as allomorphs of one another because, like the allomorphic components of a conjugated verb, these motifs convey the same semantic information and have the same function, even though they take on widely differing forms.<sup>25</sup> As a result of their presence in the narrative, the notion of imprisonment can be actualized in many lexical configurations<sup>26</sup> forming a whole series of *signifiants* for a single *signifié*.

The repetition of allomorphs in the Vulgate romances is not

verbal repetition since no set expression is shared by each one. Neither is the relationship between them established on the basis of spatial proximity, since they are spatially distant from one another. What these motifs share as allomorphs is a common referent. They could perhaps best be understood as "content forms,"<sup>27</sup> motifs of varied appearance that have the same figurative content. The allomorphs used to indicate captivity in the Vulgate romances are not necessarily images of prisons in the traditional sense, structures within which a victim is physically held captive. Although allomorphs can perform this function at times, they can also serve simply to mark a site as a potential locus of captivity. Tower, pavilion, and tree are not simply different realistic sites of captivity; they are typed incidents that can be used interchangeably throughout the tales as emblematic markers of imprisonment. It is the proliferation of these allomorphs that creates, at the most basic level, a sense of incantatory recurrence in the Vulgate texts.

Functioning in this capacity, the Vulgate's allomorphs play a role that is not dissimilar from that of the conventional images found in the *exordium* and *tornada* of Provençal lyric, or that of the *topoi* which typify love scenes in verse romance. However, the full force of allomorphs is much greater than that of the familiar, conventional motif. Although the Vulgate's allomorphs are often separated from one another by intervening narrative action, they can also be juxtaposed, increasing thereby the immediate impression of repetition. And in this juxtaposition we find variants of the original allomorph that are highly diverse and unexpected, variants whose semantic tie with the initial allomorph is not at all obvious. Description of the prison locus in relatively realistic terms as tower, castle, or dungeon, for example, is often accompanied by a secondary, more abstract evocation of captivity. The imprisonment of Arthur's men at the Doloreuse Garde is rendered through a curious double motif. The fortified castle, an obvious prison topos that appears frequently in the Vulgate corpus, is accompanied in this case by a functional equivalent, the graveyard. The prison of the Doloreuse Garde is described both as an

island with a castle at its center and as a cemetery with a tombstone at its center:

Et tantost vient devant la porte lors esgarda le castel si voit quil siet trop orgueilleusement & trop bel. Car toute la fortereche siet en une haute roche naie & si nest mie petite. (3:143)<sup>28</sup>

Si mainent le chevalier en une chimentiere moult merveillex qui estoit dehors les murs. si sen mervella moult quant il le vit. (3:152)

It soon becomes clear, however, that this cemetery is not a resting place for dead bodies, but a second version of the multifaceted prison locale. The inscription on the central tombstone establishes the link between castle and cemetery because it states that the stone will be lifted by him who conquers the castle and frees its inhabitants.

& el milieu de le chimentiere si avoit une grant lame de metal tres merueilleusement ouvree a or & a pieres & a esmax. Et si i avoit lettres qui disoient. ceste lame niert ia levee par main domme ne par esfors. se par chelui non qui conquerra cest doleros castel. (3:152)

As Gauvain later discovers, none of Arthur's knights whose tombstones appear in the cemetery of the Doloreuse Garde is dead: they are, however, imprisoned in the nearby dungeon called the Doloreuse Chartre. Thus the tombstone does not signify death but a temporary withdrawal from active life, an in-between existence characterized by internment and immobility. Both castle and cemetery function here as sites of imprisonment.

The analogical relationship between these two allomorphs explains the otherwise illogical connection between lifting the tombstone in the graveyard and freeing the distant castle inhabitants. It accounts as well for the twofold liberation of prisoners. In the first instance, Lancelot vanquishes several guards and lifts the central tombstone allowing the captives to escape, "Lors le saisist a .ij. mains par devers le plus [gros]. si la tant levee quele est plus haute que sa teste .j. pie." (3:152).<sup>29</sup> In the second liberation, however, the prison described initially as both castle and cemetery undergoes a thematic modulation to become a cave with a pillar at its center. Lancelot turns a key in the pillar



which, in addition to freeing the captives, causes the cemetery to disappear:

Li chevaliers desferme le piler a le cleif grosse. Et il se regarde si voit le piler fondre tot ius quen terre. & la damoisele de coevre autresi. & les .ij. chevalier qui luis gardoient tous debrisiés. Et il vient hors a tous les cles. si voit toutes les gens del castel qui li viennent a lencontre. Et com il vint en le chimentiere si ne voit nule des tombes ne des hiaumes qui sor les creniax soloient estre. (3:192)

This second liberation is not a superfluous repetition but a retelling of the initial event in an altered version that corresponds to the cemetery aspect of the prison locale. Rather than two successive liberations, the text presents a single incident of releasing prisoners through two thematic allomorphs. Imprisonment is depicted as a kind of false death, and entombment is presented as a form of captivity. The second freeing of the prisoners at the *Doloreuse Garde* is thus a necessary echo of the prison's double nature. The imprisonment of captives at this site is indicated by an interlocking matrix of three successive allomorphs, each of equal semantic value. The more referential image of the castle is reinforced subsequently by its metaphorical equivalents: cemetery and cave.

This process of constantly recasting the prison motif into a series of analogical variants persists through the five tales of the *Vulgate Cycle*. The captives and liberators vary, and the details of their incarceration change, but a characteristic prison topos is clearly discernible. As the lone tower of the first example is modulated into pavilion and island tree, or as we witness within a single scene the metamorphosis of the prison locale from the castle on an island rock to the cemetery surrounding a central tombstone to the cave enclosing a pillar, we can chart a list of the specific allomorphs that are used to signal captivity in the *Vulgate* texts as follows:

1. Tower
2. Pavilion
3. Tree
4. Island

5. Castle
6. Cemetery
7. Tombstone
8. Cave
9. Pillar

For a more detailed breakdown of prison allomorphs consult table 1 on page 91.

The recognition and identification of allomorphs rests on an associational or analogical process. Once we see that the Vulgate texts posit a direct link between the functions of the conventional prison and its less obvious equivalent, the cemetery, we are encouraged to look for other possible analogues of captivity. The association of prison and cemetery raises the possibility that other states of being might also be presented within these texts as forms of imprisonment, that other kinds of captivity exist which bear no overt relation to physical confinement. This is in fact the case, as we will see in part 2 of this chapter. Through an intricate chain of semantic contamination, blindness and wounding are established as the two major analogues of imprisonment, each rendered through numerous individual allomorphs.

The format of thirteenth-century romance is, in many ways, similar to that of traditional storytelling. But the kind of repetition that we find in the Vulgate texts, repetition through metaphoric variants, is not really comparable to the recurrence of the set motifs characteristic of folktale. The allomorphs of imprisonment cited above, for example, could not be considered "functions" in the Proppian sense of the term. The thirty-one functions that Propp outlines are narrative actions that are related to one another syntagmatically, through relationships of cause and consequence.<sup>30</sup> The Vulgate's allomorphs are states of being that draw their meaning from outside the sequence of actions, from a general typology of "imprisonment." Unlike Proppian functions, allomorphs have no set sequential

TABLE 1

## THE PRISON TOPOS: ALLOMORPHS USED TO INDICATE INCARCERATION

## ALLOMORPHS OF TYPE A: THE IMPREGNABLE Sronghold

The traditional *loci* of Imprisonment are: 1. Tower  
 2. Castle  
 3. Dungeon  
 4. Prison (type unspecified)

Manmade Structures	Natural Structures	Agents	Markers
5. Pavilion 6. Cemetery 7. Fountain 8. Hermitage 9. Chapel 10. Church 11. Monastery 12. Ship 13. Narrow Path 14. Narrow Bridge 15. Garden	16. Tree 17. Cave 18. Island 19. Hill 20. Lake 21. Impassable Water	22. Dwarf 23. Guard 24. Rival Knight	25. Tombstone 26. Pillar 27. Horn

NOTE: The traditional *loci* of imprisonment – Tower, Castle, Dungeon, and Prison – can be either replaced by or accompanied by the other allomorphs listed under Type A above. At times these sites function as physical enclosures that hold victims captive; at other times they simply mark the site as a potential locus of imprisonment. Some allomorphs serve only as markers of captivity (Markers, Agents); they cannot contain prisoners in the manner of a traditional prison or the variants shown under Manmade Structures and Natural Structures above.

## ALLOMORPHS OF TYPE B: THE MYSTERIOUS ENCLOSURE

Magical Enclosure	Surprise Enclosure	Doubles	Household Objects	Agent
28. Invisible Walls 29. Enchanted Doors 30. Dance 31. Tomb 32. Coffin 33. Tub	34. Windows Locked (Closed) 35. Doors Locked 36. Gates Locked	37. Double Doors 38. Double Gates 39. Double Bridge	40. Perilous Bed 41. Dangerous Chair	42. Bridge Guard

NOTE: These allomorphs are further variants of the traditional *loci* of captivity and function in the same manner as the allomorphs of Type A. The final allomorph of this series (42. Bridge Guard) serves only as a marker of imprisonment without being a prison locale.

ordering. Their placement in the narrative line is not crucial to their operation or to our recognition of them.

On the contrary, the Vulgate's allomorphs are stock forms that are reemployed in the narrative under widely varying circumstances. In the *Lancelot*, for example, we encounter two sites of imprisonment whose stock characteristics provide a clear echo of the prison *topos* we have already discussed. Karadoc's Tour Doloreuse is a Castle where a woman is held captive in the Tower containing a central Pillar (4:90–91, 113; M, 1:186, 205–6). These allomorphs from the Doloreuse Garde are modified, however, by the addition of both water and vegetation, motifs that characterize the prison locale in the tests administered by the Dame de Nohaut discussed above. The Pavilion where the first woman is detained adjoins a Fountain, and the second female victim is chained to a Tree (3:132 ff.). As a composite version of these earlier evocations of captivity, the Tour Doloreuse combines five markers of imprisonment into a highly overdetermined description: the Tower containing a central Pillar is located in a Castle that adjoins a Fountain, and is surrounded not by trees but by a variant thereof, the Garden. Several pages later we find another version of the prison at the Val Sans Retour, a curious geographic anomaly that can detain captives even though it has no recognizable prison structure (4:116–17; M, 1:275–76). It is merely a valley that is neither enclosed nor cut off from the surrounding area in any obvious way. The Val is marked indirectly as a site of imprisonment, however, by its verdant setting and central fountain, versions of the Garden and Fountain allomorphs used in the Tour Doloreuse and the tests of the Dame de Nohaut. When combined with the elements of water and vegetation, the invisible walls at the Val Sans Retour take on the function of an impenetrable barrier, equivalent in force to the stone walls of the towers and castles in other examples. The allomorphs of Garden and Fountain whose function was not apparent in the tests of the Dame de Nohaut emerge here as markers of captivity in their own right. The scene of the Val Sans Retour is composed, then, of two allomorphs that signal imprisonment. Garden and Fountain

are here shown to be semiotic and functional equivalents of one another and of the other allomorphs of captivity.

As stock forms the nine allomorphs listed above (Tower, Pavilion, Tree, Island, Castle, Cemetery, Tombstone, Cave, and Pillar), along with those of Garden and Fountain, can be grouped and regrouped in a wide variety of combinations, and as the text progresses, new allomorphs can be added to the stock repertoire. Tower and Fountain are sometimes supplemented, for example, by the allomorph of the Horn used to call out the defender of the prison. Late in the *Lancelot*, Agravain approaches a hill at the summit of which he finds a Fountain and a Horn (5:6-9; M, 4:7-12). After fighting a battle instigated by blowing the Horn, the defeated Agravain is imprisoned in a (now familiar) Tower (5:9; M, 4:12). In another incident the Horn allomorph is combined with the Garden, Cave, and Castle. At Marigart's fortress Hector enters a central garden where a Horn hanging from a pine tree serves to call forth two lion guards whom Hector subdues, freeing Lancelot's female cousin from a cave and other prisoners from a castle (4:350 ff.; M, 2:392-95). Horn and Tree form a less complex version of the prison topos in the following example: Lancelot finds a sycamore hung with ten lances and a horn used to incite to battle (5:237; M, 5:98-99).

By combining all of these incidents in a composite reading we can begin to discern a clear pattern: military triumph at the Horn locale ensures the release of prisoners held captive there, but failure to subdue the opponent called forth by the Horn results in captivity. Success at the Horn locale can be seen then as analogous to lifting the tombstone at the Doloreuse Garde; failure causes imprisonment similar to that suffered by Arthur's knights whose names are inscribed on the falsified tombstones. The motif of the Cemetery that functioned as a surrogate prison at the Doloreuse Garde is replaced, in the incidents mentioned above, by a series of functional allomorphs. The Horn, Fountain, Garden, Cave, and Tree all serve the same purpose as the more conventional *loci* of imprisonment indicated in other scenes by Castle and Tower alone.

### The Function of Allomorphs

The relentless piling up of allomorphs in this manner does not supply the reader with new information that might be used to distinguish one prisoner from the next, nor to deduce a plausible geographic distribution of these prisons over the ever ambiguous Arthurian landscape. On the contrary the *récit* that results from the accretion of allomorphs tends to undermine the realistic concerns of storytelling by constantly reusing the same repertoire of limited motifs, often regardless of contextual factors or subtle shades of meaning. In one sense the repetition of allomorphs in the Vulgate texts serves less to convey specific, denotative information than simply to make the narrative longer, to slow down the linear progression toward the final page and end of the tale. This process is reminiscent of the rhetorical effort not to “unveil the thing fully but suggest it by hints.”<sup>31</sup> It recalls specifically Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s characterization of difficult ornament as a process through which the object “does not come before us with unveiled face, and accompanied by its natural voice; rather an alien voice attends it, and so it shrouds itself in mist, as it were, but in a luminous mist.”<sup>32</sup>

This is, in a slightly different sense, the function of the clustered allomorphs in the Vulgate tales where the single notion of captivity is shrouded in a number of variant motifs that hint at the subject without revealing it straightaway.<sup>33</sup> In fact the allomorphs of captivity discussed thus far:

1. Tower
2. Pavilion
3. Tree
4. Island
5. Castle
6. Cemetery
7. Tombstone
8. Cave
9. Pillar
10. Garden

11. Fountain

12. Horn

are supplemented further by the additional allomorphs of Hill, Hermitage, Chapel, Church, and Monastery, among others <sup>34</sup> (Table 1, Type A). Moreover, these markers of incarceration are accompanied by a set of allomorphs that indicate less tangible sites of imprisonment: temporary prisons that can be created through the sudden closing of doors or the surprise manifestation of walls (Table 1, Type B). In the scenes at the Val Sans Retour (also called the Val des Faux Amants), an apparently idyllic valley is transformed into a vegetal prison when invisible walls suddenly materialize to trap the unsuspecting lovers, as we have seen (4:116; M, 1:275–76 no invisible walls). As it turns out, these invisible walls constitute a stock motif that reappears in many incidents and is often associated with an amorous liaison. Merlin, who is usually cast as a clairvoyant sage, falls prey to the invisible enclosure that Viviane creates in the Forest de Dardantes to lure and trap her lover (3:21; 2: 209–11). Camille's castle, which is surrounded by visible walls, seems at first glance less mysterious than the magical prison of Viviane. Yet an enchantment holds fast the gate so that those who enter cannot escape (3:414). This gate functions ultimately like the invisible walls at the Val Sans Retour: to surprise and detain unsuspecting victims rather than facilitate passage. In each of these incidents, imprisonment results from the combined forces of passion and enchantment that are signaled by the allomorph of Invisible Walls.

Enchanted Doors provide another allomorph of Mysterious Enclosure used to indicate captivity in the Vulgate texts. At the castle of the Estroite Marche (3:335 ff.), a city on an island rock similar to the Doloreuse Garde, Hector enters the first gate only to find the exit closed. As the entrance gate slams behind him, Hector, the potential liberator of the imprisoned Yvain and Sagremor, becomes Hector the prisoner, trapped within the impenetrable walls from which entrance and exit have been

erased. Guenevere and Arthur find themselves similarly trapped within the confines of the cemetery at the Doloreuse Garde when Lancelot closes the entrance door behind them and refuses to open the exit leading to the wonderful city (3:155). Here the allomorph of Enchanted Doors is combined with those of the Cemetery and Island to provide a triple evocation of captivity. In the case of the Estroite Marche, the Enchanted Doors are allied to Castle and Island to form a triply potent motif. At the prison of Escalon li Tenebreux, where the duc de Clarence is held captive, we again find the paired allomorphs of Cemetery and Enchanted Doors (4:107–12; M, 1:229–64). To accomplish the adventure of the *dolereuse tor*, the aspiring knight must enter the castle gate, cross the Cemetery to the Monastery, and open a second gate (p. 107). When Galeshin attempts the feat, he is so fiercely attacked by flying swords that he loses consciousness and swoons repeatedly in the attempt to retreat. His wounds bring him to the brink of death, “quida bien morir desconfes” (p. 108). Yvain subsequently falls into a similar dead faint while attempting the adventure; he exits only when rescued by Lancelot (p. 110). The inability of both knights to open the second gate means that they come dangerously close to being trapped within the castle walls. Only Lancelot, who can open both the first and second gates, entering and exiting in one uninterrupted motion, escapes imprisonment (4:110–11; M, 1:264).

A third variant of the mysterious, temporary prison can be seen in the Perilous Bed where no one can sleep without being maimed or killed (4:165; M, 2:14). Similar to the prisons composed of Enchanted Doors, this bed requires the dual ability to enter and exit. In fact, Lancelot's triumph at Escalon li Tenebreux is paralleled by his power to sleep in the special bed, avoid the threatening lance, and reemerge unscathed. However, the knight who is unable to perform this feat will be crippled by the enduring effects of a bed turned prison, “nus ne gut onques quil nen issist mors ou mahaigñies.” The captivity evoked here in terms of impaired movement finds a clear counterpart in the luxurious bed in the *Queste*. This sumptuous bed,



lodged inside the marvelous ship that Perceval, Bohort, and Galahad witness with King Pellehan's daughter, bears a special relation to the *épée merveilleuse* laid upon it (pp. 202, 207). Like the sword that is reserved only for the boldest knight, "cil qui me portera doit estre mout plus preuz et mout plus seurs que nus autres" (p. 205), this bed is destined for Galahad alone, "Grant piece demorerent li compaignon en mer, tant qu'il distrent un jor a Galaad. 'Sire, en cest lit qui por vos fu apareilliez, si come cez letres dient, ne vos colchastes vos onques. Et vos l'en devez fere, car li briés dit que vos reposeroiz dedenz'" (p. 275). All others attempting to partake of the magical ship with its accompanying bed and sword will never be allowed to leave. Their fate will be death. A voice explains to Nascien as he reenters the ship after having used the sword without permission, "par poi que vos ne chaez en pechié, et se vos en pechié estes trovez tant come vos seroiz çainez, vos n'en poez eschaper sanz perir" (p. 208). The luxurious ship-bed is thus revealed to be reserved for the chosen hero alone in the same way that only Lancelot can successfully enter and exit from his Perilous Bed in the *Lancelot*, or open both gates at the prison of Escalon. In all of these cases, the presence of an unsuspecting knight will transform an otherwise harmless site into a locus of imprisonment. When entrance is not paired with exit, confinement and in some cases death ensue. No one but the privileged knight can enter the potential prison and exit without being trapped; only a chosen hero can enter the special bed and reemerge unharmed.

We can now expand the list of allomorphs used to signal imprisonment in the Vulgate romances to include: Invisible Walls, Enchanted Doors, and Perilous Bed. In reality there are numerous allomorphs that can indicate incarceration in the Vulgate texts; however, the function of each of these motifs overlaps substantially with that of its counterparts. I have listed forty-two possible variants in Table 1—allomorphs that are regularly substituted for one another in the Vulgate narratives—and have shown how they fall into two main categories: the Impregnable Stronghold and the Mysterious Enclosure.

The difference between these two kinds of imprisonment is determined largely by a difference in point of view. In the case of the Impregnable Stronghold, the victim is constrained physically from without, whereas the Mysterious Enclosure forms an illusory and temporary barrier of restraint. In the latter case, it often appears that the victim suffers from a kind of strange paralysis as if the restriction to movement stems from within himself. In addition to the variants of imprisonment that are listed in Table 1, there are allomorphs that constitute two other major *topoi* or motif patterns in the Vulgate romances: the Wound Topos and the Veil Topos. They will be discussed in the second part of this chapter along with the phenomenon of overlap between allomorphs of different patterns.

### Clusters of Allomorphs

The allomorphs listed in Table 1 can be employed either singly, as in the case of the lone tower used to evoke the captivity of Lionel and Bohort in the beginning of the *Lancelot* (3:26), or in combination. Those that appear singly are isolated physically from other allomorphs of imprisonment. Yet they resonate with previous and subsequent motifs through a kind of associative rhythm that is set up by the repetition of allomorphs sharing a common function. Thus the tower of Gannes where Lionel and Bohort are imprisoned finds materially similar counterparts or typed variants in the Tour Doloreuse, the Doloreuse Garde, and Méléagant's tower in which Lancelot is confined (4:213; M, 2:82). Merlin's tower from which "no one returns" (4:288; M, 2:237) is allied, through its deathlike incarceration, to the prisons of the Doloreuse Garde, the Val Sans Retour, and the island prison where a woman is held captive beneath a sycamore tree (3:134).

Very often, as we have seen, two, three, or more allomorphs are juxtaposed in the Vulgate narratives to form a cluster of materially dissimilar motifs. In the test of the Dame de Nohaut, the prison site is actually rendered through four allomorphs. The motifs of Pavilion and Fountain discussed previously are accompanied by those of Narrow Bridge and Guard as well. At

the *Doloreuse Garde*, the highly overdetermined cluster of Island, Castle, Cemetery, Tomb, Cave, Pillar, and Enchanted Doors is actually even more complex, for it includes the allomorphs of Horn and Garden as well. The number of such combinations that could potentially be drawn from the allomorphs listed in Table 1 is limitless, since the rapport between motifs in a cluster is not governed ultimately by contextual or denotative considerations. Their relation one to another is largely connotative. A cluster can be defined, then, simply as the number of allomorphs realized in a given context. Table 2 contains sample combinations of Prison allomorphs used to form motif clusters in the Vulgate texts. Examples cited are limited to clusters actually attested in the texts under study.

TABLE 2  
SAMPLE CLUSTERS OF PRISON ALLOMORPHS

Sommer	CLUSTERS	Micha
4:87	Tower, Double Gates, Castle, Narrow Path	M, 1:180
3:199	Tower, Double Bridge	
3:220	Tower, Guard, Pavilion	
4:230	Tower, Guard, Pavilion	M, 2:116
4:97	Tower, Guard, Horn Narrow Path	
1:212	Tower, Guard, Castle	
1:183	Tower, Garden, Castle, Fountain	
4:91	Tower	M, 1:185 (also: Garden, Fountain)
5:205	Fountain, Tree	M, 5:27 Fountain, Tree, Tower, Hill
3:177	Fountain, Tree	
LMA 79	Fountain, Tree	
5:89	Fountain, Tree, Hill	M, 4:169-70
3:277	Fountain, Tree, Guard	
5:113	Fountain, Castle, Guard	M, 4:214-15
1:295	Fountain, Tomb	
5:244	Fountain, Tomb	M, 5:118
3:132	Fountain, Pavilion	
5:5	Fountain, Dwarf, Hill, Horn, Guard	M, 4:3
5:3	Hill, Pavilion	M, 4:1
5:33	Hill, Horn, Dwarf	M, 4:59-60
5:235 ff.	Hill, Horn, Dwarf, Castle,	M, 5:93-100 Hill,

TABLE 2 (continued)

Sommer	CLUSTERS	Micha
4:174 Q:36 4:339	Tree, Pavilion, Narrow Path, Tower, Bridge, Guard Tomb, Cemetery Tomb, Cemetery Tomb, Cemetery, Chapel	Horn, Dwarf, Castle, Tree, Pavilion M, 2:31 M, 2:366-67
2:402 4:349-52 4:306 ff.	Horn, Castle Horn, Castle, Cave, Garden, Tree, Guard Horn, Pavilion, Dwarf, Narrow Path, Guard	M, 2:390 ff. M, 2:277-84
5:27 5:37 3:281 4:98 5:123	Pavilion, Dwarf Pavilion, Dwarf Pavilion, Dwarf, Guard Pavilion, Tree, Guard Pavilion, Tree, Dangerous Chair, Dance	M, 4:46-47 M, 4:66 M, 1:237-38 M, 4:233-35
3:158 5:228 5:296-99	Castle, Island, Dungeon Castle, Island, Narrow Path Castle, Perilous Bed, Windows Locked	M, 5:74 M, 5:259-63 (Windows Closed)
4:343-44 4:130 5:136 3:143 ff.	Castle, Gates Locked, Tub Castle, Double Gates Castle, Guard Castle, Island, Double Gates, Horn, Cemetery, Cave, Garden, Pillar	M, 2:372-78 M, 1:332 M, 4:262
3:395 3:337	Bridge Guard, Double Bridge Bridge Guard, Double Gates	
	<i>Other Combinations</i>	
4:40 3:135 4:113 Q:41-42 5:332	Island, Double Bridge Island, Tree Pillar, Dungeon Guard, Dangerous Chair Perilous Bed, Island	M, 1:82-84 M, 1:205-6 M, 6:55

### How To Read Allomorphs

Whether they appear in clusters or alone, allomorphs in the Vulgate romances form a matrix of intertextual echoes since they do not refer principally to their immediate surroundings or to the dramatic action of the tale, but to one another. Although repetition can be used in Arthurian literature to pro-

duce discrete "building blocks" of narrative sequence, as is the case in certain romances of Chrétien de Troyes, in Gautier d'Arras's *Ille et Galeron*, and Renaut de Beaujeu's *Le Bel Inconnu*,<sup>35</sup> such is not the function of repetition in the Vulgate texts. Rather than generating motifs that are linked together in the development of action and plot in order to advance the story, repetition here serves to supplement the narrative line with a nonlinear configuration that must be perceived *in toto*. Thus, instead of attempting to discern links between the digressive repetitions and their chronological counterparts in the storyline, the reader of these wildly rambling texts should seek to understand the relation between the variants themselves.<sup>36</sup>

If there is a horizontal dimension to the proliferation of allomorphs as the Vulgate tale progresses, it is only the obvious feeling of sequentiality that results from reading line after line from the first page to the last. The ultimate effect of these repetitive motifs that hark back constantly to an earlier moment in the narrative is to undercut the straightforward progression of the prose *récit*. Their presence in the texts makes a strictly linear reading of events impossible. Allomorphs function, in the end, more like medieval tropes, rhetorical figures that could be termed appropriately *détours* since they guide the reader along a circular and deviant path.<sup>37</sup> Allomorphic variants can be seen to operate like tropes, moreover, since they create an *écart*, "un sens différent de leur sens propre."<sup>38</sup> Theirs is a meaning other than that dictated by the linear logic of the tale.

It is, of course, possible for allomorphs to operate on several narrative registers, to play a straightforward, denotative role that remains separate from their connotative or allomorphic function. Many incidents of imprisonment can be read literally since they make sense in realistic terms. When the young Lionel and Bohort are imprisoned in the tower of Gannes, we need not invoke the topos of incarceration to understand that the youths are held captive. The same is true of the tests devised by the Dame de Nohaut since we could reasonably conceive of a woman being held captive by two guards, or a victim sequestered on an island. Within these limited contexts the allomorphs of

Tower, Tree, and Guard can play a strictly referential role. Yet even within these straightforward examples of imprisonment there are unrealistic elements that hint at the existence of a nonmimetic narrative paradigm and point to the necessity of a metaphoric reading. The allomorphs of Fountain, Garden, and Island included in the tests of the Dame de Nohaut and in numerous other instances of imprisonment are not used mimetically, as realistic descriptions of actual prisons, just as the cemetery at the Doloreuse Garde does not function as an actual graveyard. The relationship of these allomorphs one to another and to the developmental narrative line is not primarily logical. Taken literally, Fountain, Garden, and Island would be insignificant features in the backdrop of the Arthurian adventure; but when read in terms of the numerous other instances of similar motifs they can be seen to create analogical narrative relationships that work in opposition to the linear unfolding of the tale.<sup>39</sup> In this manner the allomorphs of Tree, Island, Garden, and Fountain, that do not normally denote captivity, can be made to signal imprisonment through their association with the more conventional *topoi* of Tower, Castle, and Cave. The *écart* established on the syntagmatic axis of the text, the disparity between the common conception of "fountain" and its surprising use in a given scene to connote imprisonment, is redressed on the paradigmatic axis, as the Fountain draws new meaning from its functional association with other markers of imprisonment.<sup>40</sup>

And in this same manner, even those motifs that can be read literally—the Tower that holds Bohort and Lionel or the Guards restraining the woman captive whom Lancelot liberates—can also be seen to function as associative allomorphs when viewed in the larger context of the cycle as a whole, when they are combined with the repeated uses of the same motifs in other scenes. Because they are spatially distant from one another and often semantically distant from their immediate context, the Vulgate's allomorphs can appear superfluous or misplaced. Many of them, like the Invisible Walls, Enchanted Doors, and Perilous Bed form part of the texts' strata of marvelous and

magical occurrences. Others are absorbed into the moral framework of the tales.<sup>41</sup> Still others are simply incongruous and unmotivated by their immediate context like the double liberation of the prisoners at the Doloreuse Garde.<sup>42</sup> Yet all of these allomorphs can be seen to cohere, like the components of metaphor, on the basis of what is missing—on the latent meaning that is not directly stated but hidden behind words that have garnered a figurative function apart from their normal usage.

This technique might seem curiously indirect for a writer of prose fiction, and yet Geoffrey of Vinsauf advises the use of metaphor in exactly these terms: to transpose or hide the original meaning of a word, and then to clarify the resultant ambiguity through the addition of even more words, "The transposed verb hides its meaning, as it were, under a cloud; and since a verb so introduced remains in darkness, let an adjective come to its aid and shed light upon it. Now the adjective adds meaning to the verb."<sup>43</sup> The text that results from such a method of composition tends to be long, elaborate, and digressive. But it appears from Geoffrey's guidelines that the effect thus achieved cannot be gained through more discursive or economical prose. By a curious turn of rhetorical logic, the long way around, the narrative *détour* provides, in the end, the richest form of communication since latent meaning is cultivated through indirection. Thus in the case of the Vulgate's allomorphs, the most circuitous route becomes the most desired narrative path.

### The Prison Topos

It is clear to any reader of the Vulgate Cycle that imprisonment is not the only state of being in the Vulgate texts: none of the captives remains incarcerated for long. The allomorphs used so frequently to indicate imprisonment are balanced throughout with motifs of liberation. In the *Lancelot*, for example, one encounters a ceaseless trail of adventures in which an imprisoned knight is rescued by a more valiant one, a captive woman is liberated by a heroic knight, or a group of individuals is freed by a savior figure. Sagremor, imprisoned by Mathamas

(4:312, M, 2:297), is freed by Gauvain (4:331-332; M, 2:348), just as Lancelot frees Lionel, Agravain, and Keu from one castle, Mordred from another, and Yvain from a third. Calogrenant, enchained in a pavilion by his female captor, is liberated more mysteriously when he simply disappears (4:311; M, 2:293).

More specifically, the allomorphs listed in Table 1 can often be aligned with distinct kinds of liberation. Although force is used by Pharien's followers to procure his release from the Tower (3:92), subduing an armed guard is required in order to free the women enchained at the sites of Pavilion and Tree, and lifting the tombstone guarantees liberation from the Cemetery. Escape from the Island prison occurs typically when the captive enters a ship and crosses the perilous, restrictive water (for Lancelot and Perceval, Q, 246, 115; for Nascien and Mordrain, 1:105, 137; and for others, 1:211, 257). Types of liberation applicable to the Impregnable Stronghold (Table 1, Type A) can be distinguished, in general, from those used for the Mysterious Enclosure (Table 1, Type B). Yet there is no precise matching of prison allomorphs with corresponding allomorphs of liberation. This would be impossible given the uneven number of allomorphs in each set (42 for Incarceration, 22 for Liberation), and in view of the tendency of motifs to form clusters. We find, rather, a flexible system of "borrowing" between two sets of allomorphs, such that prisoners can be released from a particular locale in one of several ways. Liberation from the Castle can take place through the conventional means of subduing the guard or conquering the castle inhabitants, or by lifting the tombstone, an allomorph normally associated with the Cemetery. Enchanted Doors are generally overcome by Entering and Exiting, but this form of liberation also applies to the Perilous Bed, Dangerous Chair, and to the Double Doors, Gates, and Bridge.

Table 3 contains a list of the allomorphs used to indicate release from captivity. As is clear from the verbal formulation of these motifs (Subdues Guard, Lifts Tombstone), they depict actions, unlike their nominative counterparts of Castle, Cemetery, and Tree. When these two sets of allomorphs are bonded



TABLE 3

THE PRISON TOPOS: ALLOMORPHS USED TO INDICATE LIBERATION

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ALLOMORPHS OF TYPE A: LIBERATION FROM IMPREGNABLE STRONGHOLD	
<i>Liberator:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Frees Captives (method unspecified)</li> <li>2. Subdues Guard</li> <li>3. Conquers Castle</li> <li>4. Lifts Tombstone</li> <li>5. Turns Key in Pillar</li> <li>6. Blows Horn</li> <li>7. Vanquishes Rival Knight</li> <li>8. Crosses Narrow Bridge</li> <li>9. Crosses Narrow Path</li> <li>10. Subdues Dwarf</li> <li>11. Lifts Bodies from Lake</li> <li>12. Leaves Ship</li> </ol>

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ALLOMORPHS OF TYPE B: LIBERATION FROM MYSTERIOUS ENCLOSURE	
<i>Liberator:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Enters and Exits</li> <li>14. Opens Double Doors</li> <li>15. Opens Double Gates</li> <li>16. Crosses Two Bridges</li> <li>17. Conquers Bridge Guard</li> <li>18. Sleeps in Perilous Bed</li> <li>19. Sits in Dangerous Chair</li> <li>20. Breaks Spell of Dance</li> <li>21. Lifts Knight from Coffin</li> <li>22. Lifts Victim from Tub</li> </ol>

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together in the Vulgate corpus, the result is a continual conversion from prison to passage, from captives to freed persons, from impenetrable barrier to thoroughfare. Flexible couplets of stasis and motion work together throughout the texts to form an ever revolving mechanism of capture and release. The wide latitude of variation that characterizes the typed descriptions of the prison locale (Tower, Cemetery, Fountain, Enchanted Doors, Invisible Walls) is matched by an equally diverse assortment of possible methods of Liberation. Whereas prisoners vary radically from venerated kings to valiant knights to common folk, liberators range similarly from mediocre knights to the chivalric ideal incarnate. What remains constant among these multiple versions of the Prison Topos is the ceaseless oscillation between motifs of captivity and those of release. Most characters participate in both phenomena at repeated

intervals. Many of the knights serving as liberators either are subsequently imprisoned or have been captured at some time previous to their heroic feat. In the majority of cases, prisoners are eventually released, some only to be confined again. Confinement is thus not perpetual; but in the same vein, liberation is not advanced as an ultimate goal or a fixed solution. What is emphasized through the bipartite configuration of the Prison-Liberation allomorphs is the process of continual struggle, the incessant thematic seesaw between immobility and motion.

There is, thus, a dialectic of narrative movement in the Vulgate texts that is based on the ability of each allomorph to be transformed into its opposite, and to be recast, subsequently, into the original motif, or a variant thereof. This is the mechanism in force in the scene of the Doloreuse Garde where the prison as Cemetery is abolished when Lancelot lifts the central tombstone (Table 3:4); but imprisonment is then restored in the form of the Cave (Table 1:7), only to be abolished again when Lancelot turns the key in the Pillar (Table 3:5). The transformative process is also evident in the kind of hinge effect that exists among paired allomorphs. The Island prison, for example, is evacuated typically when the captive succeeds in crossing the seemingly impassable barrier of water surrounding him. Yet the converse of this phenomenon is also true, since unsuccessful crossing of water can result in captivity (on an Island, in a Castle, or in any other prison variant). Gauvain, for example, traverses a river in the *Lancelot* only to be imprisoned in the Doloreuse Chartre, an allomorph of the Tower (3:158). Gauvain's faulty crossing is repeated with variation in Yvain's failure at the narrow path of the Val Sans Retour, and Galeschin's fall into the water at the same site (4:118-19). Both of these flawed crossings are followed by captivity, this time in yet another version of the prison locale: that of the Mysterious Enclosure marked by Invisible Walls.

The metaphoric oscillation between typed instances of Incarceration and Liberation that we witness at the Doloreuse Garde and in the other examples mentioned above is often taken a step further, and can be seen to account for some of the more bewild-

ering situations encountered in the Vulgate texts. In the *Queste*, for example (Q, 159, 259–60), Hector is cast as a prisoner not because he is confined by Castle, Tower, Fountain, or Tree, but precisely because he is excluded from confinement. When the door at King Pelles' castle closes mysteriously, it seals the trapped inhabitants inside and simultaneously locks Hector out. The inability of the castle dwellers to escape is paralleled by Hector's inability to enter. In both cases the free movement of victims is blocked by an insurmountable, artificial barrier. The victims' position relative to the wall is apparently less significant than the fact of their forced immobility.

The typical transformation of prison into passage is collapsed in this instance as apparently contradictory states are made to coalesce. Imprisonment is evoked at one and the same time as confinement inside and exclusion from the locus of captivity. A similarly anomalous situation obtains in the role of the Bridge Guard, an awesome figure who is typically stationed at the entrance of the prison locale to defend the site from attack. Although the Bridge Guard appears to be the hostile enemy of a potential liberator, he is actually a prisoner himself, and is often freed by the liberator's success. When Lancelot encounters the Tertre Devee, for example, where all who ascend the Hill are killed or imprisoned, he crosses a Narrow Path and subdues the Rival Knight Bohort who, as it turns out, is compelled by an oath not to leave the Hill (5:238–40; M, 5:98–107). Gauvain, when attempting to gain entrance at the two bridges protecting Sorelois, is warned that if victorious over the bridge attendant he will be allowed to pass. If defeated, he will have to guard the bridge (3:396). Guarding the bridge is thus presented as a form of imprisonment, and can be added to the allomorphs of captivity in Table 1.

The curious plight of the Bridge Guard delineates the symbiotic relation between Imprisonment and Liberation in the Vulgate Cycle, and explains as well Hector's situation at the prison of the Estroite Marche (3:335–48). Hector's initial failure to open the second door at this fortress, causing the entrance gate to close and hold him prisoner of the castle, is followed by a

triumph. Fighting to defend the castle, Hector defeats Marganor on a Narrow Bridge and frees, by his action, Yvain and Sagremor, who had been Marganor's prisoners. Hector here plays the double role of prisoner and liberator. His failure to open the exit door, which makes him a prisoner, is counter-balanced by his subsequent success at the Narrow Bridge, an act that procures his own release as well as that of the other captives.<sup>44</sup> This incident can be seen as a conflation of complementary processes that are generally distributed between separate protagonists. In a more standard version of the same incident, Dodinel fails to cross the Narrow Bridge, falls in the water and, like Gauvain at the Doloreuse Chartre, is taken prisoner on the other shore (4:318–19; M, 2:312–14; for version with Galeschin, see 4:118; M, 1:281–82). Hector later arrives cast in the role of liberator: he crosses the Narrow Bridge successfully, vanquishes the Bridge Guard, and thereby frees Dodinel and the other prisoners (4:332; M, 2:351–52). In the scene at the Estroite Marche, the complementarity of Prison and Liberation is transformed into a relation of parity, such that defender and assailant no longer function as opposites but as identical mates.

In both of these incidents—Hector's anomalous "imprisonment" outside the walls of Corbenic Castle and his role as both liberator and defender of the Estroite Marche—freedom is characterized as the ability to move in opposite directions, to both enter and exit from the prison locale in a single, uninterrupted motion. This double-directional movement reflects the articulation of the Vulgate text itself whose own movement forward is dependent, somewhat ironically, on the rocking back and forth between allomorphs suggesting prison and passage. When this movement is interrupted, stasis prevails in two forms: incarceration results and the text comes to a temporary halt.

This is particularly clear in the famous scene during which Lancelot liberates the prisoners from Gorre. Crowning a long series of difficult feats, Lancelot's ultimate crossing of the Pont de l'Espee is destined, we are told, to secure the release of the prisoners held by Bademagu, King of Gorre (4:158, 200; M, 2:59–60). Yet Lancelot's success at the Pont de l'Espee is depen-

dent upon Gauvain's complementary crossing of the Pont des Eaux (4:193–95).<sup>45</sup> The necessity of Gauvain's seemingly superfluous feat can be clarified by comparison with the double-directional movement required to achieve victory at the Perilous Bed and the Estroite Marche. The prison at Gorre is enclosed by two difficult bridges reminiscent of the two doors at the Estroite Marche, Escalon li Tenebreux, and the Doloreuse Garde (Table 1: 37, 38, 39). Before Lancelot can free the prisoners from Gorre and the queen from the tower, he must cross a Narrow Bridge (Pont de l'Espee) and vanquish the bridge attendant, Méléagant. Thus far, the prison at Gorre is evoked through the combination of three allomorphs: Tower, Narrow Bridge, and Guard. But Lancelot's success at the Narrow Bridge does not suffice to procure the release of the prisoners from Gorre. It is only when both bridges have been crossed, creating a double passage of entrance and exit, like that which results from the opening of two doors at the Estroite Marche and Escalon, that Guenevere and the people of Logres are allowed to go free. The Double Bridge functions thus as a variant of the Enchanted Doors. And it is only after the crossing of both bridges is complete that the narrative can progress to the next incident.

### Repetition and Representation

Given this relation between the circuitous advancement of the narrative in the Vulgate romances and the somewhat redundant doubling of functions (captive as liberator, captured as freed, one gate as two), one might be tempted to suggest that linear narrative development is replaced in these romances by an oscillation between allomorphs. One can make this claim for medieval lyric, a highly self-reflexive genre in which nothing really happens, since the motor force behind each poem is not how things "change over time" but how to create infinite and complex stylistic variations of a few set themes.<sup>46</sup> And the repetition of allomorphs in the Vulgate corpus does follow a pattern that is not altogether different from the repetition and variation characteristic of courtly lyric: both are essentially

metaphoric and paradigmatic rather than discursive. Yet there is a time-bound surface in the prose texts that has no counterpart in the shorter lyric pieces. This is especially true of the *Lancelot* where a complex narrative chronology is maintained as knights part company only to meet again hundreds of pages later, their reunion punctuated by remarkably accurate and realistic notations about the time that has elapsed.<sup>47</sup> In more general terms, knights do travel across the Arthurian landscape, however ambiguous it may remain: Lancelot, after many interruptions, manages finally to reach Gorre and liberate the prisoners there, and we do see Galahad after numerous lengthy digressions finally voyage to Sarras and view the Holy Grail.

It is clear, however, that these narrative components are not arranged in the fashion that we have come to associate with "prose."<sup>48</sup> To a large degree, at least, the actions of characters in the Vulgate texts are subsumed into patterned configurations that repeat: Gauvain falters at a river crossing and is imprisoned at the Doloreuse Chartre, Yvain and Galeschin fall into water when approaching the Val Sans Retour and are consequently held captive there. The compositional process that links these disparate incidents to one another is less linear than cumulative.<sup>49</sup> These portions of the *récit* are built around associational webs of meaning in which the realistic order of events is less important than the fact that they are generically similar to one another.<sup>50</sup> It is not surprising, then, that allomorphs often make little sense when viewed individually, for they are designed to be apprehended and interpreted *reflexively*, through a process of constant re-reading. Only then can they be joined together by the reader-listener who makes the associational connections that are not explicitly drawn in the text.

The technique appropriate for deciphering the patterned repetitions of the Vulgate romances would then be the precise opposite of that used by the reader of a *Bildungsroman*. Rather than charting a narrative progression from beginning to end, we should wander through the text in all directions at once, paying heed to the patterned repetition that is the dominant

mode of composition in many portions of the cycle. The recurrent allomorphs that jar the smooth unfolding of the adventure story in the Vulgate romances can best be understood if they are interpreted in terms of their relation to an overriding paradigm or pattern—to a narrative configuration that exists not in time but in space. The ultimate effect of the allomorphic chain of events in the Vulgate romances is not to make us ask what happened in the interval between the appearance of the first motif and subsequent variants of it. Rather, the allomorphs draw our attention to the repetition itself, making us notice that the tale is retelling itself, recasting the same content over and over in slightly varied form.

In terms of the medieval controversy between Rhetoric and Scripture, the Vulgate Cycle's use of narrative repetition is significant in two aspects. Repetition in the Neoplatonic Christian tradition of the Middle Ages is conceived of primarily in a vertical dimension since it is associated with the chain of being. Within this system each repetition of an event is a further concretization of the abstract Idea that precedes it. Repetition is thus valued as a further revelation of the abstract Form or Christian Ideal.<sup>51</sup> Writing in this system is viewed as a kind of rewriting, but it remains focused on the act of copying the sacred text, a process through which the earthly book reproduces exactly the divine Book of God.

The Vulgate romances pose a particularly acute threat to this view of textuality since they transpose repetition onto a horizontal plane, alluding repeatedly to other portions of the narrative with no necessary reference to a higher plane of meaning. On the most basic level, then, the repetitive structure of the Vulgate tales is inherently subversive of the medieval ideological superstructure; the vernacular text recasts the process of theological representation into a wholly literary system of intertextual rewriting and narrative *reprise*. In Augustinian terms this would constitute an overt and extreme case of textual idolatry, since preference is given clearly to the letter not the spirit, to the proliferation of words at the expense of the Word of God.<sup>52</sup> What is cultivated here, above all else, is the seductive verbal

trap, the snare of Rhetoric that the church fathers warned against.

It is, thus, perhaps not insignificant that the thematic topos that figures most prominently in the Vulgate narratives is that of imprisonment. Each time we read of a knight being held captive by a rival knight, a lady enchained in a tower, or an entire household of people imprisoned in a castle, we are reminded indirectly of the creative power of the literary text, of its uncanny ability to draw us into its fictional narrative and keep us there by constantly transferring our attention from one intertext to another. In reading these inordinately long and digressive tales, we are led along an elaborate metaphoric detour, a complex path of repetition and indirection that goes nowhere in particular since it refers always to other texts or parts of texts.

We are thus caught in the trap of a literary tale that makes two bold claims. Demonstrating, on the one hand, that language is indeed incapable of reproducing the Word, the Vulgate Cycle asserts, nevertheless through its insistent repetition, that literary words can have a powerful voice, that although language cannot itself contain transcendent meaning, the literary artifact can invent its own significance grounded in vernacular textuality. Repetition is used in the Vulgate texts, then, to undermine the medieval system of theological representation and to proclaim simultaneously the importance of literary creation. The textual trap that results is not a prison to be avoided, as Augustine would contend. When, through their ceaseless repetition, the Vulgate texts appear always to turn back on themselves, entangling the reader ever more fiercely in a complex narrative net, the goal is clearly not to avoid literary entrapment but to exploit it. Each interwoven scene of capture and release reflects a concerted effort to prolong the textual experience *à l'infini*, to rewrite the narrative as many times and in as many ways as possible so that we, as readers, may savor the "delicious sweetness" that reading has to offer.



PART TWO:  
MEMORY AND THE DEFORMATION OF HISTORY

The issue of historical representation is central to the Vulgate romances since, on the most basic level, the purpose of these tales is to recount the life of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. Such historical representation becomes immediately problematic, however, since so little is known about the sixth-century Briton king. One way of characterizing the problem is to say that the highly repetitive structure of the Vulgate romances, the constant rupture in narrative sequence created by the use of allomorphs that repeat and echo one another, coincides in these tales with a second kind of rupture in chronological sequence: the referential gap that separates the historical King Arthur from the legendary figure who appears in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century tales about him. The problem is compounded further when we remember that the essential component of the romance text is the chivalric *aventure*, an event that is by definition unknown in advance because it is literally *à venir*.<sup>53</sup> The task of the Vulgate texts is thus to re-create the distant and blurred historical past by using a literary mechanism oriented toward the future. Here the *imprévisibilité* of the chivalric tale becomes locked in a narrative struggle against the memory it is supposed to portray.

The result of this precarious combination is a narrative in which history is not only fictionalized but invented outright. Although the Vulgate *récits* purport to tell us true tales about the Arthurian past, they convey less about the real King Arthur than about the desire to revive him in a text. In fact, these fanciful tales of life at Arthur's court can be seen as an indirect commentary on the process of writing stories (whether historical or fictive) in the High Middle Ages, a process in which the imagination weighs heavily in recording a "truthful" narrative.

From a modern point of view, the record of Arthurian history is so fraught with lacunae that we cannot even be sure whether the Arthur who scored a military victory in Wessex in the last decade of the fifth century is indeed the same King Arthur who

appears in later Welsh chronicles and then becomes the figure-head for the Arthurian court of twelfth- and thirteenth-century romance. The process of retrieving the historical Arthur is complicated further by the fact that some of the texts in which he appears include emendations and interpolations from later periods, making it very difficult to establish the chronological coordinates for this king's life.<sup>54</sup>

Historical accuracy, however, was of little concern to the medieval historian and romancer alike, since the dividing line between these two genres is largely obscured. In both medieval epics, whose function is to document and to entertain, and in genealogical accounts, which were preserved in memory for the purpose of establishing the long lineage and monetary fortune of a particular family, history comes remarkably close to fiction. The memorial tradition is notoriously heedless of strict chronology, incorporating exaggerated dates and fabricated events along with more realistic data. When the author of twelfth-century genealogies runs out of information grounded in fact, he often begins inventing a text in the manner of courtly romance, creating ancestors as one would have wished them to be.<sup>55</sup>

This process is not dissimilar from that employed in Geoffrey of Monmouth's fanciful *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the key "historical" text about King Arthur that is more story than history. And the Vulgate romances follow in the same tradition, inventing an elaborate version of the Arthurian past by referring less to historical events than to intertextual *aventures*, incidents that are generally unannounced but familiar to us nevertheless because of the narrative repetition in which they are cast. Memory is here created in the present tense by configurations of allomorphs that recall former textual moments and announce simultaneously those that are yet to come. We will examine in the following pages how individual allomorphs conjoin to form clusters of motifs that create the Arthurian past in the present, how the accretion of repeated images serves to build an Arthurian present in the absence of past documentation. In discussing

the Vulgate's narrative patterns, we will also return to the notion of textual idolatry and see how in re-creating the lost King Arthur these patterns serve to legitimize the role of medieval vernacular romance.

### The Wound Topos

The underlying content of the Vulgate romances is governed by an intricate network of three patterns: the Prison Topos discussed in detail in part 1 of this chapter is accompanied throughout the cycle by the additional *topoi* of Wound and Veil. Each pattern is composed of a series of allomorphs that can appear singly or combine to form clusters of materially dissimilar motifs. Clusters can also be formed through the combination of allomorphs from different patterns: by joining an allomorph from the Prison Topos with one from the Wound Topos, or by linking allomorphs of Prison and Veil to create a composite image.

The Cemetery allomorph that occurs in the scene of the Doloreuse Garde reappears, for example, in the *Estoire* where Symeu and Cahan await liberation from the tombstones under which they are imprisoned. Similar to the plight of captives of the Doloreuse Garde, the incarceration of these men is rendered twice but with slightly different allomorphs. The tombstone in this case is doubled not by a castle, but by the immobile sword lodged in the stone, "& il lor dist metes sor chascune tombe lespee de celui qui desous gist. & ie quit que nus ni vendra qui les puisse oster" (1:267). Although the curious presence of the immobile sword has no logical explanation, it serves throughout the Vulgate narratives as an indication of captivity. Galahad must pull the sword from the stone in the *Queste* to become the liberator of the Arthurian realm, "lors met la main a l'espee et la trest fors dou perron autresi legierement come se ele n'i tenist pas" (Q, 12; 2:83; Mer, 275). Joseph of Arimathea is freed from a temporary captive state when he pulls the sword from his wounded thigh in the *Estoire*, "puis [ioseph] traist hors de sa cuisse le piece de lespee qui dedens estoit" (1:256). How-

ever, when Bohort refuses to lift the sword from the wounded knight's body in the *Lancelot*, the latter is relegated to perpetual infirmity and immobility, "Lors apele bohort si li dist Sire or y poes vous assaier quar cils autres y a failli Biaus sire fait bohors saves vous bien que nus ne vous y puet aidier sil nest li mielres chevaliers del monde. Oil fait il ie le sai certainement Enon dieu fait bohort. dont no meterai iou ia le main" (4:260; M, 2:179). Despite the variance in agents and circumstances—the hero changes from Galahad to Joseph to Bohort and the object enclosing the sword alternates from tombstone or simple stone to the human body—all of these incidents evoke the same function, the function of lifting the sword from an enclosure, of extracting it from a fixed milieu, of transforming the uselessly static sword into a tool of liberation. In the cases of Bohort, Symeu, and Cahan, liberation is only potential; the principal use of the sword motif in these scenes is to evoke captivity.

We can discern here a second bipartite group of allomorphs: thematic variants that constitute, in this case, the Topos of the Wound. Used principally to signal Immobility, the Wound allomorphs mentioned thus far can be summarized as:

1. Sword in Gravestone
2. Sword in Stone
3. Sword in Thigh
4. Sword in Knight's Body

These allomorphs function as analogues of one another and are linked in much the same manner that the successive descriptions of the prison at the Doloreuse Garde form variants of a single *locus* of incarceration. What is of particular significance, however, is that the concept signified by the Wound allomorphs is synonymous with that of the Prison Topos. As the sword caught in the stone is shown to have the same function as the sword in the gravestone or the sword lodged in the wounded man's flesh, a thematic pattern clearly emerges in which the Sword in the Stone is implicitly likened to the Sword in the Knight's Body, and Captivity is likened to the Wound. Wounding is here used interchangeably with motifs of physical confine-

ment: both present immobility as a kind of incarceration.

In many cases, in fact, an allomorph of the Wound serves alone to depict prisoners awaiting liberation. The incident of the sword lodged in Joseph of Arimathea's thigh is elaborated further in the scene where Nascien and the Roi Méhaignié suffer bodily paralysis as a result of sword wounds, and when the Grail King is maimed by Solomon's sword:

Si fu feruz d'une espee en lançant par mi l'espaule si durement qu'il  
chaï en la nef arriere. (Q, 208)

Mes maintenant entra laienz une lance, dont il fu feruz par mi  
oultre les deus cuisses, si durement qu'il en remest mehaigniez si  
com il apert encore, ne onques puis n'en pot garir. (Q, 209)

Lors [uns hons enflammes] laisse courre un glaive quil tenoit & le  
fiert parmi les cuises ambes .ij. si quil parut tout oltre si dist al roy.  
(1:289)

The wounds incurred by these kings cannot be read in realistic terms, for they are neither mortal nor curable. Immobilized by their infirmity, these men await physical release in much the same manner as the entombed Symeu and Cahan. Rather than simple battle scars, their wounds serve to indicate a perpetual state of inactivity analogous to captivity. Thus we can add to the list of Wound allomorphs:

5. Knight Paralyzed by Sword Wound

6. King Maimed by Sword Wound<sup>56</sup>

There is a distinction to be made, however, between two types of allomorphs in the Wound Topos: those indicating Immobility in the form of fixed and useless weapons, and those connoting Immobility through a physically disabled king or knight. The distinction parallels the division of the Prison Topos into allomorphs of confinement imposed from without (Table 1: Type A, Impregnable Stronghold) and those signaling a kind of paralysis that seems to stem from within the victim himself (Table 1: Type B, Mysterious Enclosure). Yet the two halves of each *topos* are related through complementarity. In the case of Joseph of Arimathea and the wounded knight en-

countered by Bohort, immobility resulting from sword wounds renders the protagonist helpless, making him unable to wield a weapon in his own defense. When the sword is lodged in the stone or gravestone, as in the incidents involving Arthur, Symeu, and Cahan mentioned above, the result is largely the same: immobilized weapons also make combat impossible. The functional parity between these two segments of the Wound Topos is made clear in their respective resolutions, since both dilemmas are remedied by the same means. Pulling the sword from the stone or withdrawing the sword from the man both result in liberation, in the restoration of armed knights to an active role.<sup>57</sup>

TABLE 4  
THE WOUND TOPOS: ALLOMORPHS USED TO INDICATE IMMOBILITY

TYPE A: INACTIVE WEAPONS		
Embedded Weapons	Suspended Weapons	Broken Weapons
1. Sword in Gravestone 2. Sword in Stone 3. Sword in Shield 4. Sword in Bed 5. Sword in Earth 6. Sword in Lake	8. Shield Hung on Wall 9. Shield (Lances, Helmets) Hung from Tree (Pavilion) 10. Shields (Lances) Leaning against Wall (Tree, Pavilion)	11. Broken Sword (Lance)
TYPE B: IMPAIRED PHYSICAL FACULTIES		
Wounding	Wounds	Victims
12. Sword/Lance in Thigh 13. Sword/Lance in Body 14. Lance in Shoulder	15. Wound in Hand 16. Wound in Face 17. Wound in Head 18. Wound in Thigh 19. Wound in Shoulder 20. Wound as Sickness 21. Wound as Poisonous	22. Knight Paralyzed by Sword Wound 23. King Maimed by Sword Wound 24. Wounded Man (weapon unspecified) 25. Man on Bier/Litter 26. Man Wounded by Ointment 27. Man Wounded by Boar 28. "Dead" Knight 29. Comatose, En-tranced Man

TABLE 5

THE WOUND TOPOS: ALLOMORPHS USED TO INDICATE MOBILITY

TYPE A: WEAPONS FREED	
<i>Liberator:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Removes Sword from Stone</li> <li>2. Removes Sword from Bed</li> <li>3. Mends Broken Sword</li> </ol>
TYPE B: CORPOREAL MOBILITY RESTORED	
<i>Liberator:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Removes Sword/Lance from Thigh</li> <li>5. Removes Sword/Lance from Knight's Body</li> <li>6. Heals Shoulder Wound</li> <li>7. Heals Wound in Hand</li> <li>8. Revives Paralyzed Knight</li> <li>9. Heals Maimed King</li> <li>10. Heals (method unspecified)</li> <li>11. Heals Thigh Wound</li> <li>12. Heals by Applying Ointment</li> <li>13. Heals Boar Wound</li> <li>14. Heals Poisonous Wound</li> <li>15. Eradicates Disease</li> <li>16. Revives "Dead" Knight</li> <li>17. Revives Comatose Man</li> </ol>
<i>Healing by Other Agents:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. Divine Healing</li> <li>19. Healing by Woman</li> </ol>

Thus the Wound Topos, similar to that of the Prison, is doubly bipartite. Allomorphs of Useless Weapons and Impaired Physical Faculties are transformed throughout the texts by the action of their opposites: Weapons are freed repeatedly from confining enclosures as knights are cured of their debilitating wounds.<sup>58</sup> A continual process of conversion from Immobility to Mobility goes hand in hand with the ceaseless change from Imprisonment to Liberation that characterizes the Prison Topos. Table 4: The Wound Topos contains a list of allomorphs used to signal the state of Immobility; the contrastive mates of these allomorphs are indicated in Table 5.

The scene in which Symeu and Cahan are trapped beneath tombstones is based, then, on a conflation of two patterns or *topoi*, as the notion of imprisonment is rendered in double form. The cemetery motif from the Prison Topos is reinforced, in this case, by the allomorph of the Sword in the Gravestone drawn from the Wound Topos. This process of pattern overlap, or the borrowing of allomorphs from one *topos* to the next is common

in the Vulgate texts and can be seen to account for many of the anomalous passages that punctuate the prose romances. Terrican's Hill, a site where twenty-four of Arthur's knights are said to be held captive, is described as a hill topped by a fountain and pine trees. These recognizable allomorphs of the Prison Topos (Hill, Fountain, Tree) are supplemented, however, with an additional evocation of captivity: sixty shields, helmets, and lances are hung from the hilltop trees (5:89-91; M, 4:169-70). The inactive shields seem a puzzling addition until one recalls the swords mounted upright on the graves of Symeu and Cahan signaling their quasi death (1:268). The Prison Topos has here incorporated an element from the *topos* of the Wound, such that the captivity of Terrican's victims is rendered in four ways: first through the allomorphs of Hill, Fountain, and Tree, and then through their imagistic equivalent: immobile weapons (Table 4:9). This kind of layered storytelling recalls Geoffrey of Vinsauf's suggestion that the author tell and retell, dressing a single idea in many different garments.<sup>59</sup> It is also an example of the vain eloquence that Augustine condemns because it draws attention to the pluralistic verbal surface rather than the message couched within those words.<sup>60</sup>

Other examples of the same phenomenon are found in the scene of the Tertre Devee, a prison described as a Castle on top of a Hill where the Shields of those imprisoned are hung, like decorations, in an adjoining hall (5:236-37; M, 5:95-96), and Camille's Castle which is also marked by immobilized weapons. When Arthur and Guerrehes are imprisoned here, their shields are hung outside the castle wall as a sign of their capture (3:411). In all of these cases, the act of displaying captives' shields can be taken literally as the actual consequence of imprisonment, the visible shield being used to announce the identity of prisoners hidden from view. Yet when we combine these instances of immobilized shields with the frequent mention of inactive weapons in other parts of the Vulgate corpus, it becomes clear that these allomorphs have a noncontextual function as well; that in addition to signaling the captivity of a particular knight in a specific locale, they connote imprison-



ment in a larger sense. To the extent that they echo the other immobile weapons that punctuate the cycle—swords embedded in stone or lake, in human thigh or shoulder—these shields connote the general paralysis that plagues the entire Arthurian realm, a world awaiting liberation from the Grail hero.

The *topoi* of Wound and Prison overlap again in a curious scene at another hill prison in the *Lancelot*. When Agravain comes to the appointed site, he blows a horn and fights the defender Druas next to a fountain (5:3–9; M, 4:13). This is a particularly rich version of the locus of captivity as it combines the motifs of Hill, Horn, Fountain, and Bridge Guard into a single cluster. Yet it contains another, unexpected element that can be explained only by pattern overlap. Agravain's victory against Druas leads to a second battle, provoked by a second blowing of the horn, in which Druas's brother Sornehan rises from a sickbed to take revenge against Agravain. The mention of the sickbed, which seems at first superfluous, is borrowed from the Wound Topos where it serves, typically, to evoke immobility: wounded men are frequently described in this corpus of tales as helpless and immobile, outstretched on bier or litter (Table 4:25).

In the *Queste*, for example, Perceval comes upon Mordrain, the wounded king who appears to be dead because he suffers from a total loss of physical faculties (Q, 81–82), and Lancelot witnesses a hermit who lies immobile in a chapel “morz par semblant” (Q, 119). Lancelot himself, when trying to view the Grail at Corbenic, is thrown into a state of temporary paralysis (Q, 256), just as Drian li Gai, enclosed in a coffer and carried on a litter, has temporarily lost control of his limbs (4:93; M, 1:187, 199). In the case of Lancelot and the hermit, there is no specific mention of wounding, although these victims suffer the same plight as the wounded men on bier or litter: they are relegated to debilitating and almost fatal immobility, and fall thus in the category of Comatose Man.<sup>61</sup> In Sornehan's case the motif of the sickbed is used to similar effect. Like Lancelot at Corbenic, Mordrain, Drian li Gai and the immobile hermit, Sornehan is delineated, through the mention of the sickbed, as a kind of

prisoner. In this instance, however, the captive also functions as the defender of the prison, a situation we have seen before at the Estroite Marche. The scene at Sornehan's Hill is thus another variant, a more complex version of the state in which guarding the bridge is shown to be a form of imprisonment. Yet in this instance, the ambivalent position of the prison's defender is evoked by a conjunction of allomorphs from the patterns of Prison and Wound.

In a sense one could even say that the Doloreuse Garde incorporates an allomorph from the Wound Topos. For in addition to the allomorph of the Cemetery, which is used to mark the captivity of Arthur's men at this site, the prisoners whose names appear on falsified gravestones are presented as suffering from a kind of quasi-death. Their false entombment parallels closely the simulated death that is commonly associated with wounded victims who are plunged into a trance-like stupor. The highly overdetermined evocation of captivity that characterizes the scene at the Doloreuse Garde—a scene that combines the allomorphic variants of Castle, Cemetery, Tombstone, Garden, Enchanted Doors, Cave, and Pillar—here is enlarged one step further by the addition of an allomorph from the Wound Topos: that of the seemingly dead Comatose Man.

As allomorphs are combined in the Vulgate corpus, they form what could be called “constellations sémiques,”<sup>62</sup> a kind of decorative supplement to the linear tale, but a supplement that carries specific meaning.<sup>63</sup> Structurally, this network of images results from the intermixture of two related processes. Allomorphs of a single *topos* are linked by analogy: the Sword in the Stone is likened to the Sword in the Body, or the Cemetery is assigned a role analogous to the function of Castle and Cave. The creation of clusters however—the concentration of a series of allomorphs in one place—is accomplished through a process of metonymy. Whether the clusters are composed of allomorphs drawn from one *topos* or those taken from several *topoi*, their alignment next to one another in a proliferating series results from a kind of narrative contagion.<sup>64</sup> More than the simple one-to-one correspondence that exists between two spatially

distant allomorphs, a whole cluster is generated by a process of perpetual contamination that allows one analogical image to be added to the next.<sup>65</sup> The aggregate motifs that result from this kind of composition can be more or less overdetermined: the number of allomorphs grouped together in a cluster varies generally from two to five, although larger conglomerates are also found. Yet the meaning conveyed by these clusters does not vary substantially in relation to the number of allomorphs that constitute a particular group. A five-part cluster, for example, does not appear to say more about imprisonment or to characterize Incarceration differently than does a two-part cluster or, indeed, a single allomorph used to indicate captivity.

The rapport between allomorphs of a cluster could be compared, in a sense, to the relation between the linguistic units of the heavily paratactic prose that characterizes the Vulgate texts. As Rychner has observed, the conjunctions most commonly used to link sentences and clauses in *La Mort le roi Artu* are "que," "si," and "et," rather than conjunctions that introduce logical relationships of hypothesis, cause and effect, concession, consequence, and purpose.<sup>66</sup> Whereas hypotactic markers can drastically change the meaning conveyed in a sentence, the additive conjunctions that predominate in the Vulgate texts have, in the main, a "valeur égalisante." They serve simply to link one segment of the narrative to the next, without significantly altering the sense of the tale. In like manner the accretion of allomorphs into clusters can be seen as a means of expanding the tale by reiterating a central concept; the point is made not through logic but through the piling up of analogical variants into a dense narrative layer. Economy of expression, which is not suitable to this purpose, is replaced here by elaborate restatement. Yet the meaning conveyed by the most highly overdetermined motif remains disproportionately straightforward and simple. Allomorphs of the Prison Topos, whether they appear singly or in combination, connote a state of captivity; those of the Wound Topos signal a general condition of immobility.

Contextual factors may supplement the generic meaning of

allomorphs, as we have seen, either by advancing a supernatural cause for an action, by assigning it a moral motivation, or by giving it a realistic cast. The allomorphic sense of an image does not override the meaning conveyed by contextual factors; but context does not alter the intertextual association of allomorphs. The latter operates independently of the developmental narrative line, remaining constant despite changes in time, place, character, and action. Allomorphs can carry contextual and intertextual meaning simultaneously; the two processes coexist and complement one another.

### The Veil Topos

The third pattern in the Vulgate corpus is that of the Veil, a *topos* based on allomorphs of Perception and Deception. Similar to the patterns of Wound and Prison, the Veil Topos is doubly bipartite. Deception can be rendered in the form of a Disguised Object (Table 6; Type A), which ranges from the covered Grail to a wounded knight covered on a bier, to a disguised knight whose identity is hidden. It includes as well the verbal covering of cryptic prophecies and ambiguous inscriptions. The Veil can also take the shape of an internalized, Sensory Disability (Type B) such as blindness, impaired speech, madness, or any number of deceptions created by potion or spell, love, dream, or illusion. Tables 6 and 7 provide a detailed enumeration of these variants. The allomorphs of the Veil pattern function in the same manner as those used to connote imprisonment or wounding: they can be used individually or in clusters, and can be joined with motifs from other patterns through the mechanism of pattern overlap.

The motif of the Wound, for example, often occurs in conjunction with its sensory counterpart, Blindness (Table 6: 8). Victims who suffer paralysis and immobility as a result of sword wounds are frequently characterized by limited vision as well. In the *Queste* the wounded corpse-like Mordrain has lost all physical faculties, including sight, "Et maintenant descendi une nue devant lui, qui li toli la veue des elz et le pooir dou cors,

**TABLE 6**  
**THE VEIL TOPOS: ALLOMORPHS USED TO INDICATE DECEPTION**

TYPE A: DISGUISED OBJECT	
Physical Dissimulation	Verbal Covering
1. Material Disguise 2. Magical Disguise 3. Material Covering	4. Anonymity 5. Cryptic Prophecy 6. Cryptic Inscription 7. Forged Letter
TYPE B: SENSORY DISABILITY	
Impaired Faculties	Illusion
8. Blindness/Impaired Sight 9. Impaired Speech 10. Impaired Hearing 11. Impaired Reason (Madness)	12. Deception by Potion 13. Deception by Spell 14. Deception by Love 15. Deception by Dream 16. Deception by Devil's Illusion 17. Deception by Magic Ring 18. Deception by Fog 19. Deception through Ignorance

**TABLE 7**  
**THE VEIL TOPOS: ALLOMORPHS USED TO INDICATE PERCEPTION**

TYPE A: OBJECT REVEALED
1. Disguise Doffed 2. Disguise Rendered Ineffective by a Perceptive Observer 3. Recognizable Clothing Donned 4. Name Spoken 5. Name Revealed 6. Cover Removed 7. Curtain Drawn 8. Prophecy Deciphered 9. Inscription Read Clearly 10. Forgery Discovered
TYPE B: SENSORY ACUTENESS REGAINED
11. Sight Regained 12. Sight Increased (visionary) 13. Speech Restored 14. Madness Cured 15. Spell Broken 16. Dream Terminated 17. Illusion Destroyed 18. Ignorance Dispelled

NOTE: The agent for these actions is not always the liberator. It is often the victim himself who serves as liberator, doffing his own disguise for example. The liberator can also be a divine power.

en tel maniere qu'il ne vit goutte ne ne se pot aidier se petit non" (Q, 85). And Lancelot loses the power of movement *and* sight while attempting to see the Grail at Corbenic, "Lors n'a pooir d'aler avant, come cil qui est tiex atornez qu'il a perdu le pooir dou cors et del oïr et del veoir, ne n'a sor lui membre dont il aidier se puisse" (Q, 256).<sup>67</sup> The association between the wound and blindness is particularly clear in the *Estoire* when Joseph of Arimathea is wounded in the thigh by a lance and Nascien is blinded when trying to see the Grail. The two wounds are healed simultaneously when the angel withdraws the spear from Joseph's thigh, thereby causing the wound to close, and then drips the resultant blood on Nascien's eyes, restoring his sight:

.j. angele qui issi del arce vestu dune blanche roebe si tenoit en sa main la lance dont iosephes avoit este ferus & quant il retraist la lance a lui [iosephe] si virent que li fers en issi avoec la lance et en commenchieient a caïor gouttes de sanc & li anges . vint a iosephe & li enoïnst sa plaie del sanc meisme & a nascien les iex. & si tost comme il estoient enoïnt si vit ausi cleir com il avoit onques fait. (1:80).

Whereas the wound initially signified loss of motor control, it is here extended, in combination with the Veil pattern, to include the loss of sensory control as well. The captivity of the wounded men is rendered once through the concrete image of the Wound, and reinforced through its perceptual counterpart, Blindness.

It is this phenomenon of layered storytelling that can explain Perceval's surprising self-inflicted wound in the *Queste*. "Lors trest s'espee dou fuerre et s'en fiert si durement qu'il l'embat en sa senestre cuisse, et li sans en saut de toutes parz" (Q,110). Faced with the illusions of luxurious bed and lavish table setting created by the island temptress, Perceval is seduced for a moment into accepting these mirages as real. Although his failure to see clearly parallels the blindness of the wounded men mentioned above, it also resembles the impaired sight of the young Melyant, who attempts to take the crown and is consequently wounded by a rival knight, "Et cil li vient et le

fiert molt durement, si que par mi l'escu et par mi le hauberc li met le glaive ou costé (Q, 42). In Perceval's case the rival knight who inflicts the wound is absent, but the double-layered story motif remains: this knight's captivity at the temptress's isle is thus evoked through twin allomorphs of Impaired Sight and Wound in Thigh.

Unlike the shields hanging from Camille's castle, this allomorph of wounding cannot be read literally as a realistic portrait of Perceval's action. We are encouraged instead to understand Perceval's wound in moral terms, to see his self-mutilation as punishment for sin. Similar to Lancelot and Mor-drain who suffer impaired sight in the *Queste*, Perceval cannot see clearly, we are told, because of a lapse of faith.<sup>68</sup> However, this alleged motivation does not explain why the punishment for spiritual blindness should take the form of wounding, why limited sight should be associated with bodily disfiguration. This relation can be explained only in terms of the pattern structure that subtends the Vulgate narratives. In addition to the literary reading of Perceval's wound, which proves illogical, and the moral interpretation of it, which is only partially satisfactory, we can discern an allomorphic sense derived from the network of patterns that posit blindness and wounding as imagistic equivalents. The latent meaning of captivity that is inherent in allomorphs of the Wound is brought out, in this case, through association with the Blindness motif.

In other incidents, the motif of impaired sight is modulated to include faulty speech. When the Grail appears at Arthur's court in the *Queste* and no one is able to talk, Gauvain likens the incident to a similar occasion at the Roi Méhaignié's castle when no one could see the Grail clearly (Q, 16). Limited sight and impaired speech are more closely joined in the *Estoire* when Josephé renders a nonbelieving clerk both dumb and blind (1:44). Hearing is included as a third variant in the case of Trajan li Gai, the father of the twin wounded knights in the *Lancelot*, who, in addition to suffering from the paralysis typical of wounded men, is deaf and dumb as well (4:96; M,1:199; no deafness or dumbness in Sommer). Once the functional simi-

larity between the loss of motor and sensory control has been established, the allomorph of Blindness (including Impaired Hearing and Impaired Speech) partakes potentially of all the ramifications already associated with the allomorph of the Wound.

This association can account, for example, for the curious fate of the carpenters who cut down the tree of life in order to make the *Espee Merveilleuse* (1:135). As punishment for touching the sacred wood, these men are blinded. Their sensory disability makes sense only when we consider the plight of Nascien and the Roi Méhaigné, who dare to wield the unfinished sword later in the text: as punishment for their transgression these men are physically wounded. The carpenters suffer an analogous fate, although in their case debilitation is cast in a motif from the Veil Topos. Sensory impairment is here substituted for the physical disability of the Wound.

In addition to being linked with defective vision (Table 6: Type B), the Wound is also commonly accompanied by motifs of Disguise drawn from the other segment of the Veil Topos (Table 6: Type A). Many wounded victims are marked by a physical covering that conceals their identity. The corpse-like Mordrain whom Perceval views at the hermitage in the *Queste*, for example, is both wounded and covered (Q, 81–82). Gauvain, when approaching the bed where the ailing Agravain lies immobile, must pull back the cover to see the wounded knight (3:313). Similarly, Yvain uncovers the wounded knight pierced by two lances and a sword and carried in a coffin outside the castle of Trajan li Gai (4:92, 93; M, 1:187–88). The physical covering accompanying the wounds of these three victims is modulated slightly in the case of the knight who seeks a defender at Arthur's court at the outset of the *Lancelot* (3:119–20). Impaled by two swords and a lance, this knight is not concealed beneath actual drapery, but his identity is unknown and thus hidden, "Mais son non ne nomme pas li contes." Although lacking the physical properties of disguise worn by the other knights, he enjoys, nevertheless, the resultant anonymity. The same is true of the wounded Lancelot when he is transported on a litter past



Gauvain, who fails to recognize his companion (3:175). In like manner no one recognizes Lancelot in his comatose "pseudo-wounded" state that results from viewing the Grail at Corbenic (Q, 256). Lancelot's hidden identity is accompanied by a physical covering as well in the incident with the Dame de Nohaut (3:178) where Lancelot, wounded on a litter under a sycamore tree beside a fountain, is approached by a beneficent woman who must uncover the litter before recognizing the wounded knight; initially his identity remains hidden, "il s'enveloppe moult que'ele nel connoisse." Thus, the wounded man cloaked in anonymity or covered by bedclothes and curtains exists in a veiled state. His wound, which causes a physical transformation into a deathlike stasis, affects as well the way he is perceived.

Liberation of these knights can take many forms in accord with the plural motifs used to indicate imprisonment. The wounded victim is partially freed by removal of the sword from his ailing body. The knights who, in addition to their physical infirmity, are unnamed and unknown, approach liberation when the curtain is parted or the covers withdrawn, revealing their physical characteristics and establishing their identity.

The acts of revelation and liberation are advanced as functional equivalents throughout the Vulgate texts. When Lancelot lifts the cemetery slab at the Doloreuse Garde, he not only frees the captives from the twin prisons of tower and cemetery but discovers his own identity as well. The raised tombstone reveals for the first time Lancelot's name and the identity of the future liberator (3:152). Galahad's heroic identity is similarly unveiled at Arthur's court when the cloth is removed from the Siege Perilleux and an inscription bearing Galahad's name is uncovered (Q, 8). The literal unveiling of the hero's identity is accompanied by a reference to future liberation in the most general sense in the well-known motif of the sword and the stone. The inhabitants of Arthur's troubled realm will be freed when Galahad pulls the sword from the stone and establishes thereby his reputation as the Chosen Quester. Releasing the quester from his hidden identity and releasing prisoners from captive existence are thus posited as thematic analogues that

can be drawn in variant motifs. The act of pulling the sword from the stone, withdrawing the covers from a wounded man, and lifting the tombstone or cloth to reveal a hidden name are all acts of extraction that affect liberation. The announcement of the romance hero is thus rendered in terms appropriate to his task as liberator. The process by which his identity is freed is also that which will enable the future liberation of victims trapped by tomb, wound, blindness, and disguise.

The ultimate liberation of Arthur's realm can also be rendered in terms of the Spell, another allomorph of the Veil pattern. In addition to withdrawing the sword from the stone, liberating captives, and healing the blind and disfigured members of Arthur's land, Galahad is slated to sit in the Siege Perilleux and break the spell, thereby terminating the adventures of Great Britain (Q, 10). The link seen here between Prison and Spell serves as a paradigm for many similar couplets of captivity and deception within the cycle of tales. Lancelot's liberation of the Doloreuse Garde, for example, results automatically in breaking the spell that holds prisoners captive there. In response to his heroic actions at the castle, the cemetery miraculously disappears (3:192). Liberation of the Val Sans Retour is followed by the magical vanishing of the narrow plank and defending knights (4:120; M, 1:290). The two lions guarding the Pont de l'Espee are equally fragile, and disappear when Lancelot succeeds in crossing the narrow bridge (4:201; M, 2:59-60, no lions). Through these associations the Prison is shown to be a functional equivalent of the Spell that binds. Crossing the bridge and subduing the guard serve two allied purposes: to destroy the prison and break the enchantment associated with it. In the case of Galahad and the Siege Perilleux, imprisonment is cast in the form of the Dangerous Chair (Table 1:41) and then reinforced by the motif of the Spell taken from the Veil pattern (Table 6:13).

Lancelot's liberation of the women spellbound in a dance provides a reduced version of the grand liberation that Galahad is destined to procure by sitting in the Siege Perilleux.

When Lancelot enters the Forest Perdue from which no one returns, he liberates a group of entranced dancers by sitting on a special seat (5:149; M, 4:286). Instead of the Dangerous Chair/Spell cluster of the preceding example, we find here a triple motif: Dangerous Chair/Dance/Spell. The component signaling imprisonment has simply been reinforced, in this case, by its allomorph, the Dance, but the referent of entrapment remains unchanged.

Conversely, when the Saracen tries the Grail seat used by Josephé to perform the sacrament, no spell is broken (1:36).<sup>69</sup> Instead, the Veil is reinstated in the form of Blindness: the Saracen is punished for his indiscretion by loss of eyesight. His blindness constitutes, in a general sense, the opposite of the breaking of the Spell affected by Galahad. For it is this kind of impaired vision along with the limited speech and hearing, trance, madness, and deception plaguing Arthur's knights that will be remedied when the Chosen Hero puts an end to the enchantments of Great Britain. Although individual cases of blindness are generally repaired by restoration of the victim's sight, and the act of breaking a spell is typically shown to correspond to the imposition of that spell, we can see from the preceding example how allomorphs of one pattern that bear no direct relation to one another can function as narrative complements within the larger scheme of Deception and Perception that characterizes the pattern as a whole.

Enchantment in all its forms is used in the Vulgate texts to indicate the generally captive state of the whole Arthurian realm. The trapped lovers at the Val Sans Retour are characterized specifically as entranced victims since the Invisible Walls used to mark this site as a prison are accompanied (especially in Micha's edition) by the motif of the Spell (4:116-117, M, 1:275-76). Arthur's sister, Morgan, is said to have sealed the valley with an enchantment making it a place from which no one returns. Arthur's captivity at Camille's castle, which is rendered through the triple allomorphs of Castle, Enchanted Doors, and Shield Hung on Wall, is reinforced further by a

fourth imagistic layer borrowed from the Veil pattern. After Arthur is captured, four of the knights who attempt to liberate him are deceived by a False Arthur, an imposter created by the enchantress Camille (3:412). Having been fooled by the imposter, the knights are subsequently imprisoned. Their captivity is thus linked to deception as is the plight of the spellbound lovers who are caught unawares and trapped. When Lancelot is taken captive at this site, the Spell and Disguise of the preceding examples are replaced by yet another allomorph of the Veil Topos: Madness (Table 6:11). While he is incarcerated, Lancelot refuses food and drink, begins to react violently and to rave wildly (3:414). The general state of imprisonment at Camille's castle, heretofore indicated by Castle, Enchanted Doors, and Inactive Weapons, is particularized further in Lancelot's case by a sensory impairment that results from a loss of discriminating intellect. His "madness" makes him unable to see clearly, a dilemma analogous to that of the blind knights and unsuspecting lovers.<sup>70</sup>

### Overlapping Patterns

The mechanism of pattern overlap, which enables motifs of one *topos* to be interwoven with motifs of another, results in a variety of overdetermined images, each used to evoke the frozen state of Arthur's troubled and beleaguered realm. Table 8 contains sample combinations of allomorphs drawn from the five-story Vulgate corpus.

A look at Table 8 demonstrates the extreme malleability of the three patterns, making clear the extent to which their allomorphs are interchangeable. In fact, the decision to classify certain motifs in one *topos* rather than another is sometimes quite arbitrary. For example, the mysterious paralysis of victims held captive by interminable Dance or Tomb, enchanted Coffin, or Tub (Table 1: 30, 31, 32, 33) is not altogether different from the mysterious immobility of knights who have lain wounded on a bier for an unspecified length of time (Table 4:25). And the comatose stupor of these knights cannot always be distinguished clearly from the entranced state of those deceived by Potion, Spell, or Dream (Table 6:12, 13, 15). In the

TABLE 8

## SAMPLE COMBINATIONS OF ALLOMORPHS FROM PRISON, WOUND, AND VEIL

Sommer	PRISON	WOUND	VEIL	Micha
Two Motifs: Prison/Wound				
Q:93-96 5:224-25 Q:119 Q:6-7 1:289 4:96 5:155-56 4:207-8 LMA:249-51 3:319	Island Fountain Monastery Doors Locked Perilous Bed Coffin Prison Prison Tomb Horn	Wounded Man Wound in Thigh Comatose Man Sword in Stone Sword in Thigh Wounded Man Wounded Man Wounded Man Sword in Lake Shields/Lances Against Wall		M, 5:65-66      M, 1:199 M, 4:299-301
Two Motifs: Prison/Veil				
3:33 LMA:177-78 Q:59-60 2:171 2:284 4:13-14 5:215	Lake Tower Chapel Prison Prison Prison Prison		Anonymity  Ignorance Blindness Material Disguise Material Disguise Material Disguise Potion	     M, 1:22-27 M, 5:49-50
Two Motifs: Wound/Veil				
4:260 4:96 Q:209 Q:141 4:338-39 4:50, 73 3:175 4:92		Wound in Hand Wounded Man Lance in Thigh Comatose Man Broken Lance Comatose Woman Man on Bier Comatose Man	Material Covering Impaired Hearing Cryptic Inscription Blindness Physical Disguise Potion Anonymity Material Covering	M, 2:177-78 M, 1:198-99    M, 1:154 M, 1:187-88 (also: Man on Litter)
Three Motifs: Prison/Wound/Veil				
Q:57-58 4:123  1:89-97	Chapel Prison  Island	Man on Bier Man on Litter  Comatose Man	Cryptic Inscription Potion  Devil's Illusion	M, 1:303-4 (Magic Ring instead of Potion)

TABLE 8 (continued)

Sommer	PRISON	WOUND	VEIL	Micha
Three Motifs: Prison/Wound				
5:204	Fountain; Tree	Shield Hung From Tree		M, 5:26-27
5:27	Pavilion; Dwarf	Shields/Lances Against Pavilion		M, 4:46-47 (Shields Hung from Pavilion)
4:343	Castle; Gates Locked	Wounded Man		M, 2:373-39
4:130	Castle; Double Gates	Wounded Man		M, 1:332-36
4:113	Dungeon; Pillar	Man Wounded by Ointment		M, 1:205-6
LMA:79	Tree; Fountain	Wounded Man		
Three Motifs: Prison/Veil				
3:395	Double Bridge; Bridge Guard		Anonymity	
4:199-201	Double Bridge; Tower		Spell	M, 2:58-60
3:132-33	Fountain; Pavilion		Spell	
Three Motifs: Wound/Veil				
1:241		Wounded Man; Comatose Man	Blindness	
Three Motifs: Wound/Prison				
Q:207-8	Island	Wound in Shoulder; Broken Sword		
Three Motifs: Wound/Veil				
Q:107-10		Sword in Thigh	Devil's Illusion; Material Disguise	
Three Motifs: Prison/Veil				
4:116-17	Garden (Val); Invisible Walls		Love	M, 1:275-77
3:209-24	Prison		Anonymity; Love	
2:450-60	Prison		Anonymity; Spell	

TABLE 8 (continued)

Sommer	PRISON	WOUND	VEIL	Micha
Four Motifs Combined				
2:402-4	Castle; Horn	Shields Leaning	Spell; Love	M, 1:237-38
4:98-99	Tree; Guard;	Against Pavilion		
4:339-40	Pavilion	Wound in Head		M, 2:366-68
	Cemetery;			
	Tomb; Chapel			
5:89-90	Hill; Tree;	Shields Hung		M, 4:169-70
	Fountain	from Tree		
3:277-79	Fountain;	Shields Hung		
	Tree; Guard	from Tree		
Q:41-45	Dangerous	Wounded Man	Devil's Illusion	
	Chair; Rival			
	Knight			
5:332	Island;	Comatose Man	Spell	M, 6:55
	Perilous Bed			
3:119-20		Wound in Head;	Anonymity	
		Lance in Body;		
		Knight on Litter		
3:313		Comatose Knight;	Impaired Speech;	
		Man Wounded by	Material	
		Ointment	Covering	
Q:255-57		Comatose Knight	Impaired Hearing;	
			Blindness; Ano-	
			nymity	
Five Motifs Combined				
4:306-11	Pavilion;		Spell	M, 2:271-93
	Dwarf; Horn;			
	Narrow Path			
3:177-78	Tree; Fountain;		Material Covering,	
	Man on Litter		Anonymity	
4:343-46	Castle; Gates	Wound in Shoulder	Blindness	M, 2:375-81
	Locked; Per-			
	ilous Bed			
5:122-23	Tree; Dance,		Spell	M, 4:233-36
	Pavilion;			
	Dangerous			
	Chair			
4:107	Castle; Double	Sword in Body		M, 1:229-33
	Gates; Ceme-			
	tery; Monas-			
	tery			
5:296-99	Castle; Perilous	Lance in Shoulder;		M, 5:258-63
	Bed; Win-	Wounded Man		
	dows Closed			
Q:81-83	Hermitage	Comatose Man;	Blindness;	
		Wounded Man	Material Cover-	
			ing	

TABLE 8 (continued)

Sommer	PRISON	WOUND	VEIL	Micha
Six Motifs Combined				
1:114-23 3:410-14 5:5-6	Island; Ship Castle; Garden  Hill; Fountain; Horn; Dwarf; Guard	Shields Hung on Wall Man on Bier	Four Inscriptions Material Disguise; Madness; Spell	M, 4:4-11
Eight Motifs Combined				
4:349-52	Castle; Guard; Garden; Tree; Horn; Cave; Rival Knight	Lances Leaning Against Tree		M, 2:390- 400 (also: Tower)
Eleven Motifs Combined				
3:143-44, 151-56, 190-91	Castle; Island; Double Gates; Garden; Horn; Ceme- tery; Cave; Pillar; Tomb	Wounded Man	Spell	
Twelve Motifs Combined				
5:235-40	Castle; Hill; Narrow Path; Pavilion; Tree; Dwarf; Horn; Tower; Bridge Guard	Shields Hung on Wall; Lances Leaning Against Tree; Wounded Man		

NOTE: Clusters are listed in increasing order of complexity, from double motifs though triples and quadruples up to one example containing twelve allomorphs.

TABLE 9

## DISTRIBUTION OF MOTIFS

	Queste	Merlin	Estoire	La Mort Artu	TOTAL	Lancelot
Prison	14	10	23	8	55	104
Wound	21	7	23	10	61	43
Veil	29	36	28	13	106	65

NOTE: The distribution of motifs is based on the incidence of single motifs and those appearing in clusters.



same vein, many elements of the Prison pattern (Enchanted Doors, Coffin, Invisible Walls, Dangerous Chair) can result from the casting of a Spell, a major motif of the Veil pattern (Table 6:13). The lack of clearly demarcated boundaries separating allomorphs of the Wound from those of Prison and Veil is, in the end, what enables these patterns to interact freely. More important, however, the reason that allomorphs from one *topos* can so easily become attached to those of another is that they all share a common signified. Whether a character is imprisoned, wounded, or spellbound, he is rendered immobile, relegated to the inactivity of the dead who lie helplessly in their tombs.

The relative distribution of Prison, Wound, and Veil patterns is, however, not constant throughout the cycle of tales. If we count the incidence of single motifs along with those appearing in clusters, we find that all three patterns appear with relatively equal distribution in the *Estoire* and the *Mort Artu*, that the Veil pattern predominates in the *Merlin* and to a lesser degree in the *Queste*, and that the Prison clearly dominates in the *Lancelot* (See Table 9). Yet to understand the overall distribution of patterns, we should compare the incidence of allomorphs in the *Lancelot* to that in the other four volumes combined, since the *Lancelot* comprises roughly half of the total number of pages in the cycle. Comparing figures on this basis, the Wound pattern is only slightly less prevalent in the *Lancelot* than in the other volumes. The Prison and Veil exist in inverse proportion: 104 incidents of the Prison in the *Lancelot* to 106 of the Veil in the other texts; 65 incidents of the Veil in the *Lancelot* as compared to 55 of the Prison in the other volumes. Thus, although the Prison pattern clearly predominates in the *Lancelot*, the Veil predominates to the same degree in the other texts, and the Wound appears about as often in the *Lancelot* as in the other tales.

Returning to Table 8, we can see that repetition as it occurs at the level of allomorphs and at the level of allomorphic clusters is always repetition with variation. In fact the most striking feature of the clusters of allomorphs detailed in Table 8 is

precisely the limitless variety that is attested by each new grouping. Although we may notice, initially, the similarity that unites certain elements of separate clusters, we can be struck ultimately by the extent to which each cluster *differs* slightly from its predecessors. What remains the same in all of these examples, what is repeated *exactly* with each new evocation of captivity, wounding, or impaired sight are not the formal characteristics of every allomorph, but the message of entrapment they convey. This notion of immobility or enforced stasis is the overriding paradigm to which each seme of the Vulgate's *topoi* is ultimately related. It serves both as the motor force behind the proliferation of allomorphs and as the one binding element that joins the text's disparate motifs together.

The patterns of Prison, Wound, and Veil can be seen thus to function as generic templates or narrative paradigms which are realized in a wide variety of individual manifestations. The larger concept to which any number of different allomorphs refer is constant; the individual variations in their form are not correlated with a wide range of highly nuanced meanings. In this sense the function of narrative patterns in the Vulgate romances can be compared to that of graphic illustration in preprint cultures where stock images are often divorced from strictly referential use. Even though the technique for printing designs existed from antiquity, no one thought to use it for informational purposes until after the invention of typography.<sup>71</sup> Thus, as late as the fifteenth century we find the example of a woodcut by Dürer's teacher Wolgemut, which was used four times in Hartmann Schedel's "Nuremburg Chronicle" (1493), as a representation of four different cities.<sup>72</sup> Wolgemut's image of the city functioned as a visual commonplace. Rather than representing the likeness of a specific locale, the woodcut served as a generic design, a pattern for the phenomenon of "citiness."<sup>73</sup> The referent here, as in the case of the Vulgate's allomorphs, is not particular but paradigmatic.

The same is true of the conventional and stylized phrases of oral narrative that can be applied to a wide range of individual gestures and persons. Although the Vulgate motifs cannot be

considered formulaic since they lack the framework of regulated versification that governs the production of oral formulas, they resemble formulaic phrases in their patterned recurrence.<sup>74</sup> The cluster of allomorphs that details prisoners caught in Castle, Tower, Cemetery, or Cave is roughly comparable in function to the formula system: "in the house, in the tower, in the castle," taken from Albert Lord's study of South Slavic songs.<sup>75</sup> Whereas different words are substituted in formulas to create multiple, analogous versions of the original expression, different allomorphs are substituted in alternative versions of an incident in the prose romances. If we think of the typed scenes of medieval illustration and the typed phrases of oral composition as approximate models, we can perhaps understand the recurrent images in the Vulgate Cycle as a vocabulary of motifs that are used and reused to spin a nonrepresentational tale. The resultant text is by nature more stylized than realistic, a story that presents its own, slightly illogical reality rather than attempting to reproduce naturalistic form or sentiment.

To use an analogy from the History of Art, we might compare the Vulgate romances with the different versions of the Utrecht Psalter, a useful measure of stylistic change in medieval book illumination because it was copied three times between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. On this model the Vulgate texts would appropriately resemble the highly-stylized Romanesque copy.<sup>76</sup> The Carolingian original of the Utrecht Psalter portrays events in the illusionistic, naturalistic tradition using perspective to create logically organized space in which anatomically correct characters enact the story. In the later version, however, the same story is told on a multidimensional surface where characters take on unrealistic sizes and shapes to evoke rather than re-create the story. This process resembles the irrational postures often adopted by patterned characters in the Vulgate romances. The antinaturalistic tendency is carried further in the Romanesque Psalter as figures and objects are reduced to their cubic elements by a process that divides the surface into geometric rather than naturalistic shapes. A parallel fragmentation is evidenced in the Vulgate's

narrative surface that is interspersed with patterned allomorphs often spatially disjointed from one another. In Romanesque painting, surface fragmentation facilitates the interweaving of figure and ornament; in romance it enables the fusion of pattern and subject matter. Emphasizing stylized shapes arranged in patterns, the scenes of the thirteenth-century Psalter give the illusion of unrealistic volume, motion, and space. Although occasional slight overlap between objects gives a temporary suggestion of depth, this tendency is minimized in favor of an effect of oscillating, ambiguous space. Although Romanesque art and the Vulgate narratives both allow a certain amount of real space to enter their composition, neither permits logical perspective to dominate. The controlling element in both is pattern.

### The *Topos* or Pattern

It is difficult to define the Vulgate patterns *per se* since they are never found or seen *in toto*. Reading through the Vulgate texts, we encounter disparate allomorphs that are only fragmentary pieces or incomplete nodules of the overall paradigm. A pattern could be described, in one sense, as a narrative register or template, a preverbal abstract entity that has an endless variety of positive realizations. All that we see are the individual realizations of it, the verbalized allomorphs.<sup>77</sup> Yet, the pattern remains undefinable and indescribable apart from its manifestation in these motifs.<sup>78</sup> The pattern of the Wound, for example, could be characterized most accurately as the abstraction of all of its possible variants. That is to say that the allomorphs of wounding that appear in the text can be seen to conform to a projected, composite matrix. The resultant artificial construct is the Wound pattern. And yet this pattern is not merely a hypothetical reconstruction. Like the Vulgate's other *topoi* it is a generic preconstruction as well, a kind of *Gestalt* that guides the compositional process, determining to a large degree the choice and arrangement of stylized narrative incidents. Although the entire pattern is not directly visible at any given point in the text, it seems always to be present in latent

form. Its role in generating the narrative becomes particularly apparent in instances where the allomorphs of Wound, Prison, or Veil cannot be explained by contextual factors and appear unwarranted or incongruous.

The curious punishment of Hector and Gauvain in the scene of the Wasteland cemetery, for example, seems at first to defy precise explanation. After reading the inscription on the tombstone that prohibits entry to anyone but Lancelot, "gardes que ia ne metes le pie en cheste chimentiere. por accomplir les aventures qui y sont. quar chou serait paine gastee. Se tu nes li chaitis chevaliers qui par sa luxure a perdu a achiever lez aventures del saint graal" (4:339; M, 2:367), the two knights ignore the warning and attempt the adventure of the tomb. They are immediately attacked and wounded by twelve swords that detach themselves from the twelve tombs (4:340; M, 2:368).

We could easily accept this incident as one of the many supernatural occurrences that typify the Arthurian realm of marvelous adventure, but such an approach does not explain why the fanciful punishment of these knights should take the form of wounding. This connection can only be explained in terms of the pattern network that advances Wound and Prison as allomorphs of one another. The incident of wounding in the Wasteland cemetery uses the same elements found in the scene of liberation at the Doloreuse Garde but employs them to reverse effect. Whereas lifting the tombstone procures the freedom of prisoners at the Castle-Cemetery of the Doloreuse Garde, failure at the same task in this scene results in wounding, the functional equivalent of captivity.

This reading of the incongruous treatment of Hector and Gauvain draws upon two related narrative processes: the phenomenon of pattern overlap that establishes an inherent link between wounding and imprisonment, and the hinge effect of bivalent patterns that can be realized either as Liberation or Incarceration. The "captive" portion of this pattern, which is for the most part unattested in Lancelot's victorious action at the Doloreuse Garde, remains a potential analogue and is realized in the scene at the Wasteland cemetery. Much like the

multiple allomorphs of a particular motif that can either be used or left unspecified in a given context, the flipside of each pattern, the functional opposite of Incarceration, Immobility, or Deception seems to exist *in potentia* even though it is not realized at every juncture where its presence could be invoked.

This kind of partial and suggestive storytelling is found most typically in traditional texts. In both epic and folktale, we can discern the existence of something like a metatext, a controlling paradigm through which all extant and potential parts of the narrative are always present. It is well-known, for example, that the traditional phrase often carries, in addition to its immediate denotative meaning, a whole range of implied connotations that may be realized in a given context.<sup>79</sup> In the case of significant omission, an audience familiar with the narrative conventions in question could mentally fill in that part of the story that was excised by the poet-singer. In his study of South Slavic epics, for example, Lord interviewed bards who insisted that they had sung part of the story that they had not in fact sung. Yet for the singer and his informed audience, the missing part was actually present, having been supplied by their familiarity with the traditional material.<sup>80</sup> Again, it must be emphasized that the Vulgate romances were not orally composed or delivered to an audience in the same manner as were medieval French epic songs. The prose romance cannot be said to share specific stylistic traits with the earlier *chanson de geste*. Yet it does seem that the high tolerance for narrative incongruity that characterizes epic song is matched by an equally high incidence of narrative ellipsis in the Vulgate romances.

In folktale, elliptical storytelling is similarly *de rigueur*. Propp has explained how the second half of a paired function often exists alone, without the first part having been mentioned. Thus, in the pair "interdiction/violation," a limitation can be transgressed by one of the *dramatis personae* without the previous voicing of an interdiction. Or in the pair "reconnaissance of the villain/villain receives an answer," the victim may voluntarily divulge the necessary information in the absence of

interrogation by the villain. The missing element participates in the narrative through implication rather than by tangible presence<sup>81</sup>; linear logic is replaced here by a more poetic narrative resonance.

What we find in the Vulgate romances is not dissimilar: an adherence to general narrative paradigms or patterns that have a semantic scope much larger than any single manifestation of them. Because these patterns are built on a two-fold process that incorporates opposing states of being into one narrative unit, matching Incarceration with Liberation or Deception with Perception, textual incongruities often result. To understand these stranded and disembodied allomorphs requires a process of rereading, a method of interpreting these narrative elements not in accordance with their immediate context but with other, analogous allomorphs located throughout the five-volume corpus. The Vulgate's allomorphs serve, in a way, as narrative markers that point not to a transcendent signified as in Augustine's *aliud aliquid*, but to other portions of the text.<sup>82</sup> If we follow these anomalous hooks in the narrative sequence, our gaze is constantly shifted from one portion of the text to another in a process that is not dissimilar from the analogical relay between intertexts that occurs in the *Queste*. The difference is largely one of scale: the narrative of the *Queste* shifts from each chivalric adventure to its analogical counterpart cast in another narrative register, whereas the allomorphs that pervade the *Lancelot* operate by recasting a given motif into a series of analogous variants. In both cases meaning is not revealed straightaway but deferred, displaced, and delayed.

The unusual kind of narrative logic that casts the cemetery at the Doloreuse Garde as a prison and provides the rationale for the flying lances that attack Hector and Gauvain in the Wasteland cemetery also supplies the motivation for the closing of all the doors and windows at Camelot before the Grail appears (Q,7).<sup>83</sup> The incident of enforced enclosure at Camelot is closely related to the test of the *lis aventureus* at Corbenic where we find a four-tiered motif cluster incorporating two allomorphs from

the Veil pattern, Blindness and Spell, along with motifs taken from the patterns of Wound and Prison. Submitted to the test of the adventurous bed, Gauvain and Bohort are both temporarily wounded and blinded when they become trapped by the "spell" of the bed,

Mais moult se sent durement navres. Si y demora en tel maniere tant que il fu anuitie . . . ensi avint a monseignour gauvain kil ne vit goute (4:345; M, 2:379–81).

Si issi de une cambre une lance grant & longue dont li fers sambloit aussi comme uns cierges ardans si vint vers bohort au[s]si durement comme uns foudres & le feri (5:298; M, 5:260).

During their respective trials, both of these knights are also physically constrained within the castle. Gauvain discovers that all the doors are locked, making exit impossible, "Si ne pot de laiens issir quar li huis furent bien ferme" (4:344; M, 2:378). Bohort notices that all the windows in his room are closed, "Quant li quarrel orent laissiet a venir si recloient lez fenestres toutes" (5:299; M, 5:263). This fourth motif is a variant of the Enchanted Doors used to signal imprisonment.

With the miraculous closing of the doors and windows when the Grail appears at Arthur's castle, we find a less complex version of this same mechanism. In this case the inhabitants of Camelot are neither wounded nor spellbound, but their captivity is rendered through twin allomorphs. Instead of Blindness they suffer Impaired Speech (Q, 15), and the mysterious closing of all the doors and windows in the Grail chamber provides the second allomorph, that of Enchanted Doors. Although this door slamming could be attributed to purely supernatural causes, it has a wider semantic function in terms of the logic of narrative patterns. This use of the Enchanted Doors allomorph provides a clear and direct evocation of the captive state of Camelot's residents. Similar to all the inhabitants of Arthur's realm, they await liberation from the Chosen Hero who will pull the sword from the stone. In each of the cases mentioned above, the narrative "referent" is located "between the lines," the paradigm to which each sense of wounding, captivity, and disguise points is the pattern itself.



### Meaning

Understanding the pattern network operative in the Vulgate texts does not allow one to determine what a particular scene means in precise terms, to say what the incident of door slamming at Camelot signifies as opposed to the scene of wounding at the Wasteland cemetery. The meaning we can deduce from an intertextual reading of allomorphs is, like the pattern network, generalized and paradigmatic.<sup>84</sup> When we re-read the Vulgate texts in the manner suggested above, it becomes apparent that the states of Incarceration, Immobility, and Deception evoked in the Vulgate's *topoi* coalesce ultimately around a common sense of "entrapment." Whether it is a case of the sword trapped in the stone or lodged in the wounded man's thigh, a knight cloaked in anonymity or a lover held fast by a spell, a maid chained in a tower or a knight forced to defend a castle, all of these victims (be they persons or objects) are trapped in a state of partial existence, restrained from performing to capacity in their appointed roles. Although entrapment is cast in varied allomorphs within each pattern, all allomorphs of Prison, Wound, and Veil record a condition in which an object is denied its normal or proper use. To be in conformity with the *status quo* of Arthurian romance, weapons should be employed in the service of ladies by knights who clearly establish their identity through the liberation of captives wrongly imprisoned. In the Vulgate romances, however, we find weapons that have turned against their rightful owner, wounding him rather than his opponent, and knights whose identity is hidden and unknown. Theirs is a double disgrace of being both unseen and unable to see others, since they are often blind as well as unrecognized. And finally, the potential liberator is shown routinely to fail at his task and to join the imprisoned victim he hoped to release.

All of these motifs connote a serious lack, an absence of the elements necessary to ensure the smooth functioning of the Arthurian world. As repeated suggestions of disability rendered alternately in terms of Immobility, Incarceration, and

Deception, the Vulgate's allomorphs serve to indicate a general malaise plaguing the entire Arthurian world. Although they are designed to evoke a state of past Arthurian glory and triumph, the patterned motifs in this text actually record the way in which that long-lost era has become increasingly remote to the thirteenth-century viewer looking back over the six-hundred year gap that separates Capetian France from its distant and legendary roots. What the pattern network shows us, in essence, is an Arthurian world that is threatened by extinction or the near-death of obscurity, an epoch whose survival hangs in the literary balance where it appears fixed and frozen as if laid to rest in a tomb. Although the Arthurian ideal is already somewhat problematic in the works of Chrétien de Troyes where characters struggle to harmonize personal desire with social responsibility, this imbalance in the chivalric innerworkings of Arthur's realm, the chronic malfunction of certain parts of the courtly machine, is developed to the extreme in the Vulgate texts.

Although the verse romances of the twelfth century contain frequent mention of adversaries wounded in combat, lovers blinded by a potion, and defeated knights incarcerated after failure in battle, the threat of immobilization is taken one step further in the Vulgate texts where it has penetrated into the beings themselves. The improper functioning of prisons, weapons, and armor (elements of Type A in the pattern structure) engenders disastrous consequences on the human scale as simple incarceration is broadened to include unexplained paralysis, prolonged physical disability, sensory and cognitive impairment (allomorphs of Type B). In the Vulgate tales, we find a preponderance of knights who are trapped even in the absence of a constraining barrier, and kings who are blind to everything, not just to indecipherable texts or hidden objects.

However, the pattern network, which is particularly prevalent in the first four tales of the Vulgate corpus, actually serves two functions: while exposing the death-like stasis plaguing Arthur's realm, it mounts simultaneously a concerted campaign against it by constantly transforming the fixed poses of Prison,

Wound, and Veil into their opposites. The ceaseless liberation of Prisoners, the healing of wounds, and the restoration of sight that punctuate these texts can be seen as attempts to restore to life the long "dead" Arthurian past. Repeated acts of reviving wounded and blind knights could reasonably be read as the literary reparation of an ultimate lack: that of the historical Arthur and his illustrious (if fabricated) knights of the Round Table. It is in this sense that the prose romances can be seen as literary documents which expose cultural contradictions that are without resolution.<sup>85</sup> The fateful act of pulling the sword from the stone and procuring thereby the liberation of the entombed Arthurian realm constitutes a fictive means of pulling Arthur back to life, drawing the nostalgically glorified past into a trouble-ridden present. If this is the case, we are faced here with a narrative that is acutely conscious of the problems inherent in literary invention. Just as it comments indirectly on the problematic relation between the author and the text in the Middle Ages—on the deception involved in claiming authority, asserting truth, or offering interpretation—the Vulgate Cycle also outlines the difficulties of its own larger project: the re-creation of a historical figure whose history has been lost almost entirely.

Since this text, whose most basic function is to bring the largely ahistorical King Arthur to life, cannot take us back in time to the actual living conditions of a real sixth-century monarch, it can only return to itself, countering the paucity of historical data surrounding the legendary king with a prolongation of his literary presence. This singular feat is accomplished in the Vulgate romances through textual repetition, a narrative strategy that bridges the gap between historical past and literary present.<sup>86</sup> In content the allomorphs employed to create this effect allude overtly to a feudal and chivalric culture; yet because of their arrangement in patterns and the disorienting incongruities of detail that result, these allomorphs refer at the same time mainly to themselves. Textual repetition here serves two ends: it provides, first of all, a sense of returning, an illusion of going back without re-creating the past textual mo-

ment exactly. And repetition in its second sense outlines an obsessive attempt to regain that which is absent.<sup>87</sup> In psychological parlance it constitutes a search for completion, an effort to recapture an historical experience that has been lost and cannot be reconstructed through conscious memory. Repetition can thus be equated with a desire for the missing term, be it literary or historical. The Vulgate texts can be seen, then, as a harking back to a historical moment that will remain forever distant; and the desire for this return is expressed through a type of literary recurrence that is never the same. In both cases exact repetition or total re-creation is impossible. What remains is unsatisfied and cyclical desire, the desire to return to a past that never was. And the Arthurian present created in its stead is prolonged excessively by an open-ended and expandable pattern matrix which ensures on the one hand that the tale will never end, that incidents of failed sight will be matched with moments of vision and followed in turn by other cases of impaired sensory perception. But this structure guarantees, at the same time, that permanent resolution of deficiencies will be withheld. In the absence of calculated narrative progression, the repeated episodes routinely turn back on themselves.

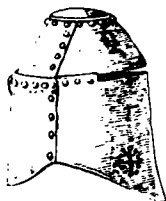
We are faced, thus, with a continuous re-enactment of stock activities and a ceaseless rewriting of a single, paradigmatic tale. This kind of narrative composition will not lead us to discover a referential sense or transcendent meaning. In Augustine's terms it can only increase our desire for more textual and wholly terrestrial experience.<sup>88</sup> Without providing the calming satisfaction offered by the archetypal spiritual Book, these books of romance engender a desire for more and longer stories. This is in fact exactly what the thirteenth-century prose cycles provide. In so doing they constitute a particularly blatant example of textual idolatry. And this bold cultivation of rhetorical excess, a form of literary indulgence that would surely be classified under Augustine's "frothy nexus of words,"<sup>89</sup> is substantiated in the Vulgate corpus by the very images that typify each of the cycle's principal patterns.

We have seen in part 1 of this chapter how the repeated

evocations of imprisonment in these tales provide a fictionalized version of the church fathers' condemnation of literature as a dangerous trap, a verbal snare into which the unsuspecting reader can be lured and detained.<sup>90</sup> When the theologians' warning against the prisonhouse of narrative becomes thematized in the Prison pattern of the Vulgate Cycle, the very notion of textual idolatry is mocked and diffused, and its message subverted. The patterns of Wound and Veil serve a similar function, deftly recasting the issue of textual idolatry by absorbing into secular romance the theological pronouncements that traditionally were levelled against it. Hugh of St. Victor's claim that literature defies Truth by deforming the natural order of the world is grounded in the belief that the "artificer" maims the harmony of natural existence,<sup>91</sup> perpetuating an imbalance in nature by disfiguring the wholeness of Truth through a kind of literary dismemberment. The Vulgate's multiple images of wounded and helpless victims fictionalize this denunciation of literature, offering, within the Wound pattern, a graphic illustration of how the unnatural, artificial, and deviant narrative path is indeed the province of the literary text. On the other hand, when Augustine speaks of the enjoyment that can be derived from terrestrial objects and warns against finding undue joy in transitory things, his concern is that readers not be seduced by what he calls the "sweetness of metaphor,"<sup>92</sup> that they not be blind to what lurks behind the "veil" of literature and fall prey to its compelling trap. This apprehension is translated into the allomorphs of perception and deception in the Vulgate Cycle where the recurrent incidents of impaired sight, concealed identity, and verbal trickery that make up the Veil pattern provide a constant if indirect reminder of the seductive power of narrative.

The function of all three patterns of Wound, Prison, and Veil is thus, on one level, to embrace the accusations used by the Church Fathers in denouncing literature and to transform them into the very substance of vernacular romance. Demonstrating on the one hand that the chivalric tale does seduce and trap the reader by offering a deformed version of Truth, the narrative

patterns in the Vulgate romances serve simultaneously to assert the inherent value of this literary enterprise. The pattern structure suggests that language is incapable of reproducing a transcendent signified; however, it underscores, at the same time, the subversive power of the literary text to generate its own signifieds. And on a related front, these literary patterns attest in the same vein that although literature may be incapable of reviving the past, it can instead simply invent it. Although the power of the sacred archetypal text lies in its ability to bring Christ to life, the force of the Vulgate romances resides in their ability to bring Arthur to life. If these vernacular tales cannot partake of the tradition of divine writing, they offer instead an elaborate assortment of rewritings. In the face of God's all-powerful creation, they boldly advance the alternative of literary re-creation, and in the place of sacred textuality, the repetition of Arthurian fictions.



## Chapter Five

### Fictions of Closure

As the last volume of the Vulgate Cycle *La Mort le roi Artu* is not only the final tale in a series of related stories, it is a text that departs significantly from the thematic and stylistic framework of its predecessors to recount the end of the world that they created. In describing the senseless and violent death of the legendary King Arthur, *La Mort* documents the death of the whole world of Arthurian adventure, and appears to mark the definitive close of the digressive and repetitive Vulgate texts that heretofore seemed endless in their attempt to bring the courtly king to life. In this final volume of the Vulgate corpus, many reasons are advanced for the Arthurian holocaust that mercilessly pits the venerable king against his own son and long-term chivalric companions against one another. The disastrous defeat of Arthur's men on the Salisbury plain can be attributed to the adultery between Lancelot and the queen, to Gauvain's fanatical vendetta against Lancelot, to the treachery of Arthur's son Mordred, or to the inability of the aging king to rule his land effectively. However, Bohort offers the most precise formulation of the problem when he explains to Lancelot that war is inevitable since what they have been hiding is now in the open, "Ha! sire, fet Boorz, or vaut pis que devant, car ore est

la chose descouverte que nos avions tant celee. Or verroiz la guerre commencer qui jamés ne prendra fin a nos vivans" (LMA, 118).

Lancelot's faithful companion does not here lament the fact of the adultery itself, that Arthur's most valiant knight deceived his king, dishonored his liege lord, and disdained the chivalric code of honesty. What Bohort decries is the disclosure of the love affair between Lancelot and the queen, the revelation of actions that remained relatively harmless until they were seen and known by Arthur and his court.

Bohort's comment is significant for two reasons. First, it establishes clearly that events within this volume of the cycle, in contradistinction to those of the preceding tales, are linked to one another largely by relationships of cause and consequence. By pointing to the cause and effect relation between the entrapment scene and the final Arthurian holocaust, Bohort outlines the mode of narrative composition that dominates the whole of *La Mort*.<sup>1</sup> This volume of the Vulgate corpus constitutes a particularly good example of Northrop Frye's "hence" narrative in which events are strung together horizontally in inevitable and inexorable sequence.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the open resumption of the love affair between Lancelot and Guenevere, the text develops through a complex chain of events whose precise linear succession is essential to an understanding of the tale.

Because Arthur has seen Lancelot's secret depiction of his love for the queen in the Salle aux Images at Morgan's castle, the cuckolded king devises a plot to catch the lovers. Although the plot fails, it results in an unexpected and in some ways unwarranted death sentence for Guenevere. In response to this injustice, Lancelot rescues the queen from death by burning, and during the struggle that ensues he unwittingly causes the deaths of Gaheriet, Agravain, and Gueherret. At this point in the narrative, a thematic shift occurs as the motif of adultery is superseded by the theme of clan vendetta between the lineage of Arthur and the lineage of Ban (Lancelot's family), but the causal chain of events is maintained. Because of Lancelot's impudent seizure of the queen, Arthur and Gauvain are forced



to attack the castle of Joyeuse Garde and to pursue Lancelot to his homeland in Gaunes where they mount a two-month siege. Arthur's absence enables his son Mordred to conspire against the king who, having lost his two best knights—Gauvain as a result of wounds sustained in a battle against Lancelot, which are later reopened in a military encounter with the Roman army, and Lancelot through banishment—is without defense. The final battle on the Salisbury plain where Arthur and Mordred take each others' lives is a direct result of Arthur's previous absence, provoked by Lancelot's abduction of the queen, which in turn was elicited by Arthur's questionable sentencing of Guenevere, a byproduct of the plot to trap the lovers, which was inspired by the pictures on the walls of the Salle aux Images. The narrative of *La Mort* thus develops along a direct line of consequential actions that link the love affair between Lancelot and Guenevere to the ultimate dissolution of the Arthurian realm. Different from the nondiscursive format of the previous romances in which the order of events was less important than their associative similarity, the order of episodes in *La Mort* is locked into a distinct and inalterable hierarchy of cause and effect.

The second feature of Bohort's sympathetic lament that deserves our attention is its insistence that the final holocaust results not from Lancelot's adultery *per se*, but from the act of making it visible to others. Disaster ensues when the lovers' hidden actions are removed from the protective realm of ambiguity and placed in the harsh light of definitive and undeniable fact. Their adultery, like that of Tristan and Iseut, can thrive when it is concealed from view because it depends on the necessary gap between what the lovers say and what they actually do, between what others think to be the case and what really happens between this knight and his lady. The lovers' dilemma in *La Mort* results, according to Bohort, from their inability to maintain this *écart* between word and deed, from the impossibility of covering their deviant actions with equally deviant or deceptive speech.

Thus, the two facets of Bohort's commentary are neatly en-

twined: the lovers' failure to keep their illegal liaison secret is inherently linked to the relentless logical progression of events in *La Mort*. The end of their infamous love affair should be seen in relation to the inauguration, within *La Mort*, of a radically different narrative mode. Whereas the preceding tales in the Vulgate Cycle depend, in large measure, on motif patterns in which there are many *signifiants* for a single *signifié*, in which uncertainty and ambiguity are *de rigueur*, *La Mort* strives in all cases to establish a single, accurate version of the event in question. Although the love affair between Lancelot and Guenevere remains stormy in the preceding volumes of the corpus—it is interrupted at times because of Lancelot's lengthy travels, suspended temporarily because of his quest for the Holy Grail, and threatened occasionally by female rivals of the queen—on the whole their adultery flourishes. The obstacles that stand in its way can always be surmounted in a text that is open-ended and ever-expansive. Each new threat to the love affair simply provides an impetus to continue the tale until the lovers are somehow reunited.

However, the elaborate *détour* of motif patterns that tell a long and rambling tale by indirection is replaced in *La Mort* by the predominance of temporal sequence that advances the tale straightaway to a single-pointed, logical end. And just as adultery can only thrive on the disjunction between words and their referents, the legendary world of King Arthur can only be kept alive through indirect and disjunctive prose: through the repetition and variation of allomorphs that constantly reverse the inexorable course of events by releasing knights from prison, reviving wounded victims, and restoring sight to the blind. To tell this tale of repeated entrapment and release in straightforward, cause-and-effect prose is to end the story. The literary world of King Arthur's knights, which is fabricated in the preceding texts through the accretion of various kinds of narrative layers—through the repetition of allomorphs in the *Lancelot*, the overlay of adventure and "interpretation" in the *Queste*, or the echo of authorial voices and rival subtexts in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin*—is dismantled in this volume by linear narrative

progression that attempts to adduce a single, overt meaning. The previous emphasis on cloaking meaning in many types of garb is here reversed as we witness the revelation of hidden truth, the painstaking disclosure of what lies beneath the plush narrative wardrobe. In this case the layers of metaphor, repetition, ellipsis, and self-contradiction are no longer increased but slowly peeled away.

In addition to its principal narrative development, *La Mort* contains a shorter series of interlocked episodes centering on the dilemma of Guenevere which, as in the main chain of events, results ultimately from the adultery theme. Guenevere's misinterpretation of two key events—Lancelot's wearing of the Demoiselle d'Escalot's sleeve at the Winchester tournament and the presence of Lancelot's shield in the same lady's castle—causes her to believe that her lover had been unfaithful and to banish Lancelot and his men. As a result, when she is subsequently accused of killing Gaheris, the queen can find no defender and faces the threat of accepting guilt by default. In this instance, as in the previous examples, the causal progression from one event to the next provides the mechanism of narrative development. If Guenevere had not misread the signs of sleeve and shield from the Winchester tournament—signs that were related to her by intermediaries—she would not have banished Lancelot so hastily and could have relied on his aid to prove her innocence in the matter of Gaheris's killing.

This sequence makes clear the close relation between the logical progression of events in *La Mort* and the question of interpretation that is central to this text. That Guenevere is shown in these examples to misunderstand the significance of the lady's sleeve and Lancelot's shield implies that there may be only one true reading of these signs, that the participants in this romance can be either correctly informed or tragically deceived. Clearly distinct from the preceding volumes of the cycle in which the meaning of repeated incidents is often metaphoric and associative, meaning in this text results largely from the opposite impulse: from the desire to eliminate the *écart* of metaphorical expression that lends a rich ambiguity to individual

terms. Rather than following Geoffrey of Vinsauf's advice that an author should present a single meaning under multiple linguistic forms, that he should dress his message in varied apparel, the author of *La Mort* seems to suggest that there is only one way of representing an event accurately. In this text the role of literary discourse is not to tell and retell an incident in as many versions as possible, but to reduce what are considered contradictory versions of an event to a single, definitive interpretation.

This is the function of both trial scenes: the judicial duel in which Lancelot fights to defend Guenevere against the accusation that she murdered Gaheris, and the single combat between Lancelot and Gauvain over the death of Gaheriet. In both cases the trial by ordeal is designed to establish a one to one relationship between word and deed, between what the accused professes to have done and what he did in fact. As Alfred Adler has pointed out, the associative multiplicity that characterizes the Augustinian backdrop in the *Queste* is superseded in *La Mort* by a more Aristotelian tendency toward differentiation through crucial distinctions.<sup>3</sup> Portraying the characters' perceptions as partial and therefore faulty, *La Mort* attempts at every turn in the narrative to sort out a definitive interpretation from a number of conflicting possibilities. The famous scene of the poisoned apple and the subsequent efforts to establish Guenevere's guilt or innocence illustrate well the existence of different levels of potential meaning within a single act.<sup>4</sup> Those who judge Guenevere's role in poisoning Gaheris are split between the eye witnesses who saw her give the apple to the victim and watched him die, and those who seek to determine the intention behind the act. Participants of the first group are certain of the queen's guilt because they *saw* her commit the crime; those of the second group assert that she would be guilty only if she killed Gaheris intentionally ("en traïson et a mon escient" LMA, 86), but innocent if the act were not premeditated. Gauvain voices both opinions alternately. First, when refusing Arthur's request to defend Guenevere in battle against Gaheris' brother, Mador de la Porte, Gauvain states that he

would be dishonored by aiding a suspect he knows to be guilty since he witnessed the crime.<sup>5</sup> Later, at the actual battle between Lancelot and Mador, Gauvain tells Arthur that Mador will lose the fight since the queen never had treachery in mind.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever its outcome the purpose of the trial is to reduce the multiplicity of viewpoints that surround Guenevere's fateful deed, to erase the uncertainty that prevents a precise and accurate understanding of what really happened. The judicial duel serves to streamline the complex questions of intent and action into a simple either/or proposition. Either Guenevere is guilty because she gave the apple to Gaheris, or innocent because she acted in ignorance, without knowing that the apple was poisoned.<sup>7</sup> Although crucial distinctions between individual opinions concerning the event suggest that conflicting interpretations might be possible, the result of both trial scenes is to dismiss some readings of the event as false while validating only one view as true. Guenevere is deemed innocent even though she handed the poisoned apple to Gaheris who ate it and died; Lancelot is judged innocent of killing Gauvain's brother, Gaheriet, even though many witnesses saw him deliver the fatal blow at the Joyeuse Garde. Whereas the other romances of the Vulgate Cycle frequently advance conflicting motivations for a single act, or attribute contradictory meanings to an individual event making no attempt to identify one reading as more accurate than the other, *La Mort* seeks more often to minimize ambiguity in favor of certainty.

This can be seen in two key incidents that involve King Arthur's assessment of the lovers' adulterous liaison. On one occasion Arthur interprets Lancelot's belated arrival at the Winchester tournament as proof of his lack of involvement with the queen. Lancelot's surprise appearance is erroneously used by the king to refute Agravain's correct accusation that the couple has fallen into adultery: "Et tout ice me fist a croire Agravains vostre freres; si me tenisse ore bien a honni, se ge l'eüsse creü de sa mençonge; car ge sei or bien que se Lancelos amast la reïne par amors, il ne se fust pas remuez de Kamaalot, tant com ge fusse hors, einz i fust remés por avoir de la reïne sa

volonté" (LMA, 29). In another incident Arthur misjudges Lancelot's willingness to return Guenevere to him at the Pope's command as proof of the lovers' innocence: "Sire, fet Lancelos, se ge amasse la reine de fole amour, si com l'en le vos fesoit entendant, ge ne la vos rendisse des mois et par force ne l'eüssiez vos pas. –Lancelos, fet li rois, vos en avez tant fet que ge vos en sei bon gré" (LMA, 158). Because the reader has been advised of the lovers' guilt in the matter of adultery and Guenevere's innocence in the apple incident, textual judgments to the contrary in *La Mort* appear faulty and misguided. The text is thus able to develop an elaborate interplay between the audience's omniscient or "true" point of view and the wide range of possible but incorrect interpretations offered by individual characters in the narrative. In contrast to the other romances of the cycle in which perception and deception are presented as complementary facets of a single phenomenon – in which the Grail is capable of either blinding or restoring impaired sight, and those who see most clearly are also victimized at times by partial vision – the effort in *La Mort* is to analyze and dissect the act of perception by distinguishing misleading appearance from reliable fact.

And as the veracity of visible events is slowly eroded and shown to be unreliable, there is a concomitant emphasis on verbal expression as a means of correcting the faulty clues derived from visual images. In a long series of examples, the inaccurate perception of an incident is corrected by clarification in words. Guenevere's misreading of the sleeve and shield as signs of Lancelot's love for the Demoiselle d'Escalot is righted when a boat arrives bearing the lady's dead body and a note explaining that her suicide resulted from Lancelot's refusal to reciprocate her love.<sup>8</sup> Arthur's understanding of the pictures depicting the lovers' adultery in the Salle aux Images is similarly incomplete until Morgan explains to him the exact meaning of these images.<sup>9</sup> In addition the king learns of the current status of the love affair, which is described as having been resumed openly,<sup>10</sup> only when Agravain and Mordred tell him of it.<sup>11</sup> Arthur's banishment of Gauvain underscores fur-

ther the importance of words over perception. Gauvain is barred from Arthur's court because he failed to tell the king of the amorous encounters which, according to the narrator, had been visible to everyone.<sup>12</sup>

In these incidents the privileging of verbal expression to determine the truth of an event contrasts starkly with the process of retelling that characterizes patterned motifs in the other volumes of the Vulgate corpus. The use of language in *La Mort* is less self-referential and repetitive. Here the characters' visual perception of an event and the subsequent verbal explanation of it cannot be read as complementary incidents that echo one another in form or content. Locked within the predominantly linear narrative mode of *La Mort*, these instances of verbal exchange are characterized rather as correctives to faulty interpretation, as replacements of former misapprehension. In all of these cases, verbal expression is advanced as superior to visual images because it is shown to be less ambiguous, less likely to give rise to polysemy and misunderstanding.

In the same vein, the mistaken identities that are so frequent in the other Vulgate romances occur only temporarily in *La Mort* before being clarified by verbal explanation. After the Winchester tournament, the Demoiselle d'Escalot explains to Gauvain that the second brother in the family of Escalot was actually Lancelot in disguise (LMA, 27), and Morgan tells the unsuspecting Arthur that although he does not recognize her, they are sister and brother.<sup>13</sup> Lancelot disguised in white arms to combat Mador de la Porte is eventually recognized by his verbal offering of mercy.<sup>14</sup> While undercutting the ability of visual signs to convey information accurately, this text repeatedly substantiates the communicative power of words.

Whereas narrative coherence among the patterned motifs in the other Vulgate texts is determined largely on the basis of what is missing, on the latent meaning that is not stated explicitly in the text, meaning in *La Mort* results from the opposite process. Dramatic coherence here stems from a logical and concerted effort to make everything apparent so as not to be deceived by what is hidden: to reveal all, as Bohort says in the

beginning of the text. But there is a built-in flaw in this literary project. For it is after all the revelation of what is hidden, the disclosure of the lovers' adultery, that launches the inexorable sequence of events that leads to war and destruction, causing the inevitable end of the Arthurian world and the stories that recount it. *La Mort* has the unique distinction of being a romance that lacks the central feature of other romances: *aventure*. This final volume of the Vulgate Cycle has no *aventure* because there is nothing *à venir*, no future, no chance occurrence, no hope for a reversal in the inflexible chain of tragic events.<sup>15</sup>

There is, rather, a tendency from the beginning of this text to attenuate the possibility of sudden shifts in character development or unexpected changes in narrative sequence by reducing the options open to individual characters. Whereas many characters display a disquieting ambivalence of feeling at the outset of the romance, an ambivalence that stems for the most part from conflicting allegiances, they are forced, as the narrative progresses, to choose between contradictory options and take a single course of action. Gauvain, who is a close and loyal supporter of both Lancelot and Arthur, is compelled by the Joyeuse Garde incident to side with Arthur against Lancelot-turned-enemy (LMA, 158). The barons, who have sworn homage to both Arthur and Mordred, eventually support Mordred's claims against those of the king; and Mordred's conflicting roles as son and traitor are finally reduced to the status of simple enemy.

Lancelot, on the other hand, does not conform to the single-minded purposefulness of this text and his actions remain, as a result, both illogical and problematic. Although he is depicted as an adulterer, a criminal, and an outlaw, Lancelot is honored throughout the romance by the title that later appears on his tombstone, "LI MIEUDRES CHEVALIERS QUI ONQUES ENTRAST EL ROIAUME DE LOGRES" (LMA, 263), and he ascends to heaven at the moment of his death (LMA, 261). As a key figure in the themes of adultery and treason, Lancelot functions concomitantly as savior and destroyer of all. His adultery with the queen, which constitutes a direct infringe-



ment of his chivalric allegiance to Arthur, is contradicted by his repeated generous and protective gestures toward the king. Lancelot politely allows Arthur to rest before undertaking the battle of the Joyeuse Garde (LMA, 140), refuses to fight back when Arthur attacks him personally, and prevents Hector from beheading the king who has been unhorsed in battle (LMA, 152). The same self-effacing generosity is displayed in Lancelot's merciful treatment of those he defeats in single combat (Mador de la Porte and Gauvain, LMA, 106, 189), and in his offer to undertake both expiatory pilgrimage and homage as a means of reconciling the hostility between Gauvain and himself (LMA, 190).

Within the realistic framework of *La Mort*, where the narrative proceeds logically from one event to the next, where distinctions are clearly drawn between truth and falsehood, and incongruous detail is reduced to a minimum, the paradoxical behavior of Arthur's favorite knight appears unpalatable, even absurd. One is hard pressed to explain how a knight who flagrantly commits adultery with his lord's wife and triggers a war that destroys the entire realm, all the while obstinately asserting his innocence, could be held up by the medieval audience and author(s) as the most valiant knight, the paragon of chivalric virtue.

In contrast to the realistic role played by other characters in *La Mort*, it is apparent that Lancelot's actions must be read metaphorically rather than dramatically. His dual nature functions much like the prisoner-liberator couplet of the earlier romances where composite characters often display complementary and antithetical traits. Similar to the patterned, typed characters who are at one time prisoner and prison guard or captive and liberator, Lancelot offers the disconcerting visage of chivalric champion and antichivalric hedonist. At odds with the streamlined and logical framework of *La Mort* in which all other characters are forced to eliminate contradictory motives from their behavior, Lancelot's highly stylized mode of action clashes abrasively with the text in which it is recounted.

There are a few other enigmatic and puzzling incidents in *La*

*Mort* that serve no apparent function in developing this narrative along its purposeful linear course, but which can be explained in terms of the pattern structure that dominates the previous romances. The incident immediately following the Winchester tournament, for example, in which Gauvain and Gaheriet encounter a wounded knight carried by two squires (LMA, 19) appears superfluous since it bears no necessary relationship to the previous disappearance of Lancelot, the subsequent episode at the castle of Escalot, or any other event in the balance of the tale. Analysis of this incident in terms of the pattern structure described in chapter 4, however, reveals it to be a functional part of the wound-disguise mechanism included in the Veil pattern. The episode of the debilitated knight plays an imagistic rather than a dramatic role, and can be explained in its relation to a small group of literary allomorphs that are closely associated throughout the cycle of tales. The initial link between the wound and disguise is established in *La Mort* when Lancelot arrives at the Winchester tournament in disguise and is then wounded by Bohort (LMA, 15).

As in similar cases discussed in chapter 4, the wound here reinforces Lancelot's disguised status, his undisclosed identity. The wounded knight that Gauvain and Gaheriet pass after the tournament simply provides another variant on the same pair of allomorphs, for in addition to being wounded this knight is disguised to the extent that his identity remains unknown: "Lors demanderent aus escuiers qui cil estoit que il apportoient. 'Sire, font il, ce fu uns chevaliers. -Et qui l'a navré, font il, en tel maniere? -Seigneur, font li escuier, uns pors sauvages que il avoit acueilli a l'entree de cele forest'" (LMA, 20). This unnamed knight can be seen to function, in a sense, as a substitute for the missing Lancelot. Gauvain and Gaheriet are searching for their wounded and disguised companion; they find instead another wounded knight whose identity is hidden.

The associative link between wound and disguise reappears in two other significant incidents in *La Mort*. After being banished from the court and relegated to temporary anonymity,

Lancelot is again wounded, this time in the thigh by a hunter's stray arrow (LMA, 79). The reason for this wound, which is dismissed in the text as accidental, can be explained by the tendency of the pattern structure to maintain an association between disguise (in this case anonymity) and wounding. The subtle intrusion of this patterned couplet into the generally discursive structure of *La Mort* can explain as well Lancelot's otherwise unmotivated reluctance to reveal his identity to the knight from Arthur's court who relates Guenevere's need for a defender (LMA, 93). In terms of the pattern network that links anonymity with the wound, this detail constitutes a natural development of the previous two-fold description of Lancelot. It adds a third associative layer to his attendant wound and his anonymous status outside of Arthur's court.

Another somewhat incongruous detail points to the association between the prison and immobile weapons characteristic of the Prison pattern. When Lancelot is banished from Arthur's realm and sent into exile in his homeland of Gaunes, he responds to Arthur's order by sending his shield to be hung on the wall of Saint Stephens cathedral in Camelot. Since Lancelot will definitely be in need of a protective shield during the upcoming siege of Gaunes, the relinquishing of his weapon seems to have symbolic rather than logical motivation. It bears obvious resemblance to the episode of Arthur's capture at Camille's castle in the *Lancelot* when Arthur's weapons are raised high above the castle walls to signal his captivity (3:411) and to the incident at the Tertre Devee in which the prisoners' weapons are hung in an adjoining hall (5:236; M, 5:95-96).

In both of these incidents, images of immobile weapons serve as functional allomorphs of the prison motif, creating a two-fold evocation of the captive status of Arthur on the one hand and the hill prisoners on the other. If one applies this pattern structure to the incident of Lancelot's immobile shield in *La Mort*, the relinquishing of Lancelot's armor could be seen as an allomorph of his forced exile into Gaunes, itself a kind of imprisonment. The shield episode appears puzzlingly illogical

in relation to the rest of this tightly constructed tale, but its presence can be explained as an integral and functional part of a vestigial pattern network.

With the exception of the examples noted above, instances where plural motifs are used to relate one meaning or concurrent causes are given for a single event are rare in *La Mort*. Once distinctions are drawn between true and false interpretations of an event, between real and imaginary meaning, the signifier can no longer be equal to the signified and the existence of multiple metaphorical equivalents for a single event becomes impossible.<sup>16</sup> The oscillatory mechanism of the previous romances, in which past and future were continually balanced in an ambiguous present and linear progression was countered by three-dimensional narrative ornamentation, is replaced in *La Mort* by an unrepeated pattern of ascent and decline encapsulated in the motif of the wheel of fortune. A woman in Arthur's dream explains to him: "Voire, fet ele, tu le voiz, n'il n'i a granment chose dont tu n'aies esté sires jusques ci, et de toute la circuitude que tu voiz as tu esté li plus puissanz rois qui i fust. Mes tel sont li orgueil terrien qu'il n'i a nul si haut assiz qu'il ne le coviegne cheoir de la poesté del monde" (LMA, 227). Fortune's wheel, which has carried Arthur to the top of the world, will now cause his fall into oblivion, just as the romances of the Vulgate Cycle that recount the ceaseless deeds of the Arthurian heroes will end with a final volume that seals the Arthurian tomb forever. The critical act of withdrawing the sword from the stone, which was accomplished by the young King Arthur in the *Merlin*, an act that marked the opening of an entire chivalric era, is matched in *La Mort* by Girflet's casting Arthur's sword into the water, returning it to useless immobility. This definitive version of the sword and the stone motif will not be followed by future withdrawals of weapons from sheaths, by future liberations of knights from prison or paralyzed victims from near-death. At the end of the funerary march of words that leads to the final Arthurian holocaust, stasis prevails and words lose their power to bring the legendary king back to life. The soap-opera time of the previous Vulgate romances, in which

episode followed episode in a seemingly endless flow of events, is here replaced by the apocalyptic time of a cataclysm to which there is no possible sequel.

One feature of metaphorical language is that the referent to which it alludes is never mentioned directly since something else is used to take its place. It is in this sense that the language of metaphor can be considered a discourse about the missing term, the element that is absent and unstated but understood nevertheless to be the ultimate referent of the words in question. Considered from this point of view, the first four tales of the Vulgate Cycle can be seen as a metaphorical description of the death of Arthur which is not related until the final volume. In the earlier texts, we find a seemingly harmless account of Arthur's life and the varied exploits of his valiant knights. And yet this tale of Arthurian adventure is interspersed with an elaborate network of patterned motifs that signal different forms of captivity. In addition to the incarceration of knights, ladies, and the inhabitants of whole towns, we witness the captivity of those who are rendered immobile by blindness and interminable wounds, those who suffer from death-like paralysis, and those who are described specifically as being entombed. If metaphor serves as a mirror of the world, as Geoffrey of Vinsauf thought it did,<sup>17</sup> as a distancing mechanism in which images are deferred and deflected slightly, then we could understand the patterned motifs of the Vulgate Cycle as an elaborate literary *détour*, a means of deferring the death of Arthur, which is the real subject of these tales. In this sense what was suggested indirectly throughout the protracted tales of Arthur's life is here finally stated overtly. And it is with that overt statement of Arthur's death that this long cycle of tales necessarily comes to a close.

Thus Arthur dies when artifice ceases, when the exacting and legalistic form of truth advanced in this final volume of the Vulgate Cycle attempts to close the gap between what is seen and what is said, between what really happened and how events were reported. Accordingly, the final lines of *La Mort* attest to a desire for textual closure, attempting to establish this text as the

definitive account of Arthur's demise: "Si se test ore atant mestre Gautiers Map de l'*Estoire de Lancelot*, car bien a tout mené a fin selonc les choses qui en avindrent, et fenist ci son livre si outrement que après ce n'en porroit nus riens conter qui n'en mentist de toutes choses." Here we are told that Walter Map has brought the tale to an appropriate end and that any further additions or elaborations will only amount to lies. This insistence on truthful accuracy is the precise opposite of Merlin's "truth" which is based, as we have seen, on marvel and magic, exploiting the semantic detour that language creates. Merlin's truth is that of the artificer, a truth that underscores difference and demonstrates how things do not ever match their appearance.

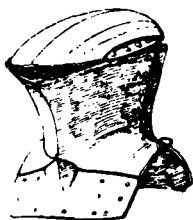
Yet despite the emphasis throughout *La Mort* on tying up loose narrative ends and advancing the tale toward a definitive close, we also find in this text the kind of truth exemplified by ambiguity and plural readings. When, in the closing moments of the tale, Girflet watches Arthur board a mysterious ship filled with ladies and guided by "Morgain la fee," it appears that Arthur does not in fact die (LMA, 250). Taking his horse and armor along with him, he strides gallantly into the ship as if to continue his chivalric adventures in another land. The end of Arthur's life, attested by the finality of the words written on his tombstone, "CI GIST LI ROIS ARTUS QUI PAR SA VALEUR MIST EN SUBJECTION .XII. ROIAUMES," is thus undermined by the enduring possibility that Arthur may return. And such a return would simultaneously undercut the finality of the cycle's supposed narrative end marked by Map's claim to textual closure. In fact, Map's authoritative boast is attenuated by the very suggestion contained within it that others may undertake to continue this tale. Arthur's entombment beneath the stone bearing his name is similarly in doubt since Girflet does not witness Arthur's burial in the cemetery but is told of it by a *preudons*. The tomb is described significantly as *merveilleuse* (LMA, 251), the adjective used to characterize both Morgain's fairy ship and Merlin's romance tales.

Thus Arthur dies but not completely, and the text ends by offering the possibility of yet another tale.

The moment of literary closure is here cast in a mode of narrative open-endedness. Not unlike the many textual genealogies, which provide enigmatic signposts for reading these romance tales, this last volume of the Vulgate Cycle ends by making assertions that pose their own questions. We are left to wonder whether King Arthur is really dead or alive; whether the story will cease or recommence. This is a kind of narrative suspense that calls into question our perception of events, catching us in a literary trap of compelling illusion that offers ambiguity as a viable alternative to verifiable truth.







## Conclusion

If we were to recast Beckett's statement that all of Proust's world comes out of a teacup, we might say that all of Arthur's world comes out of the Holy Grail. This multipurpose vessel is both a cup that gives sustenance and a book that gives life, for the Holy Grail is equated, within these texts, with the Grail story. But the nature of this book is clearly two-fold. On one occasion the *livret* of the *Estoire*, the text that Christ instructs the *copiste* to transcribe and which is, ostensibly, the text we are reading, is shown specifically to revive an entranced man from a speechless death-like stupor (2:33). This kind of rebirth is of course the effect that is typically attributed to the power of Scripture. But when Joseph of Arimathea departs to preach the word of God he does not take with him this Book of the Holy Grail that holds within it the miraculous deeds of Christ and shares the rejuvenative powers of Scripture (3:56). The tool that Joseph carries with him in order to preach the gospel is another kind of text, the Grail vessel. Much like the book that is capable of healing entranced and comatose persons, the Grail is described elsewhere in the narrative as liberating individuals suffering from physical wounds and those possessed by madness.<sup>1</sup> A clear affinity is thus posited between the Holy Story and this venerated

object whose functions intertwine. Just as the Grail story can serve as a liberating agent, the Grail vessel can be used to preach the gospel, each playing thereby a role normally assigned to Scripture.

But the Grail is not itself represented in biblical texts and the *Livres du Graal* depicted in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* is firmly tied to the fictional mode of Arthurian romance.<sup>2</sup> A vernacular tale of adventure, the Grail story recounted by Merlin to Blaise blends Christian miracles with the marvels of Arthur's realm into a single, chivalric fiction. Although the *livret* of the *Estoire* may be accorded the miraculous power of healing, the Arthurian text that recounts this episode diverges from the Sacred Word in almost every respect. Through a plurality of narrative voices alluding to multiple fictional sources, the Grail story actively undermines the univocity and authority of the Scriptural *Verbum* it is supposed to represent.

This elaborate conflation of Grail and text provides an apt paradigm for the ambivalent project behind the Vulgate Cycle as a whole: the attempt to advance notions of theological significance—authority, interpretation, representation, and closure—and replace them with vernacularized imitations in the realm of romance. We have seen how the subversive enterprise of the *Estoire* is echoed more subtly in the patterned motifs of the *Lancelot* where configurations of Incarceration and Liberation, Perception and Deception, and physical Immobility appear at first to be wholly chivalric concerns. In a particularly striking passage of the *Estoire*, however, these very phenomena are described as being the powers of the Godhead: he liberates prisoners, restores sight to the blind, and heals wounded victims, “Nostres sires desloie les prisounés; nostres sires rent la véue del cuer as avulés par les tierriennes fragilités, nostres sires garist les bleciés et les maumis (redrece)” (2:371). By displacing God's powers onto the pages of the fictional tale, the stock motifs of the Vulgate Cycle demonstrate indirectly how the secular Grail text strives in yet another way to play a role normally reserved for divine authority. Conversely, the ostensibly religious interpretations of chivalric events that are

offered by the resident hermits in the *Queste* do not provide the abstract *senefiance* that they promise. As fictional analogues cast in different historical registers, these “interpretations” narrate more than explain. Through a curious double reversal, the Vulgate’s secular tale of combat and adultery is patterned on actions of religious significance although the referent for the avowed “religious” portions of the cycle is mainly literary.

We have seen in chapter 4 how the cycle’s narrative patterns textualize the arguments against literature devised by the church fathers, diffusing thereby criticisms of the literary text as a seductive trap and an unnatural divergence from Truth. The frequency of images of deception, entrapment, and physical impairment in these tales reflects, moreover, the double mouvement embodied in the Grail vessel itself. Although claiming on the one hand that the romance narrative issues from the “bouche de la vérité,” that it descends from a Latin *auctoritas*, that it can perform the therapeutic miracles reserved for Scripture alone, the Vulgate tales proclaim simultaneously their own textual idolatry, underscoring at every turn the repetition that links them firmly to the mode of the *verbum*. This precarious balance is maintained through elaborate mechanisms of literary rewriting in which plural authorial voices undercut the absolute authority of a unique creator, polysemous interpretations take the place of claims to definitive meaning, and repeated patterned motifs obviate the possibility of accurate representation. Alluding repeatedly to the secular orality and literary provenance of the Arthurian tale, the Vulgate texts claim in so doing to convey the Truth of religious texts. Rather than respecting the theological concept of literature as an expression of the helplessness of the human condition,<sup>3</sup> the lengthy prose tales present themselves as the ultimate and audacious usurper of religious authority.

The Grail is even more instrumental in this enterprise than one may suspect. An obvious parallel to the Christian chalice that contains the body of Christ—the Word of God capable of bringing forth life from death—the Grail vessel contains the words of the Grail story, words capable of bringing to life

Arthur and his chivalric entourage. Whereas the force of the Christian tradition rests on the miracle of the Resurrection that attests God's power as the ultimate creator—as he who can produce life from death—the success of the Arthurian tradition relies on a similar phenomenon of rebirth.<sup>4</sup> Here, however, the resurrection of the long-dead King Arthur is accomplished by a fictional voice that effects a wholly literary rebirth. Rather than invoking the afterlife of its central figure as does the Bible, the Vulgate corpus details the former life (or pre-thirteenth-century existence) of the legendary King Arthur. The past life of this pseudohistorical figure is, in the end, as unverifiable as the second coming of Christ.

One goal of these tales is to erase time so that the past can be made present, so that King Arthur can live on, not just in the oral accounts of a memorial culture, or in the fixed documents of chronicle, but in an open-ended and constantly changing romance text. To this end the Vulgate Cycle makes use of a traditional view of time based largely on repetition, as opposed to a more historical view of time bound by linear sequence and the concept of progress. By harking back to former textual moments, these tales derive their authority and validity from the recurrence and repetition that is peculiar to the fictional mode. The truth that they advance is neither theological nor historical but wholly literary.

We are told throughout the Vulgate narratives that when the Grail adventures finally come to an end, prisoners will be liberated, wounded victims will be cured, the blind will regain their sight. More important, the Grail will reveal a transparent meaning that will make sense of the garbled and often illogical Arthurian world. But this resolution is never achieved in the Vulgate texts. The Grail, which is viewed only by Galahad, remains a curious mystery, and the intriguing prophecies surrounding it are never fully explained.

This is romance in its traditional sense as a delight in the unsolved,<sup>5</sup> as a genre held in the tension of ambiguity and uncertainty. The revelation of precise meaning, whatever its message, can only destroy the delicate balance that typically

melds the sacred and the secular, combining truth and falsehood as literary complements. What these romance texts reveal instead is that the very concept of absolute meaning along with the related notions of definitive authority and accurate representation are mere fictions; but fictions possessing extraordinary force. Not unlike the enigmatic Grail vessel that compels us to seek a meaning that remains unverifiable, Arthurian romance is itself both spellbinding and illusive. In a curious way, then, the Vulgate romances make good on their claim to being as powerful as Scripture. They create a world *ex nihilo* in which readers believe, a world born from a paradoxical chalice-cup whose truth resides in the repetiton of Arthurian fictions.



## Notes

### INTRODUCTION

1. I have based my analysis on the following editions: *La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. Albert Pauphilet (Paris: Champion, 1921); *La Mort le roi Artu*, ed. Jean Frappier (Geneva: Droz, 1964). For the *Lancelot* and the *Merlin* I have provided, in most cases, double references: first to the edition by H. Oskar Sommer, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, vols. 2–5 (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institute, 1908–12); and then to the more recent editions by Alexandre Micha, *Lancelot*, vols. 1–6 (Geneva: Droz, 1978–80), and *Merlin* (Geneva: Droz, 1979). For the treatment of the *Estoire* that appears in chapter 2, I have used Eugène Hucher's long version, *Le Saint Graal*, vols. 2–3 (Le Mans: E. Monnoyer, 1875); but within the discussion of narrative patterns in chapter 4, references to the *Estoire* are to the Sommer edition, vol. 1.

2. See Peter Haidu, "Repetition: Modern Reflections on Medieval Aesthetics," *MLN* 92 (1977):875–87.

3. Henceforth, I will refer to the *Estoire del Saint Graal* simply as the *Estoire*, and to the *Estoire de Merlin* as the *Merlin*.

### CHAPTER 1

1. *Lancelot*, ed. A. Micha, 2:112, and variants 2:134, 256, *Queste*, p. 26.

2. *Lancelot*, ed. H. O. Sommer, 4:350–352; ed. A. Micha, 2:391–95.

3. See especially the tales of King Mordrain, Joseph of Arimathea's imprisonment, and Solomon's sword and ship.

4. See especially Albert Pauphilet, "Etudes sur le *Lancelot en prose*," *Romania* 45 (1918–19):514–34; J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), p. 399, n. 55; A. Jeanroy, *Histoire de la nation française*, vol. 12, p. 371; Ferdinand Lot, *Etude sur le "Lancelot en prose"*

(1918; rpt. Paris: Champion, 1954), pp. 7-8. For an alternative reading of medieval texts, see Daniel Poirion, "Roman en vers et roman en prose," *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1978), pp. 74-81; Paul Zumthor, "Genèse et évolution du genre," *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, pp. 60-73; Hans Robert Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," *New Literary History* 10 (Winter 1979): 181-227.

5. Foucault offers an explanation for this phenomenon in stating that the author of a text, in addition to being a historical figure whose association with the text gives it a chronological and geographical grounding, functions as a measure of consistent style, of theoretical and conceptual coherence, and of a constant level of value. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 151.

6. Albert Pauphilet, *Le Legs du Moyen Age* (Melun: Librairie d'Argences, 1950), p. 30.

7. See note 4: Pauphilet, Bruce, Jeanroy, and Lot.

8. See Lot, pp. 7-8; Jean Frappier, *Etude sur "La Mort le roi Artu"* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), pp. 144-46; Myrrha Lot-Borodine, *Trois Essais sur "Le Roman de Lancelot du Lac"* et "*La Queste del Saint Graal*" (Paris: Champion, 1919), p. 3.

9. *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 80. An identical view is taken by Fanni Bogdanow in *The Romance of the Grail* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), which applies Vinaver's theory of thirteenth-century prose elaboration to the post-Vulgate Arthuriad, *Le Roman du Graal*. Arguing in the introductory chapter against the haphazard development of the Vulgate romances, Bogdanow asserts that the additions of redactors were specifically designed to eradicate inconsistencies and make episodes more coherent by including motivations and causes for previously unexplained events.

10. *Queste*, ed. A. Pauphilet, pp. 279-80.

11. Walter Map, a jurist and man of letters in the court of Henry II died in 1219, shortly before the earliest volume of the cycle was composed. On Map's role see Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *L'Arbre et le Pain: Essai sur "la Queste del Saint Graal"* (Paris: SEDES, 1981), pp. 23-31.

12. A curious process of double translation is posited here: Bors speaks presumably in the vernacular, the written record that Walter Map retrieves is in Latin, and the subsequent *contes* reverts to Old French.

13. See R. Howard Bloch, "The Text as Inquest: Form and Function in the Pseudo-Map Cycle," *Mosaic* 8, no. 4 (1975):107-19.

14. *La Mort le roi Artu*, ed. Frappier, p. 119. The tale is punctuated at frequent intervals by similar references to *li contes*; see pp. 19,39,40,55,66,75, 78,81,92,127,137,165,171, etc.

15. *Le Saint Graal*, ed. E. Hucher, sample references are as follows: *Li contes dist or dira*: 2:222, 230, 244, 279, 301, 321, 331, 338, 353, 405, 418, 452; 3:10, 29, 123, 126, 133, 146, 169, 235, 271, 279, 296, 297; *li contes parole, parla, a parlet, avoit parlet*: 2:123, 295, 321, 331 (twice), 404, 418, 431, 452; 3:179; *li contes se taist*: 2:123, 301,



331, 337, 353, 404, 418, 427, 452, 484, 533; 3:73, 125, 307; *li contes coumence*: 2:123; *li contes retourne (retorne)*: 2:484, 496; 3:10, 123, 125, 133, 245, 271 (twice), 279, 296, 297, 308; *li contes laist (laisse) à parler de*: 3:9, 29, 123, 125, 133, 146, 235, 245, 271, 279, 297; *li conte aconta*: 2:295; *li contes conte (contera)*: 2:301, 452; 3:29, *conter*: 3:279; *li contes raconte (a raconter)*: 2:419; *li contes repairet*: 2:457; *li contes laist à conter de*: 2:496.

Reference is also made to *l'estoire*: 2:49, 185, 496; 3:194, 195, 269 (3 times), 271 (3 times), 308 (twice); twice to other *estoires*: 3:161, 269; and to *li livre*: 2:216, 533 (the latter alludes to a different *livre*).

16. For a discussion of the shifting authorial functions in the *Estoire*, see Alexandre Leupin, *Le Graal et la littérature* (Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'homme, 1982), chap. 1. On a related question of authorship in the *Roman de la Rose*, see Evelyn Birge Vitz, "The I of the *Roman de la Rose*," *Genre* 6 (1973):49-75.

17. *li contes devise*: 2:331, 451, 476, 533; 3:235, 295; *li contes a deviset*: 2:433, 442, 476, 477, 478, 484; 3:124, 296, *li contes devisera*: 2:446, 479, 480; 3:307; *deviser*: 3:245; *Jou vous ai deviset* 3:72, *je vous ai devisé* 3:73, *Je vous deviserai* 3:73, *jou vous ai deviset* 3:235; *Je vous ai devisée* 3:295; *Je vous ai contet* 3:73; *Ne poroie jou conter* 3:209.

18. And when we read further, "ne pourqant ançois que il [li contes] die des messages, contera-il coument Nasciens vint [*sic*] . . ." (2:427), it becomes evident that *li contes* here tells of the messengers that the author (*jou*) has spoken of previously; and the author, in turn, announces what the *contes* will narrate subsequently. See also 2:72: "Maintenant se morust Ypocras en tiele manière comme *jou* vous ai deviset . . . si comme *li contes* a deviset" (my emphasis). Other voices can also double that of *li contes*. A woman who meets Mordrain and Nascien tells them her tale as the *conte* has told it: "ele lor contat tout si comme *li contes* la deviset," 3:98.

19. Other references to *jou* include the following: *lairai* 2:155; *dirai* 2:351, 3:303; *jou vous avoit commenchié* 3:427; and *je vous oi parlet* 2:433, for a total of eleven references. *Li contes* is mentioned over 111 times. For a more comprehensive discussion of this phenomenon, see Michèle Perret, "De l'espace romanesque à la matérialité du livre," *Poétique* 50 (April 1982):173-82.

20. The Vulgate Cycle furnishes a concrete example of Peter Haidu's notion that the medieval "author" survives as "the indication of a particular stage of esthetic transformation," "Making It (New) in the Middle Ages: Towards a Problematics of Alterity," *Diacritics*, Summer 1974, p. 3.

21. See Baumgartner, pp. 24-25.

22. The status of this author figure is ambiguous: he is both the narrator and the supposed author or *copiste* of the text we are reading and he is a character in the semiautobiographical tale he recounts.

23. See Roger Dragonetti, *La Vie de la lettre au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 41-61; Eugene Vance, "Desir, rhétorique et texte," *Poétique* 42 (April 1980):137-56; and François Rigolot, "Le Poétique et l'analogique," *Sémantique de la poésie*, ed. G. Genette (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), p. 161.

24. *Merlin*, ed. A. Micha, p. 73.

25. "Molt se merveilla Blaises par plusors foiz des merveilles que Mellins li disoit et toutes voies ces merveilles li sembloient a estre bonnes et beles, si i entendoit molt volentiers" (p. 74).

26. See also *Estoire* 2:236, "Mais or verrons [retournons] à la droite voie del conte qui dist que . . ." and 2:321, "Ansçois retourne la droite voie del estoire sour le roy Moudrains."

27. Map's counterpart in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* is Robert de Boron. See *Est.* 3:194, 269; *Mer.* 290-91.

28. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 80-91, 165; "La Syllepse intertextuelle," *Poétique* 40 (1979):496-501; see also Riffaterre's comment on the adaptability of his system for medieval texts, "L'Intertexte inconnu," *Littérature* 41 (1981):4-7 (special issue on "Intertextualité médiévale"); for earlier studies of intertextuality, see Julia Kristeva, *Théorie de la littérature* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), p. 124, and Laurent Jenny, "La Stratégie de la forme," *Poétique* 27 (1976):257-81 (special issue on intertextuality); and for a discussion of intertextuality as literary borrowing or literary echo, see Karl Uitti, "A propos de philogie," *Littérature* 41 (1981):30-46, and "Intertextuality in *Le Chevalier au Lion*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 2 (1980):3-13.

29. A sign, according to Augustine, is "a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses," *De doctrina*, Book Two, 2:1, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr., *On Christian Doctrine* (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), p. 34; see J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae, Cursus Completus Series Latina* (Paris: 1844-64), 34, 35-36.

30. See Larry Crist, "Les Livres de Merlin," *Senefiance* 7 (1979):197-210. On the other forms of narrative ellipsis, see Leupin, p. 45.

31. That is, a word can be predicated of God only metaphorically but not properly. See *De veritate*, vol. 1, questions 4 and 7, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., *Truth* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952), pp. 168-99, 287-308. The full title of the Latin text is *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. For Latin text see Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera Omnia* (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1949), 9:65, 104-5.

32. For a thorough discussion of the relation between philosophy and poetry in Chartrain thought of the twelfth century, see Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

33. See James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 48-49.

34. *The Complaint of Nature*, trans. Douglas M. Moffat (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1908), p. 40. For Latin text *P.L.* 210, 451. See also Hugh of St. Victor's denunciation of false gospels, which were more intent on weaving a good story than on conveying the truth of history, *Didascalicon: On the Study of Reading*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 107; Latin text in *Didascalicon: De Studio Legendi*, ed. Charles Henry Buttmer (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1939), pp. 77-78, and related com-

ments: that those who read the Word of God as if it were a tale of marvels erroneously turn divine announcements into tales (p. 134; Buttimer, pp. 111–12); that stories can be useful as a tool for teaching Truth (p. 89; Buttimer, p. 59); but Grammar that includes tropes, prose and verse composition, fables, and histories is properly a branch of philosophy offering only the semblance of truth (pp. 88, 102; Buttimer, pp. 54–55, 70).

35. Murphy, p. 49.

36. Alain de Lille, p. 40; *P.L.* 210, 451.

37. See, for example, Augustine's discussion of translation and prophecy in *De doctrina*, Book Two, 12:17, pp. 44–45, 43 and 24:37, pp. 60–61, *P.L.* 34, 53–54, and Hugh of St. Victor on the plurality of possible meanings, *Didascalicon*, pp. 121–22 (Buttimer, pp. 96–97), pp. 149–50 (Buttimer, pp. 128–29).

38. 2 Corinthians 3: 3–9; Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," chaps. 23–24; the dichotomy between letter and spirit is resolved in an extreme formulation by St. Peter Damian, "Mea igitur grammatica Christus est," Epist. 8; *P.L.*, 144, 476.

39. Jean Leclercq, *Initiation aux auteurs monastiques* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1963), p. 244. There are, of course, currents in late medieval theology, in nominalism and even natural philosophy that advance a non-Neo-Platonic world view that resembles in many ways the project of the earlier rhetoricians. See, for example, Edward Grant, "Scientific Thought in Fourteenth-Century Paris: Jean Buridan and Nicole Oresme," in *Machaut's World: Science and Art in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Madelaine Pelter Cosman and Bruce Chandler (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1978), pp. 105–27.

40. Book Two, 23:36, p. 59; *P.L.* 34, 53.

41. Book One, 4:4, pp. 9–10; *P.L.* 34, 20–21.

42. Book Two, 25:39, p. 62; *P.L.* 34, 54.

43. Book Four, 24:31, p. 139; *P.L.* 34, 102.

44. Book Four, 24:31, p. 139, *P.L.* 34, 102; Book One, 4:4, pp. 9–10, *P.L.* 34, 20–21.

45. Book Three, 5:9, p. 84; *P.L.* 34, 69.

46. Book One, 38:42, p. 32; *P.L.* 34, 35–36.

47. *Didascalicon*, p. 56 (Buttimer, p. 16); see note 64, p. 191.

48. *Didascalicon*, p. 56 (Buttimer, pp. 16–17).

49. *Didascalicon*, pp. 121–22 (Buttimer, pp. 96–97).

50. *Didascalicon*, p. 127 (Buttimer, pp. 103–4). See Augustine, *De Ordine* Book II, XII (*Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil*, trans. Robert P. Russell, New York: Cosmopolitan Science and Art Service Company, Inc. 1942, p. 37), for an explanation of the equivalence between grammar and literature. Alain de Lille explains similarly how when Nature copies God's original creation, the *pen* of the composition is guided by spiritual power; otherwise, it would stray in error, *The Complaint*, p. 44; *P.L.* 210, 454 (my emphasis).

51. For examples of vernacular romances condemned as "romans de vanité," see Dragonetti, pp. 34–35, esp. n. 2.

52. This shift is accompanied by a general antiphilosophical movement in the schools of Northern France marked by a tendency to take the *auctores* less seriously and to value modern culture more highly in comparison. See Wetherbee, pp. 5–6. On the treatises themselves, see Edmond Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Champion, 1924); see also Walter B. Sedgwick, "Notes and Emendations to Faral's *Les Arts poétiques*," *Speculum* 2 (1927): 331–43; P. Zumthor, "Rhétorique et poétique," *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 93–124.

53. See Douglas Kelly, "Theory of Composition in Medieval Narrative Poetry and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*," *Medieval Studies* 31 (1969): 117–48.

54. See, for example, Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* II, "Elegia audita est mihi propalare tripartitam versificatoriae facultatis elegantiam. Etenim sunt tria quae redolent in carmine: verba polita, dicendique color, interiorque fatus," Faral, p. 153; Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova* IV, "Quando venit tali sententia culta paratu, / Ille sonus vocum laetam dulcescit ad aurem, / Et fricat interius nova delectatio mentem," Faral, p. 226.

55. See Douglas Kelly, "The Twelfth- and Thirteenth-century Arts of Poetry," *Speculum* 41 (1966):261–78.

56. Faral, pp. 48–54.

57. Murphy, p. 182.

58. Murphy, p. 186.

59. Faral, pp. 204–18; 167–80.

60. See Kelly, "Theory of Composition," pp. 120–22.

61. Ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Champion, 1973), vv. 28–33.

62. Michelle Freeman, "Transpositions structurelles et l'intertextualité: le *Cligès* de Chrétien," *Littérature* 41 (February 1981):51.

63. Michelle Freeman, "Problems in Romance Composition: Ovid, Chrétien de Troyes, and the *Romance of the Rose*," *Romance Philology* 30 (1976–77): 159.

64. For a definition of *translatio studii* see Etienne Gilson, *Les Idées et les lettres* (Paris: Vrin, 1932), pp. 182–85; and for an analysis of Chrétien's use of this phenomenon, Michelle Freeman, *The Poetics of Translation Studii and Con-jointure: Chrétien de Troyes's "Cligès"* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1979). Also on *translatio* see Karl Uitti, "A propos de philologie," *Littérature* 41 (February 1981):32–41, and "Vernacularization and Old French Romance Mythopoesis with Emphasis on Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* in *The Sower and His Seed*, ed. Rupert Pickens (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1983), pp. 81–115.

65. See Gerald Bruns, "The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture," *Comparative Literature* 32 (Spring 1980):113–29; Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme*, p. 100; and Marie de France's mention of the *sorplus de sen* in the prologue to the *Lais*, vv. 9–22.

66. *Le Chevalier de la charrete*, ed. Roques, vv. 25–29; *Le Conte du Graal*, ed. Roach, vv. 66–68; *Cligès*, ed. A. Micha, vv. 18–23, 44.

67. *Erec et Enide*, ed. Roques, vv. 13–14.
68. Bruns, p. 125.
69. Ed. Roques, vv. 19–22.
70. Ed. Muret, vv. 1265–70.
71. Pierre Gallais, "Recherches sur la mentalité du Moyen Age," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 13 (1970):337–47.
72. Gallais, p. 337.
73. Mes tant dirai ge que mialz oeuvre  
ses comandemanz an ceste oeuvre  
que sans ne painne que g'i mete.  
Del CHEVALIER DE LA CHARRETE  
comance Crestiens son livre;  
matiere et san li done et livre  
la contese, et il s'antremet  
de panser, que gueres n'i met  
fors sa painne et s'antancion.  
(vv. 21–29)
74. Zumthor, "Intertextualité et mouvance," *Littérature* 41 (February 1981):  
12. On alterity see also Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval  
Literature," pp. 188–91; Zumthor, "Comments on H. R. Jauss' Article," *New  
Literary History* 10 (Winter 1979):370–71; Zumthor, "Médiéviste ou pas?"  
*Poétique* 31 (1977):319.
75. See Crist, pp. 197–210.
76. C. S. Lewis, "The Genesis of a Medieval Book," *Studies in Medieval and  
Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1966), pp. 36–40.
77. Zumthor, "Le Texte fragment," *Langue Française* 40 (1978):75–82.
78. Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 73.
79. For a concise history of approaches to text editing see Lucien Foulet and  
Mary B. Speer, *On Editing Old French Texts* (Lawrence: Regents Press of  
Kansas, 1979).
80. See Rupert Pickens, ed., *The Songs of Jaufré Rudel* (Toronto: Pontifical  
Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), p. 38.
81. Pickens, p. 23.
82. Dragonetti, p. 48.

## CHAPTER 2

1. For extensive background material on the relationship between oral and  
written traditions in the Middle Ages, see Brian Stock, *The Implications of  
Literacy* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 1
2. Alexandre Micha, *Merlin* (Paris-Geneva: Droz, 1979), pp. 290–91. All  
subsequent references are to the Micha edition.
3. *Le Saint Graal*, ed. Eugène Hucher (Le Mans: Editions Monnoyer, 1875,  
vol. 2, pp. 1–539; vol. 3, pp. 1–309), 2:439. All subsequent references are to the  
Hucher edition.

4. See Larry Crist, pp. 197–210.
5. Other examples of the recording of knights' tales of adventure are as follows: *Lancelot*: 3:428, 429; 4:227, 296; 5:190, 332, 333; and *Merlin*: 2:321, 335, 464.
6. On the ambiguity of *je* see Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Galimard, 1966), pp. 251–57.
7. On rewriting in vernacular texts, see Daniel Poirion, "Écriture et réécriture au Moyen Âge," *Littérature* 41 (February 1981):109–18.
8. M.–D. Chénu, *La Théologie au 12<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957), p. 354.
9. Chénu, *La Théologie*, p. 355. A similar situation obtains in vernacular poetry. See Zumthor's notion that the referent in Provençal lyric is most often a collective text, *Essai*, p. 82.
10. See M.–D. Chénu, "Auctor, Actor, Autor," *Bulletin du Cange: Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 2 (1927):84–85. Chénu offers the example of Simon de Tournai, "De Deo vero cum dicitur, non predicat motus ACTIONEM ab agendo dictam, sed AU(C)TORITATEM ab authentico," p. 85.
11. Michel Zink, *La Prédication en langue romane* (Paris: Champion, 1976), p. 309.
12. Chénu, *La Théologie*, p. 357.
13. For discussion of a similar kind of composition in medieval vernacular sermons, see Zink, pp. 305–41; and on the citing of texts without reference to their author, see Jean Leclercq, *L'Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1957), p. 77.
14. Leo Spitzer, "Note on the Poetic and Empirical "I" in Medieval Authors," *Traditio* 4 (1946):415, n. 3.
15. For examples of tales that are never recounted, see 2:339, 404; 3:307.
16. For other examples of *chà arrière*, see 2:216, 3:124, 179, 295. For *ça avant*, 2:185, 301, 418, 439, 479, 480; 3:307. *Ça avant* can also refer to future portions of the narrative, 2:295.
17. See Leclercq, pp. 80–82; Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 11–76.
18. See also 2:480; 3:229. There is a similar recasting of Nascien's lineage that is given not as a record of past ancestors but as a prophecy of future descendants. In a dream Nascien receives a document that describes his lineage not as "celui dont tu ies descendus, mais ichil qui de toi descendra d'or-en-avant" (3:115).
19. The literary debt to Robert de Boron is acknowledged in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin*, but it is complicated in the latter case by reference to Merlin and Blaise as *dictator* and *scriptor* of the text we read.
20. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 73–81.
21. Ernst Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask (1953; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 314. Curtius cites Alcuin, *Poetae*, 1:285, 66:4 and 288:15.

22. Elsewhere, "celui livre qui devise l'estoire del roi de Perse," 2:533. Reference is also made to *l'estoire*: 2:49, 185, 496; 3:161, 194, 195, 269 (3 times), 271 (3 times), 308 (twice).

23. Pierre Gallais, "Recherches sur la mentalité des romanciers français du Moyen Age," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 7, no. 4 (1964):479-93; Marie-Louise Ollier, "The Author in the Text: The Prologues of Chrétien de Troyes," *Yale French Studies* 51 (1972):26-41; Zumthor, *Essai*, pp. 65-68.

24. *Espurgatoire de St. Patrice*, ed. T. Atkinson Jenkins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903), 1. 2298-99.

25. The use of *nous* in the *Estoire* is as follows: *laisserons à parler* . . . et diront coment nostre sires: 2:50; Si vous dirons du roy Evalach: 2:155; Or lairons à tant . . . si dirons: 2:162; Or parlerons de . . . si lairons atant de ses hoirs: 2:168; Or vous lairons de Tholomer et si vous conterons del roy: 2:222; Or verrons à la droite voie del conte: 2:236; Or lairomes . . . plus n'en parlerons . . . si dirons de: 2:244; Or vous lairions . . . si parlerons: 2:264.

26. On the highly individualized "author-function" in Chrétien's prologues, see Marie-Louise Ollier, pp. 26-41.

27. See also, "or vous lairions à tant del roy Evalach," 2:264.

28. The independent status of this plural authorial *nous* is reinforced further by the constant recurrence of the refrain "ensi comme vous avés oït," which clearly establishes the listening *vous* as a separate entity from the reciter: 2:230, 244, 305, 309, 321, 339, 387, 404, 405, 406, 407, 416 (*nous avés oït*), 419, 448, 458, 460-61, 466, 477; 3:44, 52, 64, 73, 125, 147 (*nous avés oït*), 307.

29. The plurality of authorship thus achieved creates the condition that Zumthor has termed "ça parle," a state in which authorial presence is replaced by the subject of the enunciation. *Essai*, p. 69; and "From the Universal to the Particular in Medieval Poetry," *Modern Language Notes* 85 (1970):817. See also Bernard Cerquiglini's observation that in the prose romance authorial intervention is either eliminated or depersonalized, *La Parole Médiévale* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1981), pp. 111-16.

30. See Zumthor's remark that instead of an author the medieval audience seeks a "speaker," *Essai*, p. 42, and his comment that "toute origine s'efface, la voix s'étouffe dans un texte composite, neutre, oblique, destructeur des identités personnelles," *Essai*, p. 69.

31. See for example Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. M. Roques (Paris: Champion, 1955), p. 1:

d'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes,  
que devant rois et devant contes  
depecier et corronpre suellent  
cil qui de conter vivre vuelent, (vv. 19-22)

and *Le Conte du Graal* where Chrétien claims to offer "le meillor conte," ed. William Roach (Paris: Droz, 1959), p. 3, v. 63.

32. Gallais (1964), pp. 483-86.

33. Gallais (1964), pp. 486-87.

34. A close association between textuality and orality is also found in many

medieval Latin texts where the expressions *sacra pagina* and *lectio divina* are used interchangeably to denote a narrative that was read. For St. Jerome and members of both monastic and scholastic communities in the Middle Ages, the *lectio divina* was equivalent to the written words one read, or to a specific passage chosen for reading (Leclercq, p. 71). And this reading was done, for the most part, aloud. In addition to Augustine's famous statement in the *Confessions*, in which he expresses surprise at St. Ambrose's *legere in silentio* (6:3), we have the testimony of a thirteenth-century Cistercian monk in Germany who confesses that he reads aloud word by word (C. G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion* [Cambridge: The University Press, 1923-50], 1:38). It can be demonstrated further that the person reading aloud was actually a listener as well, one who "listened to the words pronounced." It is in this sense that *legere* was used as a synonym of *audire*, oral reading necessarily implied self-hearing (See Margit Frenk, "On 'Reading' and 'Readers' in the Post Gutenberg Era," paper delivered at the Eighth Convocation in Romance Philology, 24 October 1981, University of California, Santa Barbara). The function of author, speaker, and reader are conflated further when we remember that in monastic circles, at least, writing itself was done *à haute voix*. The author pronounced aloud to himself the words of the text he composed. His rough draft, inscribed in wax, was then copied by a scribe or *notarius*. But the author, in keeping with his role as a speaker of words, alone retained the title of *dictator* (Leclercq, p. 166).

35. "Jou sui chil de qui li Escripture dist: 'Toute sapience vient de Dieu nostre segnor,'" *Est.* 2:8.

36. On the relation between truth and the authorial voice in the chronicles, see Michèle Perret, ". . . A la fin de sa vie ne fuz-je me," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 183 (1981):17-37; "L'Invraisemblable vérité," *Le Moyen Age* (October 1983):25-35; Jeanette Beer, "Author-Formulae and the Differentiation of Material in Villehardouin's *La Conquête de Constantinople*," *Romance Philology* 32, no. 3 (February 1979):298-302.

### CHAPTER 3

1. Paris: Champion, 1921, pp. 16, 26, 167, 13, 157, 14, 169, 175 (for an extensive revision of Pauphilet's thesis, see Pauline Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry* [Geneva: Droz, 1979]).

2. See *De doctrina christiana*, Book Two, 22:35, pp. 58-59; Book One, 4:4, p. 9 (*P.L.* 34, 52-53 and 20-21 respectively).

3. Albert Pauphilet, ed., *La Queste del Saint Graal: Roman du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1921), pp. 26-31. All subsequent page notations for the *Queste* refer to this edition.

4. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York, 1875), pp. 437-38; Goethe, *Maximen*, trans. René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven, 1955), 1:211.

5. Pauphilet, pp. 161, 27-46.

6. See Paul Zumthor, "Récit et anti-récit: le *Roman de la Rose*," *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 259.

7. Pauphilet, pp. 157-58, 171. The confusion of two allegorical modes is



compounded in the discussion of Perceval's temptation, which Pauphilet offers as an example of the *Queste's* parabolic composition. Contradicting his previous description of the parabolic process as essentially interpretative, Pauphilet now describes it as constructed allegory, "Il semble que ce soient là les jeux d'une imagination dérégulée: en réalité c'est un travail méthodique et savant. Ce conte est un assemblage de transpositions dont chacune, prise à part, rend avec exactitude des nuances de la pensée" (p. 161).

8. "La Quête du récit," *Critique* (March, 1969):199, 202.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 213.

11. Pauphilet, pp. 169, 193.

12. A similar example is found in the "Histoire du Roi Mordrain," pp. 83-86.

13. Other examples of interpretation which explains how the custom was established or how the adventure came to pass are found in the "Mort du Religieux" (pp. 120-23); "Chateau Carcelois" (pp. 231-33), and "La Lepreuse" (p. 239).

14. Here the *Queste* can be seen both as reflecting and undermining the traditional association between *histoire* (or *estoire*) and truth. Since in biblical exegesis the *historia* was considered to be the *sensus literalis* of the biblical text, this "historical truth" was accorded a superior status to that of a purely *romanesque* narrative. In the *Queste*, however, historical truth is guaranteed by the fictive *contes*. See H. R. Jauss, "La Transformation de la forme allégorique," *L'Humanisme médiéval dans les littératures romanes du XIIe au XIVe siècles*, ed. Anthime Fourrier (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1962), pp. 120-21.

15. It is important to note that some of the analogues discussed above contain only two terms of the three-part paradigm. Yet the third term is implicitly present because of its participation in the tiered scene of the three tables, and by simple syllogism: if Joseph's chair is like Christ's, and if Joseph's chair resembles Galahad's special seat, then Galahad's chair is also Christ-like.

16. This process parallels the tendency among monastic authors to reuse elements of previous accounts when describing the life of a saint. See Leclercq, p. 157.

17. The interpretation continues in several parts: the double Christological/Tropological parallel is elaborated as the body that Galahad finds in the tomb is equated with the Jews who refused Christ, and the voice is linked with their denunciation of Christ to Pilate (ll. 12-21, p. 39). A second section has a purely historical function as it recounts the adventures of other Arthurian knights who have come to the tomb in the period before Galahad's arrival (ll. 21-28, p. 39). A final segment attributes Galahad's success in scaring the devil away from the tomb to his innocence (ll. 29-32, p. 39).

18. A tropological element is added to historical explanation in the scenes of Mordrain (p. 86) and the Mort du Religieux (pp. 123-27) as well. The interpretation of Melyant's adventure (pp. 44-46) contains no historical dimension (be it biblical, Josephan or Arthurian) and offers only a tropological explanation.

19. An equivalent passage is included in the account of the "Aventure de la tombe," p. 38, lines 13-26.

20. This process is not unlike that found in much monastic exegesis where Scripture is interpreted by reference to other Scriptural passages. See Leclercq, p. 79. It reminds us as well of Guiette's contention that the *senefiance* of vernacular tales is not designed to explain but to intrigue a reader interested in the obscure, the enigmatic, and the incomprehensible, p. 46.

All literary allegory is, in this view, equivocal because the symbols used to express it are not precise or singular but capable of changing meaning or colliding with one another in a superimposition of meanings (p. 48). This fact is demonstrated most clearly by critical studies of allegorical works which derive different and equally feasible readings from a given text. On the wide range of meanings advanced by Pauphilet alone for the Holy Grail, see Baumgartner, pp. 111-12.

21. Pauphilet, pp. 171, 158.

22. See Joseph Mazzeo, "Allegorical Interpretation and History," *Comparative Literature*, no. 1 (Winter, 1978):6-9.

23. Pauphilet, p. 171.

24. For other examples of interpretation supplied by Pauphilet see pp. 153-156.

25. Mazzeo, n. 3, p. 3. For a thorough discussion of this problem see Dan Otto Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

26. Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, pp. 11-76.

27. See Leclercq, p. 79; Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15:ix, 15.

28. See Jean Misrahi, "Symbolism and Allegory in Arthurian Romance," *Romance Philology* 17 (February, 1964):561; Henri de Lubac, *L'Exégèse médiévale: Les Quatre sens de l'écriture* (Paris: Aubier, 1959).

29. Lubac, p. 1.

30. Mazzeo, p. 6.

31. Further analogues are found in the parable of the *besanz*, pp. 63 ff., and the parable of the *festin*, pp. 127 ff.

32. See Rosemund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 427; Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 13.

33. We are reminded here of Bezzola's useful distinction between symbolism and allegory: the former admits a plurality of possible explanations for each event or symbol while allegorical discourse rests on the notion that there is one correct and precise interpretation (Reto R. Bezzola, *Le Sens de l'aventure et de l'amour* (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1947), p. 77. For a discussion of allegory as a strictly binary system dependent upon the duality of literal and allegorical meaning see Jauss, "La Transformation," p. 115.

34. Interpretation serves the same purpose in the account of Lancelot's

dream (pp. 134 ff.), Bohort's dream (pp. 171 ff.), and the "tournoi symbolique" (pp. 140 ff.).

35. "Quant li rois Varlans vit l'espee si trenchant, si pensa qu'il retourneroit por prendre le fuerre. Et lors revint à la nef et entra dedenz et remist l'espee ou fuerre; et si tost come il ot ce fet, si chai morz devant cest lit" (p. 204).

36. "CIL QUI PLUS ME PRISERA PLUS I TROVERA A BLASMER AU GRANT BESOIGN QUE IL NEL PORROIT CUIDIER; ET A CELUI A QUI JE DEVROIE ESTRE PLUS DEBONERE SERAI JE PLUS FELONESSE" (p. 206).

37. Pauphilet, p. 172.

38. Only one incident lacks both interpretation and prediction in the text: the adventure of the Espee Brisiee (p. 266). It is, however, described as having been recounted earlier, "l'Espee Brisiee dont li contes a ja devisé autre foiz, cele dont Joseph ot esté feruz parmi la quisse" (p. 266).

39. "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," (no ed.), Cahiers de Royaumont, Philosophie, no. 6, 1967:189-91.

40. *The Poetria Nova of Geoffrey de Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), pp. 24, 58; see also Sandra Ness Ihle, *Malory's Grail Quest* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 54-109.

41. For a discussion of the *simulacrum* in the Vulgate Cycle, the way in which an illusion of truth is created through the pretense of an absolute signifier, see Leupin, chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 4

1. See chapter one, pp. 21-25.

2. See Faral, pp. 61-84; Edgar de Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1946), 2:16, 52, 63; Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, pp. 68-122; Douglas Kelly, *The Medieval Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Faral also describes a second type of *ars poetriae* devoted entirely to tropes and figures, pp. 48-54.

3. Margaret F. Nims, trans., *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), p. 46.

4. See Faral, pp. 89-90.

5. Faral, p. 90.

6. "Sententia cum sit / Unica, non uno veniat contenta paratu, multiplice forma / Dissimuletur idem; varius sis et tamen idem," Faral, p. 204. English translation taken from Nims, p. 24.

7. "et tempora tardes, / Dans ita clementum verbis," Faral, p. 204; Nims, p. 24.

8. De Bruyne, 1:231; Faral, pp. 54-60; Vinaver, *Rise of Romance*, pp. 68-98.

9. Eugene Vance, "Le Combat érotique chez Chrétien de Troyes," *Poétique* 12 (1972):565.

10. See Zumthor's description of the "causalités impliquées et ambiguës" in romance, *Essai*, p. 345.

11. Vance, "Combat érotique," p. 565; Norris Lacy, "Form and Pattern in *Cligès*," *Orbis Litterarum* 25, no. 3 (1970):307-13; "Thematic Structure in the *Charrete*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 12, no. 1 (1972):13-18; "Spatial Form in Medieval Romance," *Yale French Studies* 51 (1974):160-69; Douglas Kelly, "The Source and Meaning of *conjointure* in Chrétien's *Erec*," *Viator* 1 (1970):179-200; Matilda Bruckner, *Narrative Invention in Twelfth-century French Romance* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1980), pp. 15-113.

12. Albert Pauphilet, "Etude sur le *Lancelot en Prose*," *Romania* 45 (1918-19): 514-34; J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 1:399, n. 55; Alfred Jeanroy, *Histoire de la nation française* (Histoire des Lettres), 2:371.

13. Ferdinand Lot, *Etude sur le "Lancelot en Prose"* (1918; rpt. Paris: Champion, 1954), pp. 7-8; Jean Frappier, *Etude sur "La Mort le roi Artu"* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), pp. 144-46; Rosemund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 369-70; Eugene Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 80. The comments of Myrrha Lot-Borodine are typical of this group. She reiterates Lot's contention that the cycle is "un tout composé, une oeuvre où passe le souffle d'une inspiration personnelle" rather than "un assemblage très lâche de versions indépendantes ou imitées les unes des autres," *Trois Essais sur "Le roman de Lancelot du Lac" et de "La Queste del Saint Graal"* (Paris: Champion, 1919), p. 3. The division between the scholars who argue for single authorship of the Vulgate Cycle and those insisting on a series of *remanieurs* whose work extended over centuries is reminiscent of the split between "traditionalists" and "individualists" in epic scholarship. See Juan Ramón Menéndez-Pidal, "*La Chanson de Roland*" y el neotraditionalismo (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1959).

14. Lot, p. 8; Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, p. 82.

15. Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, p. 128. Vinaver here follows Lot's theory of *entrelacement*, *Etude sur le "Lancelot"*, pp. 17-28.

16. Lot, pp. 6, 63-64, 262.

17. "From Motive to Ornament," *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, ed. Jerome Mandel and Bruce Rosenberg (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 153.

18. See Lot, p. 28; Vinaver, "Motive," p. 152. It is difficult to reconcile Vinaver's apparent preference for the well-crafted tale with his notion of decorative logic. He explains, for example, how in the *Suite de Merlin* Morgan's adventures are inessential to the development of the narrative, but understandable as decorative textual flourishes ("Motive," p. 152). Yet in his analysis of the Balin episode, each version is described as a necessary elaboration that contributes to the subtle development of theme, "several faint visions superimposed one upon another served to illumine the last and greatest of them" (*Rise of Romance*, p. 110). In this case each element is considered indispensable to the creation of a coherent whole.

19. *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 38. Poirion describes the "and then" structure of medieval prose narrative as an obsession with temporality. Through constant repetition of *après, lors, avant*, "le récit donne le sentiment d'un devenir inexorable et progressif," "Romans en vers," *GRLMA*, p. 78.

20. Frye, *Secular Scripture*, p. 51.

21. Vinaver, *Rise of Romance*, p. 68; Lot, p. 28.

22. See Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), and his predecessors: J. J. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936):272; Curtius, "Zur Interpretation des Alexiusliedes," *ZRP* 56 (1936):113-37; and W. Kellerman, *Beihefte zur ZRP* 88 (1936).

23. Walter J. Ong, S. J., *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 27.

24. For an explanation of editions used see n. 2 of the Introduction. Abbreviations that appear in this chapter are as follows: when a double reference is given for the *Lancelot*, the volume and page number of the Sommer edition appear first, followed by "M" to indicate Micha and the appropriate volume and page number (e.g., 4:130; M, 1:332). Sommer's volume 3 is not cross-referenced here since both editors use the same base manuscripts for the texts in this volume. The *Queste del Saint Graal* is abbreviated as "Q," *La Mort le roi Artu* is referred to as "LMA," Micha's *Merlin* as "Mer," and Hucher's *Estoire* as "Est." Texts in the Sommer edition are indicated by volume only: *Estoire* (1), *Merlin* (2), *Lancelot* (3-5). The text of Micha's *Merlin* corresponds to the first 87 pages of Sommer 2.

25. Todorov and Ducrot, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 259.

26. See Bruckner, p. 49.

27. See Zumthor, *Essai*, pp. 151-53, where he uses the terminology of F. Czerny to define the motif in medieval lyric as "une unité de formalisation élémentaire des contenus," and Zumthor's allied discussion of "types" in *Essai*, pp. 82, 95.

28. In my transcription of Sommer's text I have regularized the usage of *u* and *v*.

29. See also *Lancelot* 4:175; M 2:33, Galahad's tomb; and *Lancelot* 4:279; M 2:217, Galehot's tomb.

30. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2d ed., rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 22-23.

31. "nec plane detege, sed rem / Innue per notulas," Faral, p. 204; Nims, p. 24.

32. "res in medium facie non prodit aperta, / Nec sua vox deservit ei, sed vox aliena, / Et sic se quasi nube tegit, sub nube serena," Faral, p. 229; Nims, p. 54.

33. For a discussion of yet another type of amplification in romance see Douglas Kelly, "Senpres est ci senpres là: Motif Repetition and Narrative

Bifurcation in Bérout's *Tristan*," *Voices of Conscience*, ed. Raymond J. Cormier (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), pp. 131-42.

34. Hill:5:3, 33, 89, 236; M 4:1, 59-60, 169; M 5:93; Chapel: 4:339; M 2: 366-67; Church/Monastery: 4:174, 107; M 2:31; M 1:229.

35. One could also add to the list the non-Arthurian romances of *Floire et Blancheflor*, *Partenopeu de Blois*, Hué de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*, and Aimon de Varenne's *Florimont*. See Bruckner, pp. 18, 21.

36. This process is what Vinaver terms following themes in their "simultaneous presence," *Rise of Romance*, p. 81.

37. "nec sermo perambulet in re, / Sed rem circuiens longis ambagibus ambi / Quod breuiter dicturus eras," Faral, p. 204.

38. Faral, p. 89.

39. See Jean Cohen, "Théorie de la figure," *Communications* 16 (1970):23; Jakobson, R., *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), pp. 66-67; and J.-F. Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), p. 254.

40. Cohen, p. 17.

41. See for example Q, 83, 110, 258, and 2:135.

42. See also 5:3-10.

43. "Sed tanquam sub nube latet transsumptio verbi; / Et quia sic positum sedet in caligine verbum, / Mobile nomen ei det lumen et adiuuet illud.

Jam mobile nomen / Verbum promouit," Faral, p. 223. English translation from Nims, p. 46.

44. The scene at the Estroite Marche is based on an unevenly matched pair of motifs. Although imprisonment is evoked by the motif of enchanted doors (Table 1:29), liberation is rendered not through the opening of double doors (Table 3:14) but through a functional variant: crossing the bridge (Table 3:8).

45. Gauvain is omitted from the incident in most Vulgate manuscripts and in Micha's edition, although mention of the second pathway, the Eve Doloureuse, remains in Micha M 2:53.

46. See Zumthor, "Le Grand Chant Courtois," *Essai*, pp. 189-243.

47. Lot, p. 61.

48. For a discussion of the difference between cumulative thematic development and the more sequential arrangement of prose, see Berkley Peabody, *The Winged Word* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 207.

49. See Zumthor's definition of romance composition as "cumulative, énumérative, étalée en surface plutôt que hiérarchisée et organisée en profondeur," *Essai*, p. 354.

50. For a discussion of generic coherence see Eugene Falk, *Types of Thematic Structures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); and "Stylistic Forces in the Narrative," *Patterns of Literary Style*, ed. Joseph Strelka (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), pp. 42-51.

51. See Haidu, "Repetition," pp. 875-87; *Didascalicon*, pp. 121-56.

52. "On The Spirit," ch. 23, 24; P.L. 44, 223-25; *De doctrina*, Book Three, 5-6, pp. 84-85, P.L. 34, 68-69.

53. Zumthor, *Essai*, p. 357.

54. On the question of the historical King Arthur, see Kenneth Jackson, "The Arthur of History," *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 1–11; A. O. H. Jarman, "The Delineation of Arthur in Early Welsh Verse," *An Arthurian Tapestry, Essays in Memory of Lewis Thorpe*, ed. Kenneth Varty (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1981), pp. 1–21; Rachael Bromwich, "Concepts of Arthur," *Studia Celtica* 10–11 (1975–76):163–81; Thomas Jones, "The Early Evolution of the Legend of Arthur," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 8 (1964):3–21.

55. Georges Duby, "Memories With No Historian," *Yale French Studies* 59 (1980):12.

56. Other instances of wounding are as follows: Lancelot is wounded in the thigh by Méléagant (4:43; M, 1:92), Keu is wounded in the thigh by Lancelot (3:166), Alain and Pellinor are both wounded in the thigh (2:159), Lancelot and Bors are wounded in the side by a lance (4:303; M, 2:273), Nascien is wounded in the shoulder (1:163), as are Claudas (3:62), Rions (2:418), and Peter (1:264), an unnamed man is wounded in the left hand (*Est*, 2:98), Lancelot is wounded in the face (3:132).

57. Other examples of weapons rendered useless are: sword stuck in the shield (4:314; M, 2:301), sword on a bed (Q, 202), twelve swords are buried as part of Merlin's treasure (2:251), Lancelot's shield is hung in St. Stephens at Camelot (LMA, 161), Solomon's sword breaks (1:161).

58. Peter is healed of his wound (1:272), the sword is removed from Joseph's thigh but remains broken (1:256), Nascien's wound is healed by a hermit (1:194), the spear is withdrawn from Joseph's thigh and his wound is healed (1:80), the Holy Ghost cures Nascien's wounds (1:75), a wounded and maimed man is cured (Q, 275–76), Galahad cures the Roi Méhaignié (Q, 271–72) and Mordrain (Q, 263), Melyant is healed at a monastery (Q, 43), a shield heals a man who lost his hand (Q, 33), Lancelot removes an arrow from a knight's thigh (5:268; M, 5:181), Joseph's thigh wound is healed (4:327; M, 2:338), Lancelot's wounds are healed in the churchyard at Escalon (4:112; not mentioned in M, 1:266), Clamachides is healed by Joseph's shield (*Est*, 3:137). Arthur withdraws the sword from the stone (2:83; Mer, 275), Mordrain joins two sections of a broken sword (1:163).

59. Faral, p. 204; Nims, p. 24.

60. *De doctrina*, 13:138.

61. Mordrain falls into a trance (1:102), Lancelot is made unconscious by Morgan (4:140; M, 1:349), the author is knocked unconscious while reading (1:6), a mortally wounded knight is carried by on a litter (Q, 87), a woman accompanies a wounded, comatose knight (3:321).

62. Zumthor, *Essai*, p. 342.

63. This should be seen in contrast to Vinaver's theory of decorative motifs that he considers to be pure ornamentation, embellishments without semantic function, "Motive," p. 152 ff.

64. See Jakobson on metonymy, "Deux Aspects du langage," pp. 61–67.

65. For a discussion of similar metonymy in Villon's poetry, see Evelyn Birge

Vitz, *The Crossroad of Intentions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 32. A related form of composition can be seen in the technique of "irradiation" employed by Proust, although contextual factors play a much greater role in Proust's texts than in the Vulgate romances. See Gerard Genette, "La Métonymie chez Proust," *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 43-63.

66. Jean Rychner, *L'Articulation des phrases narratives dans "La Mort le roi Artu"* (Geneva: Droz, 1970), p. 235. See also H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1945), pp. 142-44; and Erich Auerbach, "Roland Against Ganelon," *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 96-122.

67. In Lancelot's case the physical wound is replaced entirely by blindness and immobility as the sole markers of his captivity.

68. "Biax sire Diex, ce est en amende de ce que je me sui meffet vers vos" (Q, 110).

69. Other allomorphs of the Dangerous Chair are as follows: A knight sits in the honored seat at the Round Table and disappears (2:157), and Moys is expelled from Christ's seat at the Last Supper by seven flaming hands (1:248).

70. There are also cases in which the Veil serves alone, without mention of a recognizable prison, to indicate a kind of visual entrapment. When Arthur, for example, is deceived by the False Guenevere's potion into thinking she is the real queen (4:50; M, 1:107 no potion), the king is described by his barons as mad, as suffering from an impairment of reason and perception that parallels Lancelot's frenetic trances at Camille's castle. Although Arthur is not physically confined, he is held captive, in a sense, by his inability to see clearly. Lancelot is similarly victimized by Pelles' potion, which induces him to sleep with Helaine thinking that she is Guenevere (5:109-10; M, 4:207), and again by Morgan's spell making him dream and subsequently believe that Guenevere has another lover (4:151; M, 1:370). Whether they are seduced by Potion, Spell, or Dream, all of these protagonists are trapped by deception and become the prisoners of faulty vision.

71. Ong, p. 53.

72. Hans Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960), pp. 68-69.

73. Ong, p. 53.

74. To avoid inappropriate comparison between orally composed narrative and the prose romances, which were most likely written and then read aloud to an audience, we can rely on the useful distinction between "traditional" tales and "oral narrative." See Larry D. Benson, "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry," *PMLA* 81 (1966):335-37; H. R. Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," p. 190. On "epic" features of the *Roman de Thèbes*, see A. Micha, "Couleur épique dans le *Roman de Thèbes*," *Romania* 91 (1970):145-60.

75. Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 35.



76. See Hans Swarzenski, *Monuments of Romanesque Art*, 2d ed. (1967; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), plates 2–3.

77. On the concept of "register," see Zumthor, *Essai*, pp. 231–32, and on narrative template see Michael Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 14, "But any one Gestalt or *spñota* beggars definition, for it is itself undifferentiated with respect to any describable phonological feature. The given word, phrase, or sentence is only a kind of hypostasis of this entity."

78. See Nagler, p. 14, n. 19 where he quotes Chomsky's *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 36, "One cannot hope to determine either the underlying abstract forms or the processes that relate them to signals by introspection."

79. Nagler, p. 40.

80. Lord, pp. 99–123.

81. Propp, pp. 27, 29.

82. *De doctrina*, Book Two, 1. 34; *P.L.* 34, 35–36.

83. "Quant il orent eu le premier mes, si lor avint si merveilleuse aventure que tuit li huis dou palés ou il mengoient et les fenestres clostrent par eles en tel maniere que nus n'i mist la main."

84. Meaning in this case would result from a whole series of formalizations (see Zumthor, *Essai*, p. 93).

85. See Zumthor, *Essai*, p. 369; Poirion, "Roman en vers," p. 81.

86. Actually, all romance can be defined in these terms. See Zumthor, "Genèse et évolution," p. 64. The revivification of a historical past through fictive and imaginative versions of it is also, at bottom, the impetus behind the *chanson de geste*. See Poirion, "Chanson de geste ou épopée?" *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 10 (1972):20.

87. This is repetition in the Freudian sense, characterized generally as a return of the repressed, which can be understood in literature as the search for the missing term of metaphor. See Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," *Yale French Studies* 55–56 (1977):280–300.

88. *De doctrina*, Book One, 38. 32; *P.L.* 34, 35.

89. *De doctrina*, Book Four, 14. 139; *P.L.* 34, 102.

90. See chapter 1, pp. 21–25.

91. *Didascalicon*, pp. 58, 102, 107; Buttimer, pp. 19, 70, 77.

92. *De doctrina*, Book One, 22. 18; *P.L.* 34, 26. *De doctrina*, Book Two, 7. 39; *P.L.* 34, 39–40; *De doctrina*, Book Two, 6:37–38; *P.L.* 34, 38–39.

## CHAPTER 5

1. Rychner, *L'Articulation des phrases narratives*, p. 215.

2. Frye, *Secular Scripture*, p. 38.

3. Alfred Adler, "Problems of Aesthetic versus Historical Criticism in *La Mort le roi Artu*," *PMLA* 65 (1950):933.

4. Jean Frappier, ed., *La Mort le roi Artu: Roman du XIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1964), pp. 76–78, 83–87.

5. "Car nos savons bien que la reïne ocist le chevalier dont ele est apelee; si le vi et meint autre. Or esgardez se ge la puis deffendre loiaument," pp. 100–101.

6. "Or creroie ge bien que Mador fust en mauvese querele; car comment que ses freres moreust, je jurroie seur seinz au mien escient qu'onques la reïne n'i pensa desloiauté ne traison," p. 104.

7. See Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 13–62.

8. "Je vos respont que ge sui morte por le plus preudome del monde et por le plus vilain: ce est Lancelos del Lac, qui est li plus vilains que ge sache, car onques ne le soi tant prier o pleurs et o lermes que il volsist de moi avoir merci," p. 89.

9. "Or vos requier ge, fet li rois, par la foi que vos me devez et que vos m'avez ici plevie. que vos me diez qui ces ymages portrest, se vos en savez la verité." And Morgan responds, "Et ge le vos dirai donc en tel maniere que ja ne vos en mentirai de mot," p. 62.

10. "Il l'ama orendroit plus qu'il n'avoit onques mes fet a nul jor, et ele ausint lui; et se demenerent si folement que li pluseur de leanz le sorrent verairement, et messire Gauvains meismes le sot tout apertement, et ausi firent tuit si quatre frere," p. 107.

11. "'Sire, fet Agravains, il vos est si loiaus qu'il vos fet desenneur de la reine vostre fame et qu'il l'a conneüe charnelment.' Quant li rois entent ceste parole, si mue couleur et devint pales, et dist: 'Ce sont merveilles,'" p. 109.

12. "Gauvain, fet li rois, fuiez de ci, car vos estes li hom en qui ge ne me fierai jamés; car mauvesement vos estes contenuz envers moi, quant vos saviez ma honte et la souffriez ne ne le me fesiez asavoir," p. 112.

13. "Sire, fet ele, je sui vostre plus charnel amie et si ai a non Morgain et sui vostre suer; et vos me deüssiez mieuz connoistre que vos ne me connoissiez," p. 60.

14. "Quant Mador entent la debonereté et la franchise que cil li offre, il connoist maintenant que ce est Lancelos," p. 106.

15. See Zumthor, *Essai*, p. 368.

16. Todorov, "La Quête du récit," pp. 200–208.

17. "Talis transsumptio verbi/ Est tibi pro speculo: quia te specularis in illo/ Et proprias cognoscis oves in rure alieno," Faral, p. 222.

## CONCLUSION

1. See for example 1:287; 5:400; 6:43.

2. See Leupin's analysis of the Grail as the ultimate simulacrum, chapter 4.

3. See Leclercq, p. 249; St. Peter Damian, "Mea igitur grammatica Christus est," *Epist.* 8; *P. L.*, 144, 476; St. Augustine, "Si autem se propter se diligit, non se refert ad Deum; sed ad seipsum conversus, non ad incommutabile aliquid

convertitur," *De doctrina christiana*, 1. 22. 21; *P. L.*, 34, 26; and St. Bernard, *Epist.* 106.2. *P. L.*, 182, 242.

4. For a detailed analysis of the Vulgate Cycle as a "mime perverse" of Christian sacrifice, see Leupin, chapters 2 and 6.

5. Guiette, *Questions de littérature*, pp. 53–54.



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allel the fundamental pluralism of the manuscript tradition in the medieval period, we can begin to see, she argues, how rewriting in various guises typifies the very nature and function of textuality in medieval vernacular romance. If the repetition of stock episodes in the Vulgate corpus poses special problems for the modern reader by defying those narrative constraints generally associated with the well-wrought tale, the allied repetition of competing authorial voices and the systematic recasting of chivalric adventures into interpretative glosses provide other instances of rewriting that work in concert to undermine the most basic tenets of modern literary history and medieval theological Truth.

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Dr. Burns is Associate Professor of French at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

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