

OUTLINE OF IMPORTANT THEMES AND QUESTIONS

CONCERNING THE VULGATE CYCLE:

HISTORY OF THE GRAIL, MERLIN, PROSE LANCELOT, QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL, DEATH OF KING ARTHUR

Unlike the individual romances of the late 12th century, when the unknown author(s) or architect of the Vulgate Cycle begin work on this series of stories, it is the *end* of Arthur's reign which takes center stage. In a sense, we go back to the chronicle tradition where we find the "whole" of Arthur's story--expanded, moralized, Christianized, and inextricably tied to the illicit love of Lancelot and Guenevere. The overall feeling of some critics is that even though we sense that the fall of Arthur's kingdom is inevitable, the authors were, to a large degree, hemmed in by their sources (both chronicles and earlier romances). At the end of the *Death of King Arthur* there is a sense that the outcome could have been different. Arthur was ready to forgive everyone (Lancelot, Guenevere, et al). But the sources of the story dominated the outcome.

The Vulgate Cycle, comprised of thousands of pages presents, as Ruth Cline states in her Introduction to her translation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Arthurian river and its many tributaries: fierce knights, adventures of all sorts, damsels (both in control and in distress!), great animals, marriage, fame, heartbreak, repentance, retaliation, reconciliation, treachery. In short, it is a witty, erudite and passionately *human world* that is to be found in the pages of the Vulgate.

THE PROSE MERLIN AND THE SUITE DU MERLIN:

From his sketchy beginnings in his first appearances in Geoffrey and Wace, Merlin emerges as a fully developed figure in the vernacular only around 1200 in Robert de Boron's poem *Merlin*. Robert had already written a verse narrative on Joseph of Arimathea and the origin of the Grail and his Merlin poem was intended as a continuation, to be followed by a Grail romance centering on the figure of Perceval. We do not know how far he got in his project for the trilogy. We do have prose translations of the *Joseph* and *History of the Grail* (the *Estoire du Graal*) that may have been prepared by Robert himself.

The *Merlin* and the *Suite* (both anonymous as far as we know) were envisaged as a complex story tied in to the Grail story. It begins with Merlin's demonic conception in pre-Arthurian times and leads to his death at the hands of the Lady of the Lake. Merlin both participates directly in the action and helps to shape it through his special powers. The *Merlin* contains a bewildering (and sometimes incoherent) number of adventures and sub-plots and ends with Arthur's accession to the throne. The *Suite* goes beyond Merlin's death and constantly reminds the reader of the overarching concern: that the subject of this story is the Grail.

The "Plot to create Merlin" emphasizes the importance of the birth of Jesus as the savior of

mankind: an example of God's forgiveness for all sins and transgressions and His love of mankind to the extent that he would send His son to earth in fleshly form to redeem fallen man. The emphasis is placed on the fact that God can "pardon sinners up to the last moment. Whoever embraces Him will be saved. Even someone who has always performed our works is not lost to us if he repents." This is the essential ethos of the legend of the Holy Grail. It is a redemptive pattern, repeated over and over again in all the parts of the Vulgate Cycle and goes far to explain how even Lancelot can be saved.

In "Merlin's Birth and Defense of His Mother" the author stresses the importance of Merlin's free will to choose to do either the Devil's work or God's.

Merlin will dictate the story of the coming of the Grail to Britain (what we know as the *Estoire du Graal*), the story of Joseph of Arimathea to Blaise. These facts will be *written down* so that the stories will teach people who hear them read.

There is then a long re-working of the prophecies found in Geoffrey, the erection of Stonehenge, the relation between the Table of the Last Supper and the creation of the Round Table. This is the method of "backfilling" (of creating "prequels" to the stories in order to fill in holes and questions that arose in earlier tales) that we have seen on so many occasions in other stories. We are constantly reminded of the end: Merlin clearly tells Arthur about the eventual destruction of his kingdom by Mordred. There are no surprises; there is no suspense. The question we should ask is: what's the point, then? What is the significance of the fact that despite our (and the characters') knowledge of the outcome of all events, there will be hundreds of pages of adventures, of stories, of intricate and intimate relationships developed (lived)? Why not just throw in the towel if the end is already known, if there is no hope of changing the outcome?

At the end of the *Suite*, the author states that he will "go on to the subject of the Holy Grail, which is the point of this book." What follows is the *Joseph of Arimathea* and the *Estoire du Graal* (in the manuscripts we possess). All events are going to lead to the climax of the Quest for the Holy Grail--but we must wait even further, for there is the long *Prose Lancelot* to get through first.

These prophecies, foreshadowings, adumbrations, etc. should color our reading of the *Prose Lancelot* (what you are reading is a variant on these same tales: the non-cyclic *Lancelot dou Lac*). Keep this idea in the back of your mind as we look at various episodes:

PROSE LANCELOT (and the *Lancelot dou Lac*; page references to Corin Corley's translation in Oxford World Classics):

pp. 4-10: Lancelot's birth name: Galahad. The ravaging of King Ban's lands. King Arthur already in power and married. Queen Helen, King Ban and baby Lancelot go to Arthur's court for help.

pp. 18-38: King Ban reduced to poverty. He almost dies from grief. (pp. 19-20: Ban's confession; asks God's mercy on his impoverished family; his noble death). Lady of the Lake takes baby Lancelot away. p. 22: title of this part of the story: Queen of Great Sorrows: Queen Helen loses everything in one day: husband, kingdom, son. Talk about a bad day!! p. 23: she takes the veil. p. 25: Lady of the Lake, Niniane, learned magic from Merlin; loves Lancelot. p. 27: extraordinary beauty and qualities of Lancelot at age 3 (typical of the physiognomies). p. 28: "breeding will show." Physical description of Lancelot--including his ability to get *very* angry. p. 29: Lancelot has a chest that's a bit too big. pp. 28-30: physical and moral description (p. 30) of Lancelot. p. 36-37: Lancelot's temper at his tutor and reason for his temper, when his tutor beats his dogs. p. 38: his noble heart; royal blood/breeding show through, despite his status as unknown foundling.

p. 47: Beginning of knighthood. Lancelot is 18.

p. 48-50: Lady of Lake's great sadness (p. 49) at knowing she must set Lancelot upon his desired course. p. 50: he instinctively wants knighthood. Why does Niniane have Lancelot do so much explaining?

p. 51: Lancelot's reasoned choice to become a knight; a knight of Arthur's court.

p. 51-54: meaning of knighthood and accoutrements; great burden, responsibility of knighthood. Discussion of the virtues of the body and the heart. Here is potential, future of Lancelot (how should we react to this knowing *what will happen to Lancelot?*). p. 56: qualities a knight needs. p. 58: Lancelot told he'll be made a knight by King Arthur and that he will surpass all others. He is dressed all in white (compare with the entrance of Galahad in the *Quest*).

p. 65: Lady and Lancelot approach Arthur; he will be knighted.

pp. 66-67: Lancelot and Lady separate. Lancelot seeks adventures right away (meaning of "adventures" in a knight's life?). She gives Lancelot *the ring...* p. 67: He is told that he will be loved by all women.

pp. 68-69: reaction to Lancelot by all of Arthur's household: stunned by his beauty; his goodness. Here is the potential, the hope, that Lancelot represents. Again: we know the future outcome: how should we react? What does this scene (and others dealing with descriptions of Lancelot) do for our reading of the image of Lancelot that we have in the *Quest of the Holy Grail*?

pp. 69-70: Guenevere hears of Lancelot for the first time and is anxious to see him (an "old" trick, this: hearing about someone, about his adventures or beauty can trigger love). Guenevere is described as "the lady of ladies," the "fount of beauty."

p. 71: Lancelot and Guenevere see each other for the first time. Guenevere's reaction? a "mature woman?" She seems to think he's a little "simple."

pp. 73-74: The knighting ceremony. p. 73: Lancelot wants to remove the lance shafts from a wounded knight's head. p. 74: He removes them (ô miracle!) and also misses out on the belting ceremony at the church.

p. 76: Small problem: Lancelot removes lance heads from wounded knight after he receives accolade in church from Arthur. This causes a commotion and Arthur forgets about the second part of the ceremony: the girding on of the sword. p. 80: Lancelot wants Guenevere to put the sword on him, to be "her knight". Guenevere utters the fateful words that seal Lancelot's love for her: "*My friend*" (*mon ami*--and its various connotations).

p. 92: Lancelot receives the sword from Guenevere (it is sent to him and he puts it on). Significance of what's happened here: Lancelot's loyalty is divided; he holds a double allegiance, since the knighting ceremony was performed by two different people. This is a symbolic explanation of the strength and inevitability of the love of Lancelot and Guenevere and the problematic triangle it creates with King Arthur. To keep in mind: the scene in the *Quest of the Holy Grail* where Perceval's sister puts the sword on Galahad..... Hmm....

pp. 98-99: Lancelot travels in secrecy (keeps his identity unknown; of course, his real name is still yet another secret!!). There is a mention of the Grail ("as you have heard"); he rides off by chance to various adventures and is in a "profound reverie." Going off by chance to find adventures (*and actually finding them*): this is a situation which will be reversed in the Grail story. His reverie: we've seen this many times before in Lancelot; he needs to create and live in a completely internalized, secret inner world. Sound **familiar?**

p. 103: Guenevere concerned about Lancelot's safety. It's staaarrtinggg.....

pp. 110-111: Lancelot sees shields hanging on a wall; his true identity will be revealed. His need (obligation) to go out and prove himself. p. 111: "you have to be known for your prowess."

p. 119: Cemetery of the future: no surprises; all is known from the outset. p. 119: Lancelot's name revealed.

p. 126: Dolorous Guard captured (reworking of Chrétien's *Lancelot-Charette*). Our author, authors, or architect certainly show great familiarity with the secular romances..... Hmmm.....

p. 134: Learn to **dare**. Don't grow indolent in love.

p. 138: Arthur and his knights see the future tombs: the end is never, ever forgotten. Popular motif: another cemetery in the *Quest* and the cemetery of the future in Chrétien's *Lancelot*..

p. 147: Lancelot, lovestruck.... But they still haven't declared their love to each other (you must wait until p. 317).

p. 189: Guenevere prisoner in Dolorous Guard. Starting to sound familiar??? Lancelot (p. 193) has to unlock keys to mystery of Dolorous Guard in order to free the place from its enchantments. The *literal keys* to the enchantments therein.

p. 201: Lancelot's real name revealed to Gawain. Gawain should be grateful that Lancelot freed him.

p. 202: Lancelot will be the best knight in the world. Does his "sin" preclude this honor? Hasn't our author explained (quite neatly) that there is a "double allegiance" (i. e. legal, reasonable) at work here? An excellent summary of all of Lancelot's exploits.

p. 203: Lancelot's name is known to all at court.

p. 207: annoyance that there are no adventures in court: no adventures is a dangerous, ominous sign... Preparing for the **misadventures** of the Grail. pp. 208-209: Arthur's dream. Arthur *insists* that his dream means something, despite the fact that the Queen and his advisors tell him that there is none. *We know better...*

pp. 236-237: Arthur's men fight Galehot's men. Arthur's men have a bad time of it (not invincible superhuman fighters). Arthur conceived in adultery, therefore the vilest of sinners. One way of looking at it. But redemption is always possible. This is not the "standard ethos" of this (or other stories), but it is one possibility.

p. 238: Arthur should repent. Does his "sin" justify his "punishment" in treachery (political and moral) of Lancelot and Guenevere? The "heart must repent what the tongue confesses."

***pp. 240-41: Responsibilities of kingship. Arthur must learn how to be healed. p. 245: what Arthur must learn: humility; to never tire of giving. When a man fails himself, others fail him.

***pp. 246-48: what "Lion in Water" and "Doctor without Medicine" mean. Grailesque here. Lancelot will receive a similar lesson in the *Quest*. Importance of learning experiences, of experience in general; importance of turning to others for explanations. Seek answers even though the "final answer" is known. What is man? seeker, quester, questioner, in constant state of flux, of "becoming"????? This is what secular literature deals with in general and is the eternal theme of the Arthurian tales.

p. 261: Arthur admits his love for Guenevere (*finally!?!?*).

pp. 270-76: Battle for Lady of Malohaut. Lancelot disguised (his "usual" state); Guenevere doesn't recognize him; p. 276: link between chivalry and love. Image of Lancelot p. 278: always the very best; always attracts a large following. (Lancelot's responsibilities because of this...) Lancelot's image as a Savior, Messiah: see next episode, below.

p. 286: strange relationship between Lancelot and Galehot. Galehot, an enemy, can't help but admire the most worthy of knights. Is this an example of Lancelot's winning of "converts"? Another facet of his personality, here greatly expanded, but whose source is Chrétien's *Lancelot*. Also adds to the "messianic" image of Lancelot--the underpinnings of Christian imagery, symbolism and echoes. p. 290: reception of Lancelot in Galehot's tent: quasi-religious admiration. His sin in the *Quest* will seem all the greater because of what we are learning here.

p. 292, 294-95: Galehot's love of and devotion to Lancelot; Galehot shows fealty to Arthur (who's afraid of losing all earthly honor). p. 295: *This time*, Gawain recognizes Lancelot. Arthur now owes Lancelot his kingdom....

p. 304: Guenevere wants to see the "Black Knight." p. 305: Lancelot afraid of discovery.

pp. 306-307: Galehot suspects and learns truth about Lancelot's love for Guenevere. He acts as "go-between" in arranging for Guenevere and Lancelot to meet. First time that Lancelot has a confidant. In Italian, this Galehot is the "Galiotto" that will be mentioned by Dante in the story of Paolo and Francesca, the adulterous lovers in the *Inferno*.

pp. 310-11: L and G meet, but Lancelot tries to conceal his identity from Lady of Malohaut. p. 310: The "flower of knighthood" arrives.

p. 312: Lancelot trembles in front of Guenevere. Remnant here of Chrétien, but also, Lancelot is very young and this, we learn is really the first time he's been in love. p. 313: Guenevere learns that Lancelot is also the "White Knight" and that she made him a knight. We get here a good summary of all his exploits, just in case we forgot some of the thousands of details that have led to this point!!!

p. 317: Lancelot reveals his love for Guenevere. p. 319: As is so typical of Guenevere's behavior with Lancelot, here she makes him "twist." p. 321: Galehot forces (?) Guenevere to reciprocate Lancelot's love, because of his total devotion to her.

***pp. 322-23: Lancelot is identified and kissed by Guenevere.

p. 325: Lady of Malohaut knows the secret!!

pp. 326-27: Parallel situation set up: Lady of M. and Guenevere//Galehot and Lancelot. p. 329: they become quite a happy foursome!! (Is this starting to sound like your favorite soap opera?)

pp. 333-36: other adventures--both strange and downright weird; Arthurian geography; Merlin's prophecies.

p. 340: fact learned (that becomes a permanent part of his "stories") about Gawain: his strength wanes at noon. pp. 342 ff: further information learned about Gawain and his adventures. He was, after all, the most important knight at court until Lancelot; he is Arthur's nephew; he played an important role in the chronicles and will play an important role in the *Death of Arthur* (after his miserable failure as a base and stinking sinner in the *Quest!*). The important thing about all these adventures is not precisely *what* they were, but that they were strange and weird... Exceptional tests of exceptional men.

pp. 349-50: Back to the love stories: Lancelot is pining away; pp. 360-70: Lancelot and Gawain have one of those "accidental, I had no idea it was you" fights.

p. 370: The "miraculous" fact that Lancelot's *blood* can cure the injured and infirm.

p. 371: Damsel Canile in love with Arthur (so he's not unlovable after all!!!). p. 373: Arthur in love with the damsel. pp. 374-76: quite a happy crew at the siege: all the principal lovers: Lancelot is wounded, Arthur loses a couple of horses from under him... All is certainly not well here. p. 377: Lancelot remounts Arthur on his horse *three times*, once again reinforcing the idea that Arthur literally owes his life and kingdom yet again to Lancelot and his prowess.

pp. 378-79: Arthur sleeps with the damsel; p. 380: Lancelot sleeps with Guenevere. Equal time for equal adulteries!!!! And who said women didn't get a fair shake in the Middle Ages?????

p. 384 ff: another skirmish; The battle with King Yder, whose horse falls upon him. (I can't resist: King Yder's down??--sorry.) p. 388: Lancelot and Guenevere have a long time to be alone. pp. 390-91: Lancelot goes mad for a bit (we've seen this theme before); Lady of the Lake arrives. pp. 392-94: important explanation of the love Lancelot has for Guenevere given by Lady of the Lake. Includes a long and *very important discourse on love*. Guenevere has the love of the most worthy man in the world. One should love the person from whom all joy comes. p. 395: Guenevere expresses her true love for Lancelot. She is far more tender here than in Chrétien.

p. 405: Arthur thinks he's lost the best knight ever. This "change" in subject highlights the link with Lancelot's divided loyalties and the tragic consequences this impossible situation will have.

p. 406: Arthur's love for Lancelot. He pays homage on his knees to Lancelot. Arthur thinks now that he's "bested" his dream: the one which said he'd lose all earthly honor. Knowing how it will all turn out: how should we react to this?

pp. 409-10: Guenevere kisses Lancelot in front of everyone and Arthur's proud of her for doing so!! Irony?

pp. 412-13: Lancelot, Galehot, Hector, all installed in Arthur's household. Important textual history here, concerning all these adventure stories and their link to the Grail story which is about to start.

pp. 415-16: summary of the "False Guenevere" episode: keep these two characters, sworn enemies of Arthur's household, in mind when you read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There just may be some clues here that will explain who the "crazies" are at the Green Knight's castle!!!!!!!!!! (See also the excerpts from the Lacy edition of the Vulgate Cycle.)

p. 416: Lancelot and Guenevere story: could turn out differently. p. 417: Another recap of all that Arthur owes Lancelot.

QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL:

CHAPTER I: THE DEPARTURE:

The familiar signposts of Arthurian romance are turned around. This is the story of **mis**adventures; **mis**placed love, duty, honor. Desire, love, adventure, mystery, chivalry, honor, strength, prowess--all the positive qualities extolled in the romances are, in the *Quest*, tried and found wanting. How? Why? Explain. Yet this text remains extremely human, for all its asceticism. All of Arthur's knights leave the court on the quest: not just the story of one individual knight. Something "different" about this story.

p. 33: mysterious writings on the Siege Périlleux: "This is a singular adventure." We all know that something different is about to happen. Rug is slipping from under us and the knights: our favorite signposts are no longer reliable: pp. 34-35: Sword in the Stone: Lancelot refuses to take it out. Gawain does. WRONG MOVE. What in other stories would have been "right move," is wrong here. p. 36. Perceval tries to remove sword--to keep Gawain company. Perceval the simpleton.

p. 37: Galahad's entry: the "Desired Knight" (p. 38, "tender in years"). Galahad is the spiritual catalyst, the Spirit released anew among men. He comes not as the *suffering* Christ who died, but as the risen Christ who gave to his apostles the Holy Spirit so that truth might be made manifest. Hence the importance of the Pentecostal imagery in the text. p. 40: the Arthurian world beginning to crumble: Gawain admits to Arthur that it's Galahad who has come to free the land: Arthur can't do it alone.

p. 41: Galahad is **certain** that the sword in the stone is for him. Lancelot's humility and humbling before the entire court.

p. 44; 45 ff: The Grail appears. What is the significance of the fact that they all **know** that many will fail and that only Galahad will succeed? They all still venture out on the quest. Value of

earthly life? of pilgrimage? **Desire** to know the truth as important as revelation of the truth. New conception of desire, the mainspring of the earlier romances. p. 49: an order and reality/codes higher than Arthur's.

CHAPTER II: THE SHIELD:

p. 58: Galahad needs to know about the history of the shield he will carry. New knighthood with new symbols (or increased symbolism of these familiar accoutrements). p. 60: they knew in Josephus' time (!!!) that Galahad would wear the shield (Josephus = son of Joseph of Arimathea).

pp. 62-63: Galahad at the stench-filled tomb: the significance of his questions? Would Christ need to ask questions?

pp. 64-65: the **general ideas**, in explanations given to Galahad, are set out at the beginning so that we might be watchful and wary as we come to learn of and appreciate the full meaning of the other knights' adventures. No surprises for audience or players. p. 64: the important phrase "in semblance only, not in sublimity."

CHAPTER III: PRESUMPTION PUNISHED (Melias):

p. 67: Melias intrigued by crown and throne. Despite warnings of people (and of Galahad) not to take the left-hand road. p. 68: Galahad "happens" upon the scene and saves Melias. Significance? Explanation of it pp. 70-71. Significance of the constant explanations that are provided?

pp. 72-73: Galahad's fight against 7 knights: never weary. The knights are exhausted and he lets them go. With God on his side, he has all the energy he needs. Totally self-sufficient: he has God's grace.

CHAPTER IV: GAWAIN:

We learn (p. 76) that Gawain has killed the knights Galahad set free. Why (p. 79) is it *sinful* that Gawain killed the brothers?

p. 80: Gawain **CHOOSES** not to be saved.

CHAPTER V: LANCELOT'S CONVICTION AND REPENTANCE:

p. 81: Lancelot turns to Perceval for advice: now we **know** that Lancelot is in trouble!!!

pp. 83 ff: Lancelot sleeps during the ceremony of the coming of the Grail. He sees it in a

"half-asleep/half-awake" state: what is the symbolic significance of this? Does he see, "through a glass, darkly?"

p. 84: Lancelot a worthless knight: harder than stone, more bitter than wood, more barren than a fig tree. Geez--what does **that mean**? Page 91 provides the explanation.

pp. 88 ff: why is Lancelot's sin considered the most serious of all? Why is he treated the harshest of all? He will be sent away in the end, told his quest is ended. p. 91: subject/object reading of Lancelot's relationship to others and God and his relationship to the other stories about him. Incredibly interwoven and complex imagery; symbols leading to other symbols, leading to other mysteries leading to other symbols and mysteries.

p. 93: Repentance can bring Lancelot back. (cf. Chapter VII: Lancelot: The Slow Ascent: further lessons for him; Galahad could sin and be lost; importance of free will and will in general; p. 147: fear of backsliding after his repentance--which he will do in the next story, the *Death of King Arthur*; Lancelot--and the Arthurian world--are salvageable. All is not lost. But will be because we know the sources for the Arthurian stories). pp. 93-94: first admission of adultery.

CHAPTER VI: THE PEREGRINATIONS OF PERCEVAL:

pp. 96-97: the death of Perceval's mother. He must go on. We can do nothing against the inevitability of death.

p. 97 ff: Explanation of the three tables: the Table of the Last Supper, the Grail Table, the Round Table. What is the image of Arthurian society in this association? Compare to page 99.

p. 100: the beginning of the story explained. Perceval needs all sorts of explanations; needs to ask questions.

p. 102: lesson about virginity (cf. p. 141-42 new hierarchy of virtues established; #1 is virginity): Virginity is hard work; it is an "exploit." Perceval's constant searching for Galahad: significance? He needs Galahad or his faith will lag; scene with the lion on the island: his isolation, away from men (and Galahad in particular). What sort of image of Perceval is this? pp. 106-107: Mordrain waiting 400 years for Galahad's arrival. p. 112: Perceval needs presence and company of others (turns to others on the island, pp. 114-115).

p. 126: Perceval's temptation: Black ship with the beautiful damsel who says she can get him off the island. He is quick (too quick, perhaps) to believe in the human race. She takes advantage of his compassion: Perceval's compassion unchecked by reason. pp. 128-129: Perceval's virginity "saved." p. 131: Perceval, you will always be simple! But, "blessed are the simple..."

pp. 132-33: image of the Church militant? Where? How? Perceval wants the priest to stay with him. Always entreats a **mortal** to stay with him for comfort and sustenance. Tends to seek in the human what can only be found in the divine. Proof?: Galahad is always by himself--way ahead of anyone else. No one can keep up with him.

CHAPTER VII: LANCELOT: THE SLOW ASCENT:

See above for discussion of the order of virtues presented in this story. p. 141 ff: long explanation of Lancelot's sins; Pentecostal colors; all virtues lost because of a woman. Complex references and cross-references here. Symbols become intertwined: Guenevere/Eve; Lancelot/Adam; Galahad/Christ; Perceval's Sister/Virgin Mary.

pp. 142-43: "new" qualities and virtues need to replace the old ones of lust and pride (would have been a surprise, perhaps, to Chrétien?). Some of the good still in him. Therefore what he accomplished was due to the **residue** of his old traits, **not because of the love of Guenevere**. Aha!!! The sound you hear is the cracking of the pedestal women were on??? Very difficult, hard-line morality in this text.

p. 144: this is no quest for earthly things, but those of heaven. But it is a quest in semblance only p. 145). This is part of the question of trying to read this text as allegory.

p. 146: Lancelot puts on the hair shirt. p. 147: damsel tells Lancelot that eventually some of the mysteries will be explained. Lesson: accept the unknown; mystery of faith and grace.

p. 150 ff: Lancelot (and audience) told the history of the Grail, Joseph and Josephus.

p. 159: **THE MEANING OF THE BEGINNING IS EXPLAINED:** and the real meaning of the text of the Holy Grail is a *textual meaning*. No one piece of this puzzle can be separated from the whole. The **Quest** brings together all the missing elements and dimensions from all the other stories.

p. 161: final image of Lancelot in this chapter: he is completely immobilized. This is the first time we see him unable to move: Lancelot, whose movements in other stories were always far and away faster than any other knight..... HMMMMMM.....

CHAPTER VIII: GAWAIN AND HECTOR WARNED IN VISION:

p. 162: meaning of adventures and misadventures: they are providential signs here. There was no dearth of adventures in other romances (or even earlier parts of the Vulgate Cycle), but here,

only Galahad seems to have adventures.

p. 164: vision of the feeding bulls: prevision of fall of the Round Table; setting up for the next text in the series. Killing of Owein (p. 169): fights among companions. There have been such fights in other stories, but here there is more danger imminent: prefigures the internal strife and coming apart of the Arthurian world. This time romantic idealism can't save the day.

p. 170: pride and lust have replaced humility and patience as standards of the Round Table.

p. 175: tragic *spiritual state* of Gawain.

CHAPTER IX: TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS OF BORS:

p. 178: free will in choosing between good and evil. Good explanation from Bors of how we can justify Galahad being an ideal knight, despite the fact that he is Lancelot's son. Parallels with Arthur's birth and conception?

p. 188: his dilemma: save brother or damsel (and 500 more). Human tragedy of Bors? p. 194: damsels will commit suicide if he doesn't sleep with one of them. Significance of his refusal? Is this matter "trivial?"

p. 201: Lionel revealed for what he truly is: earthbound, treacherous, sinful, blind.

CHAPTER X: THE MIRACULOUS SHIP:

p. 207: "Good Knight" Galahad has many adventures. Meaning?

p. 208: Galahad appears and disappears (parallels with other earlier romances and differences here?) Gawain's senseless killings and slaughterings.

p. 211: the three knights united: they have waited long for the Good Knight to appear. p. 212: they change ships and go on to the Miraculous Ship.

p. 212 ff: wholly New Testament and liturgical images here. Ship as Church (*Song of Songs*). Church is stone monument to faith. They meet with Perceval's sister. The "old prophecies" are about to be fulfilled.

p. 214-17: the mysterious sword (and all the writing on it!!). Their reaction to all this: they laugh. Meaning? Why humor? Overwhelming symbolism and levels of meaning. Caught in a labyrinth of meanings. Cross your fingers and hope for the best and leave the consequences to God.

CHAPTER XI: THE LEGEND OF THE TREE OF LIFE:

p. 222: style here is biblical, moralizing. Tone seems to change profoundly. We are leaving the realm of the Arthurian topoi and entering into Biblical exegesis. The Old Testament is finding its fulfillment in the New Testament.

p. 230: discussion about women: Eve was responsible for the fall of mankind; mankind redeemed and found salvation in the Virgin Mary who gave man God's son, Jesus. Color symbolism used in this section are the colors of Pentecost. Sense of condemnation of women or not? It's their nature to be that way; that is the way things *are* and you must therefore be on guard at all times.

p. 235: at the end of the explanation of the Tree of Life (and Solomon trying to get a message into the future down to Galahad), the companions are baffled. And well they should be. Are you baffled, too? Good!!

CHAPTER XII: ADVENTURES OF THE THREE COMPANIONS:

p. 235: Even these three worthy knights don't understand everything that happens to them. They can appreciate what happened and what they saw; they can marvel at it, but they cannot understand it. No less worthy, though. This is one of the important differences between this story and the earlier romances.

p. 236: Perceval's sister makes belt out of her hair: different meaning, token now?

p. 237: Galahad receives new arms: why does he need new arms? Perceval's sister prepares the ceremony. Her hair is shorn. What is she a symbol of? She brings the knights together and gives Galahad his new sword. In semblance only: this is still a knighting ceremony, after all.

p. 240: Galahad does kill. He regrets doing so, and we learn that the people he killed were incestuous scoundrels.

p. 242: Scene of the White Hart: to be further illustrated in the Grail ceremony later on. Partial revelation of the Grail mystery, with promise of further revelation. Here, everything needs an explanation. One more clue that this story is "different." We need help in interpreting things. Question of meaning and interpretation in the text: it is intra-textual. We have all the explanations we need (therefore we need not search elsewhere, such as in obscure theological and philosophical treatises???). (A "hart" is a male red deer with a "crown" of fully developed antlers.)

p. 247 ff: Perceval's sister observing the "custom of the castle" by giving her blood to cure the leper. Have we entered la-la land?

CHAPTER XIII: THE PARTING & CHAPTER XIV: LANCELOT AT CORBENIC

p. 253: Vengeance on the castle for death of *other* innocent victims, *not* for Perceval's sister who sacrificed herself willingly.

pp. 254-55: Lancelot sees things in his sleep. He is half-awake at important "moments" on the quest. How is this both a punishment and a comfort? What is the significance of this state he's in?

pp. 257-258: Lancelot not only as an Everyman, but as a Joseph figure also. Lancelot and Galahad reunited: Endless desire and knowledge of revelation. This is the story's power to bring these two forces into being. Spiritual seriousness of the *Quest* made Arthurian romance seem important as well as amusing and worth telling again and again. Constant references to Latin, to Book, to Author. Gives credence and importance to such tales.

p. 259: Galahad will leave Lancelot, who must now be in the service of Christ. Galahad has to fulfill the prophecy and the adventure (Pentecostal theme reiterated in the season: after Easter). "Be mindful of yourself" p. 259.

p. 260: What is Lancelot's "fault" here? Question of pride and seeing things in only human terms. In human affairs he trusts only himself and to save and protect his soul he wants help from others. He's got it backwards: the one thing he should be guarding **himself** is his soul.

pp. 262-63: Lancelot sees the Grail but can't participate in the ceremony. Interprets everything in earthly terms only. Ah, Lancelot, will you ever learn???

pp. 264-65: the ineffable is mentioned. Lancelot sees only in a dream-vision. His quest is ended. Leave off the hair shirt now.

CHAPTER XV: THE HOLY GRAIL:

(You should hear the crescendo building in the background now. All the knights have returned to Arthur's court to recount their "undying shame." Only Galahad, Bors, and Perceval remain to fulfill the rest of the story. The entire chapter is filled with the polysemous symbolism and iconography of Christian ritual--specifically the sacrifice of the Mass.)

p. 269: desire is fulfilled.

p. 270 ff: Galahad begins to work miracles. He and Perceval spend five years "cleaning up" the kingdom of Logres. p. 271: they are finally united with Bors and nine others join them for the

ceremony (p. 273). 12 is such a good number!!!

pp. 274 ff: the Ceremony itself. Josephus comes to them. Christ speaks to them. What is the miracle of this ceremony? What is happening here? The boon is granted. p. 276: they come "face to face" (cf. Gospels of St. Paul). We learn that Galahad and the Grail will both leave this earth.

p. 277: The sin of Arthur's court. Explain what it is.

p. 279: Galahad wants to die--but our author isn't about to let him off just yet. He has an ecstatic, contemplative vision. He has seen the Grail, participated in the ceremony, seen God face to face. Why can't he die? p. 282-83: final "purification" of Galahad: suffers in prison, then is elevated to king. Several years have gone by. p. 283: the "ineffable" is mentioned again. Galahad is suffering on this earth. What is significance of his slow disappearance?

p. 284: Galahad dies and with him the Grail disappears forever. Bors is the only one of the three to survive the experience and returns to Arthur's court where the clerks were keeping a record of the adventures. Bors related his adventures and they were written down (therefore, no one can tamper with these details from now on). What is the significance of the rather "typical" return to Arthur's court at the end of the story? The final transformation of the Arthurian legend as a result of this, the greatest of all adventures?

But the story is not finished. There is one final chapter:

THE DEATH OF KING ARTHUR

Contrasting paradigmatic structures and themes:

ROMANCES	QUEST	DEATH OF ARTHUR
Adventures	Misadventures dis/un-belief	Misunderstandings
Truth never questioned. Always understood.	Revelation/ explanation of divine Truth.	Personal understanding of truth--no hearsay, no supernatural understanding.

Do you agree with the Preface (p. 19): that the author is "showing how sermons and pious homilies do not really have much of an effect"?

Portrait of Arthur as a victim, a pure "symbol"? Despite all he did and all he created he is controlled by outside forces and it is the actions of others that lead to his final fall. Subject/Object dichotomy.

p. 24: Terms used to describe Gawain: misfortune, shame, etc. (compare with his epitaph at his death). Consistent with other stories that will be related about him (e. g. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). "Misadventure" theme of the Grail text is carried over to this story. Lancelot's backsliding: less than a month back from the quest and he's with Guenevere again. Arthur announces that a tournament will be staged: his strict (too strict) adherence to the "old" rules, ideas and ideals. He doesn't understand that the time of adventures has passed.

p. 25: Guenevere is "at least" 50 years old (cf. p. 186: Gawain = 76 years; Arthur = 92; Lancelot (oops!!)= approx. 55 or, if you do the math on p. 64: Lancelot is $18 + 25(+)$ = $43(+)$ years. The question of Guenevere being an "older" woman is irrelevant.)

p. 26: Agravain tells Arthur about adulterous relationship (hearsay; no direct evidence found by Arthur himself). Series of "gossipy" discussions in this story. The beginning of internal treachery which will undo the kingdom. Arthur's refusal to believe that the stories are true.

p. 30: Image of Guenevere in this story: still rather testy. She's known for her temper and she also has a "history" of being framed for misdeeds. This whole chivalry/courtly love thing is becoming rather tiresome. Is this an indictment of courtly/illicit love?

p. 37: the staged tournament becomes a "dress rehearsal" for the real final battle that will take place. Here the knights are described as being wounded (in this case, Lancelot). We therefore know that something is terribly wrong.

pp. 41-43: Lady of Escalot and Gawain: Gawain glad to learn that Lancelot is in love. Of course, he only hears the girl's version of the story and just jumps to the conclusion that her love is reciprocated. He's glad to hear (pp. 43-44) of Lancelot, because he's always been so darned secretive!! p. 43: Gawain describes (in his own words--i. e. he *understands*) his relation to Lancelot: inferior. He recognizes Lancelot as the superior knight.

p. 44: gets rather tangled here with all the assumptions, reported stories, etc. One consistency: Lancelot, as always, is misunderstood. p. 45: Arthur and Gawain talk and Lancelot and Guenevere are "saved" again.

p. 46: In all these discussions about loyalty and trustworthiness, it's always Lancelot who possesses these qualities--never Guenevere.

p. 47: rumors about Lancelot and the "girl": everyone talking about Lancelot this time, even Guenevere. Nothing but misunderstanding, assumptions, hearsay, etc. Even their speech (along with their actions or lack of actions) is inadequate now.

p. 48: Guenevere's reaction to L's supposed "desertion" is, as usual, anger. She confesses to Bors (p. 49)--but how much? Everyone was "miserable and pensive for the whole week" because of G's mood. She can bring everyone down when she gets "testy."

pp. 50-51: Arthur's court has degenerated into a kind of editorial office of the National Enquirer. Hearsay interpretation of others' actions and speeches. Meaning: need to go to the source. Glosses can lie. p. 51: Guenevere will *never* forgive Lancelot.

pp. 54-55: the "girl's" love for Lancelot and his rejection of her. We're back to Dido and Eneas. Impossible, unrequited love will lead to death. The scene of the Lady of Shallot's body being borne on a ship to Arthur's court is beautifully and poignantly handled by Tennyson in the *Idylls of the King*. p. 56: She will die for love of Lancelot.

p. 60: Third-hand reporting of events. Spurious information. p. 66: Morgan "The Faithless"

p. 68: But Morgan does know how to put on a feast!

p. 69 ff: When Arthur is at Morgan Le Fay's house and he sees the pictures that Lancelot painted: finds out the truth first-hand but is very reluctant to face it. Morgan is the arch-rival of Arthur and responsible for all sorts of "mischief" in his kingdom. Keep this in mind for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. p. 69: Morgan wants Arthur to discover the truth; reveals that she is his sister.

pp. 71 ff: many of the loose ends are tied up. We go back to many of the events in the *Vulgate Lancelot* and continue to move inexorably to the "end" of Arthur's reign.

p. 72: The complete revelation to Arthur--finally!!!

p. 76: Guenevere angry with Lancelot; p. 77: Many will suffer because **D**estiny brought Lancelot and Guenevere together.

pp. 78-81: Guenevere and Bors talking; what L/G love affair means. The rather incongruous figure of Lancelot: the finest knight; deceiver of his lord and friend; penitent sinner--and now? Is there "growth" in his portrayal? maturity? The question of what sort of kingdom is this if everything hinges on the question of an adulterous relationship between L/G? Is this an amoral book (as Loomis would have us believe)? p. 78: An important indictment of **love**.

p. 82: poisoned apple episode: Guenevere has a history of being blamed for things! Truthful lie/lying truth syndrome which is typical of the Tristan stories. Ironic twists to guilt/innocence dichotomy. We get the feeling that no one can do anything correctly now. Everyone is so sure (p. 90) that Guenevere killed Gaheris.

p. 84: Everyone is quick to jump to the wrong conclusion. They are slow to jump to the *right* conclusion, however. Where/what is Truth?

p. 93: certain level of sadistic cruelty on the part of the author: the ship arrives with the body of the Lady of Escalot. It's *almost* an adventure; the dream lives on. But no. This is even more cruel than the misadventures of the Grail story. p. 94: Lady of Escalot's letter. Decision to build a tomb with her story for "our descendants."

p. 94-95: Gawain and Guenevere talk *directly* to one another about Gawain's misunderstanding Lancelot's love for the girl. He apologizes for jumping to conclusions.

Slowly, each character is being tortured--like a butterflies under glass with pins in them.

p. 100: Even Lancelot is convinced that Guenevere killed Gaheris. pp. 101-102: Bors torments Guenevere by not saying Lancelot is coming to save her.

p. 102: Irony: Guenevere may die accused unjustly: punished for something she *did not do* rather than for what she *did do*. p. 103: Arthur admits he loves Guenevere very much.

The various episodes of skirmishes; p. 108: Lancelot and Guenevere happy again for a time, but they are indiscreet in their actions; then Mordred and Agravain tell Arthur about their affair and try to trap them "in flagrante delicto." p. 109: Gawain refuses to tell his uncle the truth about the affair of Lancelot and Guenevere since he understands the real consequences of such an admission. p. 111: Arthur's reaction: Better that Lancelot die than a king be dishonored.

p. 117: extreme emotions here: love/hate. p. 119: Arthur's desire for revenge is as extreme

as his generosity. p. 120: "A queen is sacred." She has to be burned at the stake. Question here that the ideas and ideals of Arthur's world are greater than the people: the people always fall short. Arthur was blinded, had a false sense of sense of security. He sought in the human what was only to be found in the divine. Mixed feelings that we have for all the principal characters in this love triangle.

p. 123: Lancelot has to get Guenevere out of Camelot. He'll take her to Joyeuse Garde.

p. 126: Arthur tours battlefield in tears. 128-129: Gawain's grief; pp. 129-130: Cemeteries of future are now the cemeteries of the present.

p. 132: Arthur always victorious in war and brought back honor. And now??

p. 137: Lancelot: cries from anger/love he has for Arthur. There will never be peace between them. p. 144: Bors and Gawain wounded; p. 145: Lancelot puts Arthur back on his horse during a battle. p. 146: Arthur's political situation: the Pope puts him under interdict and he's forced to take Guenevere back but ***there will never be peace with Lancelot.***

p. 148-149: Guenevere will return to Arthur and Lancelot will go away. They exchange rings.

p. 153: Lancelot's sorrowful blessing of Camelot. Gawain angry at him for killing his brother (this is a ***blood feud*** against the foreigner, Lancelot).

p. 156: Gawain asks who will guard Guenevere and Mordred offers to guard her. Arthur tells the people to obey Mordred.

p. 160-161: cleaning up and expansion of the Mordred/Guenevere story from the chronicles. This is one of the first retellings and adaptations of the material from Geoffrey and Wace. Mordred forges a letter stating that Arthur is mortally wounded. This is how he gets Guenevere to marry him. Explanation of his "dying of love" for Guenevere.

p. 181: Explanation of Gawain's strength at noon.

p. 185: Hector sees this as a war with a mortal enemy and in military terms. Lancelot and Arthur know that it's far more complicated than that.

p. 187: Back to the Chronicle traditions: the Romans are in Burgundy...

p. 189: Roman tribute. It's the ***Romans*** who kill Gawain. Kay, too... p. 190: Arthur kills the Roman emperor: ***that's the only tribute he'll send to Rome!***

pp. 190-191: Guenevere sends word to Arthur about Mordred's treachery.

p. 191 ff: Death and wounding of Gawain. Arthur learns of Mordred's treachery. p. 192: Mordred is identified as "the serpent."

***p. 193: Nexus of Arthur's tragic dilemma. Gawain's confession. Slowly, the truth emerges from the mouths of the individuals who know the truth the best and most accurately.

***p. 194: Possible reconciliation between all the principal characters, but Arthur refuses. "That was the grief..." repeated in anaphora.

p. 196: Guenevere's inner torments. One of the first times we actually see her think something through rather than just have an emotional reaction. Of course, Lancelot is not known as a "penseur" either (I just mention that for the avid feminists--equal time to the gentlemen!!!).

p. 198: Guenevere will enter a convent.

p. 200: Gawain's death; his epitaph, "Ah Fortune..."

p. 201: Adoration of Gawain's body. p. 202: Gawain loved by all *women*. What a loss!

pp. 205 ff and 220-221: Universalization of Arthurian "lessons" and meaning of the legend of King Arthur. The great human tragedy which is his story. The kingdom of Logres will be "orphaned" (p. 207). p. 205: Very sad image here: they do not **charge into battle**; they go **gently** into that dark good night. ... The image of Arthur on the Wheel of Fortune: nice summary of what it all means for Arthur--"what do you see?". The "foolish" death of Gawain. Shamed to the bitter end. p. 206: We have to have that battle on Salisbury Plain.

p. 210: "Thus began the battle on Salisbury Plain."

p. 219: Yvain killed. Only **four** of the Round Table remain.

***p. 220: Deaths of Arthur and Mordred

p. 222: Arthur speaks to Excalibur.

p. 223: sadistic torture of Arthur: after he is wounded, he can't even get his sword thrown away correctly!! p. 225: The ladies arrive for Arthur's body; p. 226: Mordred killed. Both Arthur and Mordred dead, but the story goes on.

p. 226 ff: Mordred's sons carry on the war with Lancelot (it **is**, after all, Lancelot's story).

Guenevere has joined a convent and has since died (p. 228).

News of her death reaches Lancelot. p. 232: Lancelot joins the priests. p. 233: He becomes a priest no less: penitence can go far!!!! Lancelot spends four years with the hermits and p. 234: his soul has departed and was welcomed by a host of angels. p. 235: the *very truthful ending...*

Could the outcome have been changed? Arthur was ready to forgive Lancelot. But we are hemmed in by the sources--that famous Battle on Salisbury plain. If, for the Arthurian material, we are, in fact, hemmed in by the sources of the story which were very well known, the same is not true for love literature in general and that is where romances really begin to take off (e.g. *Le Roman de la Rose, the Galeran de Bretagne, Le Coeur de l'Amour épris*, etc.).