

The Logic of the Grail in Old French and Middle English Arthurian Romance

Submitted in part fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Martha Claire Baldon

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Abstract

Approaching Grail narratives as a distinct subgenre of medieval romance, this thesis compares five Old French and Middle English Grail texts: Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* (c.1190), the Didot-*Perceval* (c.1200), *Perlesvaus* (early thirteenth century), the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* (c.1225) and Thomas Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* (1469). Through detailed analysis of the ways these texts explore three primary areas of Christian experience – sight, space and time – this thesis illuminates both concepts shared across these Grail narratives, and characteristics that distinguish them from each other. The comparative analysis of this thesis shows how the Grail romances operate according to a distinct form of logic that furthers their interests in spiritual instruction.

This thesis opens with an introduction to the five texts under consideration and an overview of previous scholarship on the Grail narratives. The introduction also discusses some of the conventional features of Arthurian romance and foregrounds the ways in which the Grail romances disrupt and distort these familiar expectations. Chapter One, 'Hermeneutic Progression: Sight, Knowledge, and Perception', explores the ways in which the Grail narratives utilise medieval optical theories to highlight hermeneutic contrasts between normative Arthurian *aventures* and Grail *aventures*. The knights' failures in perception in the latter are marked by a geographical disorientation. Chapter Two, 'Spatial Perception: The Topography of the Grail Quest', argues that once the knights embark upon the quest of the Holy Grail, they enter a separate temporal framework in which their physical progression is dictated by their spiritual improvement. Chapter Three, 'Temporal Transformations: Grail Time', suggests that in the Grail narratives, concepts of time are transformed to allow readers and Grail knights to travel between the Arthurian present and the biblical past. It is through interpreting and understanding the relationship between past and present that the significance of the Grail *aventures* emerges.

The conclusion to this thesis explores contemporary medieval ideas of demonstrative and dialectic argumentation to suggest that the Grail romances function as a visual form of demonstrative argumentation. This thesis argues that this logic distinguishes the Grail narratives from more secular Arthurian romances and enables both Grail knights and readers to develop their appreciation and understanding of the Grail miracles themselves.

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Introduction

Introducing the Grail Quest

In Thomas Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* (1469), Lancelot witnesses a tournament between two parties of knights and must decide whether to support 'they that were of the castell [...] all on black horsys and their trappoures black' or 'they that were withoute [...] all on whyght horsis and trappers'.¹ His choice to join the black knights and 'wayker party in incresyng of hys shevalry' (*Morte*, p. 719) results in an overwhelming defeat, something that surprises Lancelot no less than it might a reader familiar with Arthurian romance. The knight who formerly 'had the bettir in every place, and never was [...] discomfite in no quarell, were hit ryght were hit wronge' (*Morte*, p. 695) is defeated with ease by a group of 'erthely knyghtes' (*Morte*, p. 721). Elsewhere in the *Morte Darthur*, when Malory's Lancelot intervenes in a chivalric combat, it ends with his overwhelming success, whoever he faces. It is this prowess and experience upon which Lancelot counts when he enters the tournament. As Molly Martin summarises, 'Lancelot draws upon his previous experiences, which lead him to see this not as a moral decision but as an obvious opportunity to display his knightly skill, to gain worship'.² In this moment, however, the conventions that govern Arthurian chivalry, as exemplified by earlier and later parts of the *Morte Darthur*, have unexpectedly stopped working, and Lancelot is defeated.

This transformation of the expected romance conventions is highlighted by the recluse with whom Lancelot discusses his failure at the tournament. She tells Lancelot that:

'as longe as ye were knyght of erthly knyghthode ye were the moste mervayloust man of the worlde, and moste adventrest. Now,' seyde the lady, 'sitthen ye be sette amonge the knyghtis of hevny adventures, if aventure falle you contrary at that turnamente, yet have ye no mervayle; for that turnemente yestirday was but a tokenyng of oure Lorde'. (*Morte*, p. 721)

¹ Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, Two Volumes, ed. P. J. C. Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), vol. I, p. 719. All subsequent references to primary texts will be to the edition cited in the first footnote and will be given parenthetically in the text unless otherwise stated.

² Molly Martin, *Vision and Gender in Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 133.

Here, the recuse overtly explains to Lancelot that the meaning and significance of the *aventures* that he faces have now changed. When she mentions that the tournament ‘was but a tokenyng of oure Lorde’ (*Morte*, p. 721) she also outlines to both Lancelot and the reader the way in which the Grail *aventures* should now be interpreted. It is generally accepted without question that the Grail quest operates according to principles that are somehow different from those seen in more secular Arthurian romance. This thesis argues that the Grail narratives and miracles operate according to a unique logical system, and explores in detail the implications that this has for conceptualisations of Christian experience illustrated by Grail quest narratives.³

This sudden breakdown of the typical conventions of Arthurian chivalry when faced with the Grail is not unique to Malory’s text. In earlier Old French Grail narratives, following the rules and expectations of more secular Arthurian romance similarly proves to be an inappropriate response to the *aventures* of the Grail.⁴ In Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval* (1190), for example, Perceval’s first unsuccessful attempt to achieve the Grail at the Fisher King’s castle is precipitated by his following the instruction earlier issued to him by Gornemant de Gohort ‘gardez que vos ne neiez/ Trop parlanz ne trop noveliers’ (*Perceval*, ll. 1606-1607)⁵ [‘be careful not to be too talkative or prone to gossip’].⁶ Just as Lancelot, in Malory’s later narrative, misinterprets the tournament between the black and the white knights by following

³ This thesis defines logic as the process of deductive reasoning that the knights need to follow in order to make sense of the *aventures* that they meet. This thesis also argues that the logical system evident in the Grail narratives is informed by medieval concepts of logical argumentation, explored in more detail in the third section of the introduction to this thesis.

⁴ Throughout this thesis I will be using the word *aventure* from the Old French *aventure* meaning ‘chance, accident, occurrence, event, happening’, and with its associated meanings coming from the verb *adventurer*: ‘to wander, venture, travel, seek adventure or to happen by chance’. Definitions from Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley and Brian J. Levy, eds., *Old French – English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 59.

⁵ C. Mela, ed. and trans, ‘Le Conte du Graal’, in *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994), pp. 937–1211.

⁶ William W. Kibler, trans., ‘The Story of the Grail (Perceval)’, in *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 381 – 494 (p. 402). I cite published translations of Old French texts throughout, since each of the Old French romances that this thesis addresses has a reputable academic translation. At points at which the translations seem to depart from the original Old French I will provide my own translations and further discussion.

the conventions of secular Arthurian chivalry, Perceval misperceives how to act at the Grail procession as he attempts to apply secular chivalric expectations to the heavenly Grail procession. Each of the subsequent Grail narratives contains similar misconceptions, in which the arrival of the Grail inverts the expectations of more secular Arthurian romance in ways that prove difficult for the knights to comprehend. The Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* (c.1215) shows that the ability to interpret *aventures* correctly plays an integral role in the knights' progression, as Perceval, Bors, and Gawain each face similar tests of understanding and must choose how to respond to the '*aventures del graal*'. For instance, while Gawain refuses to alter his mode of response (and thus finds himself unable to progress on the quest), Bors and Perceval both learn to interpret the *aventures* of the Grail through their sense of Christian understanding, and are able to partially achieve the Grail.⁷

The distinction between the form of chivalry required for success in the Grail quest and the expectations of chivalry in more secular Arthurian narratives can be further understood in relation to medieval attitudes towards chivalry. Maurice Keen defines medieval chivalry 'as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements are fused together'.⁸ This definition of chivalry conforms with the chivalric ideals articulated in non-Grail Arthurian romances, in which Christianity shapes some of the knights' daily discourse and activities, but the political concerns of the Round Table also direct the knights' actions. Nigel Saul also suggests that the Grail romances reflect changing attitudes about human perception and agency in the twelfth century:

To early medieval writers, humans were fallen creatures whose fate rested with the Almighty. In the twelfth century that pessimism was gradually laid aside and thinkers invested humankind with a new dignity and a new power. Through the application of

⁷ In Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* Gawain declines to engage with the religious dimension of the Grail quest altogether, refusing to do penance for his sins as he is asked by a 'good man' on the grounds that 'we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne' (p. 535).

⁸ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 16.

reason, it was argued, the individual could understand the mind and will of God and bring order to his own experience.⁹

The Grail narratives depict the Arthurian knights' attempts to 'bring order' to their individual experience of the world, and this thesis focuses on the ways in which each text portrays the process of the knights' attempts to 'bring order'. However, Keen also highlights that there was a disparity between medieval religious ideals of chivalry and the reality of chivalry in medieval everyday life:

looking at matters through priestly eyes as naturally they most often did, ecclesiastical authors showed a very general tendency to portray chivalry in terms of priestly priorities which most knights either did not fully understand or felt justified in ignoring [...]. The high ecclesiastical idea of chivalry suffers from a limitation ultimately very similar to that which inhibits the usefulness of romances for purposes of definition: it is too idealistic.¹⁰

The Grail romances promote the ideal of chivalry articulated by medieval ecclesiastical authorities, and foreground the importance of Christian faith to all knightly endeavours; their *aventures* must be interpreted to be overcome. It is the focus on interpretation that outlines the shift in logic between non-Grail Arthurian narratives and Grail narratives most clearly. At the same time, understanding this logic allows both the Grail knights and readers to perceive the way in which they can 'bring order to [their] own experience' and, thus, progress towards the divine understanding for which the Grail stands.

The problems surrounding how to reconcile this spiritual perfection with the secular Arthurian world, however, are approached differently by each narrative. This thesis focusses on four Old French and one Middle English Grail narratives: Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* (1190), the *Didot-Perceval* (c.1200), *Perlesvaus* (early thirteenth century), the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* (c.1225) and Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1469). It will also briefly consider John Hardyng's *Chronicle*.¹¹ These Grail narratives overtly address the

⁹ Nigel Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 37–8.

¹⁰ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 5.

¹¹ Full introductions to each text are given in the second section of the introduction to this thesis.

spiritual significance of the Grail *aventures* and construe other *aventures* as mere distractions. These Grail romances therefore rework audience expectations of typical romance conventions. This thesis contends that reading these Old French and Middle English narratives together allows for an appreciation of the horizons that the Grail texts share as well as highlighting places in which they differ. Comparative analysis of these five texts enhances an appreciation of the distinct logic under which this group of narratives operate. This logic brings secular and spiritual into dialogue, and therefore illuminates the significance of the Grail narratives overall. In Chrétien's *Perceval*, for example, the narrative explains that although Perceval travels for five years without thinking of God

ce ne relaissoit il mie
A requerre chevalerie,
Que les estranges aventures,
Les felonesses et les dures
Aloit querant, et s'an trova
Tant que molt bien s'i esprova. (*Perceval*, ll. 6151-6156)

[he never ceased to pursue deeds of chivalry: he sought out the most difficult, treacherous and unusual adventures, and found enough to test his valour. (Kibler, p. 457)]

These *aventures*, however, bring him no closer to the object of his quest, and it is not until he has made confession that he can attempt to find the Grail once again.¹² The *Didot-Perceval* similarly describes the wondrous feats of arms that Perceval completes but which bring him no closer to the Grail:

Et saciés que il cevaucá puis set ans par les païs et par les forés querant aventures, et saciés que il onques aventure ne cevalerie ne merveille ne trova que il n'akievast.¹³

[he rode for seven years through the lands and forests in search of adventures, and every adventure and marvel and test of chivalry he encountered he brought to a successful outcome.]¹⁴

¹² The fact that the text is unfinished means that it is not possible to tell how successful Perceval might then have been.

¹³ William Roach, ed., *The Didot-Perceval* (Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), p. 219.

These feats of arms only serve to distract Perceval from thinking about the religious significance of his quest: ‘devint il si dervés et si fors del sens, et si en perdi sen memoire que en ces set ans ne li sovint onques de Diu, n’en sainte yglyse ne en mostier n’entra’ (Didot-*Perceval*, pp. 219-220) [‘he became so distracted and lost his senses and memory to such a degree that in those seven years he gave no thought to God and never set foot in any holy church or minster’ (Bryant, p. 146)]. In both texts completing martial *aventures* does not bring Perceval any closer to achieving the Grail, and it is not until he is reminded of the spiritual dimension of his quest through references to the seasonal Easter celebrations that he is able to progress towards the object of his desire.¹⁵

In the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal* Christian spiritual priorities distinguish secular Arthurian *aventures* and Grail *aventures*. When the recluse speaks to Lancelot about the tournament between the white and black knights in the quotation cited above she draws a distinction between ‘erthly’ and ‘hevnly’ *aventures*. This distinction, drawn frequently throughout the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, is important to each of the Grail texts and is a distinction that I will suggest is relevant to an understanding of the Grail narratives discussed in this thesis. The knights must let go of ‘wordely’ concerns, behaviours, and even chivalry, to fully understand that each of the *aventures* of the Grail quest is ‘but a tokenynge of oure Lorde’ (*Morte*, p. 721), and thus requires a form of religious interpretation.

¹⁴ In the Didot-*Perceval* Perceval spends seven years wandering as opposed to the five stated in Chrétien’s text. Nigel Bryant, trans., *Merlin and the Grail: The Trilogy of Arthurian Romances attributed to Robert de Boron* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 146.

¹⁵ In both the Vulgate *Queste* and Malory’s *Sankgreal*, a similar distinction is drawn between the *aventures* of the Grail, upon which the narrative focuses, and secular romance adventures that the knights encounter, but that the texts do not relate. When speaking of the time that Lancelot and Galahad spend together, for example, Malory writes that ‘they founde many straunge adventures and peryllous which they brought to an ende. But for tho adventures were wyth wylde beestes and nat in the quest of the Sancgreal, therfor the tale makith here no mencion therof’ (p. 595).

The Grail Narratives

Although medieval Arthurian narratives telling the story of the Grail exist in a number of different languages, including German, Spanish and Portuguese, as well as French and English, this thesis focuses on the Old French and Middle English Grail narratives. The legend of the Grail appears for the first time in French texts, and there are a greater variety of Grail texts written in Old and Middle French than in any other medieval language. The close exchange of ideas in medieval English and French literatures informs the selection of Old French and Middle English Grail narratives under discussion in this thesis. This close relationship has not been neglected by critics. As Ardis Butterfield suggests, the close relationship between these two languages and cultures is one of the defining characteristics of medieval English literature.¹⁶ In *English Medieval Romance* (1987), W. J. Barron discusses continental literature as a context for Middle English romances.¹⁷ In *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (1994) William Calin takes this further, and explores the effects of Old French and Anglo Norman texts on the literature that was produced in Medieval England.¹⁸

The Old French and Middle English Grail narratives are part of this self-reflexive tradition. Prior to the advent of English Arthurian romance, evidence suggests that French and Welsh narratives about King Arthur and his knights drew influence from one another simultaneously. As Helen Cooper describes,

¹⁶ Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ W. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987).

¹⁸ Calin divides his study into four sections which focus on the effect of Anglo Norman texts on medieval English literature, the effects of insular French texts, English literary reception of French literature and the phenomenon of translation and adaptation. William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

legends about Arthur had been circulating in the Celtic areas of Britain for some time before Geoffrey [of Monmouth] developed them into a full biography; and some of the tales in the Welsh *Mabinogion* show close links with Chrétien.¹⁹

Early romance, therefore, can be imagined as a synergistic site, in which the concurrent sharing of ideas and styles from several cultural spheres allows both English and French literatures to develop the now familiar form of Arthurian romance. Old French and Middle English Arthurian romances had a common readership, so considering English and French Arthurian romances alongside one another therefore replicates a process that medieval readers might have undergone. The Grail texts reflect the close relationship between medieval English and French literatures and cultures, while the contemporary religious customs and beliefs of each country are woven into the Arthurian story to create each individual narrative of the Grail.

The thesis focuses primarily on five of the Old French and Middle English Grail narratives: Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* (c.1190); the Didot-*Perceval* (c.1200); *Perlesvaus* (early thirteenth century); the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* (c. 1225); and Thomas Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* (1469). Together, these texts map the transformation of the Grail legend in French and English medieval literature. This study will also consider the Continuations of Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Grail section of the Post-Vulgate Cycle, and John Hardyng's *Chronicle*. It does not look in detail at the Prose *Tristan*, as the *Tristan* author chose to include the Grail story from the *Queste del Saint Graal*, rather than writing a different version of the narrative. The lack of an extant French version of the Post-Vulgate Cycle precludes a detailed examination of the text in this study. References to the Post-Vulgate Cycle are therefore taken from Martha Asher's composite translation of the text, edited by Norris J. Lacy, which draws upon Spanish and Portuguese sources alongside the

¹⁹ Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 26–7.

fragments of the Old French text.²⁰ Hardyng uses the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* as the source for his Grail narrative, but redacts many of the events of the *Queste*. Hardyng also omits most of the accounts of the Grail miracles and their exegetical explanations, in line with the fact that his text is a chronicle as opposed to a romance narrative. As Felicity Riddy notes, Hardyng ‘ignores the inwardness of the religious experience’ for which the Grail stands, in favour of using the Grail quest as one in a series of high points for the knights of the Round Table.²¹ Since the focus of this thesis is on the knights’ interpretation of the miracles and *aventures* attached to the Grail, Hardyng’s text offers less relevant material to this thesis. For this reason, the Post Vulgate Cycle and Hardyng’s *Chronicle* receive less critical attention here.

As stated above, this thesis proposes that the four Old French and one Middle English Grail narratives under consideration here represent a distinct subgenre of medieval romance that functions according to a unique form of logic. Taking a selection of Grail narratives into account, and focussing on the diegetic implications of the Grail, this thesis highlights the relationships between different conceptualisations of the Grail. Considering the Grail narratives alongside one another, as well as in contrast to other episodes from the cycles to which they belong, also allows for a more comprehensive appreciation of the structural and thematic features that distinguish this group of narratives. It also permits for the identification of chronological developments in the Grail story across the different narratives. Despite being written several centuries after the last of the Old French Grail

²⁰ Martha Asher, trans., *The Post-Vulgate Cycle: The Merlin Continuation*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010). As Fanni Bogdanow explains, ‘unlike the Vulgate Cycle or Prose *Tristan*, the Post-Vulgate Cycle *Arthuriad* has not been preserved in its complete form in any one manuscript, but has to be reconstructed from the scattered fragments that have survived’. Bogdanow states, however, that ‘it is possible to date the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal* fairly precisely, for the prose romance of *Palomède* which was in existence by 1240 contains a clear reference to the final incident of our work, Mark’s deconstruction of Camelot’. Fanni Bogdanow, *The Romance of the Grail* (New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1966), pp. 11 and 13.

²¹ Felicity Riddy, ‘Chivalric Nationalism and the Holy Grail in John Hardyng’s *Chronicle*’, in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York, NY: Garland, 2000), pp. 397–414 (p. 407).

narratives, the *Tale of the Sankgreal* shows a close interaction with both the events and the ideas of the earlier Grail narratives in ways that justify close comparative analysis. The commonalities and differences in presentations of the Grail and Grail miracles in the *Tale of the Sankgreal* and the earlier Old French Grail narratives signify that Grail romances constitute a distinct subgenre of medieval romance, from which the disparate time frame of their composition does not detract. Although each text uses the Grail to discuss (different) contemporary religious beliefs, they do so in similar ways. This thesis will show that although this group of narratives represent different literary movements, and were composed in different countries across a comparatively large timeline, they are operating according to a distinct and shared form of logic that reflects twelfth and thirteenth century ideas about logical processes, as discussed in more detail in the next section of the introduction to this thesis. Close comparative analysis highlights the way in which each text responds to this logic, and to the object of the Grail itself, and thus furthers understandings of representations of the Grail in medieval French and English literature.

The term ‘cycle’ was first used to describe the groups of medieval Arthurian romances by Claude Charles Fauriel:

En un mot, les romans de chaque classe roulent, pour ainsi dire, dans un même cercle, autour d’un point fixe commun. En ce sens, on peut les regarder comme des parties distinctes, comme des épisodes isolés d’une seule et même action; c’est dans ce sens que l’on a dit qu’ils formaient des cycles, et que l’on a parlé des romans du cycle de la Table ronde, de ceux du cycle Charlemagne.²²

Fauriel defines the collections of Arthurian romances as a cycle as they have a ‘centre’ in King Arthur and the Round Table. As David Staines summarises, Fauriel’s discussion proposes two meanings of the word ‘cycle’:

on the one hand cycle designates the classification or group of all romances that treat in any way the realm of Arthur or Charlemagne. At the same time cycle also refers to

²² Claude Charles Fauriel, *Origine de l’Épopée Chevaleresque du Moyen Age* (Paris: August Auffrey, 1897), p. 14.

those extended romances that bring together a variety of episodes from earlier and shorter romances.²³

While modern criticism of Arthurian romance has continued to use both definitions, it is the second definition to which this thesis refers. The term ‘cycle’, relating to ‘a circle or orbit in reference to the movement of the heavenly bodies’ as it was understood in the Middle Ages, describes what we call the ‘cyclical structure’ in Arthurian romances.²⁴ Miriam Edlich-Muth, however, discusses the potential problems with the terms ‘cyclicality’ and ‘cyclification’ in relation to the Arthurian narrative. Edlich-Muth argues that,

although it is an accepted and widespread term[...] the ‘cycle’ category has become confused over the years, as discussions of ‘cyclicality’ and ‘cyclification’ have focussed on chronological and seasonal forms of ‘cyclicality’, which suggest that the Arthurian plotline is shaped by recurrence – an implication that stands in contradiction to the developmental thrust of a plot depicting Arthur’s rise, prime and decline.²⁵

The reconciliation of a cyclical form with a forward progression is something that I discuss both later in this introduction and in Chapter Three in relation to time. The arrival of the Grail refocusses the thematic ‘centre’ of the romance cycles away from King Arthur and the secular *aventures* of the knights of the Round Table and onto the Grail and salvation history. This change both disrupts the cyclical structure of the romances and necessitates the change in the logic(s) according to which the *aventures* that the knights encounter should be interpreted.

Before looking at the structural and interpretative features of the Grail in detail, however, it is first important to examine the way in which each text presents the quest for the

²³ David Staines, ‘The Medieval Cycle: Mapping a Trope’ in *Transtextualities: Of Cycles and Cyclicality in Medieval French Romance*, ed. by Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), pp. 15–37 (p. 28).

²⁴ Staines, ‘The Medieval Cycle’, p. 17.

²⁵ Edlich-Muth proposes that the term ‘chronography’ is a more accurate way to describe the structure of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*: ‘The term ‘chronography’ suggests the charting of chronological developments aligned to a biography – in this case, the biography of Arthur. At the same time, it is broad enough to encompass different types of adaption, making it possible to distinguish between the different levels of chronological and structural consistency within the texts, while recognising the shared characteristics of late Arthurian text collections’. Miriam Edlich-Muth, *Malory and his Eurpoean Contemporaries: Adapting late Arthurian Romance Collections* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 9–10.

Grail. The earliest Grail narrative, and first text to be considered in this thesis, is Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* or the *Conte du Graal*. This unfinished text, composed 1190, exists in fifteen manuscripts.²⁶ While in the later Old French Grail narratives the Grail is inseparable from the story of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, in Chrétien's *Perceval* the Grail is never given an explicitly Christian origin. The Grail itself appears as part of a procession at the Fisher King's castle. Instead of the single and definitive 'saint Graal' depicted in the Didot-*Perceval* and retained by all of the later Grail authors, Chrétien's Grail is simply 'un graal', one of an implied number of similar objects. This procession also includes gold candelabra, a silver platter and, perhaps most mysteriously, a bleeding lance. Importantly, in this narrative Perceval must ask what the Grail is, and who it serves, making his subsequent *aventures* primarily a quest for knowledge gained through instruction and explanation. His decision to act upon the advice of Gournemant of Gohort, from whom he receives chivalric instruction, and to remain silent at his first experience of the Grail procession, leads to his disgrace, and he is forced to leave the Grail castle without success. It is also notable that Chrétien's *Perceval* is the only knight to search for the Grail. Similarly, Gawain's quest to find the bleeding lance is depicted as an individual challenge. The individual nature of each knight's quest is subsequently amplified in the collective yet solitary questing in *Perlesvaus*, the Vulgate *Queste* and Malory's *Sankgreal*. Chrétien's text narrates the *aventures* of Gawain and Perceval as each knight attempts to find the Fisher King's castle, but suddenly ends while on Gawain's quest.

In Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, the lack of explanation as to why the Grail is particularly prominent coupled with the fact that the text is unfinished leaves this story of the

²⁶ Information about the manuscripts for each text comes from Leah Tether, *Publishing the Grail in Medieval and Renaissance France* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 4–8. This thesis does not include a detailed study of the manuscripts of each text, as it takes a primarily literary approach in analysing and comparing depictions of the Grail miracles. However, a discussion of the way in which Grail narratives were compiled and published, informed by Tether's recent study, can be found in the conclusion to this thesis.

Grail unexplained and open to literary reinterpretations. The four *Continuations* of Chrétien's text, written between 1200 and 1225, provide examples of some of the earliest responses to the Grail story. It is worth noting that, with one exception, the *Continuations* always appear in manuscripts alongside versions of Chrétien's *Perceval*. The number of manuscripts in which the *Continuations* are preserved provide evidence for the growing popularity of the Grail story in the early thirteenth century. As Tether enumerates,

the *First Continuation*, c. 1200, [is] preserved in eleven French manuscripts and two fragments; the *Second Continuation*, no later than 1210, [is] preserved in eleven French Manuscripts; the continuations of Gerbert de Montreuil and Manessier, both composed c. 1225-30, [are] preserved in two and seven French manuscripts respectively, with a further fragment for Manessier.²⁷

However, despite articulating an aim to complete Chrétien's unfinished text, as Leah Tether observes, 'the *Perceval Continuations* seem to have a number of different motives in mind as only one of them actually provides a conclusion to the story'.²⁸ Indeed, the *First Continuation*, *Second Continuation* and *Gerber Continuation* extend the story of the Grail without drawing the narrative to a conclusion – each extending the *aventures* of Perceval and Gawain before suddenly stopping every bit as abruptly as their predecessor. In fact, the *Second Continuation* 'stops mid-Grail scene just before all is revealed to Perceval'.²⁹ Only the *Manessier Continuation* draws the narrative to a conclusion. Tether uses these narratives to distinguish between a number of different types of continuation.³⁰ As Matilda Bruckner suggests, 'responding to the architecture of Chrétien's romance as a beginning, this romance

²⁷ Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, p. 4.

²⁸ Leah Tether, *The Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval: Content and Construction, Extension and Ending* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 2.

²⁹ Tether, *The Continuations*, p. 15. Tether suggests that 'in provisional terms the *Second Continuation* has no 'end' as it does not tie, fully, the major narrative threads, most importantly not concluding the events at the Grail Castle'. Tether, *The Continuations*, p. 143.

³⁰ Tether describes a 'flow chart' approach, which first distinguishes between extension and conclusion, and then assigns the text to one of a number of subgenres, which include prolongation and interpolation. The fourth stage of the process that includes determining the 'Mode of the text', which Tether describes as 'the dominant adaptive process which appears to inform [the text's] construction'. The final stage is to create a description of the type of Continuation based on the four earlier stages. For more information and a full description of the process see Tether, *The Continuations*, pp. 191–3.

cycle produces a “conte du graal” more interested in middles than ends, a Grail story in which you can always find something more to sandwich in before the inevitable end’.³¹ A book-length study could be devoted to the experience of journeying towards and achieving the Grail in the *Perceval Continuations* alone. However, one of the purposes of this study is to examine the commonalities and differences between different Grail narratives across time. For this reason, in conjunction to the comparatively recent scholarly attention paid to the *Continuations* by Tether in her comparative work *The Continuations of Chrétien’s Perceval: Content and Construction, Extension and Ending* (2012), this study will devote less space to the *Continuations* than to the other Old French Grail narratives.³²

At the same time as the *First Continuation* was composed, Robert de Boron created a pre-history to the Grail story, the *Estoire dou Graal* or *Joseph D’Armathie* (c.1200). The *Joseph D’Armathie* reimagines the Grail as the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper, in which Joseph of Arimathea collects the blood that flows from the wound in Christ’s side after the crucifixion. This pre-history provides an unambiguously Christian origin for the Grail, and begins the literary tradition of the Grail as chalice. In fact, Robert’s reinterpretation of the Grail has shaped the way in which critics have viewed Chrétien’s work. As Melanie A. Hackney points out:

Although recent scholarship addresses the unorthodox nature of *Perceval*, it was long viewed through Robert’s eyes. His influence remains evident in modern-day notions of the Grail, proving the extent to which a work can evolve through the process of collaboration.³³

Robert de Boron also composed a second section to this text, which interweaves the story of Merlin with the history of the Grail. As Tether elucidates,

³¹ Matilda Bruckner, ‘Looping the Loop through a Tale of Beginnings, Middles and Ends: From Chrétien to Gerbert in the *Perceval Continuations*’, *Faux Titre*, 183 (2000), 33–51 (p. 34).

³² For information on other studies that have discussed the *Perceval Continuations* see Tether, *The Continuations*, pp. 5–6.

³³ Melanie A. Hackney, “‘The Collaborative Lens’: Robert de Boron’s Overshadowing of Chrétien de Troyes”, *Paroles Gelees*, 25 (2009), pp. 75–92 (83).

his 'mini-verse cycle' is witnessed by just one manuscript (MS fr. 20047, dated to c. 1300), but was shortly afterwards rendered into prose, possibly by Robert himself, and there are some fifteen extant manuscript witnesses to this prose redaction.³⁴

The history of Merlin is also interwoven with Arthur's ascension to the crown, which lays the foundation for the events of the concluding *Didot-Perceval*. The *Didot-Perceval*, no longer thought to have been written by Robert de Boron, is contained within two manuscripts alongside versions of the *Jospeh D'Arimathie* and *Merlin* and tells the story of Perceval's quest for the Grail. The cycle is concluded by the inclusion of a section that narrates the death of Arthur.

Although the *Didot-Perceval* itself follows a similar narrative to Chrétien's text, the addition of the *Jospeh D'Arimathie* and *Merlin* dramatically alter the way in which the events of the narrative invite interpretation. Once again, the Grail first appears to Perceval as part of a procession in the house of the Fisher King and the successful completion of the quest relies upon him asking who the Grail serves. However, the Christian pre-history of *Joseph D'Arimathie* places a greater weight on spiritual improvement in the *Didot-Perceval* as a way of getting closer to and achieving the Grail. In this text the Grail is finally achieved when Perceval has improved both his spiritual understanding and chivalric prowess and returns to the Fisher King's castle to ask the right question at the right time. At this point 'li Rois Pesciere est garis, et sont cheu li encantement de le terre de Bretagne' (*Didot-Perceval*, p.243) ['the Fisher King is healed, and the enchantments of the land of Britain are cast out' (Bryant, p. 156)]. After the Grail has been achieved the text includes a 'death of Arthur' section. Arthur travels overseas to conquer France and Rome, partly in an attempt to prevent the knights of the Round Table from going further abroad in search of *aventures*. Just after conquering Rome, however, Arthur receives news that, in his absence, Mordred has usurped his place as king and married Guinevere. When Arthur returns to defend his kingdom he

³⁴ Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, p. 5.

receives a fatal wound and is carried to Avalon to be treated by his sister Morgan. Merlin returns to narrate the final *aventures* to Blaise, before Blaise retires to Perceval's house to live in the company of the Grail. The end of this Trilogy focuses on the idea of remembrance, as the text explains that:

Ne de Merlin ne del Graal ne parole plus li contes, fors tant seulement que Merlins pria nostre Segnor que il fesist a tos caus merci volentiers orioient son livre, et qui le feroient escrire por ramembrer ses oeuvres. (Didot-Perceval, p. 279)

[Neither of Merlin nor of the Grail does the story say more, except that Merlin prayed to Our Lord to grant mercy to all who would willingly hear his book and have copied it for the remembrance of his deeds. (Bryant, p. 172)]

This importance placed on memory, and specifically on the written word as a conveyor of memories, is reiterated throughout the trilogy, and is later amplified in the Vulgate Cycle.

Each of the Grail narratives discussed in this study contains an account of a similarly fictive literary genealogy, in which the miracles of the Grail are recorded by an individual who witnessed them first hand. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, when the prose romance form was becoming increasingly popular, the narrative of *Perlesvaus* opens with an exhortation to its readers to hear:

Li estoires du saintisme vessel que on apele Graal, o quell li precious sans au Sauveer fu receüz au jor qu'il fu crucefiez por le pueple rachater d'enfer : Josephes le mist ne remembrance par la mencion de la voiz d'un angle, por ce que la veritez fust seü par son escrit e par son tesmoignage, de chevaliers e de preudomes, coment il voldrent soffrir painne e travail de la loi Jhesu Crist essaucier

[...]

Josephes nos raconte cest sainte estoire por le lignage d'un buen chevalier qui fu après le crucefiement Nostre Seigneur. Buens chavaliers fu sanz faille, car il fu chastes e virges de son cors, e hardiz de cuer e poissanz, e si ot teches sanz vilenie. N'estoit pas bauz de parler, e ne sanbloit pas a sa chiere qu'il delaia a dire, avindrent si grant meschaances a la Grant Breteigne que totes les illes e totes les terres en chaïrent en grant doleur.³⁵

[the story of that holy vessel which is called the Grail, in which the precious blood of the Saviour was gathered on the day when He was crucified to redeem mankind from Hell; Josephus recorded it at the behest of an angel, so that by his writing and

³⁵ William A. Nitze and T. Atkinson Jenkins, eds., *Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 23–4.

testimony the truth might be known of how knights and worthy men were willing to suffer toil and hardship to exalt the Law of Jesus Christ.

[...]

Josephus tells us this holy tale about the family of a good knight who lived after the crucifixion of Our Lord. A good knight he was, for he was chaste and pure in body, bold of heart and strong, and in him there was no wickedness. But he had no way with words and his face did not suggest such courage; and indeed, through just a few words which he neglected to say, such great misfortunes befell Britain that all the isles and lands fell into great sorrow.]³⁶

This opening presents the narrative of *Perlesvaus* as a continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, but simultaneously incorporates the Christian pre-history of the Grail created by Robert de Boron. The narrator explains that Arthur's waning interest in pursuing *aventure* has led to fewer *aventures* and marvels happening in Britain. To receive guidance and restore the fame and popularity of the Round Table, Arthur visits the chapel of St Augustine and witnesses a vision of the Virgin Mary and the child Christ. After this miracle a hermit explains Perceval's earlier mistake at the Grail castle (as described in Chrétien's text). To renew interest in *aventure*, Arthur decides to hold a celebration at the feast of St John, which marks the beginning of the quest of the Grail.³⁷ In this text, the knights who reach the Grail castle initially fail to achieve the chalice because of the wondrous effect that it has on them.³⁸ Gawain, for example, neglects to ask who the Grail serves because he 'est pensis, et li vient si grant joie en sa pensee q'il ne li membre de rein se de Dieu' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 119) ['was deep in thought, so deep in joyful thought that he could think only of God' (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 79)]. This distraction marks Gawain as ultimately unworthy to achieve the Grail.

³⁶ Nigel Bryant, trans., *The High Book of the Grail* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978), p. 19. The date of *Perlesvaus* has been frequently debated by scholars of Arthurian literature. As Tether elucidates, 'many argue for a very early date of composition [...] while some consider the romance to have been composed significantly later, perhaps closer to 1250'. Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, p. 6. For a summary of the arguments related to dating *Perlesvaus* see Thomas E. Kelly, *Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus: A Structural Study* (Geneva: Droz, 1974).

³⁷ *Perlesvaus* explains that Arthur decided to hold it 'on that day because Pentecost was too soon, and some of those who would be attending would not have been able to be there in time' (p. 33). Later the knights themselves wonder at this choice of date, as the text explains that they 'had come from all around, wondering why the king had not held this great court at Pentecost' (p. 33).

³⁸ The appearance of the Grail at Camelot in the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* has a similar effect on the knights.

At the same time, however, many of the more miraculous features of the Grail story are omitted. The mobility attributed to the Grail landscape, for example, is absent from this text, and the knights are instead prevented from entering the Fisher King's lands because of a series of ingenious war machines. Similarly, the Fisher King, keeper of the Grail, is described as 'li mielres rois *qu vive en terre* [...] et plus loiaz e li plus droituriers' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 50) ['the greatest, most loyal and upright king *on earth*' (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 34)] [emphasis mine]. As opposed to occupying a separate spatial and temporal framework, in *Perlesvaus* the Fisher King's lands are a static part of the Arthurian landscape. This decentering of the Grail is accentuated by the fact that in this text the Grail is achieved a little over half-way through the narrative, which does not end until Perceval has defeated a series of earthly adversaries, and finally returned to the Grail Castle.

The next Grail text in the chronology, the prose Vulgate Cycle (c. 1225), takes a different direction from the *Perlesvaus* and amplifies the Grail legend presented in the *Jospeh D'Arimathie*, Merlin and Didot-Perceval by interpolating the story of Lancelot between the story of Merlin and the quest of the Grail.³⁹ The structure of this cycle is therefore as follows: the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the *Suite de Merlin*, the *Lancelot Propre*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the *Mort Artu*. Evidence suggests, however, that the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Suite de Merlin* were composed later than the *Lancelot Propre*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the *Mort Artu*.⁴⁰ This, again, suggests an interest in authenticating the story of the Grail through a return to and creation of a pseudo-religious history and lineage, as will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three. To further unite the story of the Grail and the story

³⁹ For more information on the date of the text and evolution of the Arthurian Legend see Jane H. M. Taylor, 'The thirteenth-century Arthur', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 53-68. For information about the Vulgate Cycle manuscripts see Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁴⁰ Recently, however, Alison Stones has suggested that the Vulgate *Estoire* and *Merlin* may have been in circulation by 1220. For further information see Alison Stones, 'The Earliest Illustrated Prose *Lancelot* Manuscript', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 3 (1977), 3-44.

of Lancelot, Galahad replaces Perceval as the most successful Grail knight. In the *Queste*, the earthly Arthurian world and the Christian significance of the Grail are brought together through Galahad's lineage. Son to Lancelot, the best of all earthly knights, and Elaine, daughter to King Pellès (and thus descended from the line of Joseph of Arimathea), Galahad embodies the perfect ideal of celestial chivalry. The distinction between the nature of normative Arthurian *aventures* and Grail *aventures*, however, is highlighted through the inclusion of a Christian interpretation of each event. Approaching the Grail, therefore, becomes a matter of spiritual improvement. In the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* the quest to achieve the Grail is also transformed from a quest for knowledge gained through instruction, to a quest for perception and sight. As opposed to asking what the Grail is and who is served from it, the knights are journeying to receive a clear and open sight of the Grail and acquire knowledge about the Grail and what it stands for on their way.

Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1469) is the first Arthurian romance cycle written in English. The *Morte Darthur* omits all of the events of the *Joseph d'Armathe* and *Estoire del Saint Graal* as well as a large proportion of the *Suite de Merlin*, although we know that Malory did have access to the last of these texts. The *Tale of the Sankgreal*, however, follows its main source, the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal*, closely. At the same time, Malory consistently redacts the religious explanation of the Grail miracles. Furthermore, Malory's redaction of the history of the Grail has the effect of tying the events of the Grail quest more closely to the events of Arthur's reign. This is further supported through Malory's earlier inclusion of the tale of *Balin or the Knight with the Two Swords*, an episode found in the Post-Vulgate Cycle, but not the Vulgate Cycle itself. As Kevin Whetter highlights, 'the only knights in the whole of the *Morte Darthur* thus to draw swords from magical scabbards or

stones are Balyn, Galahad, and Arthur himself'.⁴¹ Through the inclusion of the episode of Balyn, Malory highlights the parallels between Galahad and these two other Arthurian figures, and thus draws the Grail quest further in to the secular Arthurian world.

As in the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal*, in the *Tale of the Sankgreal* the quest is for a clear sight of the Grail, and Galahad, as opposed to Perceval, is the principal Grail knight.⁴² The *Tale of the Sankgreal* follows the same narrative as the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and retains similar incidents and *aventures*, but Malory reduces and sometimes even omits the religious explanations of these *aventures*. This redaction caused earlier generations of critics to accuse Malory of misunderstanding or failing to appreciate the subtle religious significance of the French *Queste del Saint Graal*. C. S. Lewis, for example, writes that 'a case can be made out for the view that Malory evaded the religious significance' of the French Grail through the omissions of many of the longer religious explanations found in the *Queste*.⁴³ In some of his earlier scholarship, Vinaver describes the *Tale of the Sankgreal* as 'a confused and almost pointless story, a beautiful parade of symbols and bright visions'.⁴⁴ In the 1980s, however, scholarship started to attribute significance to the way in which Malory adapted his source. Sandra Ness Ihle's *Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaption in Medieval Prose Romance* (1983), for example, discusses the various ways in which Malory adapted the Vulgate *Queste* to build his own purposeful interpretation of the Grail story. More recent criticism has retained this scholarly focus. Dhira B. Mahoney, for example, suggests that the effect of Malory's rewriting is to express 'the thirteenth-century spiritual

⁴¹ K. S. Whetter, 'On Misunderstanding Malory's Balyn', in *Reviewing Le Morte Darthur*, ed. by K. S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp.149–62 (p. 151).

⁴² Although Galahad is the principle Grail knight Bors and Perceval also achieve some success on the Grail quest.

⁴³ C. S. Lewis, 'The English Prose *Morte*', in *Essays on Malory*, ed. by J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 7–28 (p. 7).

⁴⁴ Eugène Vinaver, *Malory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), p. 84.

message in language and thought that is characteristic of the religious temper of fifteenth-century England'.⁴⁵

In writing the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, Malory drew on Hardyng's *Chronicle* and on Old French Grail texts to create a story that follows the narrative line of the French Vulgate Cycle but reflects the character of fifteenth-century English religious thought and feeling. Riddy, for example, suggests that the *Sankgreal's*

introspectiveness and its eucharistic-centred piety are very much fifteenth-century concerns [...] The *Sankgreal* has a place alongside Nicholas Love's *Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* – which has been particularly associated with the growth in lay literacy in the fifteenth century.⁴⁶

This method of adaptation and rewriting is common to the Grail narratives, each of which combines a close attention to contemporary religious tensions with an underlying interest in national identity frequently seen in Arthurian literature. The *Joseph D'Arimathie*, *Merlin* and *Didot-Perceval* and the Vulgate Cycle, written at a time that the doctrine of the Eucharist was under debate, use the Grail miracles to emphasise the relationship between the sacrament of the Eucharist and the actual body and blood of Christ. The unique combination of Christian pseudo-history and Arthurian material characterises the sub-genre of Grail narratives and differentiates this group of texts from other examples of Arthurian literature. Each of the Old French Grail narratives adapts the Grail legend to reflect contemporary debates and beliefs, while focusing on the same primary areas of Christian experience and presenting similar conceptualisations of time and space. In addition to writing new narratives into the flexible Arthurian cycle, the Grail narratives rewrite one another and deploy biblical history to authenticate their own tales.

⁴⁵ Dhira B. Mahoney, 'The Truest and Holiest Tale: Malory's Transformation of *La Queste del Saint Graal*', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 379–96 (p. 380).

⁴⁶ Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), p. 113.

This thesis identifies that conceptualisations of sight, space and time are developed chronologically through each new version of the Grail legend; each successive narrative builds upon distinctive features of some of the preceding narratives to present each unique version of the Grail story. For this reason, each of the chapters will follow a looser chronological structure. However, there are moments of close commonality between Grail narratives that come from a chronologically disparate time and that illustrate the relationships between all of the Grail narratives. To highlight these relationships the thesis will take a thematic approach, and each of the chapters will explore depictions of one of the primary areas of Christian experience: sight, space and time.

Grail Logic

One of the primary arguments of this thesis is that Grail quest narratives rework many of the familiar expectations and features of more secular Arthurian romances to highlight the eternal relevance of God's grace. To do this, this thesis draws upon ideas of logic and medieval theories of logical argumentation, to suggest that the ways in which the Grail miracles are used within each text can be further understood in relation to advances in logical theory in the thirteenth century. This thesis defines logic as the process of deductive reasoning that the knights are supposed to follow to interpret the *aventures* that they meet on the Grail quest. At the opening of the Grail quest the type of 'deductive reasoning' that the knights need to perceive changes from that followed in more secular Arthurian romance, and some of the decisions that the knights must make appear to be distinctly illogical. Choosing to lower your sword when faced by two growling lions, for example, as Lancelot is instructed to do when he arrives at Corbenic in the *Queste del Saint Graal* and *Tale of the Sankgreal*, directly contravenes the focus on physical prowess that dominates descriptions of Lancelot's successes in earlier parts of each text. In the Grail narratives under consideration in this thesis

the logic that the knights need to follow is in some ways the antithesis of what we might ordinarily think of as ‘common sense’. It is the un-common sense that the knights need to recognise and apply in order to progress on the Grail quest.

In the normative Arthurian world, the statement made by Chaucer’s Wife of Bath that ‘Experience, though noon auctoritee/ Were in this world, is right ynogh for me’ might characterise the way in which a young and inexperienced knight proves his worth.⁴⁷ In the story of La Cote Male Tayle in the *Tristram* section of the *Morte Darthur*, Mordred explicitly highlights the importance of experience to developing chivalric prowess in a defence of La Cote Male Tayle after he is unhorsed during a joust:

‘I warne you playnly he is a good knyght, and I doute nat but that he shall preve a noble man. But as yette he may nat sytte sure on horsebacke, for he that muste be a good horseman hit muste com of usage and excercise [...] For in lyke wyse Syr Launcelot du Lake, whan he was fyrste made knyght, he was oftyn put to the worse on horsebacke, but ever uppon foote he recoverde his renowne’. (*Morte*, p. 366)

Fighting on horseback, Mordred suggests, is a skill that must be learned, and a young knight’s inability to do this does not reflect a lack of chivalric potential.⁴⁸ Similarly, close to the beginning of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, Perceval himself is instructed in correct chivalric behaviour by Gornemant de Gohort:

Lors a desploïe l’ensaigne
Si l’aprant et si li ensaigne
Comant en doit son escu prandre.
Un petit lo vait avent pandre
Tant qu’au col do cheval lo joint
Et met la lence ou fautre et point
[...]
Et do cheval et de la lance,
Car il l’ot apris des enfance.
Si plot molt au vallet et sist
Trestot quant que li prodrom fist.
Quant il ot fait tot son cenbel

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Wife of Bath’s Prologue’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 105–21 (ll. 1–2).

⁴⁸ This incident is unusual, since youthful chivalric ineptitude is not often shown elsewhere in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.

Devant lo vallet bien et bel
Qui bien s'an est garde donee,
Si s'an revient lance levee
Au vallet et demande li:
'Amis, s'avreiez vos ansin
La lance et l'escu demener
Et lo cheval poindre et mener?' (*Perceval*, ll. 1385-1406)

[Then he unfurled the pennon and showed him how he should grip his shield. He let it hang a little forward so that it rested on the horse's neck, fewtered his lance, then spurred the horse [...]. The gentleman was very skilled with shield, horse and lance, for he had practiced with them since boyhood; everything the gentleman did pleased and delighted the young man. When he had gone through all his manoeuvres in front of the boy, who had observed them all very carefully, he returned to the youth with raised lance and asked him: 'Friend, could you maneuver the lance and shield like that, and spur and guide your horse?'. (Kibler, p. 399)]

Although Chrétien highlights Perceval's natural aptitude for chivalric activities, the techniques of jousting and horsemanship are skills that he needs to learn. It is the combination of his natural chivalric disposition and his own determination to practise, signified by the fact that his 'li cuers do tot i entant' (*Perceval*, l.1432) ['heart was set upon it' (Kibler, p. 399)], that allows Perceval to become the best knight in the world. In turn, it is this innate chivalric ability that makes Perceval worthy to search for the Grail.

Experience, however, is not only the means by which a knight improves his prowess (as Malory's Mordred states); it is also how he learns to interpret *aventures*, and, therefore, how he develops the ability to choose a successful course of action. Shortly after he is married, Arthur himself has to be taught the right way to react to *aventures* by Merlin when he responds to a potential *aventure* with inactivity:

'Nay' seyde Merlyon, 'ye may nat leve hit so, thys adventure, so lyghtly, for thes adventures muste be brought to an ende, othir ellis hit will be the disworchyp to you and to youre feste'. (*Morte*, p. 82)

In this example, Arthur's initial reaction marks his inability to interpret the significance of *aventures*. The Grail narratives replicate this learning process, as the knights must 'unlearn' their usual response to Arthurian *aventures* and instead acquire an understanding of the

correct way to engage in a Grail *aventure*. However, as the episode concerning Lancelot at the tournament of black and white knights indicates, experience of former *aventures* does not guarantee the successful completion of a Grail *aventure*, and Lancelot's considerable chivalric prowess cannot help him once he embarks upon what turns out to be the wrong course of action.

More secular romance narratives operate according to a form of logic that relies upon fate and chance, and Grail romances complicate this concept of *aventure* by relating it directly to knights' spiritual state. While to the knights questing for the Grail, the *aventures* still appear to materialise according to chance, these events are actually responding to the decisions and choices made by the knights themselves. James Wade suggests that, in certain sections of the *Morte Darthur*, the order of interlaced episodes seems to 'give way to unmotivated or at least under-motivated sequences in which the characters appear to be at the mercy of chance and the action of the narrative tends to become arbitrary'.⁴⁹ To illustrate this point, Wade discusses Malory's treatment of his source in the 'Gawain, Ywain and Marhalt' section of the *Morte Darthur*, in which the three knights meet 'thre damesels' (*Morte*, p. 127) sitting by a stream. When the knights question why the women are sat by the fountain they receive the reply that 'We be here [...] for this cause: if we may se ony of arraunte knyghtes to teche hem unto straunge adventures' (*Morte*, p. 127). These sequences, Wade argues, follow a distinct type of logic that is based on 'knowing through analogy', rather than a causal relationship between episodes.⁵⁰ While some of the events of the *Tale of the Sankgreal* may initially appear to correspond to Wade's description of 'under-motivated sequences', the distinct spiritual significance that each *aventure* has (as revealed by the explanations of hermits, priests and other religious figures inhabiting the Grail forest) indicate that the

⁴⁹ James Wade, 'Arbitrariness and Knowing in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Book 4.18–21', *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013), 18–42 (pp. 18–19).

⁵⁰ Wade, 'Arbitrariness and Knowing in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', p. 27.

narrative is functioning under a type of logic unique to the Grail. As Wade summarises, ‘in the Grail Quest the rules of the game are different, and the knights on that quest are faced with a logic slightly at an angle to that of the ordinary Malorian world’.⁵¹ In the world of the Grail it is the knight’s own choices that determine which *aventures* they encounter and the experiences that they have. It is this ‘Grail Logic’, a logic that Wade does not address, that forms the focus of my thesis.⁵²

This distinctive logic, illustrated by the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, can be seen in various forms in each of the earlier Old French Grail narratives. This thesis therefore explores the specific diegetic implications of ‘Grail Logic’ in Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval*, *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal*.⁵³ The heightened priority of religious values throughout the Grail quest means that a knight must interpret each *aventure* he faces to overcome it. To illustrate the importance of interpretation, the Grail narratives describe the journeys undertaken by each knight as uniquely personal experiences. Gone are the days where knights can expect to find a missing companion by following the *aventures* that this companion has already completed. The importance placed on ‘worldely’ knowledge of Arthurian *aventures* is eclipsed by the increased focus on spiritual perception. Understanding the diegetic implications of the Grail both deepens understandings of the Grail narratives themselves and furthers understandings of conceptualisations of time and space in secular romance.

⁵¹ Wade, ‘Arbitrariness and Knowing in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, p. 20.

⁵² In ‘Arbitrariness and knowing in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, Wade specifically acknowledges that an exploration of ‘Grail Logic’ would ‘require an extended, perhaps altogether different argument’ than the one he proposes for the logic of the more secular parts of the *Morte Darthur*. Wade, ‘Arbitrariness and knowing in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, p. 20.

⁵³ By diegetic implications I mean the effect that the Grail has on the structure of the Arthurian quests. In this thesis I am examining three primary areas of Christian experience – sight, space and time – and the way in which the arrival of the Grail transforms conceptualisations of each.

Medieval Forms of Argumentation

As the knights step into the Grail quest they enter into what can be conceptualised as a dialogue with God, in which the Grail miracles act as a form of argumentation. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, when Grail quest narratives were being written, medieval philosophers drew a distinction between two primary modes of logical argumentation: dialectic arguments and demonstrative arguments. Dialectic arguments followed a similar pattern to the method of dialectic argumentation described by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues.⁵⁴ According to Eleanor Stump, Socrates ‘discovers arguments [...] that he uses in oral disputation with some opponent to compel his opponent to agreement’.⁵⁵ For this reason, dialectic arguments have to be persuasive, to compel a second party to change their view on a given topic. The conclusions reached by such arguments, however, are not necessarily true.

In contrast,

a demonstrative argument such as a geometrical proof, begins (ultimately) with certain axioms, which are self-evidently true, and works by strict deductive steps from these self-evident truths to conclusions containing new information about the subject matter.⁵⁶

This view, that knowledge can only be produced by demonstrative arguments whose conclusions are unequivocally true, characterised thirteenth-century ideas about logic.⁵⁷

However, medieval logicians also perceived that one potential problem with demonstrative arguments as a method of persuading an opponent to a certain point of view is that the first axioms (as described above) are often difficult for a non-specialist to understand. This makes the deductive steps that proceed from these first axioms impossible to follow.

⁵⁴ Eleanor Stump, ‘Dialectic’, in *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages*, ed. by David L. Wagner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 125–146 (p. 126).

⁵⁵ Stump, ‘Dialectic’, p. 126.

⁵⁶ Stump, ‘Dialectic’, p. 126.

⁵⁷ Stump outlines the changing use of the term ‘dialectic’ throughout the Scholastic period. For more information see Stump, ‘Dialectic’, p. 127.

This thesis suggests that in each of the Grail texts, miracles associated with the Grail function as visual demonstrative arguments for the divine truths for which the Grail stands. Ideally, the knights should witness a vision or event, perceive the relationship between Arthurian events and the divine truth that the *aventure* illustrates, and decide how to act accordingly in a series of logical steps that lead to a further spiritual illumination. This, however, is rarely what happens, and most of the knights appear to find the deductive steps between Grail miracle and divine understanding impossible to follow. When Perceval first witnesses the Grail procession in Chrétien's *Perceval*, for example, he is unable to perceive the right way to act due to his lack of understanding of both the secular Arthurian world and the religious significance of the Grail quest. In trying to apply his limited understanding of the former to the Grail procession he misperceives the organising principles of the latter, and finds himself further from the Grail than he had been before he arrived at the Fisher King's castle. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* Lancelot frequently misunderstands what he sees, and is unable to follow the deductive process even once his Christian understanding improves. Even when Lancelot has cleared his eye to the extent that he is able to see a shadowy vision of mass and the transformation of the Host at Corbenic, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter One, he is unable to grasp its significance, and is subsequently left in a state of paralysis, devoid of his senses and any spatial or temporal awareness. Even Galahad, the most perfect of all the Grail knights, cannot follow the deductive process fully even though he always acts correctly, as indicated by his response to Bors after Bors, Perceval and Galahad have killed a number of non-Christian knights in the *Morte Darthur*. The knights, like a non-specialist party to a demonstrative argument, struggle to perceive the first axiom of divine truth and therefore cannot follow the deductive process through to understand how they should act.

The deductive steps are explained to both the knights and the reader by the hermits, priests and other religious figures that inhabit the Grail forest. The increase in exegetical explanation in each chronologically successive Grail narratives further reflects the rise of Scholastic perspectives throughout the thirteenth century. These perspectives questioned the nature of the distinction between dialectic and demonstrative arguments, particularly in relation to the production of knowledge. Medieval scholars became increasingly interested in the *Posterior Analytics* in which Aristotle states that

knowledge comes through demonstration'. By 'demonstration' I mean a scientific syllogism and by 'scientific' a syllogism the mere possession of which makes us know.⁵⁸

As John Marenbon elucidates, 'for Aristotle, scientific knowledge is of facts which cannot be otherwise than they are; its objects are eternal and changeless'.⁵⁹ The idea that a 'true' knowledge and understanding of a given topic could only be gained through demonstrative arguments (those which Aristotle defines as 'true, primary, immediate, better than, anterior to and the cause of the conclusion') led medieval scholars to concentrate on two primary questions:⁶⁰

1) What are the ultimate criteria (rather than simple formal criteria) for the validity of inferences?; and 2) what sort of things in the world can be the subject of necessary and unchanging premises?⁶¹

The result of this questioning was a blurring of the boundary between dialectic and demonstrative methods of argumentation. The Grail narratives reflect the resulting connection between metaphysics and logic through their depiction of the Grail miracles. The hermits, priests, abbots and other religious figures who inhabit the Grail landscape and who provide explanations of the knights' experiences fill in the deductive steps that the knights

⁵⁸ E. S. Bouchier, *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1901), p. 4.

⁵⁹ John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 47–48.

⁶⁰ Bouchier, *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Stump, 'Dialectic', p. 130.

themselves are unable to perceive. As such they provide the dialectic response to the demonstrative miracles.

The increase in exegetical explanations and length of the Christian history that accompany the Grail miracles in each successive Grail narrative is mirrored by the increasing interest in the distinction between the dialectic and demonstrative arguments across the thirteenth century. J. D. G. Evans suggests that ‘dialectic proceeds by asking questions rather than making statements which distinguishes it from scientific demonstration’.⁶² Catherine Kavanagh further suggests that ‘rather than establishing absolute, incontrovertible, logical proofs, which is demonstration, dialectic aims to produce conviction’.⁶³ Kavanagh also states that

a notable use of the dialectical [...] occurs in those areas where demonstration would be impossible, for instance, in the question of the relation between the utterly transcendent God and his creation.⁶⁴

When the knights request interpretations of a given event from a religious figure they engage in form of dialectic reasoning. The hermits and other religious figures do not only ‘fill in’ and explain the spaces between each deductive step that connects the Grail miracle to the religious truth for which it stands, and so lead the knights to a practical action, they also often provide a compelling argument as to why the knight should follow this guidance. At the beginning of Lancelot’s quest in the *Sankgreal*, for example, Lancelot is advised to confess all of his previous sins because ‘youre strengthe and your manhode woll litill avayle you and God be agaynste you’ (*Morte*, p. 696). It is the advice given by similar religious figures, which draws upon Christian history and understanding, that the knights must accept and believe to progress towards the Grail.

⁶² J. D. G. Evans, *Aristotle’s Concept of Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 22.

⁶³ Catherine Kavanagh, ‘Eriugenian Developments of Ciceronian Topical Theory’, in *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism: Rhetoric, Representation and Reform*, ed. by Stephen Gersh and Bert Roest (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), pp. 1–30 (p. 6).

⁶⁴ Kavanagh, ‘Eriugenian Developments of Ciceronian Topical Theory’, p. 9.

Reading the Grail miracles as examples of demonstrative arguments therefore illuminates the progression from very little exegetical explanation in Chrétien's *Perceval* to the profusion of exegesis in the Vulgate *Queste*. In *Perceval*, Perceval is supposed to witness the Grail procession, understand the story of resurrection and sacrifice for which it stands, and therefore ask whom the Grail serves in a series of logical steps that do not require further explanation. Perceval's almost comical lack of understanding results in his failure, and he quickly finds himself geographically further from the Grail than he was before he first set out. It is not until Perceval is reminded of God's grace some five years later that he makes the great leap forwards in understanding that the reader can only assume would eventually lead him back to the Fisher King's castle and allow him to achieve an understanding of the Grail.

The *Joseph D'Arimathie*, *Merlin* and *Didot-Perceval* attempt to fill in the deductive gaps of Perceval's story with the addition of the Christian pre-history that provides a persuasive context for the Grail, and the addition of characters to act as guides. In the prose Trilogy Merlin reappears to Perceval on a number of occasions to provide him with the explanation and information that he needs to progress on the quest. Perceval is also directed by two children that he finds sitting in a tree, as is discussed further in Chapter Two of this thesis. Furthermore, the action that Perceval must complete to achieve the Grail is announced to the Arthurian court, thus reducing the number of deductive steps that he must make alone.

Although the spatio-temporal relations in *Perlesvaus* are somewhat different in form to those presented in the other Grail narratives, the text includes a great increase in exegetical explanation from that found in the *Didot-Perceval* and the appearance of some distinctly visual Grail miracles. In this text, unlike in the earlier Grail narratives, the knights encounter a visual phenomenon, meet a religious figure who elucidates this vision for them, and then continue their journey with a greater degree of Christian understanding, establishing the

pattern that governs the spatio-temporal conceptualisations in the Vulgate *Queste*. This pattern can be seen in Arthur's *aventure* at the Chapel of St Augustine and Gawain's experiences on the way to the Fisher King's lands, as discussed in Chapter Two. In the example of Lancelot at the tournament of black and white knights, discussed above, the tournament itself is a visual demonstration of the combat between righteousness and sin contained within each individual. If Lancelot could perceive the logic of the Grail he would be able to witness the tournament, correctly interpret it, and would thus choose to join the side of the white knights. However, Lancelot is not able to follow this deductive process, and requires a recluse to explain both the significance of the tournament and the action that Lancelot should have taken.

Bohort's vision of the two lilies and the rotten tree in the *Queste del Saint Graal* provides one of the clearest examples of this process. As Bohort rides through the forest he meets a priest with whom he speaks and from whom he later asks counsel. He leaves the priest the next day, after having the sacrament of the Eucharist explained to him, and spends the night in a castle belonging to a lady. That night he has two visions. In the first,

a senestre partie . j. fust pouri vermeneus si foeble qua paines se pooit il tenir en estant; A destre auoit. ij. flors de lis. Lune des flors se tenoit pres de lautre & li voloit sa blanchor tolr (*Queste*, p. 123).

[to his left, some distance away, there was a rotten, worm-eaten tree trunk, so weak that it could hardly stand. To the right there were two lillies of the valley. One of the flowers bent toward the other and tried to deprive the second of its whiteness. (Burns, p. 55)]

The lilies are separated by a 'preudons' who is seated on a throne, and who tells Bors that he should 'Or ten garde [...] se tu vois teile aventure auenir que tu ne la[i]sses pas les flors perir por le fust pouri secorre' (*Queste*, p. 123) ['take care that if such an adventure should occur, you do not allow the flowers to perish for the sake of the rotten tree' (Burns, p. 55)]. The vision that Bors encounters in his dream acts as a demonstrative argument. Two days later

Bohort meets with ‘vne aventure merueilleuse’ (*Queste*, p. 125) at a crossroads and is forced to choose between saving his brother Lionel, who is being beaten and led away by two knights, and saving a young girl who has been abducted by a knight. At this point the *Queste* begins to blur ‘the distinction between romance adventure and dream’, and the truth exemplified by the dream becomes a physical *aventure* that he must overcome.⁶⁵ Without making a conscious reference to the events of his dream Bohort chooses to save the young girl and then returns to the crossroads to look for his brother unsuccessfully. After meeting a false priest who incorrectly interprets the *aventure* for him Bohort finds himself at an abbey of white monks. Here, the Abbot provides an exegetical explanation of all the events that Bohort has encountered since meeting the first priest, relating Bohort’s choice at the crossroads to his earlier vision of the lilies:

Le fust sans force & sans vertu senefie lyonel ton frere qui na en soi nule vertu de nostre signor qui en estant le tiegne. La poureture senefie la grant plente des pechiez quil a en amonchelees de ior en ior. [...] Par les .ij. flors qui estoient a destre dois tu entendre .ij. virges. Si en est li cheualiers que vos naurastes li vns & lautre la pucele que vous rescousistes. (*Queste*, p. 133)

[The tree without strength or sap represents your brother Lionel, who has none of the virtues of Our Lord that you possess. The rotten wood represents the abundance of mortal sins that he has accumulated from day to day within himself. [...] The two flowers to your right represent two virgins. One is the knights whom you wounded yesterday, and the other the maiden that you rescued. (Burns, p. 59)]

In choosing to rescue the maiden, the Abbot explains that Bohort has acted in accordance with the warning of the vision. Bohort has acted correctly, although he cannot perceive the deductive steps necessary to fully understand his choice. The Abbot’s explanation subsequently fills in any dialectic gap in Bohort’s understanding, and clarifies both the events of the narrative and the Christian reasoning behind the choice that Bohort faced. There is a progression from the vision in the dream (the initial demonstrative argument), to diegetic events (the physical *aventure* that is designed to test Bohort’s ability to reason), and finally to

⁶⁵ Burns, *Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*, p. 74.

the explanation of the same events through Christian theology, as ‘the reader is made to come full circle in a loop’.⁶⁶

Not only do the *Queste* and the *Morte Darthur* encourage the readers to put themselves in the position of the knights and make the deductive steps necessary to perceive the Christian miracles of the Grail, but they also conceptualise the knights themselves as kinds of readers. Wade suggests that:

when readers construct fictional worlds they fill in the gaps in the text by assuming a familiarity with their own experience, other narratives participating in an audience’s imaginative network will always shade the reception of any given text.⁶⁷

The knights’ own experiences in earlier *aventures* influence the way in which they interpret the Grail miracles. Lancelot’s interpretation of the *aventures* that he meets, for example, is frequently shaped by his experiences on secular quests. As a result, Lancelot is never fully able to clearly perceive a Grail miracle, and once the quest is over Lancelot returns unchanged to his place in the world of secular romance ‘and forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste’ (*Morte*, p. 790).

This is not to say, however, that a lack of earlier *aventures* guarantees immediate success, although it is one of the things that the two most successful Grail knights – Perceval in Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the Didot-*Perceval*, and *Perlesvaus*; and Galahad in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* – have in common. Neither Perceval nor Galahad appears in any other Arthurian narratives prior to the quest of the Grail, although the reasons for and terms of their absence from the main Arthurian narrative are very different. Perceval, deliberately isolated from the Arthurian and chivalric worlds by his mother, must create his own chivalric, as well as religious, narrative before he is able to achieve the Grail. This dual emphasis on chivalric progression and Christian education is repeated in each subsequent *Perceval* Grail text.

⁶⁶ Burns, *Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*, p. 64.

⁶⁷ Wade, *Fairies*, p. 3.

Galahad, on the other hand, is brought up in an abbey. His exclusion from the Arthurian world allows him to participate in the Grail Quest without having to atone for any former misdeeds (as Lancelot must) or ‘re-learn’ how to react to *aventures*, while his religious education allows him to perceive how to act correctly. At the same time, however, Galahad’s position as the best of all knights, and therefore as worthy to achieve the Grail, can only be established once he has created his own chivalric narrative and proved himself against the Grail *aventures*. Understanding the Grail miracles as demonstrative arguments provides a logical framework through which both knights and readers can interpret the Grail miracles, and thus understand the process of spiritual improvement towards which the texts direct their audiences.

The focus on individual perception and understanding inherent in the conceptualisation of the knights as readers is illuminated through each narrative’s depiction of three primary modes of Christian experience: sight, space and time. Each of these modes of experience features frequently in medieval Christian writings, and often serves the function of differentiating between the principles that underlie human experience and divine reality. In the *Confessions*, for example, Augustine discusses sight, space and time in relation to the distinction between human experience and divine reality:

*et cum te primum cognovi, tu adsumpsisti me ut viderem. Et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore. Et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis.*⁶⁸

[When I first recognised you, you lifted me up, to let me see that there was something I must see, but I was not yet capable of seeing it. Your beams of light reflected back the weakness of my sight, so brightly did they shine upon me, and I trembled with love and awe. Then I discovered that I was far away from you, in a place of unlikeliness (p. 329)]

et non illuc ibatur navibus aut quadrigis aut pedibus, quantum saltem de domo in eum locum ieram ubi sdebaumus. Nam non solum ire verum etiam pervenire illus nihil

⁶⁸ Carolyn J. B. Hammond, trans., *Augustine of Hippo: Confessions: Books 1-8* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014) p. 328.

erat aliud quam velle ire, sed velle fortiter et integre, non semisauciam hat atque hac versare et iactare voluntatem parte adsurgente cum alia parte cadente luctantem (p. 392)

[There is no going there by boat or chariot, or on foot; it is not even as far as my movement from the house to this place where we were sitting. For not only heading there but also arriving there was simply a matter of having the will to go there; but it must be a constant and complete willingness, with no tossing and turning a half-wounded will this way and that, hesitating while one part seeks to ascend and the other to sink (p. 393)]

Augustine suggests that physical sight alone does not allow one to perceive spiritual truths, and that the only way to ‘arrive’ both figuratively and literally, at a destination of spiritual understanding is to have a complete and unchanging desire to improve one’s spiritual understanding. The Grail narratives portray the knights’ varying degrees of spiritual understanding through the fabric of each knight’s Grail journey.

Literature Review

None of the Grail narratives has lacked critical attention individually. Many book-length studies of the Arthurian narratives have tended to focus on a single Arthurian text, from Ferdinand Lot’s early *Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose* (1916), Albert Pauphilet’s *Etudes sur la Queste del Saint Graal* (1921), and Jean Frappier’s *Etude sur la Mort le Roi Artu* (1936) through to E. Jane Burns’ *Rereading the Vulgate Cycle* (1985), Elizabeth Edwards’ *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory’s Morte Darthur* (2001) and Frank Brandsma’s *The Interlace of the Third Part of the Prose Lancelot* (2010). *Perlesvaus*, or *Le Haut Livre du Graal* as it is also known, has received less recent critical attention in English than the other Grail romances. The most recent book length study this text is Thomas E. Kelly’s *Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus: A Structural Study* (1974), but several studies of the text were produced

earlier in the twentieth century.⁶⁹ Most of these critical works offers a detailed close reading of the text on which it focuses, but does not concentrate on the relationship between texts more broadly.

Recently, Leah Tether has focused on the *Perceval Continuations*. Tether's study closely compares analyses and compares the four texts to explore the different types of continuation that each text illustrates.⁷⁰ This thesis will extend Tether's valuable comparative analysis to consider a larger selection of Old French and Middle English Grail narratives. While a consideration of the ways in which the Grail episodes of these texts are different from the rest of the respective cycle can be helpful in identifying structural and thematic features that are specific to the Grail quest, these features have sometimes been attributed to each author's idiosyncratic conceptualisation of the Grail. Comparing the Grail narratives to one another, as this thesis does, reveals some of these choices to be features common to multiple Grail narratives. As Tether's approach highlights, identifying common features and differences between texts is a successful way of recognising subgenres of different types of text.

Where attention has been paid to the close relationship between Grail narratives, it has primarily focussed on the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*. Sandra Ness Ihle's *Malory's Grail Quest* (1987), for example, compares sections from these two texts throughout to provide a reading of Malory's redactions. In 'Le

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Justice Neale Carman, *The Relationship of the Perlesvaus and the Queste del Saint Graal* (Lawrence: University of Chicago, 1936), and William Albert Nitze, *The Old French Grail Romance, Perlesvaus: A Study of its Principal Sources* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1902).

⁷⁰ Tether analyses each of the *Perceval Continuations* to suggest that the medieval continuation constitutes a genre of medieval literature that contains distinct subgenres: 'continuation is, in some ways, functionally similar to a genre in so far as it may constitute an umbrella term under which there are a number of 'subgenres' which need identification, explication and description'. Tether, *Continuations*, p. 2. For a full description of Tether's method of distinguishing subgenres of the medieval continuation see footnote 38. This thesis builds upon Tether's approach of close reading and comparative analysis to suggest that the Grail romances function as a distinct subgenre of medieval romance.

préparation a la *Queste del Saint Graal* dans le *Tristan* en Prose' (1994) Emmanuele

Baumgartner explores the interpolation of the Grail quest into the Prose *Tristan*:

L'insertion de la *Queste du Saint Graal* est nécessaire à l'achèvement, à la perfection du cycle tristanien, donc, d'une certaine manière à sa beauté; mais elle risque d'en remettre en question la tonalité propre.⁷¹

This thesis extends this approach, examining the effect of the arrival of the Grail into Arthurian narratives through a comparative analysis of the Old French Grail narratives. The thesis argues that the distinctive features of the later *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* are amplifications of those found in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, the Didot-*Perceval* and *Perlesvaus*.

More recently, however, there have been several valuable comparative studies that have taken a number of different Grail narratives into account. Ben Ramm's *A Discourse for the Holy Grail in Old French Romance* (2010) offers a Lacanian reading of the Grail narratives. Ramm focuses on the Vulgate Cycle and *Perlesvaus* and draws upon a range of other Old French Grail narratives to support close readings of these texts. Ramm argues that 'that the Grail should be read as a symptom of disruption and obscurity rather than fulfilment and revelation' and suggests that many of the transformations that occur in Arthurian literature between the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries can be attributed to the appearance of the 'literary Grail'.⁷²

Leah Tether's recent study *Publishing the Grail in Medieval and Renaissance France* (2017) extends this comparative approach but from a different perspective. Tether considers the manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, the *Perceval Continuations*, Robert de

⁷¹ Emmanuele Baumgartner, 'Le préparation a la *Queste del Saint Graal* dans le *Tristan* en Prose', in *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honour of Douglas Kelly*, ed. by Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Atlanta, GA: Rodolpi, 1994), pp. 1–14.

⁷² Ben Ramm, *A Discourse for the Holy Grail in Old French Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), p. 2. Ramm suggests that the Grail can be seen as 'the marker of ontological and epistemological anxiety, deep-rooted in those who embark upon its Quest, and for whom the Grail does not represent an epiphanic, holistic or organic (pace Weston) experience of plenitude and fulfilment, but is a symbol of ideological fracture, uncertainty and impossibility'. Ramm, *A Discourse for the Holy Grail*, p. 4.

Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie*, the *Didot-Perceval*, *Perlesvaus*, the Vulgate Cycle and the Post Vulgate Cycle to explore the publication and dissemination of Old French Grail quest narratives. Tether suggests that the way in which medieval publishers treated Grail quest narratives is different to the way in which they treat other, more secular, narratives. This thesis builds upon Tether's idea of the Grail as different from more secular Arthurian narratives but takes a primarily literary approach. The thesis also further extends the comparative approach taken by Ramm and Tether to include Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Reading the *Morte Darthur* alongside not just the *Vulgate Queste del Saint Graal*, but a number of Grail narratives accentuates the chronological amplification of some of the *Sankgreal's* most distinctive features, while connecting the text to each of its predecessors. It also highlights that the subgenre of Grail narratives is not restricted to Old French texts.

Historicist critics have taken a different approach and frequently explored the relationship between the Grail texts and the Crusades. Helen Nicholson's historical study *Love, War and the Grail* (2001), for example, 'reconsiders the connection of the Grail with the Holy Land and the concept of the 'perfect knight' and considers how these themes were developed in the Middle Ages'.⁷³ Nicholson, however, focuses on Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* as well as the Old French and Middle English Grail narratives, and her approach is primarily historical rather than literary. In *Visio Pacis* Helen Adolph suggests that the interest in the Grail legend stems from the Crusades.⁷⁴ Adolph discusses a wide range of historical periods in her study, and draws parallels between the characters of the Grail legend and key figures in the Crusades.

In addition, some studies have focussed exclusively on the Grail as an object, and draw evidence from a range of different sources. Collections such as *The Grail: A Casebook*

⁷³ Helen Nicholson, *Love, War and the Grail: Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights in Medieval Epic and Romance 1150–1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. vii.

⁷⁴ Helen Adolph, *Visio Pacis: Holy City and Grail: Attempt at an Inner History of the Grail Legend* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1960).

(2000) ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney, address a range of different topics across the Grail narratives including the origins of the Grail, the Grail as vessel, the theme of the waste land, the Grail quest as failure, Malory's adaptation of the Grail quest and modern adaptations of the Grail quest.⁷⁵ This collection also discusses a range of different texts including Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Hadryng's *Chronicle*, Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Tennyson's poetry. *The Grail Quest and the World of Arthur* (2008), edited by Norris J. Lacy, includes essays on 'the Shape of the Grail in Medieval Art' and 'Glastonbury, the Grail-Bearer and the Sixteenth-Century Antiquaries' as well as discussions of the Grail in a range of different medieval texts. Although these essay collections gesture towards the relationship between texts, such multi-authored studies mean that the relationship between chapters (and therefore texts) is not explicitly discussed at length.

There have also been a series of more popular studies that focus on the Grail.⁷⁶ These texts, however, combine literary criticism with popular mythology, folklore, and more speculative historical accounts. Studies such as Juliette Wood's *Eternal Chalice: The Enduring Legend of the Holy Grail* (2008) addresses popular material in a scholarly manner and approaches the Grail from a variety of perspectives that cover a diverse range of fields. Wood's study also discusses medieval and modern retellings of the Grail legend, rather than focussing exclusively on the medieval texts. Conversely, in *The Holy Grail: The History of a Legend* (2005), Barber addresses the medieval material in a more popular manner as he traces the development of the Grail legend over time. Barber starts with a discussion of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, and working through to a section on 'The Grail Today'.⁷⁷ Studies such as

⁷⁵ Dhira B. Mahoney. ed., *The Grail: A Casebook* (New York, NY: Garland, 2000).

⁷⁶ The range of modern creative responses to the Grail and rewritings of the Grail legend, from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* through to Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, also represent a continued interest in the story of the Grail.

⁷⁷ Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: A History of a Legend* (London: Penguin, 2005).

Barber's and Wood's represent a crossover between popular and academic interests in the Grail. These studies provide a useful summary of the different cultural functions that the Grail has served over time, and an overview of the development of the legend between the medieval and modern periods. However, their focus on the portrayal of the Grail over time, and interest in historical and folkloric concerns, preclude a detailed literary analysis of the medieval Grail narratives. My thesis moves away from popular Grail scholarship and concentrates on a comparative analysis of medieval Grail narratives.

The earliest literary critical studies on the Grail texts shared a similar interest in the origin of the Grail stories, tracing the Old French Grail legends back to early Welsh and Irish sources. R. S. Loomis, for example, highlights the parallels between the Grail and the life-giving cauldron in *Branwen*.⁷⁸ Loomis also draws attention to the parallels between Bendigeidfran and the Fisher King. In *The Old French Grail Romance Perlesvaus: A Study of its Principal Sources* (1902), William Nitze explores the influence of religious history on the symbolic objects of the Grail procession:

The Grail and the Lance, we are told, were originally the national emblems of the Britons. As such they were cherished even after the Britons had accepted Christianity from the Irish. Finally, through the influence of St Augustine and his followers, they were identified with Christian relics (those of Calvary), and thus they became symbols of the Church.⁷⁹

Following the scholarship of William Nitze, Jessie Weston opened her study of the quest for the Holy Grail with the assertion that 'the study of the Grail quest, fall[s] [...] within the field of comparative religion'.⁸⁰

In the 1960s and 1970s, practical criticism and close reading of texts became a popular mode of analysis in English literature. During this period critics began to pay more

⁷⁸ R. S. Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁷⁹ William A. Nitze, *The Old French Grail Romance Perlesvaus: A Study of its Principal Sources* (Baltimore, MD: John Murphy, 1902), p. 25.

⁸⁰ Jessie L. Weston, *The Quest for the Holy Grail* (London: Frank Cass, 1913), p. vi.

attention to the structure of Arthurian romances.⁸¹ Perhaps most famously, Eugène Vinaver and C. S. Lewis interpreted Arthurian romances by comparing their long cycles to the structures of other medieval art forms such as the tapestry, interlaced illuminations, and a variety of architectural structures. As Vinaver suggests,

the cycle turned out to be remarkably like the fabric of matting or tapestry; a single cut across it would unravel it all. And yet it was clearly not a unified body of material: it consisted of a variety of themes, all distinct and yet inseparable from one another.⁸²

Architectural metaphors were also used to illustrate the evolution and transformation of the Arthurian narrative over time. Jean Frappier first famously used an architectural metaphor to suggest that the Vulgate Cycle was constructed by a single ‘architect’.⁸³ In 1963 C. S. Lewis built upon this idea to suggest that the most appropriate way to view the rewriting of Arthurian romances was as ‘a great Cathedral of words [...] so large that everyone can find in it the work of his favourite period’.⁸⁴ The idea that Malory’s text bears the traces of its predecessors is also discussed in architectural terms by Derek Brewer, who argues that:

When we look at Malory’s work – or works – we are not looking at the work of one man, but perhaps of a dozen, far separated in time and space, occupation and outlook. Each writer built upon what had been made before.⁸⁵

These studies, however, do not concentrate on the effect that the arrival of the Grail has on the structures of the Arthurian romances, which is one of the central focuses of this thesis. Recognising the differences between the structures of the Grail narratives and the structures of secular romance narratives can further understandings of the conventions according to which the subgenre of Grail romances operates.

⁸¹ It is important to note, however, that an interest in structural metaphors to describe the composition of the Grail narratives can also be seen in some of the earliest criticism of the texts. Ferdinand Lot, for example, first proposed the concept of *entrelacement* to describe the way in which the various *aventures* of the Vulgate Cycle could be unified.

⁸² Eugène Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 72.

⁸³ Jean Frappier, ‘Plaidoyer pour l’“Architecte” contre une opinion d’Albert Pauphilet sur le *Lancelot en Prose*’, *Romance Philology*, 8 (1954–5), 27–33.

⁸⁴ Lewis, ‘The English Prose *Morte*’, p. 28.

⁸⁵ D. S. Brewer, ‘The Hoole Book’, in *Essays on Malory*, ed. by J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), pp. 41–63 (43).

In the course of the questions it asks about the Grail narratives, this thesis makes key contributions to knowledge in its new understanding of the relationship between genre and diegetic logic, revealed through its comparative analysis of texts and consideration of the editing and incorporation of sources. Reading the Old French and Middle English Grail narratives as a distinct subgenre of medieval romance, which operate according to a unique form of 'logic', furthers understandings of the the significance and meaning of the Grail in each text. Structural transformations and conceptualisations of space and time which, when analysed in each text individually, appear to be idiosyncratic choices on the part of one Grail text or author, are revealed to be shared across the group of narratives. In turn, comparative analysis highlights the commonalities and differences between each text, which contribute to each Grail narrative's individual conceptualisation of the Grail as responding to a particular moment in time.

As well as furthering understandings of the Grail texts, looking at different types of romance as operating according to distinct forms of logic has wider implications for methods of defining genres and subgenres. As such, this thesis contributes to the work on logic begun by James Wade in *Fairies in Medieval Arthurian Romance*, and 'Arbitrariness and knowing in Malory's *Morte Darthur*'. Although, as stated at the opening of this thesis, it is generally accepted that the Grail romances operate in a way that is somehow different to more secular Arthurian romances, this is the first book length study to focus in explicit detail on defining and exploring the diegetic implications of this type of logic.

Furthermore, reading Malory's text alongside the Old French Grail narratives and employing close comparative analysis of depictions of the Grail miracles contributes to the more recent scholarly discussions of Malory as a deliberate and purposeful editor of his sources. Through connecting Malory's Grail text to a number of Old French sources, this thesis helps the reader to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of the

Grail in the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, while the context of the Old French texts provides an insight into the possible purposes of Malory's redactions. Close comparative analysis also highlights the chronological progression in conceptualisations of sight, space and time in each Grail narrative. Putting the *Tale of the Sankgreal* into a chronological sequence of development highlights the somewhat overlooked relationships between the presentation of each of these areas of Christian experience in *Tale of the Sankgreal* and all of the earlier Grail narratives, rather than the *Queste del Saint Graal* alone. Understanding Malory's changes to his source as deliberate and purposeful also highlights attitudes towards the doctrine of the Eucharist in the fifteenth century. When Malory, writing in a period of religious unrest that was situated between the rise of Lollardy in the fourteenth century and the reformation, writes that 'So cam there... a good man, which was a preste and bare goddis body in a cup', he clearly articulates an orthodox view of transubstantiation. The fact that this line does not appear in Malory's sources highlights this addition as a careful and purposeful change that deserves close scholarly attention, and this thesis provides a framework for considering such changes in Malory's work overall.

Narrative Structure and the Grail Texts

It is the unique structural similarities between the Grail texts which suggest most clearly that they are a distinct subgenre of medieval romance. Before examining the sub-genre of Grail romances in detail, this section of the thesis will discuss the expectations and features of the romance genre as a whole. Defining romance, however, is not an easy task, due in part to the varying functions, subjects and shapes that romance narratives have and the effusive and contradictory responses that romances received from medieval audiences. As Melissa Furrow

describes it, ‘romance was a genre that evoked both admiration and attack as other genres of the period, chronicles, saints’ lives, even fabliaux, did not’.⁸⁶

It is also important to acknowledge that medieval definitions of what classified a given text as a romance were far broader than modern definitions of the genre. Some modern critics define a romance text as ‘a narrative poem dealing with the adventures of a chivalric hero’.⁸⁷ Helen Cooper defines the ‘outward form of romances’ as ‘predominantly fictional narratives of some amplitude about particular individuals (whether those individuals are named or not)’.⁸⁸ Cooper explains that this definition

is one which [romances] share with many other genres, though spelling it out is necessary in order to register the difference between romance and (non-fictional) history, or romance and the (more concise) ballad, or romance and allegory [...] though the borders between romance and all three other genres are highly permeable.

Cooper also explores the features shared by romance texts and the way in which romance features, or ‘memes’, were used in different romance texts over time. Cooper argues that,

whilst romance narratives remain superficially the same, sometimes even down to verbal detail, the usage and understanding of them changes over time, rather in the way that a word may change meaning.⁸⁹

This thesis takes a similar approach in analysing the way in which the Grail romances transform depictions of three key areas of Christian experience to illuminate the meaning and significance of the Grail in each text. Over time the narrative of the Grail is embroidered and transformed, while many episodes, figures and objects remain a central part of the story.

However, as Ad Putter discusses,

⁸⁶ Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), p. 42. As Furrow summarises, ‘there is a deep split on ethical lines, between those like William of Nassington and Denis Piramus, on the one hand, who warn against the genre’s ability to distract the reader with lies and frivolity from the pursuit of the true and the purely good, and those like Caxton on the other hand, who argue that a romance should have an ethical impact on its readers and allow them to choose to pursue the good and avoid the evil’ p. 41.

⁸⁷ Paul Strohm, ‘“Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie”’: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives’, *Speculum* 46:2 (April 1971), 348–59 (p. 354).

⁸⁸ Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, p. 4.

The resemblances shared by the overwhelming majority of the romances are very broad: romances usually end happily with the restoration of an order that was disrupted at the beginning of the story; the cast is aristocratic, consisting of knights and kings, queens and ladies; the setting is idealized, often supernatural.⁹⁰

Although these features can be seen in all romance narratives, they do not clearly distinguish the genre of medieval romance from other medieval texts. The problem of how to define romance is further complicated by the fact that medieval ideas about the genre were even less prescriptive. As Cooper highlights, ‘there is very little theoretical discussion of vernacular genres in the Middle Ages, as scholastic theoreticians confined themselves to writing about classical forms’.⁹¹ Furrow compares medieval use of the term ‘romance’ with the modern use of the term ‘literature’ to describe ‘various forms of printed material from campaign flyers to instruction manuals, from scientific writing to Shakespeare’.⁹²

Modern critics have divided romance narratives into a series of subdivisions in order to further classify and demarcate this group of narratives. As Putter describes:

Arthurian romances, homiletic romances, crusading romances, family romances, penitential romances, exemplary romances, Charlemagne romances: these are some examples of subgenres that critics have at one time or another found useful.⁹³

While it is undeniably true that many romances could be classified and therefore discussed under several different subgenres, dividing romance narratives into a series of more specific subgenres has allowed critics to pay more detailed attention to the shared features of different groups of romance narratives. This, in turn, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the genre of romance as a whole. One of the most prominent subdivisions of the romance

⁹⁰ Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert, ‘Introduction’, in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1–38 (p. 1). Putter and Gilbert also suggest that ‘the categorical inexactness of ‘romance’ is further reflected in manuscript compilations, in which a saint’s life is sometimes found in the middle of chronicles or religious materials’ (p. 2).

⁹¹ Cooper highlights that ‘what discussion of romance there is comes in the form of comments from vernacular authors within their own works, and those make it clear that they, as both readers of earlier romances and writers of their own new ones, were fully aware of the tradition in which they were writing’. Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, p. 8. Cooper uses the family resemblance theory to discuss the genre of medieval romance further.

⁹² Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, pp. 43–4.

⁹³ Putter and Gilbert, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–2.

genre is Arthurian romance. Texts that take King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table as their subject matter form a popular and distinct group of romances that are easy to distinguish from non-Arthurian romance texts through the recognition of central protagonists and their references to Arthur's court.⁹⁴ Unlike many of the other romance narratives, however,

the protagonist of an Arthurian romance can be a major figure like Gawain or Lancelot or Tristan, or a new character, a would-be knight like Perceval [...]. The focus can be a single protagonist, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or on a group, as in the Grail quest.⁹⁵

Not every text, however, containing Arthur is a romance, and even within the subgenre of Arthurian romance further distinctions can be drawn. This thesis will suggest that the Grail narratives should be considered as a distinct subgenre of Arthurian romances. While the subject matter of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table is shared with all other Arthurian romances, the way in which the arrival of the Grail disrupts the expectations of more secular Arthurian romance and transforms configurations of time and space distinguishes this group of narratives. This thesis suggests that the distinct logic according to which the Grail romances operate can illuminate the concerns of these texts both collectively and individually.

Before looking at the Grail narratives in detail it is important to discuss the temporal features of the medieval romance more broadly. As Mikhail Bakhtin discusses, different genres can be defined through an analysis of the interrelationship between time and space. This interaction, he argues, creates a 'chronotope' that is distinctive to each genre:

⁹⁴ As Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter summarise, the intertextuality of the Arthurian legend gives it 'a special richness when it combined with the remarkable flexibility and infinite expandability of the central story. Other major narratives are limited by the focus on a single hero (Alexander), or on a short span of the hero's life (Robin Hood), or on a fixed set of locations and cast of characters (the Troy story), or on historical context (Charlemagne)'. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Archibald and Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1–19.

⁹⁵ Archibald and Putter, 'Introduction', p. 2.

in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the artistic chronotope.⁹⁶

The relationship between principles of time and space, as described by Bakhtin, can provide a useful way to conceptualise the interaction between the unique structural principles of the Grail quest. The transformation of temporal and geographical structures (in line with the heightened priority of religious values) illustrates the similarities between the Grail narratives, and differences between Grail narratives and non-Grail Arthurian romances.

Bakhtin suggests that

the chronotope of the miraculous world, which is characterized by [a] subjective playing with time, [a] violation of elementary temporal relationships and perspectives, has a corresponding subjective playing with space, in which elementary spatial relationships and perspectives are violated.⁹⁷

The expectation that a knight will return to the court, however far he may have wandered on his quest, and however lost he may appear to be, in time for the next celebration and commencement of *aventure* entails an interdependence between time and space, in which the two transform alongside one another. In the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*, for example, the relationship between geography and time can be seen through the way in which time seems to stand still when Orfeo crosses the boundary into the fairy 'otherworld'.⁹⁸

The geographical circularity of the outward-and-return questing pattern is mirrored by a temporal circularity. As Muriel Whitaker notes, Arthurian *aventures* typically cover a

⁹⁶ M. M. Bakhtin 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84–258 (84).

⁹⁷ Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', p. 155.

⁹⁸ Orfeo follows Heurodis and a party of fairy women through a passage in a rock, which acts as a clear physical boundary between the romance world from which he came, and the fairy 'otherworld'. The narrative states that the light shining from the jewelled walls of the fairy castle means that the fairy land is never dark, calling a halt to the diurnal progression of day and night. Once inside these walls, Orfeo passes many bodies of 'folk that were thider y-brought/ and thought dede, and nare nought' (l. 390). The image of these bodies, caught forever in an eternal moment of dying, further accentuates the lack of temporal progression. Anna Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., 'Sir Orfeo', in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 26–41.

twelve-month period.⁹⁹ In the Vulgate Cycle Gawain explicitly highlights this importance of the twelve-month questing period as he tells Yvain that ‘*droite queste ne dure que. vn. an & vn iour*’¹⁰⁰ [‘true quests only last a year and a day’].¹⁰¹ This means that, although a full year has passed, the knights return to the court at a similar time of year, and so to similar seasonal conditions and celebrations, to those which they left. The inclusion of the extra day moves the narrative forwards and into the next *aventure*, the next year. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late fourteenth century) provides one of the clearest examples of the reciprocity of cyclical temporal and spatial manipulation. After interrupting a Christmas feast the Green Knight explicitly gives Gawain just over twelve months to complete the task that he has been set:

To þe grene chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte
Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt--disserued þou habbez
To be 3ederly 3olden on Nw 3eres morn.¹⁰²

The passing of the year is subsequently given a 34-line description, which focuses on the cyclical changing of the seasons. Since the reader is told nothing about the events at Arthur’s court during these twelve months, the action seems to resume immediately after the court’s recovery from the Green Knight’s visit with a description of the next year’s All Saint’s day celebrations (on the first of November). Gawain leaves to find the Green Knight, and after riding for just under two months, when Gawain requires a place to hear mass on Christmas Eve, he prays to Mary, and a castle immediately appears before him. Similarly, when Gawain tries to leave after enjoying Christmas celebrations at the castle, he is told that the Green Chapel is ‘not two myle henne’ (*Sir Gawain*, l. 1078). Due to this geographic proximity,

⁹⁹ Muriel Whitaker, *Arthur’s Kingdom of Adventure* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), p.110.

¹⁰⁰ H. Oskar Sommer, *Le Livre de Lancelot del Lac: Part III* (Washington, WA: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1912), p. 270.

¹⁰¹ Carlton W. Carroll, trans., ‘Lancelot, Part VI’, in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, Volume III, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 252.

¹⁰² Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds, ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (Exeter: The University of Exeter Press, 1994), pp. 207–300 (ll. 451–3).

Gawain remains a guest at the castle until New Year's morning and this period of waiting consequently forms the first part of his test and quest.¹⁰³ Once Gawain has encountered the Green Knight, he returns to the court to relate his *aventures* and the lesson that he has learned.

This cyclical pattern can also be seen with some variation in earlier Arthurian romances. Although Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* (1170) features a return to Arthur's court at the end of the narrative, in his *Lancelot* the narrative ends after Lancelot kills Meleagant, bringing a thematic close to the tale, which is mirrored by the fact that the narrative both opens and closes in the courtly setting. Similarly, at the end of *Yvain*, Yvain returns not to King Arthur's court, but to the realm and castle of Laudine. These romances narrate the *aventures* of a single knight whose *aventures* carry him away from the Arthur's court on a series of *aventures* and bring the knight to rest in a courtly setting at their close.

While Middle English romances such as *Havelock the Dane* (280-1290), *King Horn* (mid thirteenth century) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (mid- to late fourteenth century) accentuate the cyclicity of the outward-and-return journey of the questing knight, the Grail romances follow an outward-without-return pattern, which is given a specifically Christian significance.¹⁰⁴ In the *Didot-Perceval*, achieving the Grail leads to Perceval retiring from chivalric pursuits altogether. As Merlin explains, 'il a pris a le cevalerie congié et se volra des or mais tenir a le grasse de son Creator' (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 243) ['he has taken his leave of chivalry, and wishes to live henceforth in the grace of his Creator' (Bryant, p.156)]. Although the text returns to Perceval to record that when Perceval heard about the fate of the knights of the Round Table 'si en plora por le pité que il en ot; et pria nostre Segnor que il

¹⁰³ For a full discussion of the length of time Gawain stays at Hautdesert castle see Ad Putter, 'In Search of Lost Time: Missing Days in *Sir Cleges* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 119–36.

¹⁰⁴ The fact that Chrétien's first text remains unfinished means that it is impossible to know whether or not Perceval would have returned to assume a role in Arthur's court.

eust pitié de lor ames, car il les avoit molt amés' (Didot-Perceval, p. 278) ['wept with sorrow, and prayed to Our Lord to have pity on their souls for he had loved them dearly' (Bryant, p. 171)], he plays no active role in the text after his initial removal. Once Perceval has achieved the final *aventure* in *Perlesvaus*, the narrative simply states that 'ne onques puis ne sot nus hom terriens que il devint, ne li estoires n'en parole plus' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 408) ['from that time forth no earthly man ever knew what became of him, and the story tells nothing more'] (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 264).¹⁰⁵ The *Morte Darthur* states that by the time Lancelot returns from his Grail quest 'many of the knyghtes of Rounde Table were slayne and destroyed, more than half' (*Morte*, p. 777). Towards the end of the Vulgate *Queste*, the journey that Galahad, Bors and Perceval make to Sarras to see the Holy Grail constitutes a clear linear and geographical movement towards the East. It is also a moment of unusual geographical specificity, raising this location and the events that accompany it above the allegorical topography of the Grail *aventures* in Logres. In both the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* Galahad and Perceval die in Sarras (Galahad immediately after achieving the Grail and Perceval after spending a 'yere and two monethis' (*Morte*, p. 788) in a hermitage). Only Bors returns to narrate the events in Sarras to the Arthurian court. The fact that the knights do not return to Arthur's court accentuates the gap between the secular values of the Arthurian court and the religious significance of the Grail quest. Once the knights have learned to function under this religious logic they can no longer return to the secular *aventures* that they formerly completed, and are instead geographically removed from the texts. The quest to find the Grail, therefore, is not a quest from which a knight can return to pick up where he left off (as is the case with so many secular Arthurian quests). Although Bors returns to the court, Lancelot is the only knight to forget the lessons of the Grail and continue with the lifestyle of the secular knight errant after having partial

¹⁰⁵ In *Perlesvaus*, however, achieving the Grail is not the last *aventure* of the narrative.

success in the Grail quest. His actions arguably precipitate the demise of the Round Table, the death of Arthur himself, and the end of the Arthurian cycle.

Even in the long Arthurian cycles, which do feature some circular patterns, the ‘shape’ of the texts is further complicated by the linear passing of time that follows Arthur and Lancelot from birth to death. As David Staines writes, ‘a cycle has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning and end are often fixed and determined; the middle is the area of flexibility and creativity’.¹⁰⁶ Both the Vulgate Cycle and the *Morte Darthur* exemplify this kind of pattern. In the *Morte Darthur* there are two main shifts in the predominant pattern of time. The first two books of the text follow a linear progression that narrates Arthur’s youth and early years as the King of Britain. Although these sections narrate quests, and thus form circular patterns, the temporal focus of the narrative follows Arthur’s progression to maturity, and is thus predominantly linear. In *Lancelot, Gareth and Tristrem*, however, it is the *aventures* faced by individual knights which take precedence, and circular time patterns reign. It is worth noting that during this period of the text the passing years are marked primarily by a new knight’s appearance at the court. This section of the text documents the arrival and initial *aventures* of Sir Lancelot du Lake, Sir Gareth of Orkney, Sir Tristram de Lyones and the knight named by Kay as La Cote Male Tayle. At the commencement of the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, however, this circular pattern of romance is broken (as will be discussed in more detail below), and after the knights return from the Grail quest, time seems to speed up, as events rush the Round Table towards its own destruction. This return to a linear structure mirrors the significance of Arthur’s death, which marks the end to Arthurian *aventures*.

¹⁰⁶ David Staines, ‘The Medieval Cycle: Mapping a Trope’, in *Transtextualities in Cycles and Cyclicity in Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm Maddox (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), pp. 15–37, (p. 36).

Superficially, each of the Grail texts initially seems to follow a similar pattern to that seen in other romance narratives. Aisling Byrne notes that Arthurian quests usually begin with the interruption of a stranger: ‘the entrance of the intruder widens the focus of the narrative from the microcosm of the court to the world beyond [...]. The tensions and conflict it contains are unpacked throughout the rest of the text’.¹⁰⁷ All of the Grail quest narratives fulfil this initial expectation. In Chrétien’s *Perceval*, for example, the court is interrupted first by the Red Knight (prior to Perceval’s arrival), and then by Perceval himself, who rides so close to the king that ‘Li abati de sor la table/ Dou chief un chapel de bonet’ (*Perceval*, ll. 894-895) [‘he knocked the king’s cap of fine cloth from his head on to the table’ (Kibler, p. 392)]. In the Didot-*Perceval*, Perceval disrupts the Pentecostal celebrations by insisting upon sitting in the seat only to be occupied by the best knight in the world. The moment Perceval sits in the seat,

li pierre fendi desous lui et braist si angoisseusement que il sambla a tous caus qui la estoient que li siecles fondist en abisme. Et del brait que li terre jeta si issi une si grans tenebrors que il ne se porent entreveir en plus d’une liuee. (Didot-*Perceval*, p. 150)

[the stone split beneath him, uttering such an anguished groan that it seemed to all those present that the earth was crumbling into an abyss. And with the earth’s groan came so great a darkness that for a league and more no man could see his neighbour. (Bryant, p. 119)]

In this text Perceval not only disrupts the social unity of the Round Table by insisting upon his right to sit in the empty space, but also fractures the physical foundations of the Round Table, which split beneath his seat. The commencement of the Grail quest is announced while Arthur is being reprimanded for allowing Perceval to sit in this seat. In each of these texts Perceval causes a physical disruption to the gathering at court.

In the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal* this physical disruption is replicated by the fragmentation of the brotherhood of the Knights of the

¹⁰⁷ Aisling Byrne, ‘The Intruder at the Feast: Negotiating Boundaries in Medieval Insular Romance’, *Arthurian Literature*, 27 (2010), 33–59 (p. 34).

Round Table. In both texts, the knights gather at Camelot for a typical Pentecostal celebration, which is first disturbed by a lady who takes Lancelot away to make Galahad a knight, and is later interrupted once again by the arrival of Galahad himself. As Elizabeth Edwards writes, ‘Galahad completes the Round Table by filling this one vacant seat, but in doing so he defeats wholeness altogether, bringing with him departure and dissolution’.¹⁰⁸ Galahad is therefore the most disruptive of all visitors to the Arthurian court; he ‘widens the focus of the narrative’ beyond the secular concerns of the Arthurian world, and heralds the heightened importance of spiritual perception to the Grail quest. In each of the Grail narratives, therefore, the commencement of the Grail quest causes a disruption to the Arthurian court, which is mirrored by the way in which the Grail quest disrupts the expectations of Arthurian romance.

The sudden change in priorities, signalled by the arrival of the successful Grail knight, is made explicit in Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal*. In the moment that Galahad supersedes Lancelot as the ‘best knyght of the worlde’ (p. 672), Lancelot’s change of state is publicly announced both to the Arthurian court and to the reader by a lady riding a white palfrey:

ye were thys day in the morne the best knyght of the worlde. But who sholde sey so now, he sholde be a lyer, for there ys now one bettir than ye be, and well hit ys preved by the adventure of the swerde whereto ye durst nat sette to your honde. And that is the change of youre name and levyng. (*Morte*, p. 672)

As in secular Arthurian romance, this disruption results in the manipulation of ‘elementary’ spatial and temporal perspectives. However, the heightened importance of religious values introduces vertical movements into each formerly horizontal narrative. The geographical circularity of the withdrawal and return questing pattern is disrupted by the interdependence of physical and spiritual progression. In the earlier parts of the quest, the *aventures* that all the knights encounter, irrespective of their ultimate success, are related to the current state

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory’s Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 91.

and potential improvement of their relationships with God. As a result, each *aventure* either brings the knight further upwards and towards God, or downwards and away. The structure created by the knights encountering a marvel, riding on to discover an explanation of it (often encountering other *aventures* along the way), and then finding a hermit to revisit the initial event with a clearer understanding, remains essentially circular. The hermeneutic nature of this progression, however, marks the verticality of the movement either towards or away from God.

In the Grail texts the lack of geographical circularity is mirrored by a break in temporal cyclicity and an end to the prevalent twelve-month questing period. Both Chrétien's *Perceval* and the Didot-*Perceval* depict the quest of achieving the Grail as a journey of personal improvement that takes several years. In the *Queste del Saint Graal*, Gawain, who earlier in the Vulgate Cycle affirmed the proper length of an Arthurian quest, explicitly vows to follow the Grail quest for 'j. an & vn ior & plus se mestier en est'¹⁰⁹ ['a year and a day and longer if [there] is need of it'] [emphasis mine].¹¹⁰ Malory retains this assertion in the *Tale of the Sankgreal*.¹¹¹ Gawain's assertion indicates the heightened importance of the Grail quest, which will transcend the temporal boundaries of other Arthurian quests.

The inclusion of a series of analogues from the biblical past employed by hermits, priests and other religious figures to explain the significance of the Grail *aventures* in the Arthurian present further manipulates the temporal constructions of romance. The relationship between events in the present and events in the past, and the constant movement

¹⁰⁹ H. Oskar Sommer, *Les Aventures ou la Queste del Saint Graal; La Mort le Roi Artus*, Volume VI (Washington, WA: Riverside, 1913), p. 14.

¹¹⁰ E. Jane Burns, trans., 'The Quest for the Holy Grail', in *Lancelot-Grail*, Vol. IV, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 8.

¹¹¹ In the *Morte Darthur* Gawain states that he will 'holde me oute a twelve-month and a day or more if nede be, and never shall I returne unto the courte agayne tulle I have sene hit more opynly than hit hath bene shewed here' (p. 674).

between different time periods, create moments that seem to be almost suspended in time, forestalling any kind of temporal progression. When the rock splits beneath Perceval's seat in the *Didot-Perceval*, for example, the voice that announces the start of the Grail quest relates Perceval's misadventure to the fate of Moyses, who wrongfully took the same place at the table in the time of Joseph of Arimathea. Immediately after this, the voice explains exactly how the Grail is to be achieved, and what the outcome of achieving the Grail will be. In this moment, the text looks backwards and forwards simultaneously, and past, present and future are joined in the image of the table and the seat that is not to be filled until the Grail has been achieved. It is from these moments that the significance of the Grail miracles, and thus the Grail narratives themselves, can be understood.

This interaction between linear, cyclical and vertical patterns implies that each Grail narrative is constructed from what Kevin Marti describes as a 'peculiar geometry of Christian time and space'.¹¹² This geometry is expressed through the conceptualisations of space and time. Recognising these patterns allows for a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the logic under which each Grail narrative operates, while similarities between the patterns foregrounded within each text highlight the relationship between Grail narratives, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

Conceptualising and Interpreting the Grail Quest

As mentioned above, Arthurian criticism has frequently turned to other medieval artisanal endeavours and art forms such as weaving and building to create metaphors for the complex beauty of Arthurian quest narratives. Twentieth-century critics were not, however, the first to

¹¹² Kevin Marti, *Body, Heart and Text in the Pearl Poet* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), p.92.

note the suitability of architectural metaphors to literary composition.¹¹³ The relationship between theories of architectural and literary creation is documented in six medieval rhetorical treatises produced between 1175 (Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria*) and 1235 (John of Garland's *Parisiana Poetria*).¹¹⁴ The rhetorical treatises were therefore composed during the same time period as Chrétien's *Perceval*, the prose Trilogy, *Perlesvaus*, and the Vulgate Cycle. These treatises 'conceived of literary composition as "building"' and thus 'provide a framework to translate architectural principles into medieval literary terminology'.¹¹⁵

The Arthurian romances exhibit a close interaction with the ideas proposed by the rhetoricians. As noted by E. R. Curtius, the relationship between medieval French Arthurian narratives and the theories of the rhetoricians was first explored by E. Faral in 1910.¹¹⁶ Scholarship on English textual relations has largely focused on Geoffrey of Vinsauf's theories of amplification and abbreviation.¹¹⁷ Amplification and abbreviation are not, however, the only ways in which Arthurian narratives make use of the ideas suggested by the rhetoricians. In the *Poetria Nova*, Geoffrey of Vinsauf writes that 'the material's order may follow two possible courses: at one time it advances along the pathway of art, at another it

¹¹³ The relationship between proportion, creation and divine metaphysics is further evidenced by a profusion of images which depict God as a celestial architect, creating the world with a compass. Before the emergence of the profession of the architect in the twelfth century, 'the function and even appellation of the architect was sometimes assigned to ecclesiastical patrons'. Nigel Hiscock, *The Symbol at your Door: Number and Geometry in Religious Architecture of the Greeks and Latin Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, medieval architects were also depicted holding drawing instruments in images that parallel pictures of God as a divine architect and draw a comparison between divine creation and architectural creation.

¹¹⁴ These six texts are Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* (c. 1175), Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (1208–13) and *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* (after 1213), Gervase of Melkley's *Ars versificaria* (c.1215), John of Garland's *Parisiana Poetria*, and Eberhard the German's *Laborintus* (after 1213, before 1280).

¹¹⁵ Sandra Ness Ihle, *Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaption in Medieval Prose Romance* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Edmond Faral, *Les Jongleurs en France au Moyen Âge* (Paris: H. Champion, 1910). Commented on by E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 384.

¹¹⁷ Ihle, for example, structures her study of Malory's *Morte Darthur* and the *Queste del Saint Graal* around these two processes, detailing the effects of Malory's abbreviation and comparing these to Cistercian and Romanesque architectural features.

travels the smooth road of nature'.¹¹⁸ 'Artistic order', therefore, occurs when narrative events are related in an order that disrupts the natural chronology of the text. In the five Old French and Middle English Grail narratives discussed in this thesis, the interlacing of *aventures* in the Arthurian present with religious explanations from Christian history leads to a self-conscious oscillation between past and present. The meaning of each Grail is reached through the interpretation of this temporal interlace.

These Grail narratives each demonstrate an interest in the art of composition. When Gorneman de Gorhaut asks Perceval how he got his arms in Chrétien's *Perceval*, for example, the text states that:

cil li conte
 Vos qui avez oi lo conte,
 Qui autre foiz lo conteroit,
 Anuiz et oiseuse seroit,
 Que nus contes de ce n'amande (*Perceval*, ll. 1327-1331)

[the boy told him, just have you have heard in the story. To repeat it would be a bore and pointless: no story benefits from that. (Kibler, p. 398)]

This interest in the art of storytelling and the creation of a narrative is amplified in the prose *Didot-Perceval*. In this text, Merlin instructs Blaise to write down all of the *aventures* that he tells him to create a book. Merlin then explain that this book should be joined with the book that tells of Joseph of Arimathea: 'Et quant li sui livre seront assamblé, s'en I avra .I. biau, et li dui seront une meisme chose'¹¹⁹ ['and when the two books are brought together there'll be one beautiful book, for the two are one entity' (Bryant, p. 62)]. The image of two parts that are simultaneously one replicates the divine geometry of the trinity, illustrated through the use of different visual images throughout the Grail narratives.¹²⁰ A similar interest in methods

¹¹⁸ Margaret Nims trans., *The Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), p. 18.

¹¹⁹ Alexandre Micha, ed., *Merlin: Roman du XIII Siècle* (Genève : Librairie Droz, 2000), p. 76.

¹²⁰ An example of this can be seen in Gawain's vision of the three maidens who seem to become one in *Perlesvaus*: 'Atant es vos .iii. damoiseles o viennent de molt tresgrant biauté, e avoient blanches vesteüres, e leur chiés coverz de blans dras, e aportoit l'une en un vessel d'or pain, e l'autre en un vessel d'ivoire vin, e la

of composing a narrative can be seen in the *Lancelot* section of the Vulgate Cycle. The first book of the Vulgate Lancelot ends with a description of the way in which the *aventures* earlier described are recorded:

Si mistrent en escript lez aentures monseignor Gauvain tout auant. Por ce que cestoit li commenchemens de la queste [de lancelot del lac]. Et puis le[s granz proeces] hector [por ceo quil acheua la quest[e] de monseignor Gawain &] por chou que de cel conte estoit branche. & puis cil autre furent branche de chestui. Et [B126b] li contes lancelot fu branche del graal.¹²¹

[First they wrote down the adventures of Sir Gawain, because that was the beginning of the quest for Lancelot, and then those of Hector because they formed a branch of that story, and then the adventures of all the other eighteen companions. All this was the story of Lancelot, and all these others were branches thereof. And the story of Lancelot formed a branch of the story of the Grail, when it was integrated into it. (p. 238)]

The explanation of the way in which all of the different ‘branches’ of the narrative issue from and form part of the story of the Grail self-consciously demonstrates how the structure of a narrative can inform a reader’s interpretation of events. The Vulgate Cycle creates a clear hierarchy of events that highlights the central importance of the Grail narrative. In each of these texts, the beautiful religious truth for which the Grail stands is replicated through the creation of a carefully composed narrative structure.

Artistic order, however, has a further significance for the Grail narratives. Geoffrey of

Vinsauf defines eight types of artistic order before describing the way in which:

[...] Trahit ars ab utroque facetum
Principum, ludit quasi quaedam praestigiatrix
Et facit ut fiat res postera prima, future
Praesens, transversa directa, remota propinqua;
Rustica sic fiunt urbana, vetusta novella,

tierce en un d’argent char. E viennent au vessel d’or qi au oiler pendoit, e metent enz leur aport. Après s’asieent desoz le piler, puis s’en revont arriers. Mes au r’aler sanbla Monseignor Gavain q’il n’en I eüst que une. Messires Gavains se merveilla molt de cel miracle’ (p. 102). [‘three maidens of the most fabulous beauty appeared, all draped in white robes with white drapes to cover their heads; one of them carried bread in a vessel of gold, another brought wine in a vessel of ivory, and the third bore meat in a vessel of silver. They came up to the golden vessel which hung from the pillar and in it they placed their offerings. And after sitting awhile at the foot of the pillar they began to walk back, but as they went, it seems to Sir Gawain that there was but one of them, and he wondered much at this miracle’ (p. 68)].

¹²¹ Oskar Sommer, ed., *Le Livre de Lancelot del Lac*, Three Volumes, (Washington, WA: Riverside, 1910), I, p. 429.

Publica private, nigra candida, vilia cara.¹²²

art plays, as it were, the conjurer: causes the last to be first, the future the present, the oblique the straight, the remote to be near; what is rustic becomes urbane, what is old becomes new, public things are made private, black things white, and worthless things are made precious. (p. 20)¹²³

In each of the Grail narratives addressed in this thesis it is the Grail itself that ‘plays the conjurer’, a role which is highlighted by the changing conceptualisations of space and time in each text. Accordingly, understandings of each of these narratives can be furthered by an examination of the diegetic implications of the Grail.

Through altering the perspective from which the events of the Arthurian world are viewed, the Grail texts invite the reader to reread the events of the narrative already past, as well as interpret those to come, in light of the heightened spiritual emphasis that the Grail brings. Thus, as the reader moves through the narrative, he or she is also encouraged to look backwards to reinterpret the significance of earlier events retrospectively. In the Manessier *Perceval* Continuation (c. 1230), for example, a hermit explicitly informs Perceval that killing another knight is a sin. This calls Perceval’s concepts of honour and chivalry into question, as Perceval, alongside the reader, is forced to reconsider his past chivalric triumphs. This is amplified further in the Vulgate Cycle. As Douglas Kelly describes,

the literal account of Lancelot’s achievements follows the natural order. But the reinterpretation of his life and the condemnation of his sinful love for Guenevere in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, almost at the end of the cycle, forces the reader to make a complete re-examination and reinterpretation of his life in the earlier parts.¹²⁴

¹²² Ernest Gallo, ed., *The Poetria Nova and its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), ll. 120–5.

¹²³ The transformative effect of the Grail on the narrative can be exemplified in both the Vulgate Cycle *Queste* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur* when the colour white metaphorically becomes black. In the interpretation of Bors’ dream, for example, in which he is petitioned by two birds, one white and one black, to serve them, a priest explains that ‘by the blak birde might ye understande Holy Chirche whych seyth, ‘I am black,’ but he ys fayre. And by the whyght birde may men undirstonde the fynde’ (p. 742). Both order and symbolism have been inverted by the advent of the Grail quest.

¹²⁴ Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 244–5.

The movement between past and present engendered by the process of retrospective reading replicates the movement between the biblical past and Arthurian present in each of the Grail narratives from Robert Boron's text onwards.

However, for the knights to comprehend the significance of this movement in time and progress towards the Grail, they must also remember the lessons that they are taught. Memory itself is centrally important to all the Grail narratives under discussion. As discussed earlier, in Chrétien's *Perceval*, when Perceval sets out to find the Fisher King's castle for a second time he loses 'la memoire/ Que de Deu ne li sovient mais' (*Perceval*, ll. 6144-6145) ['his memory so totally that he no longer remembered God' (Kibler, p. 457)]. It is only after he is reminded of the religious significance of Good Friday that he is moved to make confession and therefore starts to progress towards the Grail. In the *Merlin* section of the prose Trilogy, the importance of memory is further highlighted by the fact that Merlin tells Arthur exactly how the quest will be achieved before it begins. Merlin explains that the Fisher King

ne il n'avra yamés santé devant que uns chevaliers que ya a la Table Rounde aserra sera prodons vers Deu et vers Saint Eglise et ait tant fait d'armes que il soit le plus alosez del monde. Et lors vendra a la maison au riche Roi Pecheor ; et quant il avra demandé de quoi li Graaus sert, tantost sera li rois gariz de sa fermeté et cherront li enchantement de Bretagne et sera prophecie acomplie. (*Merlin*, p. 301)

[cannot die until a knight of the Round Table has performed enough feats of arms and chivalry— in tournaments and by seeking adventures— to become the most renowned knight in all the world. When that knight has attained such heights that he's worthy to come to the court of the Rich Fisher King, and has asked what purpose the Grail served, and serves now, the Fisher King will at once be healed. [...] With that the enchantments of the land of Britain will vanish, and the prophecy will be fulfilled. (Bryant, p. 113)]

Perceval's failure to ask the question upon witnessing the Grail procession therefore becomes a problem of memory. In the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* the knights are tested upon their ability to remember the Christian lessons that the religious figures teach as they face the next *aventure*. The depiction of the Christian lessons

as visual miracles also underlines the relationship between sight and memory, which is significant to the process of achieving the Grail in each of the narratives. Mary Carruthers outlines the importance of memory in medieval cultures:

the choice to train one's memory, or not, for the ancients and the medieval, was not a choice dictated by convenience: it was a matter of ethics. A person without a memory, if such a thing could be, would be a person without moral character and, in a basic sense, without humanity.¹²⁵

In the Grail narratives this ethical understanding of memory shapes perceptions of the knights' progression; the knight without a memory is a knight who has little understanding of the Christian significance of the quest and will not be able to succeed in approaching or achieving the Grail. Notably, just after the end of the *Sankgreal*, the *Morte Darthur* states that Lancelot returns to his love for the Queen and 'forgot the promyse and the perfeccion that he had made in the queste' (*Morte*, p. 790). It is not just Lancelot's actions but his memory that is at fault. The relationship between sight and memory will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis.

Concepts of order, such as the branching metaphor in the Vulgate Cycle, had a further significance regarding concepts of memory in medieval mentalities. Carruthers argues that

learning can be seen as a process of acquiring smarter and richer mnemonic devices to represent information, encoding similar information into patterns, organisational principles, and rules which represent even material we have never before encountered, but which is like what we do know and thus can be recognised or remembered.¹²⁶

The Vulgate Cycle uses the branching metaphor as an organising principle through which the various narratives of the knights' journeys can be recorded and remembered, but also leaves space to include material not recounted in the Vulgate narrative. Sarah Breckenridge draws upon the relationship between sight, memory and the landscape to argue that the Fisher King's castle in Chrétien's *Perceval* should be understood in relation to Aristotelian

¹²⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 14.

¹²⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 2.

mnemonic devices.¹²⁷ This thesis will expand that idea, suggesting that the unique combination of patterns from which each narrative structure is created is designed to enhance the memorialisation of the lessons of the Grail. Carruthers argues that, ‘according to the early writers, retention and revival are stimulated best by visual means, and the visual form of sense perception is what gives stability and permanence to memory storage’.¹²⁸ This focus on the relationship between sight and memory is reflected in the profound visual experiences that each of the knights encounter on the Grail quest and which inspire their understanding of the Grail itself.¹²⁹

This process of remembering the lessons of the Grail narratives is significant to the reader as well as to the knights within the text. Andrea Williams asserts that,

as the *Queste* develops, we find that the homiletic passages become less frequent, and it is increasingly left to the reader to interpret the metaphorical dimension of the adventures. Thus, the reader is placed in a position analogous to that of the characters engaged on the quest’.¹³⁰

Arguably, one of the primary functions of the Grail texts is to stimulate the reader’s desire to engage with Christian ideals, and to improve their own understanding of it. The popular Arthurian subject is a medium through which the authors of the Grail narratives from the *Didot-Perceval* onwards can encourage their readership to improve their own Christian understanding. By putting the reader in a position similar to that of the knights on the quest, the Grail narratives stimulate the readers’ desire to improve their own relationship with God through inviting them to interpret and reinterpret the *aventures* that they read in accordance

¹²⁷ Breckenridge argues that the ‘memory-making process is dramatized in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal* by the Grail Castle’s anomalous appearances and disappearances, and the many retellings of Perceval’s experience there. These Grail castle incidents are steps in memory creation that finally unravel the enigma of the Grail Castle’. Sarah Breckenridge, ‘Cognitive Discoveries and Constructed Mindscapes: Reading the Grail Castle as a Mnemonic Device’, *The Modern Language Review*, 106:4 (October 2011), 968–87 (p. 970).

¹²⁸ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 19.

¹²⁹ The significance of sight and visual experience in each of the Grail narratives is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two: ‘Sight, Knowledge and Perception: The Depiction of Hermeneutic Progression in the Quest for the Holy Grail’.

¹³⁰ Andrea Williams, ‘La Queste del Saint Graal’, *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. by Glyn Burgess and Karen Pratt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp. 305–11, (p. 310).

with Christian theology. In each of the Grail narratives the knights and the readers are invited to become interpreters of the Grail quest, and the unique structures of the Grail narratives are designed to direct the reader's attention towards the importance of interpretation.

Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) writes that the Church is 'a figure and image of the entire world composed of visible and invisible essences [...]. For the whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms, for those who are capable of seeing this'.¹³¹ In the *Queste del Saint Graal* the actual *aventures* that the knights encounter are always symbolic of a higher religious truth, and hermits ('those who are capable of seeing this')¹³² are needed to explain the meaning of these *aventures* even by Galahad, the only knight who has 'the requisite pre-understanding to see signifieds instinctively'.¹³³ With the knowledge gained from these religious figures, the knights are able to improve their sense of sight through increasing their religious perception. This spiritual improvement is simultaneously directed towards the reader, who can improve his or her own knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith through engaging with the text.

Thesis Structure

This thesis suggests that the Grail narratives operate according to a model of logic that relies upon the interaction between visual demonstration and dialectic explanation. The spatial and temporal constructs of each knight's journey reflect the knights' understanding of this process. In Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*, Lancelot's first failure, the failure to awaken, and

¹³¹ George C. Berthold, trans., 'Mystagogia', in *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings* (London: SPCK, 1985), pp. 188–9.

¹³² Laurence N. de Looze, 'A Story of Interpretations: The *Queste del Saint Graal* as Metaliterature', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York, NY: Garland, 2000), pp. 237–260, (p. 243).

¹³³ Although Galahad is able to discern how to act, he still has to have the meaning of the *aventures* that he brings to an end explained to him either by a priest, hermit, or, on one occasion, Perceval's sister. This marks a separation between this archetypal perfect knight, able to achieve and complete the Grail quest, but not to interpret it, and the hermits, who know and understand the 'things of God' that the Grail signifies, but cannot themselves bring the quest to an end. As Edwards argues, in separating the ability to know and the ability to act the *Queste* 'redeems chivalry by subordinating it to hermits who know, and whose knowledge of the significations of the symbols which permeate this world orders those symbols in a metaphorical hierarchy'. Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative*, p. 94.

thus to clearly see the Grail 'heal the syke knyght', is a failure of sight. Lancelot is later informed that it is

your presumption to take upon you in dedely synne for to be in Hys presence, where Hys fleyssh and Hys blood was, that caused you ye myght nat se hyt with youre wordely yen, for He woll nat appere where such synners bene. (*Morte*, pp. 695-696)

This failure of perception (his physical inability to see the Grail miracle and his inability to interpret the significance of the Grail quest,) is marked by a geographical disorientation.

Lancelot is lost in the forest, following 'no patthe but as wylde adventure lad him' (*Morte*, p. 692), when he initially finds the stone chapel to which the 'syke knyght' is brought.

Throughout the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, Lancelot's inability to stay on the 'right path' is a marked feature of his quest. Indeed, even as his quest draws to a close, Lancelot approaches Corbenic by way of a rudderless boat, his inability to control his own direction highlighted further by a comparison with the journey made by Galahad, Perceval and Bors, who 'rode they a grete whyle tyll they cam to the castell of Carbonek' (*Morte*, p. 781). This geographical disorientation created by the shifting quest spaces that each knight's individual journey inhabits, is accompanied by a temporal disorientation. It is Lancelot's inability to recognise the relationship between the events of the Arthurian present and the biblical past that leaves him unable to learn how to interpret the *aventures* of the Grail quest. The diegetic implications of the Grail are therefore most evident through the transformation of concepts of sight, space and time in each of the Grail narratives under discussion. The three main chapters of this thesis focus on depiction and manipulation of the concepts of sight, space and time in Chrétien's *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval*, *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* to further understandings of the shared significance of the Grail in each text.

In the Perceval Grail narratives, Chrétien's *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval* and *Perlesvaus*, visual experiences override both the other senses and the knights' consciousness of the present moment. The importance of sight is amplified in Galahad Grail narratives, the Vulgate Cycle and Malory's *Morte Darthur*, in which the knights' increased abilities to interpret and understand the spiritual significance of the Grail *aventures* is illustrated as a transformation in their visual process. The knights progress from using physical sight alone to starting to see the Grail world through a form of spiritual sight. In turn, the interdependent nature of spiritual and physical progression towards the Grail causes both figurative and literal changes in the Arthurian landscape. The geographical features and *aventures* that constitute each knight's journey are directly related to his relationship with God, and therefore must be capable of constant movement. Again, the apparent mobility of the Grail landscape is amplified in each of the chronologically successive Grail texts. This geographical transformation is mirrored by a temporal transformation, which highlights the relationship between the past, in the form of biblical history, and the present Arthurian events. The parallels between events and figures from these two distinct times, created by the constant movement between present *aventure* and past explanation, highlight the eternal relevance of the Grail miracles and the Christian lessons that they illustrate. In the five Grail narratives under discussion in this thesis, the relationship between conceptualisations of sight, space, and time foreground the logic under which each narrative, and thus Grail, operates.

The first chapter, 'Hermeneutic Progression: Sight, Knowledge and Perception', focuses on the significance of sight in each of the Grail narratives. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval* and *Perlesvaus*, sight is figured as the primary form of sensory experience. In each of these texts visual experiences are shown to be all-consuming, overriding any other form of sensory perception. These *Perceval* Grail romances also depict a clear relationship between sight and knowledge, in which seeing the Grail procession should

inspire the successful Grail knight to ask the questions that will bring the Grail quest to an end. The *Queste del Saint Graal* and *Tale of the Sankgreal* amplify the importance of the sense of sight. In these texts, visual experiences both dictate the way in which the Grail is to be ‘achieved’, and act as the medium through which the knights experience many of the *aventures* of the Grail quest. The process of learning to appreciate the transformed priorities of the Grail quest is depicted as a transformation in the visual process, in which the knights must cease to look using their physical sight, and instead learn to perceive the events of the Quest through their faith and spiritual understanding.

The second chapter, ‘Topography of the Grail Quest: Spatial Perception’, explores the effect of the Grail on the Arthurian landscape. As Nicolette Zeeman argues, in the Grail romances ‘theology is given a new urgency by being situated within the enigmatic, questing narratives of *aventure*’.¹³⁴ Although the Grail forest may appear to superficially resemble that of the non-Grail Arthurian world, it, like the new priorities of the quest itself, responds to the increased priority given to Christian values, as signalled by the name of the ‘Waste Forest’.

As Corinne Saunders suggests:

in Chrétien’s narrative, the term *gaste* is mainly used to signal distance and wildness and to indicate a more abstract, densely symbolic forest. In later versions of the Grail story, this quality is developed and the landscape becomes highly metaphorical.¹³⁵

The metaphorical nature of the waste forest transforms the Grail quest’s spatial and geographical framework. As each knight must make a personal spiritual improvement to approach the Grail, the landscape through which he travels must reflect this inward journey.

¹³⁴ Nicolette Zeeman, ‘Tales of Piers and Perceval: Piers Plowman and the Grail Romances’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 22 (2009), 199–236 (p. 200).

¹³⁵ Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 123. Saunders explores the relationship between the forest and spiritual journeys. Saunders points out that ‘while the conjunction of these religious traditions with the romance landscape of the forest was to lead ultimately to the great romances of the Grail, a meeting of secular and sacred occurs even earlier in texts such as the twelfth century *Vita Merlini* attributed to Geoffrey of Monmouth, and in retellings of saints’ lives such as *La Vie de Saint Eustace*. In these texts, the forest functions as a landscape of vision, spiritual testing and prophecy, associations which lie at the core of the Grail romances and which vividly recall the sacred overtones of the classical forest’ (pp. 114–5).

The difference between the normative questing geography of Arthurian romance and the geography of the Grail quest therefore lies in the expectation for the landscape of the Grail to adapt to the experience of each individual knight. This chapter begins by exploring the ways in which transitions between landscapes are portrayed in non-Grail Arthurian romances, before analysing the Grail narratives chronologically, starting with a focus on the portrayal of the Fisher King's castle. This chapter argues that the inherent mobility of features in the landscape of the Grail quest is apparent from Chrétien's primal text, and is amplified in each of the subsequent retellings of the legend until the distinctively allegorical landscapes of the *Queste del Saint Graal* and *Tale of the Sankgreal*. This has the effect of prioritising the interdependent relationship between increased spiritual understanding and physical progression.

The third chapter of this thesis, 'Temporal Transformations: Grail Time', explores the teleological significance of the Grail with reference to the way in which the arrival of the Grail disrupts the typical patterns of time in romance. Alongside the transformation in spatial conceptualisations, the Grail narratives also manipulate temporal constructions to highlight the a-temporal nature of the lessons of the Grail. Unlike the cyclical and timeless feel attributed to the temporal structures of many romance narratives (including the earlier episodes of the Vulgate *Lancelot* and the *Morte Darthur*), each of the Grail texts tries to contextualise its narrative within some form of timeframe. At the same time, barriers between the biblical past and the Arthurian present are broken down increasingly with the appearance (and subsequent increase in number) of Grail miracles from the *Didot-Perceval* onwards. Just as the knights move between different conceptualisations of space, so too do they move between different historical time periods within the 'present' of the text to learn and finally accept the timeless nature of God's grace, the ultimate value for which each Grail stands. This chapter examines the way in which these Grail narratives interweave *aventures* in the

present with explanations from the Biblical past to create lessons that transcend temporal progression. The lessons of the Grail are thus portrayed to be relevant to have a timeless and universal relevance that encourages the readers, as well as the knights, to improve their Christian understanding by interacting with the logic of the Grail.

Chapter I: Hermeneutic Progression: Sight, Knowledge, and Perception

Introduction

The ultimate aim of all knights on the Quest for the Holy Grail is to ‘achieve’ the Grail. What the experience of ‘achieving’ the Grail involves, however, is conceptualised differently in each of the Grail texts. In the first two Grail narratives addressed here, Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval* (and the *Continuations*) and the *Didot-Perceval*, the Quest for the Holy Grail is presented as a quest for knowledge. Perceval must question the use of the Grail, and it is through the reciprocal acts of asking for and receiving knowledge that the Fisher King can be healed and the *aventures* of the Grail achieved and ended. In both of these texts, however, Perceval’s desire to question is inspired by his visual experience of the Grail procession at the Fisher King’s castle. These acts of seeing and questioning illustrate a relationship between sight and knowledge that is amplified in each of the successive Grail narratives.

The *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal* transform the process of achieving the Grail from a single moment of seeing and acquiring knowledge into a series of visual experiences, which reflect medieval theories about memorial processes. Mary Carruthers suggests that

letters and other images are signs (*notae*), not primarily by virtue of imitation but by virtue of recalling something again to memory, making one mindful as the prophet is made mindful. This understanding requires that pictures themselves function recollectively, as letters do.¹

In the Grail quest, as it is depicted in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, the knights’ visual experiences act as visual demonstrations of various Christian lessons, which they must both understand and remember to approach the Grail. The *aventures* have a recollective function. In these texts to achieve the Grail is to be allowed a clear and open sight of the Grail, and it is through religious visions that the knights’ understanding of the Christian faith improves. In each text, the conceptualisation of sight and the processes through which the knights learn to

¹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 257.

see illustrate the current state of their spiritual understanding: it is a knight's spiritual perception that shapes the journey that he undertakes and the obstacles that he overcomes. Consequently, in the five Grail narratives considered in this thesis, an understanding of each knight's visual perception is integral to an appreciation of the spatial and temporal structures that govern the Grail quest, as will be explored in more detail in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis.

Questions surrounding how, what and why an individual is able to see feature frequently in the work of medieval theologians such as Augustine, and sight was a primary form of medieval Christian experience. The difficulty in reconciling evidence collected by the senses with the medieval reality of a divine presence caused medieval philosophers to question the sense of sight. In *De genesi ad litteram*, for example, Augustine distinguishes between three types of vision: corporeal vision, spiritual vision and intellectual vision. As C. Hahn summarises,

The lowest level, "corporeal vision," consists of what one sees with the eyes of the body. The second level, "spiritual vision," is the occurrence of images in dreams of the imagination, largely but not exclusively dependent on the recollections of corporeal vision. [...] The third level, "intellectual vision," occurs exclusively in the highest levels of the mind and is the only site where Augustine admitted the possible perception of divine truths.²

The Grail narratives illustrate the relationship between these three 'levels of sight', in which perceptions collected by corporeal vision, spiritual vision and intellectual vision work together to allow the knights to perceive the divine truths for which the Grail stands. As Molly Martin writes, 'God is not a recognisable form, not a visible image with which mankind is familiar'.³ Illustrating God and acts of God in medieval literature and visual arts therefore required the author or artist to form a system of representation which makes visible the invisible for the education of the audience. The Grail narratives make use of Arthurian

² C. Hahn, 'Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality', in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. R. S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 169–96 (p. 171).

³ Molly Martin, *Vision and Gender*, p. 123.

history, characters and landscapes to illustrate the transformative nature of spiritual improvement. It is this spiritual improvement that allows the knights to perceive the divine truths for which the Grail stands and that encourage the readers to improve their own spiritual understanding.

In typical non-Grail Arthurian quests, a knight increases his knowledge of how to act correctly and in accordance with the many, and often competing, claims that may be made upon his chivalry through a combination of innate knightly prowess and the experience of former *aventures*. This means, as Jill Mann writes, that often ‘adventure is heuristic: it reveals a knight’s pre-existing worth rather than offering an opportunity to acquire it’.⁴ It is through chivalric experience that a young knight learns to fulfil his potential and exhibit this ‘pre-existing worth’. Thus, when a given situation closely resembles a preceding episode, the knight must draw on the experience of the earlier event to decide which course of action to take. The tales which narrate a young knight’s arrival at the Arthurian court and first *aventures* typically follow this pattern in which increased experience corresponds directly with increased understanding and eventual success.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, however, in the Grail narratives experience does not necessarily guarantee that a knight will choose the correct course of action. This is due, in part, to a distinction between physical appearance and spiritual truth. In Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the Didot-*Perceval* and *Perlesvaus* seeing the Grail procession is no indicator that a knight will be able to perceive the spiritual truths for which the Grail stands. Furthermore, in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the things that the knights see do not even necessarily represent a true presence. Pauline Matarasso describes the *Queste* as

the product of a period when things were rarely what they seemed, when the outward appearance was merely a garment in which to dress some inward truth, when the

⁴ Jill Mann, ‘Malory and the Grail Legend’, in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 203–20 (p. 210).

material world was but a veil through which the immutable could be sporadically glimpsed and perpetually reinterpreted.⁵

In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the distinction between physical appearance and spiritual truth is discussed through a religious exposition of theories of sight. In both narratives the Quest for the Holy Grail is initially presented as a quest to see the Grail ‘more opynly than hit hath bene shewed’ (*Morte*, p. 674) during its first appearance at Camelot, while frequent parallels are drawn between the knights’ ability to see and the state of their relationship with God. Eventually, the new and most successful Grail knight, Galahad, will die in the midst of a vision, gazing upon the ‘merveilles del Saint Graal’, a sight which is concealed both from his companions and the reader. The idea of ‘seeing the Grail’, however, remains intimately connected to knowledge of the Grail and Christian doctrine (as in *Perceval* (and *Continuations*), the *Didot-Perceval*, and *Perlesvaus*), and a combination of the two forms of experience is required for a knight to achieve the Grail.

This chapter argues that a knights’ progression on the quest is shaped by his visual experiences, which illustrate a close relationship between sight and knowledge. To meet and understand an *aventure*, to ‘see’ one of the mysteries of God, and be inspired to gain knowledge of the Grail, a knight must first ensure that he will not be left blind to spiritual truths by fully confessing all of his sins. In *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval*, confessing all of his sins allows a knight to respond to visual stimuli and experiences correctly, asking the necessary questions about the Grail and thus gaining the knowledge required to bring the Grail quest to an end. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the successful Grail knight receives knowledge of Christian history by visiting a hermit, abbot, or priest to hear an explanation of his vision and receive the guidance offered to him. If he understands the vision, can see it ‘opynly’, and accepts the penance and advice offered by the religious figure, the knight is able to move towards the Grail, both spiritually (as indicated by a clearer sight of the next

⁵ Pauline Matarasso, trans., *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 9.

miracle) and physically (into a new landscape). For this reason, the knight's perception and subsequent interpretation of each *aventure* is paramount in importance to his progression either towards or away from the Grail.⁶

This chapter will argue that the phrase 'seeing the Grail' should be understood as 'perceiving the Grail'— an act which draws together physical sight, religious illumination, and spiritual understanding.⁷ In *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval*, 'perceiving' the Grail involves seeing the Grail procession, being inspired to ask about it and acting upon this desire to speak. The knowledge and understanding that the knight gains from this action brings the quest to an end. As the narratives of the *Queste* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* progress, the way in which the successful Grail knights see is transformed: they stop looking with their physical sight and instead use their increasing knowledge of the Christian doctrine to interpret the *aventures* of the Grail. As the knights in each Grail narrative learn to see through the Christian faith, their perception of the world is altered: they increase their religious understanding and redirect their gaze away from the world of secular chivalry and upwards towards God.⁸

⁶ Movement, either towards or away from the Grail, is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two: 'Spatial Perception and the Medieval Geographical Imagination: The Topography of the Grail Quest'.

⁷ In classical Latin texts perception (*perceptio*) is often defined as the act of apprehending with the mind or senses. The relationship between sensory information and increased understanding remains important to modern definitions of 'perception'. Medieval epistemological theories, primarily concerned with questions of cognition, were equally interested in the senses as the agents through which the mind gathers knowledge and, thus, increases understanding. For this reason, the senses were also important to medieval religious ceremony. Miri Rubin describes, for example, how 'at the elevation [of the Host] all senses were called into play. Bells pealed, incense was burnt, candles were lit, hands were clasped, supplications were mouthed'. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 58. At the same time, physical sight of the transformation of the Host was concealed from lay people by screens which would obscure clear and direct sight of what was happening. Arguably, obscuring the congregation's physical sight both adds to the mystery and drama that characterise the sacrament, and increases their desire to perceive the spiritual transformation. Many of the Grail texts make use of similar features to those seen in eucharistic ceremony at each appearance of the Grail, while the relationship between sensory information and spiritual knowledge becomes increasingly significant from the Vulgate cycle onwards.

⁸ This idea of the upward gaze towards God is reflected by medieval physiological theories about the placement of the eyes. As C. M. Woolgar argues, 'unlike beasts, whose eyes naturally turned to the ground, the eyes of men were set high in their heads so that they might look up to Heaven. Aside from the appropriateness of this aspect of human physiology, it was a signal that sight was a form of perception by the soul'. C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 148.

In all five Grail romances, sight is presented as the primary form of sensory experience. The first section of this chapter looks at the significance of sight in two romances by Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval* and *Lancelot*, the Didot-*Perceval*, and *Perlesvaus*. In *Perceval* and *Lancelot* sight is presented as having the ability to overwhelm and even suspend the other senses. During one of these visions, the affected knight simultaneously also loses all sense of time and space. The depiction of this ‘all-encompassing visual experience’ is amplified in *Perlesvaus*, in which the watching knights are almost paralysed when witnessing a eucharistic miracle. In *Lancelot*, Chrétien also indicates a relationship between sight and knowledge. It is once Lancelot has asked about and understands the significance of the hair that catches his eye that he experiences an extreme emotional reaction. The second part of this section on ‘Sight and Knowledge: Understanding Visual Experiences’ looks at the relationship between sight and knowledge in more detail, paying particular attention to the Grail procession in Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the Didot-*Perceval* and *Perlesvaus*. Each of these texts depicts a reciprocal relationship between sight and knowledge: to achieve the Grail Perceval must be inspired by the visual stimulus of the Grail procession to ask about the Grail. In turn, this knowledge allows Perceval to understand and ‘see’ the significance of the Grail procession more clearly.

The all-encompassing visual experience and the relationship between sight and knowledge are both amplified in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, in which the quest for the Grail is transformed into a series of visual experiences that the knights must learn to interpret. The discussion of the Galahad Grail narratives opens with an exploration of the sensory experience of the Grail’s first appearance at Camelot, focussing on the relationship between light and sight. Gawain’s initial reaction to the appearance of the Grail in the *Queste* suggests that a distinction can be made between different forms of sight. This is reflected by the growing vocabulary addressing the distinction between physical and what I will define as

‘spiritual’ sight between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. In the Grail narratives, sensory information should be interpreted through ‘trewe byleue’ in the Christian faith and doctrine, a process which subsequently improves each knight’s spiritual understanding and consciousness and allows him to move towards God. When a knight interprets the *aventures* that he meets purely through the evidence of his physical senses and prior experience of the Arthurian world he only moves further from the Grail and God’s grace. This spiritual model of sight, which suggests that individual perception plays an important part in the process of seeing, engages with contemporary theories of sight. This chapter subsequently examines the relationship between extramissive models of sight, and the things that the knights see on the Grail Quest. This discussion leads back to a consideration of the relationship between sight and understanding, discussed in the first part of this chapter in relation to the *Perceval* Grail romances. This chapter closes with an analysis of the final, and most spectacular, Grail miracles in the light of the models of sight suggested by each text.

Seeing the Grail in the *Perceval* Grail Romances

The All-encompassing Vision

Visual experience is presented as being the primary mode of sensory experience in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval* and the Didot-*Perceval*. As Tether has highlighted, from the opening of *Perceval*,

Chrétien makes a particular point of focussing his narrative specifically on depiction of Perceval’s apparent material, sensual world by, for example, peppering the narrative with verbs of sensation such as ‘veoir’, and related verbs such as ‘connui’, which seem to imply that for Perceval, seeing, in its simplest form, equates to understanding.⁹

⁹ Leah Tether, ‘Perceval’s Puerile Perceptions: The First Scene of the *Conte du Graal* as an Index of Medieval Concepts of Human Development Theory’, *Neophilologus*, 94 (2010), 225–239 (p. 228). Tether argues that Perceval’s growing maturity can be mapped according to a development in his ability to perceive and understand. Tether analyses four key scenes from *Perceval*, which she argues shows his progression from understanding the world according to his sensory perceptions, to being ‘able to relate the physical object to its significance’. Leah Tether, ‘Beyond the Grail: The Roles of Objects as Psychological Markers in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Conte du Graal*’, *Durham Theses* (Unpublished MA: Durham University, 2004), p. 13. While Tether reads this sensory development alongside medieval developmental theories, this process of a development in

In these texts, visual experiences seem to override other forms of sensory perception, ultimately suspending them. Once the senses are suspended, the affected knight seems to lose all sense of time and space, and is caught in the extreme emotions roused by the vision he witnesses. The way in which these all-encompassing visual experiences lead to extreme contemplation is reflected by the religious contemplation later caused by the sight of the Grail procession.

The ability of visual experience to suspend the other senses and lead to a temporal and spatial disorientation can be seen most clearly just over half way through Chrétien's *Perceval* when Perceval sees three drops of blood melting in the snow. Perceval wakes up at dawn and sets off in search of *aventure*. Suddenly he sees a hawk attack a wild goose:

La gente fu navree el col,
Si saigna .III. goutes de sanc
Qui espendirent sor lo blanc,
Si senbla naturel color.
[...]
Qant Percevaus vit defolee
La noif sor coi la gente jut
Et lo sanc qui entor parut,
Si s'apoya desus sa lance
Por esgarder cele senblance.
Et li sanz et la nois ensamble
La fresche color li resamble
Qui est en la face s'amie,
Et panse tant que toz s'oblie (*Perceval*, ll. 4120-4136)

[the goose had been wounded in the neck and bled three drops of blood, which spread upon the white snow like natural colour [...] When Perceval saw the disturbed snow where the goose had lain, with the blood still visible, he leaned upon his lance to gaze at this sight for the blood mingled with the snow resembled the blush of his lady's face. He became lost in contemplation (Kibler, p. 432)]

Perceval's previous active state, riding through the forest in pursuit of *aventure*, and chasing after the hawk to watch it attempt to make its kill, is juxtaposed with his sudden stasis as he

understanding that starts with a form of basic sensory perception, and ends in an ability to understand the 'higher significance' of event or object is precisely the journey that the knights must make in order to move towards the Grail in all of the Grail narratives under discussion in this thesis.

pauses to contemplate the colours of the red blood on the white snow.¹⁰ The text draws the audience's attention towards the snow that Perceval sees, the visibility of the blood that catches his attention, and the way in which he gazes at the arresting juxtaposition of colours. This contemplation, prompted by a visual stimulus and highlighted through Chrétien's use of the verb 'esgarder', reduces Perceval's consciousness of the present moment. The sudden abdication of his active chivalric role is accentuated by the fact that he leans upon his lance, relying upon the support of his chivalric accoutrement, but in a passive way. Chrétien draws further attention to Perceval's passivity in the next lines, as he describes the way in which

Percevaus sor les goutes muse,
Tote la matinee i use,
Tant que fors des tantes issirent
Escuier qui muser lo virent,
Si cuiderent qu'il someillast (*Perceval*, ll. 4145-4149)

[Perceval mused upon the drops of blood throughout the hours of dawn and spent so much time there that when the squires came out of their tents and saw him, they thought he was sleeping. (Kibler, p. 433)]

This moment, Tether argues, functions as a turning point in Perceval's developmental process: 'medieval development theories suggest that ultimate maturity must occur when he, for the first time, acknowledges more than mere superficiality; when he sees the blood drops and understands their higher significance'.¹¹ Perceval's contemplation of the significance of the drops of blood and lack of movement visually appears to the squires' eyes to be a lack of consciousness.¹² This is further accentuated by Perceval's complete lack of reaction when Sagremor attempts to address him: 'Et cil ne mot,/ Ainz fait senblant que il ne l'ot' (*Perceval*, ll. 4179-4180) ['But he did not move and acted as if he had not heard him' (Kibler, p. 433)].

At the same time, the potential for Perceval's stasis to leave him open to criticism of his

¹⁰ The juxtaposition of the red blood against the white is also used in descriptions of the Grail procession and the white lance that bleeds from its tip.

¹¹ Tether maps Perceval's sensory perceptions against medieval perceptions about the stages of *infantia*, *pueritia* and *adolescencia*. For more information see Tether, 'Beyond the Grail', p. 50.

¹² This relationship between consciousness and sight will be explored in more detail later in the chapter in relation to Lancelot witnessing the Grail heal a 'sick' knight but being unable to wake up and experience the Grail fully in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*.

chivalric behaviour is immediately countered by the fact that he responds successfully to both Sagremor's and Kay's physical challenges. Here, Perceval's visual experience and the contemplation it causes remove him from his immediate surroundings and isolate him in a moment which is only broken by a physical threat to his person. Through making this exception Chrétien simultaneously foregrounds the distinction between the causal relationship between sight and all-consuming contemplation, and Perceval's innate chivalric prowess, which he is able to utilise without thought.

The effect that the visual stimulus has on Perceval's contemplative state is amplified further in the description of Gawain's approach to Perceval. Immediately after Perceval has been approached by both Sagremor and then Kay Perceval returns to his contemplation, without distraction. As Gawain begins a third approach to Perceval, however, the text states that

N'encor n'estoit mie anuiez
De son panser que molt li plot,
Et neporquant li solauz ot
Dos les gouttes do sanc remises
Qui sor la noif erent assises,
Et la tierce aloit remetant.
Por ce ne pansoit mie tant
Li chevaliers com il ot fait. (Perceval, ll. 4356-4363) [emphasis mine]

[He was still not tired of his pleasing reverie, even though the sun had melted away two of the drops of blood that had lain upon the snow, and was even then melting away the third. *Because of this the knight was not so lost in contemplation as before.* (Kibler, p. 435) [emphasis mine]]

These lines illustrate the direct relationship between the pull of Perceval's all-consuming emotional experience and his visual process. As the colour of the blood starts to melt into the snow and the sight becomes less visually striking Perceval begins to reengage with the world around him, speaks to Gawain and eventually returns with him to King Arthur's tent. In this example, the sight that Perceval finds arresting overrides all of his other senses and instincts, the only exception to which is the physical impulse to defend himself. It is only the loss of

this visual stimulus that causes Perceval to start participating again in the realities of the world around him. As Tether summarises, ‘the blood drops inspire such a reverie in Perceval that he is able to relate the material image to the abstract image, and thus attain a kind of perceptive or spiritual maturity’.¹³ The importance of a removal from a sense of time and space can be seen in each of the later Grail narratives under consideration, in which manipulations of time and space foreground the eternal relevance of the Christian lessons of the Grail.¹⁴ In each of the later Grail narratives the knights must similarly learn to look beyond their initial sensory perceptions, in order to understand that the miracles that they witness have a higher spiritual significance.

Chrétien also represents visual experience as potentially all-encompassing in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* or *Lancelot*. In this text the relationship between sight, explanation and understanding forms a similar pattern to that encountered by the knights in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*. About halfway through the text Lancelot is riding through the forest accompanied by a young girl with whom he refuses to communicate because he is already lost in thought:

Cele l’aresne et il n’a cure
 De quanque ele l’aparole,
 Einçois refuse sa parole,
 Pansers li plest, parlars li grieve. (*La Charette*, ll. 1332-1335)

[she spoke to him, but he paid no heed to what she said and refused to speak himself; to reflect was pleasing, to speak was torment. (Kibler: *Knight of the Cart*, p. 224)]

In this text, Lancelot is lost in contemplation of his love before he has any profound visual experience. Once again, however, contemplation is shown to entail a lack of engagement with Lancelot’s surroundings, which manifests here as a lack of spatial awareness. When the

¹³ Tether, ‘Beyond the Grail’ p. 114. The ‘perceptive maturity’ that allows Perceval to relate the material to the abstract in this example is the kind of perception for which all of the knights on the Grail quest must aim to achieve any form of success on the Grail quest.

¹⁴ Manipulations of spatial and temporal principles in the Grail narratives are explored in more detail in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.

girl first notices a beautiful comb containing a handful of Guinevere's golden hair she tries to lead Lancelot away from the path he has chosen:

Et cil qui se delite et pest
De son panser qui molt li plest
Ne s'aparçoit mie si tost
Qu'ele fors sa voie l'ost. (*La Charette*, ll. 1361-1364)

[and he, delighting in and savouring his pleasant meditations, did not immediately notice that she had led him from his path. (Kibler: *Knight of the Cart*, p. 224)]

Lancelot's awareness of his surroundings is diminished through his consuming contemplation, which overrides his other sensory perceptions, here shown to include his sense of direction.¹⁵

Before it has a visual focus, however, Lancelot's contemplation is not as strong as that experienced by Perceval. Lancelot quickly notices that they are taking the wrong path and insists that the girl lead him back. Once back on the right path Lancelot notices the comb almost immediately and bends down to pick it up. The strength that this visual focus brings to his contemplation is immediately apparent: 'Quant il le tint molt longuemant/ L'esgarde et les chevox remire,/ Et cele an comança a rire' (*La Charette*, ll. 1392-1394) ['As he held it he gazed steadfastly at the hair until the girl began to laugh' (Kibler: *Knight of the Cart*, p. 224)]. It is once Lancelot holds the comb, and can see the hair on it, that his gaze is fixed.¹⁶

In *Lancelot*, however, it is not until the girl who is accompanying Lancelot tells him the truth about the comb, and reveals that it, and the hair, belonged to queen Guinevere that Lancelot experiences an extreme emotional reaction:

¹⁵ From the Didot-Perceval onwards, all of the Grail narratives make frequent use of a lack of spatial awareness to illustrate the knights' individual journeys of spiritual improvement, as is explored in more detail in the second chapter of this thesis: 'Spatial Perception and the Medieval Geographical Imagination: the Topography of the Grail Quest'.

¹⁶ Chrétien provides a vivid description of the hair itself in the next couple of lines, further accentuating the the finding of the hair as a profoundly visual experience: 'Ors .CM. foiz esmerez/ Et puis autautes foiz recuiz/ Fust plus obscurs que n'est la nuiz/ Contre le plus bel jor d'esté/ Qui ait an tot cest an esté./ Qui l'or et les chevols veïst/ Si que l'un les l'autre meïst' (ll. 1487-1494) ['if you took gold that had been refined a hundred thousand times and melted down as many, and if you put it beside these strands of hair, the gold would appear, to one who saw them together, as dull as the darkest night compared to the brightest summer day of all this year' (p. 226)].

Quant cil l'ot, n'a tant de vertu
Que tot nel coveigne ploier,
Par force l'estut apoier
Devant a l'arçon de la sele (*La Charette*, ll. 1424-1427)

[On hearing this, the knight did not have strength enough to keep from falling forward and was obliged to catch himself on the saddle bow. (Kibler: *Knight of the Cart*, p. 225)]

The relationship between sight and surprise is extended here to include the processes of acquiring knowledge and gaining understanding. This pattern of visual experience, explanation, and then extreme surprise and sorrow parallels the process portrayed in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*. In these texts the knights witness a range of striking visions which rouse their curiosity, but it is not until a religious figure has explained their significance to the knights that they are most profoundly affected by them and inspired to take the measures necessary to progress towards the Grail.¹⁷

Lancelot's adoration of the hair itself is depicted as a profoundly sensory experience, in which the sense of sight is highlighted. Once he has removed the hair from the comb, therefore separating the object of his desire from its captor, he treats it like a religious relic:

Ja mes oel d'ome ne verront
Nule chose tant enorer
Qu'il les comance a aorer
Et bien .C.M.. foiz les toche
Et a ses ialz et a sa face
[...]
An son saing pres del cuer les fiche
Entre sa chemise et sa char (*La Charette*, ll. 1460-1470)

[Never will the eye of man see anything receive such reverence, for he began to to adore the hair, touching it a hundred thousand times to his eye, his mouth, his forehead and his cheeks. [...] He placed the hair on his breast near his heart, between his shirt and his skin. (Kibler: *Knight of the Cart*, p. 225)]

¹⁷ The exception to this is, of course, Gawain, who refuses to do penance for his actions after the significance of his dream has been explained to him and the path forwards has been made clear.

The sensory nature of Lancelot's adoration is highlighted through the way in which he touches the hair against his face and heart and finally places it against his skin.¹⁸ As Suzanne Akbari acknowledges 'from antiquity to the present, vision is both explicitly and implicitly acknowledged as the highest of all senses'.¹⁹ As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, theories about the sense of sight also held an important place in Christian dialogues. It is therefore fitting for Lancelot's physical adoration of the hair to begin with his pressing it against his eyes, the organs through which his attention was drawn to the hair and which enable him to experience its beauty. As C. W. Woolgar writes, 'the eyes were the tokens of the soul: they were the sense organ closest to it and the eyes showed its trouble and delight'.²⁰ As Lancelot presses the hair against his eyes, he emphasises the fact that his romantic love for Guinevere is the the most important thing to both his heart and his soul. In the Vulgate *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* it is this romantic love that prevents Lancelot from clearly seeing the miraculous Grail miracles and, therefore, from achieving the Grail. The physicality of this action also reflects medieval theories of optics, which suggested that vision created a physical connection between eye and object that could create an emotional reaction in the viewer. Medieval theories of affective piety made a similar use of this connection between the eye and the object of sight, particularly in relation to visions of Christ, as is discussed in more detail in the next part of this chapter.

In both *Perceval* and *Lancelot* a visual experience leads to a reaction of extreme surprise and sorrow through which all the other senses are suspended. At the same time, the knights lose all perception of time and space, failing to recognise where they are, where their horses are walking, and how much time has passed. The *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* build upon

¹⁸ In the Vulgate *Queste* a sick knight who is healed by the Grail treats the Grail itself in a similar manner, pressing his eyes against it and the table on which it stands as a sign of his adoration.

¹⁹ Suzanne Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 3.

²⁰ Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 149.

this model of the all-encompassing gaze, relating it specifically to Christian forms of sight and debates surrounding ‘seeing’ the transformation of the Host.

Sight and Knowledge: Understanding Visual Experiences

Perceval and the *Didot-Perceval* also illustrate a reciprocal relationship between sight and knowledge or understanding. Aristotle discusses the relationship between sight and knowledge and the preference shown towards the sense of sight in his *Metaphysics*:

All men by nature desire knowledge. An indication of this is our esteem for the senses; for apart from their use we esteem them for their own sake and most of all the sense of sight. Not only with a view to action, but even when no action is contemplated, we prefer sight to practically all the other senses. The reason for this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions.²¹

As the example of Aristotle demonstrates, ‘seeing and knowing are inextricably linked in Western culture’, and this relationship between sight, as the most important of the ‘external senses’, and knowledge persists in modern speech.²² As Akbari describes, ‘we say “I see” to indicate that we have understood an argument, explain our “point of view”, try to “look” at the problem differently, and finally, we hope, achieve an “insight”’.²³ In the five Old French and Middle English Grail narratives discussed in this thesis, the sense of sight provides the primary experiential mode through which the knights get to know and understand the meaning and truth of the Grail. The ‘many distinctions’ that visual experience can reveal, discussed by Aristotle, are conceptualised as the myriad of different visual experiences that the knights have on the Grail quest and which correspond directly to their own Christian understanding. As Tether’s analysis of *Perceval* demonstrates, as the texts and quests progress, the successful Grail knights learn to look beyond their sensory perceptions, and to

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1933), p. 3.

²² Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, p. 3.

²³ Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, p. 4.

make the connection between the physical objects before them and the higher significance that these items have.

In *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval*, the knights' desire to find and achieve the Grail is conceptualised as a search for understanding, which is gained through visual experience. In each of these texts the Grail procession is conceptualised as a visual demonstration which has the potential to inspire the successful Grail knight to bring the Grail quest to an end. The visual importance of the Grail procession is first highlighted by the description of the way in which

Et tuit cil de leianz veoient
La lance blanche et lo fer blanc,
S'an ist une goutte de sanc
Do fer de la lance an somet,
Et jusqu'a la main au vallet
Corroit cele goutte vermoille. (*Perceval*, ll. 3134-3139)

[everyone in the hall saw the white lance with its white point from whose tip there issued a drop of blood, and this red drop flowed down to the squire's hand (Kibler, p. 420).]

The religious miracle is conceptualised as a shared visual experience. There is a strong performative element to the Grail procession which parallels the growing emphasis on religious rituals in the twelfth century. As Miri Rubin describes,

priests were seen as teachers but above all as ritual performers of sacramental acts, those acts which tie the Christian world to God through repeated, and reiterated procedures that only the priest could perform.²⁴

In *Perceval*, although no priest is present, the ritual bringing out of the candles, the lance and the Grail itself mirror the ritualistic elements of medieval religious services. At the same time, this performance directs the gaze of both the watching knight with the desired effect of inviting and inspiring him to question what he sees.

²⁴ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 50.

The relationship between sight and understanding is discussed more directly by Perceval's cousin, who criticises Perceval after he leaves the Fisher King's castle. Chrétien foregrounds the significance of visual experience by the series of questions that Perceval's cousin asks Perceval:

Or me dites se vos veïstes
La lance don la pointe saigne,
Et si n'i a ne char ne vaine.
– Se je la vi? Oil, par foi!
– Et demandates vos por coi
Elle saignoit? – N'en parlai onques.
– Si m'aïst Dex, ce saichiez donques
Que molt avez espleitié mal.
Et veïstes vos lo graal? (*Perceval*, ll. 3486-3494)

[‘...tell me whether you saw the lance with the tip that bleeds, though it has neither blood nor veins.’
‘Yes, upon my word I did see it!’
‘And did you ask why it bled?’
‘I never spoke a word’
‘So help me God, let me tell you then that you have done ill. And did you see the Grail?’ (Kibler, p. 424)]

When Perceval explains that he did see the Grail, but did not ask about that either, his cousin explains the nature of his mistake to him, relating it directly to the fact that Perceval has sinned. The questions that she asks highlight sight as the mode of experience through which Perceval should have felt himself moved to ask the appropriate questions. In *Perceval*, then, sin does not prevent an individual from seeing altogether, but from knowing how to respond correctly to something that he has seen. The knight is not physically blind, but suffers from an inability to interpret the information received through his eyes. Similarly, in the *Didot-Perceval* the woman asks Perceval

Dont ne jeüs tu anuit a le maison Bron ton taion, qui tant est de grant ancisserie, et veïs passer le Graal devant toi et les autres reliques? Or saces, fait le demisele, que se tu eüsses demandé que on en servoit, li rois tes taions fust garis de l'enfermenté que il a et fust revenus en sa santé, et fust acomplie la prophetie que nostre Sire commanda a Joseph. (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 211)

[Didn't you lie last night in the house of your grandfather Bron, that man of such high lineage? And didn't you see the Grail and the other relics pass before you? Know then

that if you'd asked what the Grail is for, your grandfather the king would have been healed of his infirmity and restored to health, and the prophecy that Our Lord made to Joseph would have been fulfilled. (Bryant, p.143)]

Seeing the Grail procession, this woman suggests, should be enough to prompt the watching knight to ask the question that will bring the Grail quest to an end, if he is worthy enough to achieve this. Sarah Stanbury writes that 'in many texts the gaze itself, the very privilege of vision, is not only a solitary desire but a carefully orchestrated act mediated by others who tell the viewer how and what to see'.²⁵ In *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval* the Grail procession is depicted as a carefully choreographed visual spectacle, designed to direct the knight's vision (and thus attention) towards the knowledge that they must seek. The two examples from *Lancelot* and *Perceval*, explored above, depict an interconnected relationship between visual experience and overwhelming contemplation. Similarly, the visual demonstration of the Grail procession should lead to a religious contemplation: seeing the Grail should inspire the watching knights to ask about it, and thus to uncover the truth about its origin. It is the experience of receiving knowledge through visual stimuli and religious history that allows the quest of the Grail to finally be brought to an end. This relationship between sight and religious contemplation increases in importance in the Vulgate *Queste* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*.

As in the example from Chrétien's *Lancelot*, however, in the *Didot-Perceval* Perceval is initially prevented from appreciating the significance of his visual experience by a lack of understanding about what he has witnessed. It is not until after the beautiful woman has explained the significance of Perceval's vision to him that he can fully react to it:

Et quant Percevaus a oï çou que li demisele li avoit conté, si s'en esmervella molt, et en ot si grant duel il en commença a larmier et dist bien jamais n'arestera si ara trivee le maison son taion, et si ara demandé tout çou que li demisele li avoit amenteü.
(*Didot-Perceval*, pp. 211-212)

²⁵ Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 6.

[Perceval was astounded by the woman's words, and so distressed that he began to weep; and said he would not rest until he had found his grandfather's house and asked everything just as the damsel had said. (Bryant, p. 143)]

Perceval's knowledge of his failure to act correctly causes him to experience extreme shame and sadness. This relationship between visual experience, explanation and reaction again foreshadows the process of spiritual improvement illustrated in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*.

One of the primary differences between Perceval's experience of the Grail procession in Chrétien's *Perceval* and in the Didot-Perceval is the fact that in the prose Trilogy the knights know how to achieve the Grail from the opening of the quest. Despite this, however, when Perceval does reach the Fisher King's castle he is unable to bring the quest to an end. Although a similar reason is provided to explain Perceval's inability in the prose Trilogy as in Chrétien's *Perceval*, in the *Didot-Perceval* it makes markedly less sense. If Perceval is already aware that he must ask what the Grail is and who it serves, why would he worry that doing so might upset his host? I suggest that the reason for Perceval's oversight lies in the profound and disorienting visual experience of the Grail procession. The visual experience of the Grail procession has the same effect on Perceval in the *Didot-Perceval* as the three drops of blood have in Chrétien's text. Both images, reminiscent of the marvellous sacrifice made by Christ for mankind, command profoundly sorrowful contemplation in the viewer. While Perceval watches the procession he is unable to bring himself to question its significance in a way that might upset his host and thus bring the spectacle to an end.

The paralysing effect of the Grail on the observer is amplified further in *Perlesvaus* and the *Lancelot* sections of the Vulgate Cycle, in which the watching knights are unable to move or speak in the face of the eucharistic miracles. In *Perlesvaus*, all of the eucharistic miracles described are conceptualised as visual events. Arthur's first experience of the transformation of the Host at the chapel of St Augustine, for example, clearly indicates the primacy of the sense of sight. The narrative places a repeated emphasis on the vision as a

description of what Arthur can ‘see’ and refers to his gaze: ‘Il esgarde a une verriere devers l’autel, e voit une flanbe parmi venir, lués que la messe fu commenciee, plus clere que rais de soleil, e est descendue desus l’autel’ (*Perlesvaus*, pp. 35-36) [‘then he gazed up at a glass window behind the altar, and just as mass began he saw a great flame, brighter than a shaft of sunlight, pass through and fall upon the altar’ (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 26)]. The reader experiences the miraculous transformation of the Host through Arthur’s eyes and the magnificent nature of the vision is framed by this opening of light, flame and colour. Arthur is prevented from taking any further part in the service as he is physically unable to enter the chapel:

Mes s’il deüst conquerre tot l’or du mont n’entrast il dedenz; e si ne li deffendoit nus, car li huis estoit overz, ne il ne voit nului qui li deffendist. (*Perlesvaus*, p. 35)

[But even if all of the gold in the world had been at stake he could not have entered the chapel: yet no-one was stopping him, for the door was wide open and he could see no-one blocking his way. (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 26)]

Arthur is allowed to witness but not to partake in this experience. This inability to cross an invisible threshold can also be seen in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* when Lancelot sees the Grail heal a sick knight and then later when Lancelot witnesses a vision of the Trinity at Corbenic. Arthur, then, acts as an audience for this miraculous vision that he is able to see, but unable to fully understand or approach.

Later in *Perlesvaus* when Gawain witnesses the Grail procession at the Fisher King’s castle he finds himself paralysed in the presence of the Grail. As the Grail enters the room

Messire Gavains esgarde le Graal, et li senble q’il voie une chandoile dedenz, donc il n’ert gaires a icel tens, et voit la pointe de la lance donc li sans vermauz chiét, et li senble qu’il voit .ii. angres qui portent .ii. chandelabres d’or espris de chandoiles. (*Perlesvaus*, p. 119)

[Sir Gawain gazed at the Grail and thought he saw therein a chalice, which at that time was a rare sight indeed; and he saw the point of the lance from which the red blood flowed, and he thought he could see two angels bearing golden candlesticks. (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 79)]

Like in the above example of Arthur at the Chapel of St Augustine, the Grail procession is described to the reader as if seen through Gawain's eyes. The repetition of 'et li senble q'il voie' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 119) ['and thought he saw' (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 79)] reinforces the idea that the description is Gawain's vision, recreated for the eyes of the reader. This draws a distinction between real presence and perception. In *Perlesvaus* the miracles that the reader receives are conceptualised as being the knights' perceptions. The consuming effect that this vision has on Gawain is immediately apparent and he is unable to react or speak in the presence of the Grail: 'Messire Gavains est pensis, et li vient si grant joie en sa pensee qu'il ne li membre de rien se de Dieu non' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 119) ['Sir Gawain was deep in thought, so deep in joyful thought that he could think only of God' (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 79)]. The relationship between sight and this all-consuming contemplation is emphasised as the Grail passes before Gawain once again and 'li mestres des chevaliers semont Monsaingnor Gavain, et il esgarde devant lui et voit chaoir .iii. gotes del sanc desus la table, si fu toz esbahiz de l'esgarder, si ne dist mot' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 119) ['the foremost knight cried out to Sir Gawain, but he, looking before him, saw three drops of blood drip onto the table, and was so captivated by the sight that he did not say a word' (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 79)]. Like Perceval in Chrétien's *Perceval*, the sight of the three drops of blood, and the sacrifice for which they stand, completely overwhelm Gawain's sense of his surroundings and he is unable to speak and ask the question that he knows must bring the Grail quest to an end.

The way in which these all-encompassing visual experiences lead to a disorientation of the knights' perceptions of time and space contrasts with Merlin's ability to 'see' forwards and backwards in time simultaneously. The prose *Merlin* specifies that:

Et por ce ne vost pas Diex que deables i predist chose qui li deust avenir, ainz volt bien qu'il I eust ce qu'il desiroit et ce por quoi il l e fist. Il le fist por ce qu'il eust lor art de savoir les choses qui estoient et faites et dites et alees, et tot ce sot il. Et Nostre Sire qui tot conoist et set, por la repentance de la mere et por la reconaissance et le

lavement de confession et por bonne repentance que il sot qui en son cuer estoit et que por son gré ne par sa bone volenté ne li estoit avenu ce qui avenu li estoit, et por la force de baptesme dont ele ot esté lavez au fonz, vost Nostre Sire que le pechié de sa mere ne li poïst nuire : si li dona pooir et sens de savoir les choses qui estoient a avenir. (*Merlin*, pp. 49-50)

God had no wish to deprive the Devil of what was rightfully his, and since the devil wanted a child to inherit his power to know all things said and done in the past, he did indeed acquire that knowledge; but, in view of the mother's penitence and true confession and repentant heart, and of her unwillingness in the fatal deed, and of the power of her cleansing baptism in the font, Our Lord, who knows all things, did not want to punish the child for his mother's sin, but gave him the power to know the future. (Bryant, p. 55)

Unlike the knights, Merlin is all-seeing, and, therefore, all knowing. It is this ability that allows Merlin to instruct the knights, a role which is superseded in the Vulgate *Queste* by the many hermits, priests and other religious figures who inhabit the Grail forest and provide the knights with explanations of the Grail miracles. It is this simultaneous forward and backward sight that allows Merlin to instruct Blaise in making the books of the Holy Grail which form the trilogy itself, and which also separate Blaise's book (and therefore the Trilogy as its descendant) from other versions of the Grail story. Merlin, therefore, embodies the antithetical experience to the connection between vision and temporal perspective that affects the knights on the quest. Just as the knights lose all awareness of temporal progression when they are experiencing a Grail miracle, Merlin is removed from an experience of this progression by his knowledge of the past, present and future. Merlin's lack of a specifically situated temporal perspective, and his freedom to 'see' across the past, present and future results in a lack of distinction between the three times. As will be discussed here, the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* manipulate distinctions between past, present and future further to highlight the eternal relevance of the Christian lessons of the Grail.

In the prose Trilogy, the figure of Merlin also illustrates the potential fallibility of the sense of sight. In the *Merlin* section of the Trilogy, Merlin frequently changes his physical appearance to test the loyalty and understanding of those around him. It is one of the marks

of the ‘most noble’ characters that they quickly form the ability to override the evidence provided by their sense of sight, and recognise Merlin however he chooses to present himself. When Merlin first appears to Pendragon and Uther, for example, he takes on a variety of different physical appearances that confuse many of the messengers who are sent by the brothers to find him. Later in the text, however, when Merlin takes on two different appearances when speaking to Ulfin, Uther immediately recognises that both forms were Merlin, although he was not present at either interaction. When Ulfin asks Uther whether ‘pourroit ce donc estre voirs que hom se pouïst si disfigurer? Et que cist est qui einsis s’est desfigurez’ (*Merlin*, pp. 221-222) [‘a man can really change shape so?’ (Bryant, p. 99)], Uther replies ‘ce est Merlins qui einsis se gabe de nos et joe; et quant il voudra, il nos fera bien asavoir cui il est’ (*Merlin*, p. 222) [‘It’s Merlin playing games with us [...] When he wants you to know his identity, he’ll let you know for sure’ (Bryant, p. 99)]. Merlin’s identity is not tied to his physical appearance, which highlights the potential instability of information gained through the senses. The disruption of the relationship between seeing and knowing also highlights the importance of interpretation to an individual’s ability to understand correctly the information gathered by his senses. Again, this tension between seeing and interpreting is amplified in the later Grail narratives, which expand the distinction between sight and perception and develop a new vocabulary to describe different forms of ‘seeing’.²⁶

All of the examples from *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval* and *Perlesvaus* discussed above explore the relationship between sight and understanding in a way that indicates a distinction between sight and perception. I define perception as the act of apprehending a given phenomenon by interpreting information collected by the senses. It is understanding how to interpret the information gained by the sense of sight that allows Lancelot to recognise the significance of the hair that he finds; Perceval to realise the nature of his

²⁶ The vocabulary generated by discussions of seeing using physical sight versus making use of religious knowledge and understanding to perceive through a form of spiritual sight is addressed in more detail in ‘Unveiling the Grail: Physical and Spiritual Sight’.

mistake at the Grail castle; and Uther to recognise the disguised Merlin. Cognitive perception is also central to an understanding of the significance of sight in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, in which the miracles of the Grail are directly related to the Eucharist.

Seeing the Grail in the Galahad Grail Romances

Light and Sight: The First Appearance of the Grail

The Vulgate *Queste* draws directly on the structure of the Grail narrative created by the prose trilogy and, like the *Didot-Perceval*, emphasises the Christian origin of the Grail. References to the events of the Vulgate *Estoire* in the Malory's *Sankgreal* imply that Malory's Grail has a similar origin to that of the *Queste*, although Malory omits the history of the Holy Grail and greatly abridges the story of Merlin. In each of the five Grail narratives discussed in this thesis, however, the first appearance of the Grail to the Arthurian knights is heralded by a bright flash of light. When the Grail first appears in *Perceval* at the procession in the Fisher King's castle, Chrétien writes that,

Un graal entre ses .II. meins
Une damoisele tenoit
Qui aviau les vallez venoit,
Et bele et gente et bien senee,
Quant ele fu leianz antree
Atot lo graal qu'ele tint,
Une si grant clartez i vint,
Qu'ausin perdirent les chandoilles
Lor clarté comme les estoilles
Quant li solaux luist o la lune. (*Perceval*, ll. 3158-3167)

[a girl who came in with the boys, fair and comely and beautifully adorned, was holding a Grail between her hands. When she entered holding the Grail, so brilliant a light appeared that the candles lost their brightness like the stars or the moon when the sun rises. (Kibler, p. 35)]

Similarly, the author of the *Queste* writes that as the Grail enters Camelot,

Maintenant entra laiens vns rais de soleil [ki fist le palais] plus cleirs a . C . double quil nauoit este deuant. Si furent tuit par laiens au[s]si com sil fuissent tout enlumine de la grace del saint esperit. (*Queste*, p. 13)

[a ray of sunlight shone down, making the castle seven times brighter than before. The people inside seemed to have been illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit. (Burns, p. 7)]

Malory describes the entrance of the Grail in similar terms: ‘So in the myddys of the blast entyrde a sonnebeame, more clerer by seven tymys than ever they saw day, and all they were alyghted of the grace of the Holy Goste’ (*Morte*, p. 673). In the Post-Vulgate Cycle a brilliant light appears at Galahad’s first entrance to the hall, and then again with the arrival of the Grail. In each of these examples the light that appears in advance of the Grail signifies the divine, eclipsing all present man-made sources of light, and dazzling the Arthurian court.

An examination of the medieval religious significance of light is useful in illuminating the meaning and purpose of the light that announces the arrival of the Grail. A. C. Spearing writes that ‘light, the effusion of God himself, is the favourite medieval expression of beauty’, and the relationship between light and the divine is well documented in the work of Boethius, Robert Grosseteste, and Augustine.²⁷ Light also had a special importance in eucharistic ceremonies. Rubin records that ‘lighting was provided for illumination as long as consecrated Hosts were kept in the church, as well as for the duration of the mass, and additional lights were required during the elevation’.²⁸ In the early fourteenth century the *pupilla oculi* even instructed priests that ‘*signe igne, id est sine lumine, celebrare non licet*’ [‘without fire, that is without light, celebration should not take place’].²⁹ The relationship between light and the Eucharist can also be seen in a widely circulated miracle story entitled *The Miracle Host of Arras* in which a stolen Host, wrapped in cloth and hidden in a well, emitted a bright light to signify its presence.³⁰ The bright light that announces the arrival of the Grail thus reminds a medieval audience of the lights associated with the sacrament of the Eucharist.

²⁷ A. C. Spearing, ‘Symbolism and Dramatic Development in *Pearl*’, *Modern Philology*, 60 (1962), 1–12, p.5

²⁸ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 60

²⁹ D. R. Dendy, *The Use of Lights in Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 1959), p. 38.

³⁰ Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.87.

While the precise meaning of the Grail in each of the narratives differs, every text describes a clear relationship between the Grail and the Eucharist.³¹ The divine significance of the light that first announces the appearance of the Grail is reinforced throughout each text by the prominence of gold and candles at celebrations of mass and during the miracles performed through the Grail. The emphasis on the sensory experience of the Grail miracles, suggested by this effusion of light, engages the religious imagination through dramatic rituals and ceremony.³² When Lancelot witnesses the Grail heal a sick knight in the *Queste* and *Tale of the Sankgreal*, for example, his attention is first caught by the sight of candles burning mysteriously in a chapel. Candlelight, however, is only an imitation of the divine light. As Von Simpson suggests, ‘the distinction between physical nature and theological significance was bridged by the notion of corporeal light as an ‘analogy’ to the divine light’.³³ Rather than mirroring or recreating the divine, the light which appears in advance of the Grail comes from the ‘*verum lumen*’ [true light] (as described of Abbot Suger of St Denis), and symbolises the dawn of a new chivalric age, one which requires a new form of spiritual and ‘true’ sight.³⁴

The arrival of this blindingly brilliant light into the Arthurian court also engages medieval theories of divine illumination with questions of sight and perception. In the

³¹ In Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, the Grail is described as being holy because of its connection with the life sustaining Host, rather than containing any inherently holy properties itself. In the prose Trilogy, the Grail is given clear connection to the Eucharist through the story of Joseph of Arimathea using the vessel to catch Christ’s blood. In *Perlesvaus*, the Grail is the eucharistic vessel, and there is an emphasis on the lavish celebrations of the new ceremony of mass. The visions of the Christ child and the wounded suffering Christ tell the story of Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection, and provide a visual illustration of the meaning of transubstantiation. In the Vulgate *Queste*, however, the Grail moves beyond being one static object and is instead interchangeably used to represent the eucharistic vessel and God’s grace and mercy, and also constitutes a source of miraculous communication between the mortal and the divine. Malory, on the other hand, marks a distinction between what the Grail is and what it represents. In the *Sankgreal* the Grail is arguably the eucharistic vessel. However, the multifarious nature of the Grail in the *Queste* is retained in the many different Christian elements that the Grail signifies throughout Malory’s text.

³² The emphasis on drama and theatricality increased throughout the Middle Ages. Rubin, for example, records that ‘Thomas Goisman, an alderman of Hull, [...] left in his will of 1502 £10 to the Holy Trinity chapel, for the construction of a machine by which angels would descend from the roof at the elevation, and ascend after the *Pater noster*’. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 62.

³³ Otto Von Simpson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York, NY: Bollingden Foundation, 1956), p. 55.

³⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 165.

Sankgreal Malory describes the way in which at the appearance of the Grail the watching knights are ‘alyghted of the grace of the Holy Goste’ (*Morte*, p. 673). Similarly, the author(s) of the *Queste* write that ‘si furent tuit par laiens au[s]si com sil fuissent tout enlumine de la grace del saint esperit’ (*Queste*, p. 13) [‘the people inside seemed to have been illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit’ (Burns, p. 7)]. In both of these texts the knights are both physically illuminated by the bright light, and spiritually enlightened by the appearance of this divine favour.

This idea of spiritual illumination engages with medieval theories of cognition. Augustine suggested that ‘the mind needs to be enlightened by light from outside itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the nature of truth’.³⁵ This notion of ‘divine illumination’ suggests that the human intellect requires divine assistance to understand certain things. Furthermore, in the *Soliloquia*, Augustine petitions God as ‘*Deus intelligibilis lux, in quo et a quo et per quem intelligibiliter lucent, quae intellegibiliter lucent omnia*’ [‘God, intelligible light, in whom and from whom and through whom all those things which share in intelligible light have intelligible light’].³⁶ Augustine describes God as the source of light, and thus the source of all understanding. God illuminates the minds of men and helps them to understand and perceive religious truths. The process of divine illumination, as described by Augustine, is integral to understanding the logic of the Grail world. This first appearance of the Grail, signified by the bright light, marks the point at which the knights can no longer rely on their own experience and interpretation of events to succeed in their *aventures*. Instead, the knights will have to make use of divine assistance (both in the form of direct instructions and comments from God, often conveyed through mysterious voices, and instructions issued by mediators in the form of hermits and priests) to

³⁵ Henry Chadwick, trans., *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), IV.xv.25, p. 68.

³⁶G. Watson, ed. and trans., *Saint Augustine: Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990), *Soliloquies*, I.i.3, pp. 24 and 25.

achieve and end the *aventures del saint graal*. It is this reliance on divine illumination that transforms the rules and expectations of Arthurian chivalry at the opening of the Grail quest.

The illumination of the mind from an external source is an image used in a different context in an inscription on the doors of the Abbey of St Denis: '*Nobile claret opus, sed opus quod nobile claret/ Clarificet mentes, ut eant per lumina vera/ Ad verum lumen, ubi Christus juana vera*' ['Bright is the noble work: but, being nobly bright, the work/ Should brighten the minds so that they may travel, through the true lights,/ To the True Light where Christ is the true door'.]³⁷ The idea that a visual experience can act as the vehicle for spiritual illumination recurs throughout the Grail narratives in the various knights' visions. However, Suger's suggestion that a work of art can inspire the viewer towards spiritual illumination can also be applied to the wider purpose of the Grail narratives. In the same way that the viewer of Suger's door might feel his or her mind moved towards spiritual illumination by the transcendent beauty of the carving, the readers of the *Queste* could find themselves similarly moved towards improving their Christian understanding by the intricate imagery and lessons of the narrative.

The knights' reactions to the sudden arrival of this physical light and spiritual illumination signify the state of their present Christian understanding. The knights of the *Queste* 'comenchierent a regarder li vns lautre. Car il ne sauoient don't cele clartes venoit & neporquent il ni ot chelui qui peust parler ne dire mot' (*Queste*, p. 13) ['looked at one another, wondering where this could have come from. No one could talk or utter a single word. All stood silent for a long time' (Burns, p. 7)]. In the *Sankgreal* Malory similarly describes how the knights 'loked every man on other as they had bene doome' (*Morte*, p.

³⁷ '*Nobile claret opus, sed opus quod nobile claret/ Clarificet mentes, ut eant per lumina vera/ Ad verum lumen, ubi Christus juana vera./ Quale sit intus in his determinat aurea porta:/ Mens hebes ad verum per materialia surgit./ Et demersal prius had visa luce resurgit*' ['Bright is the noble work: but, being nobly bright, the work/ Should brighten the minds so that they may travel, through the true lights,/ To the True Light where Christ is the true door./ In what manner it be inherent in this world the golden door defines:/ The dull mind rises to truth, through that which is material/ And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion']. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, pp. 164–165.

674). Malory's mention of the knights seeming to be struck dumb in the presence of the Grail recalls the paralysing effect that the Grail procession has on Perceval and Gawain in the *Perceval* Grail romances, both of whom find themselves unable to speak in its presence. In each Grail narrative this sudden divine illumination momentarily suspends the physical senses of the watching knights. They are unable to speak, both blinded and illuminated by the appearance of the Grail and the new perspective (a perspective that they are as yet unable to fully comprehend) that the Grail *aventures* require.

The idea that blinding can conversely lead to clearer sight is reflected again through the stories of Lancelot and King Mordrain in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, and Queen Jandree in *Perlesvaus*. Each of these examples illustrates a close relationship between physical sight and spiritual perception. While Queen Jandree is blinded for refusing to see, Lancelot and King Mordrain are both blinded for attempting to see more of the Grail than God has allowed to them. This emphasises the concept of appropriate behaviour, in which wanting to see 'oute of mesure' is depicted as sinful, and acts as a barrier to gaining a clear sight of the desired view. Each of the texts suggests that it is not proper to want to 'see', understand, or perceive more or less of the Christian faith than God has apportioned to each individual.

The stories of Lancelot, King Mordrain, and Queen Jandree are also suggestive of each text's conceptualisation of the relationship between free will and predestination. Each of these examples seems to suggest that although an individual's life follows a predetermined path, the ability to exercise free will means that he or she can still make decisions that shape the direction that this path takes. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, although the knights know from the commencement of the quest that Galahad is the knight destined to achieve the Grail, each knight still has the potential for spiritual improvement through their interpretations of the religious *aventures*. The *Queste*, for example, explains that Lancelot would have been the

knight to achieve the Grail were it not for his illicit relationship with Guinevere. The text emphasises Lancelot's innate potential to achieve the Grail, whilst making it clear that his choices will lead him down a different path.³⁸ It is the knights' ability to perceive the Christian significance of this relationship that determines their progress on the Grail quest. For this reason, although Lancelot's movements on the quest are penitential, the penitential path is not open to Gawain as he is both unable and unwilling to perceive it.³⁹ Gawain's lack of Christian perception is suggested by the blindness that he describes when talking about his inability to see the Grail at its first appearance.

The way in which each character's sight is restored further illustrates the analogy between physical blindness and spiritual ignorance. In *Perlesvaus* Queen Jandree's sight is restored when she feels the desire to see Perceval:

Or li est muëz ses courages en tel maniere. Or vouroit bien qu'ele poïst veoir celui qui la dedenz est venuz, car on li a dit que ce est li biax chevaliers del monde, e bien samble estre si bons come l'on le testimoigne. (*Perlesvaus*, p. 375)

[now her heart had changed, and she dearly wished that she could see the one who had come, for she had been told that he was the fairest knight in the world, and he seemed indeed to be as good as she had heard. (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 242)]

Queen Jandree's 'change of heart' and her desire to see Perceval signifies her desire and readiness to receive and accept Christianity, just as her previous blindness resulted from her refusal to look upon any Christian person, and thus to 'look upon' the faith. Her physical sight is restored when her perception of the Christian faith, and the knights who believe in it, is transformed.

Although King Mordrain was deprived of his sight for the opposite reason, wanting to see 'too much' of the Grail, his sight is restored in a markedly similar manner. In the *Tale of*

³⁸ The relationship between predestination and free will therefore affects the landscapes through which the knights travel, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

³⁹ Gawain's lack of Christian perception is suggested by the blindness that he describes when talking about his inability to see the Grail at its first appearance in Camelot.

the Sankgreal a priest explains to Perceval that in the time of Joseph of Arimathea, King Mordrain was

ever bysy to be thereas the Sankgreall was. And on a tyme he nyghed hit so nyghe that Oure Lorde was displeased with hym, but ever he folowed hit more and more tyll God stroke hym allmost blynde. (*Morte*, p. 702)

Malory suggests that King Mordrain's 'fault' lies in wanting to know more about the Grail, and thus divine matters, than God had decreed proper. Similarly, the *Queste* explicitly states that Mordrain 'tos iors auoit desire a veoir le saint graal aprement' (*Queste*, p.62) ['had always wanted to see the Holy Grail openly' (Burns, p. 29)], directly tying the nature of his transgression to his sense of sight. In both texts Mordrain asks to be kept from death until he has seen the knight who is to achieve the Holy Grail. When Galahad reaches him, his sight is suddenly restored, and he looks upon Galahad before asking to die: 'Seriant dieu vrais cheualiers de qui iai si longement atendue la venur embrace moi & me lais[s]e reposer sor ton pis . si que ie puisse deuier entra tes bras' (*Queste*, p. 185) ['servant of God and true knight whom I have awaited so long, hold me in your arms and let me rest against your chest, so that I can die in your embrace' (Burns, p. 82)].⁴⁰ In each example the character is deprived of his or her physical sight for a religious transgression or misunderstanding. The restoration of physical sight is accompanied by an improvement in religious understanding. Galahad and Perceval thus become Christ-like figures, capable of both redeeming Queen Jandree and King Mordrain from their sin and healing the physical manifestation of their punishment.⁴¹

Unveiling the Grail: Physical and Spiritual Sight

⁴⁰ The *Sankgreal* follows a very similar line to the *Queste*. Mordrain says 'Sir Galahad, the servaunte of Jesu Cryste and verry knyght, whos commynge I have abyddyn longe, now enbrace me and lette me reste on thy breste, so that I may reste betwene thyne armys!' (p. 779).

⁴¹ The relationship between sight and healing can also be seen in the *Queste* in the episode in which Lancelot sees the Grail heal an injured knight. The text tells us that when the injured knight approaches the Grail he presses his eyes on the table upon which the Grail stands, even though the injuries that he has sustained (as far as the reader can tell) appear to be to his legs.

Descriptions of the presentation of the Grail at Camelot also provide the first direct indication that a type of vision other than physical sight is required for success in the Grail quest. In both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the Grail appears before the Arthurian court ‘coverde with whyght samyte’ (*Morte*, p. 674). The way in which this cover is described and conceptualised, however, indicates a difference between the two texts, and the way in which sight, and specifically sight of the Grail, should be understood. Malory’s Gawain says that ‘one thing begyled us, that we might nat se the Holy Grayle: hit was so preciously coverde’ (*Morte*, p. 674). In the *Sankgreal*, the obstruction between the Grail and the eyes of the knights is described as a physical cover that, once removed, will fully reveal that which lies beneath. By comparison, in the *Queste* Gawain says that the knights are ‘engignie quil ne le uirent apertement. Ains le[u]r fu couerte la veue par samblance’ (*Queste*, pp. 13-14) [‘so deceived that they couldn’t see the Grail clearly; its true form remained hidden from them’ (Burns, p. 8)]. In this text it is the knights’ own blindness, as opposed to the material cover, that prevents them from openly seeing the Grail and the religious truths for which it stands. Thus, as Gawain states that he will enter into the Quest for the Holy Grail and ‘ne reuenrai encore a cort por chose qui mauiegne deuant quil ne ma ci este moustres [apertement] sil puet ester en tel maniere qui iou le puisse veoir ne ne doi[u]e’ (*Queste*, p. 14) [‘not return to court, no matter what happens, until I have seen the Grail more clearly than I did today, assuming that I see it at all’ (Burns, p. 8)], the *Queste del saint Graal* becomes a journey through which the knights must learn to unveil their eyes to the beautiful mysteries of God.

The difference between the presentation of the veiling of the Grail in each text calls attention to the question of whether the Grail should be understood as an object or a concept. In the *Queste*, the Grail’s polyvalent nature allows it to be simultaneously the eucharistic vessel, God’s grace, and a vehicle for communication between the knights and God. Sight of the Grail is entirely dependent on each individual knight’s interpretation and understanding,

and the physical form of the Grail is not an accurate representation of what the Grail is. For this reason it is the eyes of the knights, and not the Grail itself, which are veiled. Although Malory uses the Grail to signify the variety of meanings embodied by the Grail of the *Queste*, Malory's Grail is the eucharistic vessel, and thus a physical object. The knights are allowed a clearer sight of the Grail when God chooses to 'lift the veil' from its form, an action that takes place only in line with an improvement in each knight's spiritual understanding. This physical unveiling can be seen in the final Grail miracle at Corbenic, discussed later in this chapter, in which Galahad, Perceval and Bors are able to see both the physical form of the Grail openly, and the religious apparitions that issue from it and signify the Christian truths for which the Grail stands.

In the quotation above, Gawain's words foreshadow a distinction between physical sight and a form of 'spiritual sight', which corresponds to an individual's religious understanding. This spiritual sight becomes the model of vision required by the knights to perceive the Grail *aventures* and succeed in the quest. Discussions surrounding the distinction between physical sight and a form of spiritual sight gained momentum in the controversy surrounding the Eucharist. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council explicitly discussed the process of transubstantiation. This interest in how the Host can physically resemble bread and wine while taking on the substance of the body and blood of Christ can be seen most clearly in the *Queste* in a discussion that Bohort has with a priest about the nature of the Host. Upon being asked whether he understands what the Priest is holding Bohort replies,

Oui bien. Je voi que vous tenes mon salueur & ma redemption en semblance de pain
Et en tel maniere nel veisse ie mie. Mais mi oeil sont si terrien quil ne peuent veoir les
espirituels choses [ne il] nel me laissent [autrement] veoir ains me tolent la vrai
samblance. Car de ce ne dout ie mie [que ce ne soit] vrai chars & vrais homs &
enterriene deites. (*Queste*, p. 120)

[Yes indeed, sir. I see that you are holding my saviour and my redemption in the form of bread. I would not see it in such a form except that my eyes, which are too worldly to perceive spiritual things, will not allow me to see it any other way. Its true form is

hidden from me. Yet I do not doubt that it is truly flesh: a real man and also a deity. (Burns, p. 53)]⁴²

This explanation suggests that seeing with the ‘mortal’ eye has the potential to leave the observer blind to religious truths. It is this problem of seeing religious truths with the mortal eye that sparked many of the debates surrounding the Eucharist. As Stephen Justice suggests, ‘once God starts working on the matter [...] eyes cannot be trusted to assess what looks like bread’.⁴³ At the same time, religious understanding and faith allow a recognition of the limitations of physical sight. In this example Bohort’s eyes are veiled from seeing the ‘true appearance’ of the Host by his humanity, and the *Queste* makes it clear that physical sight is not enough to allow an individual to see the Grail. Bohort must rely upon a form of divine illumination to perceive the ‘true’ substance of the Host (as he later does at the Grail Table alongside Perceval and Galahad), although his eyes currently veil this appearance from him. Time and time again the *Queste* illustrates the difference between the way in which religious and Arthurian *aventures* should be interpreted through a metaphoric language of sight, as the knights misunderstand, misinterpret, and misperceive the events with which they are faced. Lancelot’s progression on the quest, in particular, illustrates the difficulty in separating the expectations of secular romance from the spiritual significance of the Grail quest, as I shall explore in more detail in the remainder of this chapter.

As discussions concerning the Eucharist and the process of transubstantiation continued throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a new vocabulary concerned with describing the distinction between different types of sight developed. Nicholas Love’s *The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Crist* (ca. 1400) draws a clear distinction between ‘bodily eyene’ (physical sight) and ‘gostly eyen’ (spiritual sight) in a discussion concerned with the transformation of the Host:

⁴² There is no equivalent to this explanation in Malory’s *Sankgreal*.

⁴³ Stephen Justice, ‘Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42:2 (2012), 307–332 (p. 312).

we seyen and beleuen that in that holy sacrament brede is turned into goddus bodye, by virtue of cristes words. And so we alle holely honouren nat brede, bot god and his body in forme of brede, that is to sey likeness of brede that we sene with our bodily eyene; we honouren goddus body that we seen by trewe byleue in soule with oure gostly eyen.⁴⁴

In the *Mirroure*, the model I have defined as ‘spiritual sight’ is described as that which is seen through the ‘gostly eyen’. This new term, for there is no clear parallel in Old French, builds on ideas of the limitations of the ‘bodily eyene’ in perceiving religious truths and marks a clear division between the two different kinds of sight.⁴⁵ As Woolgar describes, ‘the eye of faith enabled one to see beyond a place or object to the eternal realities that were associated with it biblically or hagiographically, which then became physically present’.⁴⁶ In both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, this distinction between physical and spiritual sight becomes increasingly important as the knights progress on the Grail quest and the nature of their visual experiences changes. The knights start to be able to see beyond their physical environment and perceive the eternal realities for which each *aventure* stands. The relationship between sight and religious knowledge illustrates the ways in which information gained through physical sight is often to be mistrusted and the visions that the knights receive can be both illuminating and blinding. Seeing through his faith, ‘by trewe byleue’, as Love describes, allows a knight to correctly interpret and perceive the *aventures* that he encounters, and this allows him to progress on the quest. In turn, the biblical truths for which the Grail stands are physically present in the *aventures* that the knights must interpret to overcome.

The next appearance of the Grail in the *Queste* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* builds upon the distinction between physical and spiritual sight in relation to the form of the Grail. Both texts follow a similar narrative: riding through the forest alone Lancelot finds himself at

⁴⁴ Michael G. Sargent, ed., *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed life of Jesus Christ* (London: Garland, 1992), p.228.

⁴⁵ The French texts provide a description of the process of seeing during transubstantiation. In fourteenth-century England the phrase ‘bodily eyene’ emerges to give a name to the distinction between the ability to see the physical world, and inability to see the visible form of religious truths. My use of the term ‘spiritual sight’ performs a similar function, transforming the different types of sight into separate visual modes.

⁴⁶ Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 149.

a stone cross by an ancient chapel. He sees candles burning within the chapel but is unable to enter the building and so lies down to sleep upon his shield beneath the cross. ‘Half wakyng and half slepyng’ (*Morte*, p. 693), Lancelot witnesses the Grail heal a ‘syke knyghte’ (*Morte*, p. 693) but is unable to rouse himself.⁴⁷ Neither text suggests or implies that the Grail is covered and Lancelot is able to see it quite openly. However, when he finds a hermit to explain his vision to him, the hermit speaks of Lancelot’s inability to see the miracle, relating this to his sin:

And for youre presumpcion to take uppon you in dedely synne for to be in Hys presence, where Hys fleyssh and Hys blood was, that caused you ye myght nat se hyt with youre worldley yen, for He wol nat appere where such synners bene. (*Morte*, pp. 695-696)⁴⁸

Love’s ‘bodily eyene’ become the more emphatic ‘worldley yen’ of the *Sankgreal*, the description of which foregrounds Lancelot’s misconception of the Grail quest. Instead of turning his gaze towards the heavens and spiritual matters, Lancelot continues to allow both his sight and interpretation of events to be clouded by the secular Arthurian world. Again, there is a clear distinction between physical sight, attained with ‘worldley yen’, and spiritual sight, allowed only to those who are free from sin and have an understanding of religious truths. That Lancelot is able to see the outward form of the Grail but unable to discern the wondrous miracles that it works also forces the reader to disambiguate the Grail as an object from the different religious meanings for which it stands. It is when Lancelot understands this

⁴⁷ After the Grail has healed the ‘cheualiers malade’ in the Vulgate *Queste* the text states that ‘ainsi li auint ou por ce quil iert trop pesans du trauail ou par pechie dont il estoit surpris quil ne se remua onques por le saint graal qui la vint ne ne fist samblant que riens len fust. Dont il troua puis en mint lieu grant honte len dist & asses len mesaint en maint lieu ou il fu puis’. (p. 43) [‘whether because he was so overcome with fatigue or because he was weighed down by the sins he had committed, Lancelot did not move or reach at all when the Grail appeared. Later he was shamed for this and suffered for it in many ways during the Quest.’ (p. 21)]

⁴⁸ There is no direct parallel to this condemnation in the *Queste* and there is no equivalent for the ‘worldley yen’ described by Malory. Lancelot, however, admonishes himself in similar terms just after he wakes up, saying ‘quant ie me deu[s]se amender lors me destruit li anemis qui ma tolu la veue si que [ie ne puis ueoir chose . qui de par dieu soit . ne cou nest mie merueille . se] ie ne puis cler veoir’ (pp. 44–45) [‘When I had the opportunity to make amends, the devil destroyed me, taking away my sight. He blinded me to anything that came from God. It should come as no surprise that I cannot see clearly’ (p. 21)]

differentiation that he is finally moved to confess fully, and begin his quest anew in a state of ‘clannesse’.

The half-sleeping, half-waking state through which Lancelot experiences the miracle is indicative of his initial spiritual paralysis. When Lancelot first awakens after witnessing this miracle he is unable to ascertain whether the events of his vision are real: Lancelot ‘si apense se ce quil a veu a este soignes ou uerite’ (*Queste*, p. 44) [‘wondered if what he had seen was real or a dream’ (Burns, p. 21)]; ‘sette hym up and bethought hym what he had sene there and whether hit were dremys or nat’ (*Morte*, p. 694). It is not until he sees that the previously ‘syke knyght’ (*Morte*, p. 693) has taken his horse and armour that he is able to perceive the truth of his experience. Lancelot’s inability to discriminate between sleeping and waking, real life and dreams, signifies his difficulty in distinguishing between physical and spiritual modes of vision and interpretation. Lancelot’s confusion, his inability to ‘stirre nother speke whan the Holy Bloode appered’ (*Morte*, p. 695), also mirrors the confusion and inability to speak experienced by the knights during the Grail’s first appearance at Camelot, and Gawain’s paralysing wonder at the Grail procession in *Perlesvaus*. Again, this example emphasises the importance of interpretation and perception to seeing the Grail. Lancelot is not unable to see because the object of his gaze is covered, or because his sight is physically restricted, but rather because he is unable to interpret the religious *aventures* of the Grail quest in the requisite way. Lancelot’s need to verify the truth of his vision with physical evidence underwrites his reliance on the physical and earthly mode of vision. This is emphasised in the *Morte Darthur* by the description of Lancelot’s ‘worldley yen’, which are unsuitable for success in this spiritual quest.

Extramissive Theories of Vision and Individual Perception

Lancelot, ‘la flor de toute terriene cheualerie’ (*Queste*, p. 84) [‘flower of all earthly chivalry’ (Burns, p. 38)], frequently struggles to distinguish between earthly and spiritual modes of

sight and perception, and mistakes, misunderstands, and misperceives throughout his journey on the Grail quest in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*. For this reason, it is Lancelot's Grail journey that most clearly illustrates the importance of individual perception to the Grail quest. Lancelot's failure to recognise the importance of Christian faith to his ability to perceive the events that surround him, illustrated by the way in which he approaches the tournament between the black and white knights, corresponds to his inability to leave the evidence of physical sight in favour of interpreting the *aventures* that he meets through spiritual sight. Lancelot's failure to distinguish the religious nature of the Grail quest from the physical demands of secular chivalry leads to a further mistake when he takes out his sword to attack two lions that are guarding the gate into Corbenic. In both texts Lancelot is rebuked by a voice which explains the nature of Lancelot's misdeed:

hons de poure foi & de maluakise creance porquoi te fies tu plus en to main que en ton creator. Tu es chaitis quent to quides que tes armes te puissant plus aidier que cil en qui seruice tu es (*Queste*, p. 179)

[man of little faith and weak belief, why do you put greater trust in your hand than in your creator? What a wretch you are not to realise that He in whose service you have placed yourself has more strength than your armour (Burns, p. 79)];

O man of evylle fayth and poore beleve! Wherefore trustiest thou more on thy harneyse than in thy Maker? For He myght more avayle the than thyne armour, in what servyse that thou arte sette in. (*Morte*, p. 773)

Throughout his quest Lancelot continually struggles to accept and understand the need for a new mode of vision, interpreting events through the sensory information and experience of the Arthurian world rather than 'trewe byleue' in the Christian faith and doctrine.

The depiction of Lancelot's misperception of the Grail world, and the effect of his misunderstanding on the *aventures* that he sees, corresponds to the model of sight that dominated in medieval optical theories at the time at which the *Queste* was written. Until the end of the thirteenth century optical theories were split into three main divisions: Euclidian mathematical 'extramission' theories, atomistic or Aristotelian 'intromission' theories which

concentrate on physics, and the Galenic physiological theory.⁴⁹ In the first half of the thirteenth century, during which time the *Didot-Perceval*, *Perlesvaus*, and the Vulgate Cycle were written, ‘extramission’ theories dominated discussions of optics. These theories proposed that

radiation issues from the observer’s eye in the form of a cone and proceeds in straight lines unless reflected or refracted. If it falls on an opaque object the object is perceived, and the perception is [...] returned or communicated to the sense organ.⁵⁰

Such ‘extramissive’ models of sight provide a useful way of thinking about the process of ‘seeing’ described in the *Queste*. In the *Queste* the perception of a given object or miracle is controlled by the perspective and understanding of the eye that beholds it. Instead of information entering the eye from an external source and affecting the understanding of the individual, it is the individual’s interpretation and understanding that issues outwards and affects the physical objects that he or she sees.

Lancelot’s final experience at Corbenic, during which he is allowed a partial glimpse of the ‘*merveilles del saint graal*’, provides a clear illustration of this process, in which Lancelot’s interpretation of the events shape the physical scene that he witnesses. In a room in the castle Lancelot sees the Holy Grail, this time covered with red samite, and a man clothed as a priest performing mass. When the priest reaches the Elevation of the Host

fu auis a lancelot que deso[u]s les mains al prestre auoit .iij. homes. Dont li doi metoient le tiers par samblant le plus iouene entre les mains al prouoire. Et il le leuoit en haut si faisoit samblant quil le moustrast al puele (*Queste*, p. 180)

[Lancelot thought he saw three men above the hands of the aged priest; two of them were placing the youngest in the worthy man’s hands. Then the priest lifted him up as if to show him to the congregation. (Burns, p. 80)]

hit semed to Sir Launcelot that above the prestis hondys were thre men, whereof the too put the yongyste by lyknes betwene the prystes hondis; and so he lyffte hym up ryght hyghe, and hit semed to shew so to the peple. (*Morte*, p. 774)

⁴⁹ During the mid-to-late of the thirteenth century intramissive theories grew in popularity. For a full account and history of the changes in medieval optical theory see David C. Lindberg, *Studies in the History of Medieval Optics* (London: Valerium Reprints, 1983), pp. 338–368.

⁵⁰ Lindberg, *Medieval Optics*, p. 340.

While he watches, Lancelot ‘est auis que li prestres est si charges de la figure quil tient quil doie choir’ (*Queste*, p. 180) [‘was of the opinion that the celebrant was so charged by the figure he was holding that he seemed about to fall’]; ‘thought the pryste was so gretly charged of the vygoure that hym semed that he sholde falle to the erth’ (*Morte*, p. 774). Wanting to help the priest and seeing that the other figures are not going to assist him, Lancelot ignores his previous warning to move no further forwards and crosses the threshold into the room. He is subsequently punished for this transgression by being deprived of his physical senses and all movement, lying in an unconscious state for twenty-four days. Lancelot’s inappropriate response to this vision stems from a misperception that parallels the examples given above, and that reflects medieval views about the transformation of the Host during mass.

As mentioned above, the process of transubstantiation was proclaimed official dogma by the Lateran Council in 1215, after which debates about the precise nature of the transformation of the Host dominated medieval discussions of the Eucharist. Any witness to a miraculous transformation of the Host might question whether, when one ‘finds that the host he holds has become an infant, does he feel in his hands a light piece of bread, or a chubby eight pounds?’⁵¹ In the *Summa Theologicae* Aquinas draws on this distinction between substance and dimension:

Since the substance of Christ’s body is present by the power of the sacramental sign, whereas his dimensions are present as a real accompaniment, the body of Christ exists in the sacrament in the way substance exists under its dimensions, not in the way the dimensions of a body exist within the dimensions of the place containing it.⁵²

Although the Host may take on the substance and appearance of the Christ Child, adult Christ, or even just human flesh, its weight does not change in accordance with this transformation. In both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* Lancelot’s vision of the Trinity at

⁵¹ Justice, ‘Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt’, p. 324.

⁵² Timothy McDermott, ed. and trans., *St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1989), p. 577.

Corbenic engages with the debates surrounding transubstantiation. The vision that he witnesses is a physical manifestation of Lancelot's interpretation of the transformation of the Host.

At Corbenic, Lancelot views the celebration of mass through 'bodily eyene' and physical sight alone, and thus misperceives substance as weight, hurrying forward to help the priest elevate the Host as if the priest was lifting the weight of a mortal man. Throughout the descriptions of this vision the repetition of '*li est auis*' in the *Queste* and 'semed' in the *Sankgreal* reinforces the idea that the account that the reader receives is Lancelot's perception of the miracle. The image of the priest struggling to raise the transformed Host therefore becomes a product of Lancelot's own misunderstanding of the nature of transubstantiation. This moment illustrates the wider complexities of living by two competing modes of vision; as Akbari describes, 'vision is both the truest and falsest of the senses: it has the greatest capacity to reveal truths and the greatest capacity to deceive'.⁵³ In this example Lancelot's misperception affects his physical sight as well as spiritual progression. Even after Lancelot has confessed all of his sins, accepted religious instruction and increased his understanding of the '*merveilles del saint Graal*', he cannot fully perceive through spiritual and religious modes of sight but instead continues to rely upon his physical senses and knowledge of the Arthurian world. This is Lancelot's greatest mistake, and the barrier that prevents him from achieving a clear sight of the Grail and the miracles that it signifies and performs.⁵⁴

⁵³ Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Like the *Queste*, the *Sankgreal* was written at a time at which the doctrine of the Eucharist was being fiercely contested. The focus of these contestations was the point at which the ceremony of the Eucharist was first coming into being, and was largely concerned with the process of transubstantiation. The difference between substance and accidents, and the question of whether during the eucharistic ceremony the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, formed the basis of this dialogue. In the late fourteenth century these debates gained force as the Lollards, led by John Wycliffe, denied the process of transubstantiation. These ideas influenced John Huss and, in turn, Martin Luther, each of whom questioned the process of transubstantiation. Instead, Wycliffe and his followers suggested a process of consubstantiation, through which the bread and wine could exist alongside the body and blood of Christ, rather than being transformed into the body and blood of Christ. In turn, this criticism led to a fierce defence of transubstantiation by the orthodox

The act of ‘seeing’ described in the *Queste* also shows an interest in the physiology and epistemology of the visual process in ways which reflect the emergence of interest in ‘perspectivist’ treatises. Lindberg writes that ‘perspectivist’ ideas insisted ‘on a unified approach that investigated the mathematics, the physics, the physiology and even [...] the *psychology and epistemology* of the visual process’ (emphasis mine).⁵⁵ The combination of theories which relate physiological approaches to the sense of sight to epistemological and even theological questions became increasingly important in the fourteenth century, when four ‘prespectivist’ treatises were written. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ‘perspective became the subject of lectures at a variety of universities, including Prague, Leipzig, Krakow, Wurzburg, Alcala, Salamanca, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge’.⁵⁶ The Grail narratives make use of a similar relationship between sight and knowledge as ‘pespectivist’ treatises, in which seeing ‘opynly’ requires knowledge and understanding, and ‘seeing’ is depicted as both a physical and spiritual process. These texts also question how far information collected from physical sight can be trusted, something which became increasingly important to theories about refraction and the growing awareness of optical illusion. How far the evidence collated by physical sight can be trusted is a question that each of the five Old French and Middle English Grail narratives discussed in this thesis explores to foreground the importance of spiritual understanding to the production of knowledge.

Lancelot, however, is not the only knight who is portrayed as struggling to reconcile the evidence of his physical sight with his spiritual understanding. Both Perceval and Bohort must also distinguish physical sight from spiritual sight and correctly interpret the evidence of their eyes to improve their Christian understanding and progress on the Grail quest.

Church. In the *Sankgreal*, Malory’s depictions of the Grail miracles and the miraculous transformations of the Host support the official dogma of transubstantiation. For further information about the debates regarding the Eucharist throughout the Middle Ages see Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen Van Ausdall, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012).

⁵⁵ Lindberg, *Medieval Optics*, p. 338.

⁵⁶ Lindberg, *Medieval Optics*, p. 353.

Perceval's and Bohort's responses to the *aventures* that they meet, however, separate their eventual success from Lancelot's failure. Perceval, for example, first encounters a problem of interpretation when he accepts a devilish horse from an unknown woman and is only saved from the fiend when his fear prompts him to make the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross saves Perceval again later, when he is almost seduced by a second mysterious woman. In this case it is catching sight of the cross on his sword that prompts Perceval to cross himself and, thus, to save his soul. In both of these examples, although Perceval does not initially make the correct choice, and comes close to endangering both his soul and progression on the quest, he is saved by his pious reaction. Unlike Lancelot, who, faced with the fear of lions, places his trust in the strength of his arm, Perceval's instinctual reaction is to invoke the protection of God.

In comparison to Perceval's instinctive reactions, when Bohort is faced with a tower full of maidens who threaten to kill themselves unless he returns their love, and thus forsakes his vow of chastity, it is religious reasoning that allows him to set aside the evidence of his physical sight and correctly interpret the *aventure*:

Il les regarde & quide vraiment que ce soient gentiex femes & hautes dames si len prent si grans piti[e]s. Et nonporquant il nest mie conseilles quil naimme [assez] miex quil prenent lor ames que il la soie. Si lor dist quil nen fera nient ne pour [lor] mort ne por [lor] vie. (*Queste*, p. 130)

[Bors looked at them, thinking what noble women and highborn ladies they were, and he felt pity for them. Yet he was not of a mind to lose his soul to save theirs. So he told them that he would do nothing, regardless of whether they lived or died. (Burns, p. 57)]

Than loked he upwarde and saw they semed all ladyes of grete astate and rychely and well besyne. Than had he of hem grete pité; natforthat he was nat uncounceyld in hymself that levir he had they all had loste their soules than he hys soule. (*Morte*, p. 740)

Although Bohort does not himself directly draw a distinction between spiritual and physical sight, he decides on a course of action through interpreting the situation in light of the

Christian doctrine. It is through his use of religious reasoning that Bohort is able to choose the ‘right’ course of action.

Here, Perceval and Bohort therefore represent two different kinds of spirituality. A descendant of the Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes and the Didot-*Perceval*, the Vulgate Cycle Perceval acts impulsively, and is eventually saved by his own instinctual and innate piety. Bohort, on the other hand, reasons, discusses, and interprets the *aventures* that he meets through a detailed Christian understanding to ensure that he correctly perceives the situations that he must face. However, after choosing to act correctly, both knights still have to have their *aventures* explained to them to understand their actions and progress on the quest. The journey from physical to spiritual sight necessitates a rejection not just of the values of Arthurian chivalry, but also of evidence supplied by the physical senses.

Exegesis and Understanding: Mediating the Gaze

As discussed above, the mutual dependency between sight and knowledge is centrally important to achieving the Grail in Chrétien’s *Perceval* and the Didot-*Perceval*. Unlike in the *Perceval* Grail romances, however, in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the exchange between sight and knowledge is not presented as a singular event. As opposed to witnessing a grand procession and asking about it, the entire quest for the Grail is transformed into a repeated pattern of seeing, asking, understanding and remembering. As opposed to the single chance that Perceval has to see, interpret and understand, once lost difficult to recover, the knights of the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* are given a myriad of ‘second chances’ to hone their gaze. The *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* both present ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ as interdependent processes through which the knights more gradually acquire the knowledge integral to achieving the Grail in Chrétien’s *Perceval* and the Didot-*Perceval*.

In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, the knowledge that the knights need to learn how to see using their spiritual sight and progress on the quest is primarily supplied by the

abundance of hermits and priests who inhabit the Grail forest. Explanation and religious illumination, the dialectic form of reasoning, is required by all of the knights on the quest for the Holy Grail to allow them to understand the visions and *aventures* that they encounter. Even Galahad, the knight who most successfully combines religious understanding with instinctive natural piety (and always acts correctly), is unable to interpret the *aventures* of the Grail alone and requires the illumination of hermits, priests and other religious figures. At the castle of the earl Hernox, for example, Galahad rebukes Bors' suggestion that the reason that they were able to kill ten knights was because God did not love their adversaries: 'Ye say nat so [...] First, if they mysseded ayesnt God, the vengeaunce ys nat owris, but to Hym which hath power thereof' (*Morte*, p. 762). However, after discussing the miracle with a priest Galahad himself offers the same explanation, saying 'Sertes [...] and hit had nat pleased Oure Lorde, never sholde we have slayne so many men in so litill a whyle' (*Morte*, p. 763). Galahad's understanding of the miracle is shaped by this conversation with the priest, (and the subsequent religious illumination), rather than by an innate understanding of the situation.

In the various Grail narratives religious figures and knights have complementary roles, and a successful interaction between the two is required in order for the *aventures* of the Grail to be achieved and ended. In the Grail texts the role of the priests is to supply Christian knowledge to the knights, a role which involves listening to confession, administering penance for sins, and performing the ceremonies of mass. The cerebral illumination provided by the hermits and priests allows for the increased visual illumination that accompanies the knights' progression on the quest. The actions of the priests become the medium through which the knights are able to access the wondrous visions of the '*queste del saint graal*'. However, the priests are not able to achieve the Grail themselves or bring the various *aventures* to which it is connected, and which they are fully capable of explaining, to an end. Instead, the real miracle of the *Queste* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* exists in

witnessing the ‘truth’ behind the religious ceremonies. The priests know and understand the religious ‘truth’ of the acts which they perform: the knights experience these ‘truths’ visually.⁵⁷ In the *Queste*, for example, when Galahad, Bohort and Perceval witness four lions and a stag enter a chapel and transform as a priest is singing mass, the priest is not aware of what they have seen until they describe the vision to him. However, once the vision is described to him he says:

Or sai oui bien que vos estes des cheualiers ihesu crist qui la queste del saint graal doiuent mener a fin & qui souffrois les grant paines & les grans trauals [por le mener a fin]. Car vous estes cil a qui nostre sires a monstre ses [grans] secretes [& grans repostailles & si uous en dirai grant partie. (*Queste*, p. 167)

[I can tell from what you have said that you are worthy men, true knights who will bring the Quest for the Holy Grail to an end by enduring great hardship and travail. Our Lord has shown you His secrets and His mysteries in part. (Burns, p. 74)]⁵⁸

The priest then continues to explain the meaning of the vision to the three knights. While the physical act of witnessing the miracle is indeed a personal act, it is only through the dialectic explanation and illumination provided by a religious figure that the vision can be understood, and thus truly perceived. During mass the priest would have sight of that which is partially obscured from the sight of the congregation. Similarly, the Grail narratives present visions of mass in ways which lay people had never been able to see it.

Writing about the literary representation and significance of sight in the late Middle Ages, Sarah Stanbury suggests that ‘the gaze itself, the very privilege of vision, is not only a solitary desire but a carefully orchestrated act mediated by others who tell the viewer how and what to see’.⁵⁹ The Grail romances portray gazing as a carefully orchestrated act in which the viewer needs to be able to interpret what they have seen in order to understand it. The Grail procession in Chrétien’s *Perceval*, for example, is designed to draw Perceval’s attention

⁵⁷ In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the priests perform a similar role to the Fisher King and his attendants in Chrétien’s *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval*.

⁵⁸ The *Sankgreal* includes a markedly similar description of the priest’s reaction: “A, lordys”, seyde he, “ye be wellcom, for now wote I well ye beth the good knyghts which shall brynge the Sankgreall to an ende; for ye bene they unto Oure Lorde shall shew grete secretis” (pp. 764–65).

⁵⁹ Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire*, p. 6.

to the miracle that he should be able to interpret, but is unable to. Perceval gazes at the Grail, and at the blood drops dripping from the lance, but without being told what to see he looks without perceiving. In the Grail romances the knights are told what and why they have seen retrospectively. This can be further understood in relation to the medieval ideas of logical argumentation discussed in the introduction. The knights visually experience the demonstrative miracle, and then later receive a dialectic explanation of what they have seen and why they have seen it. In this way, the act of ‘gazing’ forms part of a complex act of mediation comparable to biblical exegesis. In the same way that understanding one line of a biblical passage does not automatically ensure a better understanding of the next, receiving the explanation for one Grail miracle does not mean that the knight is able to comprehend the next. However, each time a knight understands one miracle this understanding contributes to the accumulative Christian and spiritual knowledge that knights acquire throughout the Grail quest. This accumulative knowledge allows the knights to improve their spiritual understanding and progress towards the Grail.

Achieving the Grail: The Final Miracles

The most detailed and extravagant miracle in the *Queste* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* occurs in the presence of Bohort, Perceval, and Galahad at Corbenic and provides a visual illustration of the religious ‘truth’ of Mass. Prior to this point the reader has experienced the Grail covered at Camelot, ‘seen’ the outward form of the Grail through Lancelot’s sleeping eyes, and watched a shadowy vision of the Trinity with Lancelot at Corbenic. In contrast with these earlier experiences, the miracle witnessed by Bohort, Perceval, and Galahad is marked by its clarity. In this instance, the Host takes on two separate and distinct forms, that of the Christ Child, and that of the wounded and bleeding adult Christ. Before looking at the transformation itself in more detail, it is important to note that in all three of the texts in

which either of these transformations occur, *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste*, and the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, the two parts (the child Christ, and the suffering adult Christ) always occur alongside one another.⁶⁰ In *Perlesvaus* the transformation of the Host into the Christ Child and of the child into the suffering adult Christ appears twice (first to Arthur at the chapel of St Augustine and then to Gawain at the Fisher King's castle), but the vision of Christ's birth and death also appears for a third time to Queen Jandree the night before her sight is restored. The first of these visions appears to Arthur at the Chapel of St Augustine early in the text and there is no sense of increased clarity alongside a marked progression from physical to spiritual sight, as seen in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*.

The miraculous transformation of the Host described in *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste*, and the *Sankgreal* is part of a wider tradition of the use of optical testimony to support religious 'truths' in the Middle Ages. Collections of miracle stories were 'in circulation towards the end of the twelfth century when the doctrine of transubstantiation was still under debate'.⁶¹ These miracle stories aimed to reinforce belief in the Christian faith and doctrine by capturing the imagination of the reader. Arguably, the tales of miracles performed by the Grail in the *Queste* perform a similar function. Collections of miracle tales became increasingly popular in the thirteenth century, which saw the creation of Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum* (1223-4), James of Vitry's *Exempla* (1227-40), Thomas of Cantimpre's *De Bonum Universal de Apibus* (1256-61) and Stephen of Bourbon's *De Septum Donis Spiritualis Sancti*. However, many of these later collections find their roots in earlier Cistercian accounts of miracles in which 'eye witness accounts and the experiences of brother monks often constituted the authorities for new tales'.⁶² Throughout all of the

⁶⁰ Although Perceval sees two naked and divine children sitting in a beautiful tree in the *Didot-Perceval*, they are not directly connected to the celebration of mass or the transformation of the Host.

⁶¹ Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), p. 133.

⁶² Riddy, *Malory*, p. 110.

collections an emphasis on the importance of sight is retained, both in terms of the medium through which miracles are experienced and as the authority for a given miracle.

The authority of sight can also be seen in more secular miracle and marvel collections such as the *Otia Imperialia* (1210-1214), at the beginning of which Gervase of Tilbury assures his reader that ‘*abiectis importunes fabularum mendaciis, que uetustatis auctoritas comprobauit aut scripturarum firmauit auctoritas aut cotidane conspectionis fides oculata*’ [the crude falsehoods of idle tales should be spurned, and only those things which are sanctioned by the authority of age, or confirmed by the authority of scripture, or attested by daily eye witness accounts’] will be included.⁶³ This use of the sense of sight as a reliable mode of testimony in contemporary secular texts as well as religious collections indicates the reliance upon the relationship between sight and knowledge. The Grail narratives play with the idea of sight producing ‘true’ and reliable testimony through use of the relationship between sight and perception. The visions that the Grail knights see are ‘true’ to their beliefs, but religious ‘truths’ can only be seen through developing a sense of Christian understanding and perception.

The vision that Galahad, Bohort and Perceval witness at Corbenic in both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* draws upon the popular eucharistic vision of the Christ child. Rubin records that ‘one of the oldest tales in the eucharistic repertoire was that told in the *Vitae Patrum* of an old man who suffered from doubts and who was convinced by seeing a child at the moment of consecration’.⁶⁴ In the *Queste*, the description of the transformation of the Host shows a concentration on and interest in the way in which this experience may have looked:

⁶³ S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns, ed. and trans, *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 558–9.

⁶⁴ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 135. Rubin records that this tale is ‘told by Humbert of Romans among many others, *Sermones*, no. 44, p. 59’. Humbert of Romans, *Beati Umberti sermons*, Venice, 1603. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 135 (fn. 318).

lors fist ioseph[e] samblant quil entrast el sacrament de la messe. Et quant il i ot. j. poi demore si prinst dedens le saint vaissel vne oublee qui ert faite en semblance de pain. Et al leur quil fist descendi de deuers le ciel vne figure [en semblance] denfant & auoit le viaire aus[s]i rouge & aus[s]i embrase comme fus si se feri el pain. Si que cil qui el palais estoient virent apertement que li pains auoit forme dome carnel. Et quant ioseph[e] lot grant piece tenu si le remest el saint vaissel maintenant. (*Queste*, p. 189)⁶⁵

[The Josephus appeared to begin the sacrament of the Mass. After a brief delay, he took from the vessel a host made in the form of bread. And when he raised it up, a figure in the form of a child descended from above; his red countenance seemed to burn like fire. As he entered the bread, those present clearly saw that the bread took on the form of human flesh. After he had held the host for a long time, Josephus returned it to the Holy Vessel. (Burns, p. 84)]

This description provides an illustration of transubstantiation taking place, rather than concentrating solely on the miraculous nature of the transformation or the reactions of the watching knights. Once again, the Grail narratives provide a visual description of religious truths that the majority of lay people would not have experienced. The interest in the mechanism of transformation works alongside the increased emphasis on the visual experience of the Grail. The authors of the *Queste* describe the miracle to the reader in a way that ‘recreates’ the experience of seeing, and provides a glimpse of a sight that was often withheld from the eyes of the laity. As readers imagine the scene, applying their own Christian understanding to the description of the events taking place in the text, the mental image available to them is both a spiritual sight and the stimulus to improving their own Christian outlook and understanding.

Both the image of the Christ child and that of the suffering Christ are designed to evoke compassion, and became increasingly important to the instigation of affective piety. Through coupling the image of the Christ child with that of the ‘Man of Sorrows’, these miracles further emphasise the themes of sacrifice and resurrection for which the Eucharist

⁶⁵ The description given by Malory in the *Sankgreal* is very similar: ‘And than the bysshop made sembelaunte as thoughe he wolde have gone to the sakerynge of a masse, and than he toke an obley which was made in lyknesse of brede. And at the lyftyng up there cam a vigoure in lyknesse of a chylde, and the vysayge was as rede and as bryght os ony fyre, and smote hymselff into the brede, and all they saw hit that the brede was fourmed of a fleyshely man. And than he put hit into the holy vessell agayne’ (pp. 782–783).

stands. In *Perlesvaus*, the inclusion of Mary in each of these visions underlines Christ's humanity and adds her suffering as a mother to Christ's personal suffering. This would also evoke a more powerful compassion from an audience of the vision. As well as this, through including Mary, and tracing Christ's life from birth to death, the miracle recreates the entire process of birth, sacrifice and resurrection, the two forms which the Host takes representing the two points at which the pain of Christ's humanity can be felt most acutely.

In *Perlesvaus*, Gawain's reaction to this vision underlines the effect that such an image should have on a witness. The reader is told that as Gawain witnesses the Grail procession

esgarde contremont et li senble que li Graax soit tot l'air. Et voit, ce li est avis, par deseure un home cloufichié en une croiz, et li estoit le glaive fichié eu costé. Missire Gavains le voit, si en a grant pitié, et ne li sovient d'autre chose fors de la dolor que li rois sofre. (*Perlesvaus*, pp. 119-120)

[looking up it appeared to him that the Grail was high up in the air. And above it he saw, he thought, a crowned king nailed to a cross with a spear thrust in his side. Sir Gawain was filled with sorrow at the sight and he could think of nothing save the pain the king was suffering. (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, pp. 79-80)]

Schiller writes that 'the link between image and spectator ha[s] never in the West been as immediate as it was in the devotional images of the Late Middle Ages', to which the image of the 'Man of Sorrows' played an important part.⁶⁶ This early description describes the physical connection between the sorrow of the vision, and the sorrow felt by Gawain, the observer. The description of Gawain's distress extends out of the text and invites an emotional reaction from medieval readers, all of whom would have witnessed mass and could thus experience the sorrow connected to the 'truth' of the ceremony.

The second part of the Grail miracle in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, the appearance of the adult Christ, wounded, bleeding, and suffering, also belongs to the iconographical tradition of the 'Man of Sorrows' which developed in the thirteenth century and grew in

⁶⁶ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, Two Volumes, trans. by Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1972), Vol. II, p. 197.

popularity throughout the late Middle Ages.⁶⁷ This image of Christ can be seen in many different medieval illuminations and paintings.⁶⁸ Once again, the author of the *Queste* describes this miracle in a way that allows the apparition of the figure of Christ to be experienced by the reader:

Lors regardent li compaignon & vo[i]ent issir del vaissel. j. home qui auoit les mains sanglentes & les pies & le cors si lor dist. Mi cheualier & mi seriant & mi fil loial qui en ceste mortel vie estes deuenue espiritel vous maues tant quis que iou ne me puis plus vers vous celer. si conuient que vous vees partie de mes repostailles & de mes secretes [...] (*Queste*, p.190)⁶⁹

[Then as the three companions gazed upon the Vessel, they saw an unclothed man issue from it. His hands were bleeding, as were his feet and his body, and he said to them, ‘My knights and servants and loyal sons, who from human beings have become spiritual creatures, you have searched for me for so long that I can no longer conceal Myself from you. It is appropriate for you to see part of My mysteries and My secrets’. (Burns, p. 84)]

Gertrude Schiller writes that ‘divine glory is present for the faithful in this figure of the dead Christ who appears to live’.⁷⁰ Galahad’s, Perceval’s and Bohort’s improved spiritual perception, refined by the accumulation of Christian knowledge engendered by their experiences on the Grail quest, allows them to witness this final vision of the adult Christ, resurrected through their faith and piety.⁷¹ Although, later in the text, we are told that Galahad approaches the figure of Christ with an ‘overflowing heart’, the description emphasises the miraculous nature of sight rather than the emotional response of the watching knights.

⁶⁷ Gertrude Schiller notes that although the image almost certainly originates from an earlier date, ‘no example of the Man of Sorrows has been identified before the twelfth century’. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, p. 199.

⁶⁸ For a full description of the transformation of the iconographical tradition of the ‘Man of Sorrows’ see Schiller, *Iconography*, pp. 197–224 and for images see plates 681–793.

⁶⁹ Similarly, the *Sankgreal* specifies: ‘Than loked they and saw a man com oute of the holy vessell that had all the sygnes of the Passion of Jesu Cryste bledynge all opynly, and seyde, “My knyghes and my servauntes and my trew chylidren which bene com oute of dedly lyff into the spirituall lyff, I woll no lenger cover me frome you, but ye shall se now a parte of my secretes and of my hydde thynges’ (p. 783).

⁷⁰ Schiller, *Iconography*, p. 200.

⁷¹ This final transformation of the Host is never interpreted for the knights by a religious figure. Therefore, the reader is presumably supposed to assume that by this point the knights are capable of interpreting and perceiving the significance of this vision for themselves. This suggested progression in religious understanding is mirrored by the marked clarity of the vision.

The connection between the religious image and its effect on the observer is also related to medieval optical theory. A common idea behind the different optical theories in circulation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was that the process of sight created a physical connection between eye and object. As Sarah Stanbury summarises,

in looking we are connected physically to the object we see by [...] visual rays. Images, through their species, literally touch us, linking us physically with them in ways that underwrite the dramatic physicality of affective piety.⁷²

Medieval theories of optics relied heavily on the concept of a physical bond created between the eye of the observer and the object of their sight. Theories of affective piety suggest that this physical connection is capable of translating emotional reactions to a given sight into physical responses. The profusion of late medieval lyrics concentrating on the pain and suffering of Christ perform a similar function, in which detailed descriptions of Christ's wounds aim to create an experience of pain in the reader.⁷³ The examples discussed from Chrétien's romances in 'The All-Encompassing Vision' section of this chapter depict a similar relationship between visual stimulus and emotional reaction: it is when Lancelot and Perceval see something that reminds them of their love that their emotions overwhelm their other forms of sensory perception. This, in turns, leads to a physical response, causing Lancelot to almost fall from his horse, and Perceval to lower his lance and remain entirely static.

In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, Galahad's final experience of witnessing and achieving the Grail is suggestive of a similar connection. The author of the *Queste* writes that 'il se traist avant & regarde deuant le saint vaissel. & si tost comme il ot .j. poi regarde si commencha a trambler moult durement si tost comme la mortels char commencha a regarder les espritels choses' (*Queste*, p. 197) ['Galahad drew near and looked the Holy Vessel. As

⁷² Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire*, p.6.

⁷³ One example of a lyric that focusses on Christ's suffering in this way is *The Wounds and the Sins*. This poem was one of the most popular Middle English lyrics and concentrates, as its name suggests, on the wounds of Christ and the seven deadly sins. Reginald T. Davies, ed., 'The Wounds and the Sins', in *Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 207–8.

soon as he did he began to tremble violently as his mortal flesh had caught sight of spiritual mysteries' (Burns, p. 87)]. Malory also describes how as Galahad looks into the Grail 'he began to tremble ryght harde whan the dedly fleysch began to beholde the spirituall thynges' (*Morte*, p. 787). In both of these examples Galahad's sight connects him physically with the miracles that he witnesses. The contact between Galahad's mortal flesh and the divine visions that his spiritual perception now allows him to witness leads to physical trembling. However, the movement of trembling and flickering is also sometimes applied to the object of sight. In the *Book of Margery Kempe*, for example, the author describes how

on a day as this creatur was heryng hir messe, a yong man and a good prest heldyng up the sacrament in his handys ovyr hys hed, the sacrament shok and felkeryd to and fro as a dowe flekeryth wyth hir wengys. And, whan he held up the chalys wyth the precyows sacrament, the chalys mevyd to and fro as it shuld a fallyn owt of hys handys.⁷⁴

In this example, the movement of the Host and the chalice signify a message from God to Margery. A similar movement is also evident in Hardyng's *Chronicle* in the first appearance of the Grail at Camelot:

[...] the Saynte Graalle preciouise
Flawe alle aboute within the halle fulle ofte
Flyghtrande fulle faste above thaym alle on lofte.⁷⁵

In both of these examples, the divine object displays physical movement when it comes into contact with humanity. The sense of sight thus provides the medium for a profound connection between the human and the divine which is capable of producing both physical and emotional responses.

In neither text is Galahad's final sight revealed to the reader. Riddy writes that, the way in which [Malory] handles the scene, so that Galahad and the priest are present to us but what Galahad sees is not, means that this passage skirts around the vision itself; it is an emptiness, and abstract source and object of desire.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), p. 57.

⁷⁵ James Simpson and Sarah Peverly, eds., *Hardyng's Chronicle: Edited from British Library MS Lansdowne* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), ll. 2993–95.

⁷⁶ Riddy, *Malory*, p. 121.

The miracles that Galahad is finally allowed to see are only possible through his own journey of increased understanding and perception: ‘we lesser mortals can only envisage [it] “through a glass darkly”’.⁷⁷ While it is appropriate for the readers to see the increased clarity with which the knights are able to view the Grail miracles as their Christian understanding improves, it is their journey to which we bear witness, not our own. Readers’ spiritual understanding can improve as they encounter both the miraculous *aventures* of the Grail and the religious expositions of these miracles, but their real journey begins outside the pages of the text. For this reason, more than any other, the final sight of the Grail, a sight that can only be accessed through use of ‘spiritual sight’ and a detailed knowledge of the Christian doctrine, becomes the abstract and absent object of desire.

Conclusion

Writing on non-physical perception in the late fifth century, Pseudo-Dionysius saw ‘the field of spiritual perception’ as a ‘graded continuum’, where ‘one’s cognitive capacities are stretched and transformed as one draws closer and closer to God’.⁷⁸ The way in which the knights’ visual experiences of the Grail miracles are presented in the *Queste* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal* portray a similar movement and transformation. During the Grail quest the successful knights increase their Christian understanding as they discuss their visual experiences with hermits, priests, and other religious figures. Alongside the knights’ progression in understanding, the miracles that they witness also become increasingly detailed and complex, culminating in Galahad’s, Bohort’s, and Perceval’s final experience at Corbenic in which the Host takes on two definitive forms. Galahad’s trembling as he finally looks into the Grail signifies the connection between human and divine in the achievement of the Grail, finally reached through a voyage of increased sight, understanding, and perception.

⁷⁷ Barber: *The Holy Grail*, p. 222.

⁷⁸ Paul Gavriluk, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’ in *The Spiritual Senses*, ed. by Paul Gavriluk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 86–103 (p. 99).

The relationship between sight and knowledge, documented by medieval epistemological and optical theories, underwrites the connection between the knights and the miracles that they witness and helps to explain the physical and mental symptoms that seeing the Grail causes. The way in which medieval mentalities expect a certain relationship between sight and knowledge means that the methods of interpretation imperative to an understanding of the Grail miracles would be familiar to a medieval audience. Sight of the Grail is portrayed as only accessible through an increased religious understanding. The achievement of the Grail is not merely a visual experience, but a journey of perception.

From Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* onwards, visual experiences and the sense of sight are shown to be of primary importance to the knights' own experiences and understanding of the Grail quest. In Chrétien's *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval* it is through seeing the Grail procession that Perceval should feel moved to ask the right question at the right time and thus bring the Grail quest to an end. This relationship between sight and knowledge is amplified in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, both of which transform the quest for the Grail into a repeated circular pattern of sight, explanation and understanding.

An examination of the visual experiences of the knights on the Grail quest also illustrates the need for the reader to move from interpreting the Grail texts alongside knowledge of other Arthurian narratives to interpreting the texts through an understanding of medieval religious theory. Like the knights, we are asked to disengage our physical sight and engage with the texts through our own Christian understanding. The Grail texts themselves take the place of Merlin in the prose Trilogy, and the various religious figures in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, explaining the various images and signs within the narratives according to Christian scripture and thus directing the readers' spiritual sight. As the knights learn to perceive the *aventures* with which they are faced correctly, so the readers learn to interpret the Grail narratives. The silence surrounding Galahad's final sight of the Grail acts to

stimulate the readers' own desires to continue their individual 'quest' of spiritual perception beyond the end of the text and into their own lives.

The journey towards perception, illustrated by the increased clarity with which the knights are able to view the *merveilles del saint graal*, can also be seen in the physical journey undertaken by the knights. In the Grail narratives, starting on the Quest for the Holy Grail necessitates moving from the normative landscape of more secular Arthurian romance and into a world whose topography is more allegorical than literal. In the transformed geography of the Grail world, the physical landscapes through which the knights travel are closely tied to their journey towards spiritual understanding. The metaphorical 'journey' towards a clearer sight of religious miracles is paralleled by a literal journey from the secular Arthurian world and into the world of the Grail.

Chapter II: The Topography of the Grail Quest: Spatial Perception

Introduction

Individual perception and the journey towards Christian understanding transform geographical space to present the quest for the Grail as a personal journey in each of the Grail narratives. The topographical features of each knight's unique journey are dictated by the state of his Christian understanding (as indicated by the visions that each knight witnesses), while the way in which the knights interact with the various *aventures* of the Grail determine the 'shape' of the landscapes through which they ride. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, Gawain's inability to perceive the path of salvation offered by the Grail quest is reflected by his physical inability to find any path or *aventure*, leaving him to wander aimlessly through the unusually desolate wilderness of the Grail forest. Bohort, Perceval, and Galahad, on the other hand, each encounter a series of strange and allegorical *aventures* drawn from biblical sources and which, along with the immeasurable and pathless forest and the vast sea, form the landscape of the Grail quest. In this chapter I will argue that in the Grail narratives the heightened sense of religious priorities mobilises the Arthurian romance landscape. As opposed to remaining static, the geographical features of the Grail setting seem to move alongside the knights, constantly changing and transforming the shape of the landscapes through which the knights travel. This foregrounds the significance of the knights' individual perceptions of the quest, indicating that the journey towards the Grail is controlled by a spiritual, as opposed to a merely physical, progression.

This movement is the product of the interaction between two different types of landscape: the secular Arthurian world, and the Christian landscape of salvation history. As cited in the introduction to this thesis, Bakhtin's theory of the literary chronotope suggests that in any specific chronotope, 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history'.¹ This is especially relevant to the Grail narratives, in which the

¹ Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', p. 84.

individual journeys that each knight makes reflect their knowledge and understanding of Biblical history, revealed through the *aventures* that they encounter. This chapter will argue that conceptualisations of space in the Grail narratives illustrate the interactive relationship between spiritual and physical progress, a central part of the distinct logic according to which the knights should interpret the Grail miracles. The physical landscape of a knight's journey becomes itself a demonstration of his state of spiritual understanding, while his ability to respond to the dialectic reasoning provided by the religious figures that he meets dictate the *aventures* that he will encounter next.

This particular relationship between time (in the form of historical events) and space parallels that of medieval maps, suggesting a shared geographical imagination which is exegetical rather than cartographical. David Woodward writes that 'the factual information on medieval world maps is a blending of historical events and geographical places, a projection of history onto a geographical framework'.² On the Hereford *mappamundi* (c.1300), for example, geographically accurate cities are marked alongside 'earthly paradise' and a collection of strange and monstrous races, thus combining elements that are real, religious, and otherworldly.³ Similarly, many Arthurian narratives construct a landscape from a combination of real geographical locations, stock romance settings, and ethereal otherworlds (those which are 'distinct from the worlds of ordinary humanity and orthodox theology') to create a spatial framework which unites the varied episodes of the literary

² David Woodward, 'Medieval Mappaemundi', in *The History of Cartography*, Two Volumes, ed. by J. D. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), Vol I, pp. 286–370 (p. 326).

³ I use the terms 'real' or 'accurate' geography to depict geographical verisimilitude. This includes the use of actual places (places which exist in the world which we inhabit and whose existence is independent from any individual) and conceptions of space that conform to modern cartographical practices of mapping, which frequently seek to create 'representation[s] to scale of the features of the surface of the earth'. G. R. P. Lawrence, *Cartographic Methods* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 3. The term 'otherworldly' is used to cover 'the ambiguous supernatural' elements of romance. James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1.

history of Arthur.⁴ Corinne Saunders writes that ‘the otherworld both resembles and surpasses the human world’, a characteristic which blurs the margins between the human and the other. The inclusion of places which occupy the boundary between reality and romance, such as Lyonesse and Avalon, further connect the history of Arthur, set in the purportedly real locations of Britain and France, to the kind of otherworldly and marvellous landscapes described in the *lais* of Marie de France and other non-Arthurian romances.⁵

At the same time, the linear nature of many romance narratives parallels another type of medieval map: the itinerary maps, which transform long journeys into linear spatial constructions in the same way that the readers are carried through the landscapes of medieval romance. Helen Cooper observes:

that travel was experienced as linear, however wandering a line it might follow, makes sense of a great deal of what first appears strange about the journeys of a questing knight. The story, like an itinerary, focuses on specific foci along the line of travel.⁶

Similarly, Daniel D. Connolly suggests that the itinerary maps in Matthew Paris’ *Chronica Majora* present a conceptualisation of space that is ‘much more immediately available, familiar, and comprehensible [than the medieval *mappaemundi*]; they look like strip maps, those maps designed by travel clubs or the internet to aid their members in planning out their travels or vacations’.⁷ Robert Rouse also suggests that ‘much medieval romance is concerned with the movement of the narrative’s protagonists through the world, constituting in itself an early form of travel literature’.⁸ In *Yvain*, for example, the journey that both Yvain and

⁴ Wade, *Fairies*, p. 1. In the Arthurian cycles the Grail narratives represent a geographical representation of orthodox theology, and the narrative romance landscape portrays the world of ‘ordinary humanity’.

⁵ In records of Cornish and Breton mythology Lyonesse, which features most prominently in the legends of Tristan and Iseult, is said to have sunk beneath the waves. Interestingly, in her *Lai Chevrefoil* Marie de France chooses to exchange Lyonesse for ‘*Suthwales*’, substituting the ambiguously mythological location for a ‘real’ (but distant) geographical setting. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby trans., ‘Chevrefoil’, in *The Lais of Marie de France* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 109-111.

⁶ Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 70.

⁷ Daniel D. Connolly, *The Maps of Matthew Paris: Medieval Journeys Through Space, Time, Liturgy* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), p. 5.

⁸ Robert Rouse, ‘Walking (Between) the Lines: Romance as Itinerary/ Map’, in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 135–48 (p. 137).

Calogrenant make is depicted as a series of linear points, each of which is marked by a feature that has some kind of marvellous significance to the narrative. Although many romance quests take the larger form of a circle, as the knights travel out from the court and back again, the description of their journeys remains essentially linear.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that romance texts make use of conceptions of space in a variety of different ways, often in accordance with the context in which they were written. Thirteenth-century French writers of Arthurian romance, for example, are unlikely to have understood the geographical reality of the north of England in the same way as the *Gawain*-poet. Thus, geographical distance can lend a sense of 'faerie' or otherness to a geographically real location. This chapter suggests that deployments of space in romance narratives form a continuum, which progresses from the Arthurian romance geography depicted in tales such as Malory's 'Sir Gareth', through texts that portray a movement between different worlds, like *Yvain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and finally to the Grail narratives, in which space and distance are almost wholly allegorical.⁹ From the Didot-*Perceval* onwards, the landscape of the Grail quest is depicted, like the *mappaemundi*, as a projection of salvation history onto the Arthurian landscape. Robert Allen Rouse and Cory James Rushton argue that 'the Arthurian tradition plays an important role in the construction and articulation of [a] mythical landscape, interweaving the aura of the age of Camelot into the palimpsest that is the British landscape'.¹⁰ The palimpsest provides a useful form for imagining the way in which the Arthurian landscape is constructed and transformed both over time and throughout different parts of the longer cycles. This is particularly relevant to the

⁹ I use the term 'Arthurian narrative geography' to describe landscapes that are made up of topographical features common to Arthurian texts (castles, rivers, mountains and forests) unconnected by any form of geographical continuity. The *aventures* that a knight encounters are part of the human world, as opposed to a distinct and separate faeriey other, and belong to the Arthurian present. The use of any real place names is countered by a lack of geographical continuity.

¹⁰ Robert Allen Rouse and Cory James Rushton, 'Arthurian Geography', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Archibald and Putter, pp. 218–34 (p. 218).

Grail narratives in which the heightened priority of Christian values sublimates the ideals of secular chivalric texts, and thus transforms the Arthurian romance landscape.

The first part of this chapter will explore the continuum of non-Grail ‘romance landscapes’ in more detail. It will suggest that medieval Arthurian romances frequently negotiate different conceptions of space within the same narrative to highlight differences between the expectations of Arthur’s court and a variety of ‘otherworlds’ through which the knights must travel. Building on the idea of transition, the second part of this chapter will illustrate the way in which *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval*, and *Perlesvaus* reveal the effect of the Grail on the Arthurian landscape. The initial ambiguity surrounding the location of the Fisher King’s castle in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval* is developed over time to eventually become the mobile and allegorical landscape of the *Queste*. The third part of this chapter will examine the landscape of the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, arguing that in these texts geography is used to depict the ideal relationship between predestination and free will. It is the balance between these two forces that the knights have to learn to negotiate in order to be successful on the Grail quest. In the Grail narratives, the metaphorical path towards salvation becomes a literal path through a dark and infinite forest as the knights stumble towards God and the Grail, only the most successful making it through this symbolic forest to the other side.

Writing about the purpose of medieval *mappaemundi*, Woodward describes the way in which ‘sometimes the whole map is presented as a symbol of Christian truths. The [...] earth is a stage for a sequence of divinely planned historical events from the creation of the world, through its salvation by Jesus Christ in the Passion, to the Last Judgement’.¹¹ The Grail narratives superimpose Christian figures, stories, and *aventures* onto the Arthurian

¹¹ Woodward, ‘Medieval Mappaemundi’, p. 334. A vertical line has been identified on the Hereford *mappamundi* which places various religious stories and features in order according to their proximity to God. Above and outside the map itself there is an image of God. Immediately below and within the circle of the world is earthly paradise. Moving vertically downwards again one can see the Tower of the Babel, signifying the attempt of men to reach God. Below Babel is Jerusalem, with an image of the crucified Christ. Below Jerusalem is Rome, signifying the foundation of the Christian church and at the bottom of the map are the Pillars of Hercules.

landscape, thus transforming it into a 'stage for a sequence of divinely planned' events which appear to the chosen knight at an appropriate time and with which he must interact correctly in order progress on the quest. The transformation of the Arthurian landscape at the opening of the Grail quest illustrates the use of a similar exegetical geographical imagination as that of the Hereford *mappamundi*. The way in which Arthurian and religious landscapes, figures, and settings coexist and interact with one another is indicative of the way in which each text presents the Grail legend functioning within the framework of the respective Arthurian cycle. Chrétien's *Perceval* follows a similar structure to his other Arthurian romances, while the deployments of geography indicate that this Holy quest transcends all others as the ultimate achievement of chivalric endeavour. In the prose Trilogy, however, the Grail is presented as the thematic centre of the narrative from the opening of the text. In the *Queste*, the relationship the shape of each knight's quest and their understanding of God's grace reinforces the centrality of the Grail to the Vulgate Cycle overall.

The Arthurian Landscape: Reality and Romance

Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries the writers of Arthurian romance expanded the boundaries of Arthur's kingdom alongside their expansion of the Arthurian legend, setting the new *aventures* in an increasingly diverse range of geographical locations. The coexistence of real and romance features that typifies the Arthurian kingdom is a result of an accumulation of the landscapes that are described across different Arthurian texts. As Rouse and Rushton argue, 'medieval Arthurian geography is a complicated mixture of real places and mythic sites, and is shaped and reshaped in often idiosyncratic ways by successive authors and competing narrative traditions'.¹² While some texts present a more geographically accurate depiction of Britain, others display an almost entirely otherworldly landscape of the type parodied by Chaucer in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*:

¹² Rouse and Rushton, 'Arthurian Geography', p. 220.

In th'olde dayes of Kyng Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede. (*Wife of Bath's Tale*, ll. 857-861)

This removed and otherworldly land, set in the distant past by the Wife of Bath, provides a dismissive reimagining of the marvellous and supernatural elements of romance geography and the Arthurian legend. This chapter will examine different conceptualisations of geography in Arthurian romances to further understandings of typical 'Arthurian geography' and the way in which Arthurian romances present transitions between different landscapes. This analysis will act as the precursor for a detailed examination of the distinctive way that the Grail narratives make use of flexible Arthurian geographies to highlight the interdependent relationship between spiritual improvement and physical progression on the Grail quest.

The first part of this chapter will focus on Malory's 'Tale of Sir Gareth', Chrétien de Troyes' twelfth-century Old French poem *Yvain*, and the fourteenth-century Middle English alliterative poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Each of these texts has a clear narrative structure which conforms to the 'outward-and-return' pattern typical of romance questing narratives (as discussed in the introduction to this thesis) and which relies upon each text's depiction of geography. In the 'Tale of Sir Gareth' Malory uses many of the expectations of normative Arthurian romance geography. In contrast, the journeys undertaken by Yvain and Gawain are both marked by a transition between two distinct types of landscape, and the way in which each text presents this transition is emblematic of its use of Arthurian geography.

In Malory's 'Tale of Sir Gareth', Gareth's journey both begins and ends at Camelot, and is created from a series of challenges that represent some of the most commonly recurring *aventures* in the Arthurian world. Gareth's first *aventure* involves saving the life of a knight by killing six thieves in the forest. As is typical of this kind of *aventure*, the knight

emerges from the dense forest and into the narrative as soon as Gareth enters the wood: ‘so right thus as they rode in the wood there com a man fleying all that ever he myght’ (*Morte*, p. 182). The physical density of the forest obscures literal sight of what might be happening around the knight, making unexpected encounters possible. After spending the night at this knight’s castle, Gareth then encounters two knights guarding a river crossing and kills them before passing back into the wood once more. The next challenge that Gareth meets is marked by a shield hanging in a tree. Like the river crossing, the hanging shield acts as a marker of *aventure*, and both are common features in the landscape of Arthurian romance.¹³ Each of the *aventures* that Gareth meets belongs to the world of what Wade describes as the ‘ordinary humanity’ of Arthurian romance, and together they form the landscape of Gareth’s quest. The geography of Gareth’s journey serves his need for *aventures* against which to prove his chivalric prowess, the setting of the forest allowing them to appear regularly and suddenly. As Saunders describes,

the combination landscape of trees and clearings reflects the geographical reality of the forest, yet also allows [the author] to play on the symbolic density of the forest [...] to create the suspense of *aventure*.¹⁴

The *aventures* that constitute the landscape of Gareth’s quest progressively increase in difficulty rather than following a geographical continuity as he progresses and there is no indication of which direction he is heading.

This type of geographical representation, in which a knight meets and overcomes a series of obstacles that appear before him as he rides through an indeterminable forest landscape, corresponds to models of geography presented by medieval itinerary map. As mentioned earlier, Helen Cooper suggests that

¹³ An example of a hanging shield marking an *aventure* can be seen in the story of the ‘Spring of the Pine’ in the first book of the Vulgate *Lancelot* (Sommer, *III*, p. 276). Gareth’s final *aventure* before reaching Lyonesse’s castle in which he fights in a tournament is similarly marked by ‘fyffty shyldis of dyvers coloures’ (p. 257) hanging above a tower gate.

¹⁴ Saunders, *The Forest of Romance*, p. 73.

The story, like an itinerary, focuses on specific foci along the line of travel: the narrative: the narrative settings are places where things happen (a spring, a hermitage, a ford, a castle) and are recognised by their characteristics, not by their spatial coordinates.¹⁵

Robert Rouse similarly notes the suitability of the medieval itinerary map for comparison with the spatial structure of medieval romance. Malory's 'Tale of Sir Gareth' illustrates the vague yet essentially linear representation of journeys in medieval romance narratives. As opposed to noting the directions in which Gareth travels, the narrative describes Gareth's journey through the *aventures* that he encounters, the spaces between which are left undescribed and anonymous as Gareth rides onwards. Rouse expands Cooper's discussion to suggest that 'romances themselves have the potential to act in the form of [...] a guide leading the reader through the textualised world of the narrative'.¹⁶ The *aventures* that mark Gareth's journey indicate to the reader the importance of chivalric prowess to constructions of identity in the Arthurian world.

In secular romance narratives the knight errant typically searches in the abstract for a chance to (im)prove his reputation, rather than riding in a specific direction or trying to fulfil a definitive aim. In fact, in *Yvain* this directionless wandering in search of *aventure* is explicitly named as a characteristic feature of the knight errant: Calogrenant describes how he 'Aloie querant *aventures*,/ Armé s de toutes armeüres/ Si com chevaliers devoit estre'¹⁷ [went to seek *aventures*, armed with all [manner] of arms just as a knight should be'.¹⁸ When the knights do have a specific purpose, and thus a direction in which to head, they are frequently either led by a guide (as is Gareth) or know before they set off the direction in which they should travel. At the beginning of Chrétien's *Perceval*, Perceval is not explicitly in search of the Grail, and the Fisher King's castle is not the location to which he consciously heads. In

¹⁵ Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 70.

¹⁶ Rouse, 'Walking (Between) the Lines: Romance as Itinerary Map', pp.139–140.

¹⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, ed. and trans. by David F. Hult (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) ll. 177–179.

¹⁸ William Kibler, trans., 'Yvain', in *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 295–380 (p. 297).

each retelling of the Grail legend the knights become increasingly aware of the place at which they want to end their quest, as their search for the Grail becomes more deliberate. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the knights leave Camelot with the clear intention of finding the Grail and they do this by trying to reach Corbenic. Although the knights have a very clear location in mind, the mobility of the landscape disorientates them, leaving them unable to find this destination without spiritual understanding and guidance.

Although both *Yvain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* feature elements of normative Arthurian narrative geography they also represent more unusual transitions between different types of landscape. Chrétien opens *Yvain* with a description of a marvellous *aventure* that Calogrenant encountered seven years previously in the forest of Brocéliande. As Calogrenant rides in search of *aventure* he suddenly notices

[...] un chemin a destre
Par mi une forest espesse.
Mout y ot voie felenece,
De ronses et d'espines plaine ;
A quel qu'anui, a quel que paine
Ting chele voie et chel sentier.
A bien pres tout le jour entier,
M'en alai chevauchant ainsi,
Tant que de la forest issi,
Et che fu en Brochéliande. (ll. 180-189)

[a path leading to the right through a thick forest. The way was very treacherous, full of thorns and briars; with considerable effort and difficulty I kept to this course and this path. For nearly a whole day I rode along in this manner until I emerged from the forest, which was named Brocéliande. (p. 297)]

Once on the other side of this path, a different landscape appears to Calogrenant, marked by a series of increasingly marvellous features which begin with a hospitable castle at which he is invited to spend the night, and progress from a hideous and marvellous peasant in charge of a field of wild bulls, to a magical spring. As Auerbach points out, at this stage of the journey 'we are deep in fairy tale and magic. The right road through the forest of brambles, the castle which seems to have sprung out of the ground [...] the satyr, the magic spring – it is all in the

atmosphere of a fairy tale'.¹⁹ The forest of Brocéliande in *Yvain* acts as a penetrable natural barrier which separates the narrative 'real' world of the text from the 'otherworldly' and marvellous.

Chrétien foregrounds the distinction between the landscape of Arthurian Britain and France and the geography of the 'otherworld' beyond the forest of Brocéliande in the description of Yvain's replication of the journey. Yvain's journey begins at the court, which Chrétien situates in the recognisable location of Carduel in South Wales. From here, he travels through the narrative geography of Arthurian romance,

Par montaignes, et par valees,
Et par forés longues et lees,
Par lieus estranges et sauvages,
Si passa maint felons passages,
Et maint perilz, et maint destroit,
Tant qu'il vit le sentier estroit
Plains de ronces et d'oscürtés
Et lors fu il assureés
Qu'il ne perroit mais esgarer. (761-769)²⁰

[across mountains and along valleys, through long and deep forests, and through strange and savage places. He crossed many deadly and perilous passages [and] many straits until he saw the narrow path full of brambles and darkness. Then he was reassured that he would not lose his way again. (p. 304)]

Chrétien makes use of all of the wild and inaccessible landscapes that feature in romance narratives without creating any geographical continuity. As Auerbach points out, 'we hear nothing of a crossing of the sea', presumably needed to take the protagonist from Britain to Brittany.²¹ Yvain appears to be wandering, moving from one perilous landscape into another as he traverses the boundaries of the romance kingdom in pursuit of the *aventure*. In this passage the 'narrow path, full of thorn bushes and darkness' through Brocéliande acts simultaneously as the barrier and connection between the two worlds. Chrétien portrays the

¹⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 130.

²⁰ In the Middle English version of this romance, *Yvain and Gawain*, the description of the landscape through which Yvain travels is redacted further, and the reader is simply told that, 'He passed many high mowntayne/ In wilderness and mony a playne,/ Til he com to þat le þir sty,/ þat him byhoved pass by' (597-600).

²¹ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 129.

path of *aventure* as progressing from the geographically real location of Carduel, through the narrative geography of romance landscapes, and finally into the ‘otherworld’ of the marvellous spring.

The use of Brocéliande as a point of connection between the narrative Arthurian world and a fairy otherworld originates in Wace’s *Roman de Rou* (c. mid 1170s). In the *Roman* Wace locates Brocéliande in Brittany, thus providing a real geographical location for the forest. However, Wace’s reference to the local legend that the forest and spring are home to fairies also connects this real medieval forest to the supernatural. Wace describes Brocéliande as ‘Vne forest mult longue e lee,/ Qui en Bretaigne est mult loee’²² [‘a very long, broad forest which is highly praised in Brittany’] and about which ‘Breton uont souent fablant’ [‘the Bretons often tell stories’].²³ He goes on to describe how ‘La fontaine de Berenton/ Sort d’une part lez un perron’ (6399-6400) [‘at one side the fountain of Barenton emerges beside the stone slab’], and at this fountain ‘seut l’en les fees ueir,/ Se li Breton nos dient ueir’ (6409-6410) [‘people used to see fairies [...] if the accounts of the Bretons are true’ (p. 162)].²⁴ The local legends that connect this ‘real’ forest to the marvellous and otherworldly make Brocéliande a singularly appropriate liminal landscape to connect the narrative worlds of Arthurian Britain and France to the magical otherworlds of romance.

In many medieval romances, events or *aventures* are used to mark the topographical features of the landscape. Similarly, on the Hereford *mappamundi* pictorial representations of events are frequently used to demonstrate the significance of a given place. Jerusalem, for example, is marked with an image of Christ at the crucifixion, and various points on the route of the Exodus, which starts in Egypt and is represented by a thin black line, are marked by images of a phoenix, Moses receiving the tablets from the hand of God, and the Israelites

²² Wace, *Roman de Rou*, ed. by Hugo Andresen (Bonn: Heilbronn, 1977–79), ll. 6397–98 and 6396.

²³ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, trans. by Glyn S. Burgess (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), p. 162.

²⁴ Burgess points out that ‘there is an evident link between Wace’s remarks and the magic spring in Chrétien’s *Yvain*. At one point Chrétien has Calogrenant use very similar language to that of Wace: ‘*Einsi alai, einsi reving,/ Au revenir por fol me ting*’. Burgess, *Roman de Rou*, p. 162, fn. 242.

worshipping the golden calf. This use of pictorial and spatial representation to tell a narrative is matched by the narrative function of the medieval *mappaemundi*. Anna-Dorothee von der Brinken, for example, argues that *mappaemundi* can be seen as ‘pictorial analogies to the medieval historical textual chronicles’.²⁵ The way in which Calogrenant uses the people and *aventures* that he met to describe his journey beyond the path in Brocéliande indicates the similarly narrative function of geography in medieval romances. Instead of marking journeys by descriptions of visual topographical features which create a sense of geographical continuity, journeys are described in terms of the *aventures* that a knight meets as he rides. Medieval romances frequently make use of this technique, naming the many castles in each narrative after notable events, and describing journeys by the *aventures* that a knight encounters, rather than the physical geography through which he travels.²⁶ In this way, the various quest landscapes that constitute the Arthurian world are connected through a fabric of reiterative memory. Each time a knight arrives at a castle which has been the site of an earlier *aventure*, the reader is reminded of the previous narrative whilst simultaneously following the events that are happening in the present. Like the lands depicted on the Hereford *mappamundi*, the Arthurian landscape is therefore constructed not just from geographical features, but also from the *aventures* and quests that have happened in each place. My discussion of ‘landscape’ in the Grail narratives will therefore examine a similar combination of topographical features, man-made structures, and religious *aventures*.

Both *Yvain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* share a self-conscious awareness of the conventions and expectations of romance, and an emphasis on correct social behaviour generates the action of each plot. As Ad Putter has highlighted, ‘*Sir Gawain and the Green*

²⁵ David Woodward, ‘Medieval Mappamundi’, in *The History of Cartography: Volume I*, ed. by J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 286–370. See Anna-Dorothee von der Brinken, ‘Mappa Mundi und Chronographia’, *Deutsches Archiv für die Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 24 (1968), 118–86.

²⁶ This technique of naming castles after the *aventures* that have happened there can be seen in many different Arthurian romances. In the Vulgate Cycle, examples include Joyous Gard (known as Dolorous Gard before it was rescued from an enchantment by Lancelot), and the Castle of Maidens.

Knight is a conventional romance, deeply rooted in the tradition of the Old French *roman courtois*.²⁷ The influence of French Arthurian romance, and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes in particular, make a comparison between *Yvain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* singularly appropriate. It is this emphasis on courteous behaviour and an ability to follow the correct social code that dictates the landscapes through which each knight travels. In *Yvain*, the journey to the marvellous spring followed by Calogrenant and Yvain reflects the knight errant's inherent need for *aventure*. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Hautdesert castle suddenly appears in response to Gawain's prayers.²⁸ In each text the knights' knowledge and understanding of chivalric courtesy is tested.

Like Chrétien de Troyes, the *Gawain*-poet makes use of different types of geography to construct the unique landscape of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; in so doing, the poet describes one of the most unusually precise and accurate journeys to be found in any Arthurian medieval romance. As Gawain leaves the court and begins to make his way north he appears to briefly step out of the legendary kingdom of Logres and onto a path that follows a realistic geographical route:

Now ridez þis renk þurȝ þe ryalme of Logres,
 Sir Gauan, on Godez halue, þaȝ hym no gomen þoȝt.
 Oft leudlez alone he lengez on nyȝtez
 þer he fonde noȝt hym byfore þe fare þat he lyked.
 Hade he no fere bot his fole bi frythez and dounez,
 Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to karp,
 Til þat he neȝed ful neghe into þe Norþe Walez.
 Alle þe iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez,
 And farez ouer þe fordez by þe forlondez,
 Ouer at þe Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk
 In þe wyldrenesse of Wyrle; wonde þer bot lyte

²⁷ Ad Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 244. Putter suggests that 'if we wish to discover what the *Gawain*-poet got out of French romance, we need a study that looks at broader connections [than plotline] – connections, for example, between the heroic ideal of *Gawain* and in earlier Arthurian romances, between their interest in polite manners, in peaceful interpersonal relations – and which considers the stock of literary motifs and conventions out of which courtly romancers constructed their fictional worlds' (p. 5).

²⁸ Putter highlights a further parallel between Gawain's lamentation of the weather and subsequent prayer for relief (answered in the appearance of Hautdesert castle), and the prayer of a maiden who struggles with the weather and finds relief by the appearance of a hospitable castle. Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*, pp. 27–30.

Pat auþer God oþer gome wyth goud hert louied. (*Sir Gawain*, ll. 691-702)

Many critics, including Ralph Elliot, John Burrow and Ad Putter have been keen to draw attention to the unusual specificity with which Gawain's journey through North Wales, Anglesey, and the Wirral is depicted, arguing that in these lines the *Gawain*-poet is describing a well-known route through a country that was familiar to him.²⁹ Particularly relevant for this study is the way in which the *Gawain*-poet combines these accurate geographical details with the features common to the generic romance landscape. Up until line 698, for example, the description of Gawain's journey conforms to the kind of vague travelling undertaken by Yvain. However, as Burrow argues, 'when Gawain "holds" the islands of Anglesey on his left hand [...] for a time he is no longer wandering 'wylsum ways', in a state of typical romance disorientation, but riding purposefully east along the coast road, across the Dee and into the Wirral'.³⁰ Unlike the consistently mythical nature of the geography in *Yvain*, and the use of the occasional real place name in the Vulgate Cycle and later *Gawain* romances, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain seems to move between two distinct types of landscape: the romance kingdom of Logres and the geographically accurate journey from Anglesey to the Wirral.

This transformation of Arthurian narrative geography into a geography that appears to be both realistic and accurate is presaged by the subversion of other geographical and meteorological features typical of romance quests. Instead of the warm summer weather which often characterises the Arthurian quest (and forces the knight errant to cool off in the shade of the eternally present forest), Gawain is 'Ner slayn with slete' as he 'sleped in his yrnnes' (*Sir Gawain*, l.729). David Faris writes that in medieval romance narratives 'over and

²⁹ J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 51–56; Ralph Elliott, 'Landscape and Geography', in *Companion to the Gawain-poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 105–118; Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*, pp. 10–50.

³⁰ J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 176–177.

over, time and geography are subordinate to the progress of the knight's *aventures* [...] Unlike the rest of us, the knights need not heed weather or distance [...] or seek and not find'.³¹ In contrast, Gawain meets with accurate geographical places and distances, and is left to face the reality of winter weather alone. The *Gawain*-poet represents Gawain's journey north as an inversion of the expected features of romance narratives.

The 'cinematographic' style, characteristic of the *Gawain*-poet's descriptions of the landscape, has also played a part in the critical assumption that the *Gawain*-poet set his romance in a landscape that was familiar to him and his intended audience.³² Elliott writes that 'the poet's pinpointing of closely visualised features of landscape, particularly with the aid of local words [...] serves to alert his audience to specific locales, actual places familiar to himself and, we may assume, to his audience also'.³³ The description of the Green Chapel and the landscape in which it can be found provides a startling example of the *Gawain*-poet's technique of 'poynting', suggestive of the poem's interest in the evocation of realism:³⁴

And þenne he wayted hym aboute, and wylde hit hym þoʒt,
 And seʒe no syngne of resette bisydez nowhere,
 Bot hyʒe bonkkez and brent vpon bope halue,
 And ruʒe knokled knarrez with knorned stonez;
 Þe skwez of þe scowtes skayned hym þoʒt.
 Þenne he houed, and wythhylde his hors at þat tyde,
 And ofte chaunged his cher þe chapel to seche:
 He seʒ non suche in no syde, and selly hym þoʒt,
 Saue, a lyttel on a launde, a lawe as hit were;
 A balʒ berʒ bi a bonke þe brymme bysyde,
 Bi a forʒ of a flode þat ferked þare;
 Þe borne blubred þerinne as hit boyled hade.
 Þe knyʒt kachez his caple, and com to þe lawe,
 Liʒtez doun luflyly, and at a lynde tachez
 Þe rayne and his riche with a roʒe braunche.
 Þenne he boʒez to þe berʒe, aboute hit he walkez,

³¹ David E. Faris, 'The Art of Adventure in the Middle English Romance: *Ywain and Gawain, Eger and Grime*', *Studia Neophilologica*, 53 (1981), 91–100 (p. 96).

³² Alain Renoir, 'Descriptive Technique in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', *Orbis Litterarum*, 13 (1958), 126–32.

³³ Ralph Elliott, 'Landscape and Geography', in *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 105–117 (107).

³⁴ This is noted by J. A. Burrow in *Ricardian Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 69. Burrow writes that 'the verb 'point', meaning 'to describe in detail' [...] must have had some general currency since it is found both in *Sir Gawain* and Chaucer's *Troilus*' (p. 69).

Debatande with hymself quat hit be myzt.
Hit hade a hole on þe ende and on ayþer syde,
And ouergrown with gresse in glodes aywhere,
And al watz holz inwith, nobot an olde caue,
Or a creuisse of an olde cragge, he couþe hit nozt deme
with spelle. (*Sir Gawain*, ll. 2163-2184)

This detailed and realistic depiction of the landscape dramatically contrasts with the vague description of landscape and geography given by Chrétien in *Yvain*. Michael R. Curry marks a difference between medieval definitions of topography and geography, explaining that the term topography originally referred to ‘the description of places in terms of words rather than inscribed visual images’.³⁵ In this stanza, the *Gawain*-poet creates a sense of spatial continuity through topographical description as the reader follows Gawain from the ‘hyze bonkkez and brent vpon boþe halue’ (*Sir Gawain*, l. 2165) and ‘ruze knokled knarrez with knorned stonez’ (*Sir Gawain*, l. 2166), to the object of Gawain’s quest– that strange *berze* which is the Green Chapel itself. Far from Chaucer’s otherworldly and indistinct ‘grene mede’ on which ‘the elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,/ Daunced ful ofte’ (*The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, ll.860-861), the landscape of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is characterised by a vein of realism that does not disappear at the moment at which Gawain comes into contact with the supernatural. Moreover, unlike the world beyond the path through Brocéliande, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* there is no separation between the Arthurian narrative world and the supernatural otherworld.

Both Chrétien de Troyes and the *Gawain*-poet make use of multiple types of geography to illustrate a physical separation between the narrative reality of the Arthurian court and the marvellous nature of the *aventures* that each character encounters. In *Yvain*, the ‘otherworldly’ landscape in which Laudine’s castle is located is physically separated from Arthur’s world by the difficulty of passing along the path through Brocéliande. In *Sir Gawain*

³⁵ Michael R. Curry, ‘Toward a Geography of a World Without Maps: Lessons from Ptolmey and Postal Codes’, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 95.3 (2005), 680–91 (p. 683).

and the Green Knight, on the other hand, the detailed topographical descriptions of the landscape of the Green Chapel place real medieval Britain, the narrative geography of Arthurian romance, and the supernatural ‘magic’ of Hautdesert and the Green Knight alongside one another. This continuity between different types of landscape can also be seen in the Grail narratives (though in a different way), where the heightened priority of Christianity transforms the way in which conceptions of space in the Arthurian world should be understood.

Finding the Grail Castle in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, the Didot-*Perceval* and *Perlesvaus*

The moment at which the knights in the *Queste* disperse and enter ‘en la forest [...] ou il la veoient plus espesse en tex liex ou il ne trouerent ne voie ne sentier’ (*Queste*, p. 20) [‘into the forest at those points where they found it to be thickest, following no path or trail’ (Burns, p. 10)] marks a transition between different types of landscape, similar to those in *Yvain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As the hopeful knights step into the forest, their physical journeys are no longer controlled by the normative conventions of Arthurian quests, but are governed instead by the religious rules of the Grail. However, unlike in *Yvain*, the forest is not a barrier through which the knights must pass, but a landscape within which the knights are trapped, unable either to emerge from the other side or return the way they came until their ‘queste ys done’ (*Morte*, p. 578). In the *Queste* it is the choice to step away from the path, leaving the well-worn tracks of Arthurian romance behind, which signifies the move into the symbolic landscape of the Grail, even if the knights themselves are not necessarily aware of it.

The allegorical landscape of the *Queste* finds its source in the earlier versions of the Grail legend, each of which amplifies and expands the initial geographical ambiguity of the location of the Fisher King’s castle in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*. This section will

examine Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval*, and *Perlesvaus* chronologically, to argue that the coexistence of different types of landscape is evident in all of these Grail narratives. The interaction between different conceptions of space also becomes progressively more significant to each text's conception of the Grail quest, which is presented as increasingly distinct from the secular Arthurian quests in each adaptation. This section will focus on the location of the Fisher King's castle and the way in which the journey made by each individual knight is portrayed as an interaction with the Arthurian landscape.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Hautdesert castle's appearance relies upon a flexible geography connected to a firm belief in the Christian faith that is similar to the complex rules which surround finding the 'right way' to the Grail castle. Exhausted from his journey, Gawain prays to Mary 'Of sum herber þer he3ly I my3t here masse' (*Sir Gawain*, l. 755) and 'Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot þrye/ Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote' (*Sir Gawain*, ll. 763-764). That Hautdesert appears only and immediately after Gawain has prayed to Mary suggests that its appearance is a direct response to the action of prayer, and therefore that this miracle is divine, rather than supernatural, in nature.³⁶ Like the Fisher King's castle, for the wrong individual Hautdesert could prove impossible to find, or appear in an entirely separate location, with a different 'Crystemas gomen' (*Sir Gawain*, l. 283) and a new set of rules. Thus, Gawain's narrative journey is made up of a series of challenges which progress from physically battling with the 'wormez' (*Sir Gawain*, l. 720), 'wolues' (*Sir Gawain*, l. 720), and 'wodwos' (*Sir Gawain*, l. 721) of Arthurian Britain, to tests of his faith, and the complex trials of morality at Hautdesert itself. This relationship between faith,

³⁶ In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the tension between miracle and marvel, religion and 'magic', can be seen throughout the text. Although Bertilak eventually suggests that it was Morgan la Fay who transformed him into the Green Knight and devised the test for Gawain (ll. 2445–2455), the religious aspects of the narrative (the prayer to Mary, moral tests of virtue and honour, and the condemnation of Gawain's acceptance of the 'magical' green girdle) along with the Christian significance of the other poems in MS. Cotton Nero A. x, also attributed to the *Gawain*-poet, all indicate the importance of Christian morality to the narrative.

indicated by Gawain's prayer, and the features that create the landscape of his journey is directly comparable to the narrative journeys in the Grail romances.

The illusory nature of Hautdesert's appearance arguably finds an analogue in the description of the sudden appearance of the Fisher King's castle in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*. Like Gawain, Perceval does not see the Fisher King's castle until it is suddenly in front of him, having spent the day wandering in solitude: 'il n'encontra rien terriene/ Ne crestien ne crestiene/ Qui li saüst voie ensaignier' (*Yvain*, ll. 2915-2917) [he met no earthly being, neither Christian man nor Christian woman, who could guide him on his way (Kibler: *Yvain*, p. 32)]. Instead of the knights travelling alone to increase their honour, as in secular romance texts, and meeting one another *par aventure* as the interlaced narrative structure demands, the narrative threads of the Grail romances only bring knights together when their spiritual states parallel one another.³⁷ As Whitaker suggests, 'instead of proceeding companionably together, they usually travel alone, each seeking salvation in his own way'.³⁸ Until Galahad, Bohort, and Perceval enter Corbenic together at the end of the *Queste*, across the different Grail narratives all of the knights who reach the Fisher King's castle do so individually.

The relationship between physical and spiritual journeys is most clearly evident from Didot-*Perceval* onwards. In Chrétien's *Perceval*, although the sudden appearance of the Fisher King's castle does suggest uncertainty regarding its geographical location, there is no suggestion that this miracle is in directly attached to Perceval's spiritual state. Perceval meets the Fisher King fishing in a river and is given directions to his castle through a cleft in a rock and over a hill. This cleft in the rock represents the threshold between the Arthurian

³⁷ The landscape of the forest allows the knights to meet one another in this manner without question. As Whitaker writes, 'the force of the forest image is not derived from its botanical make up but from its suggestion of limitless, uncultivated space, hidden menaces, and the kind of density that enables animals, damsels, giants, dwarfs, and knights to appear suddenly without warning'. Whitaker, *Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure*, p. 53.

³⁸ Whitaker, *Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure*, p.83.

landscape and the landscape of the Fisher King, similar in function to the pathway through Brocéliande in *Yvain*. Perceval follows the instructions that he is given and

Maintenant cil s'en va amont,
Et quand il vin ten son le mont,
Qu'il fu Montez an son lo pui,
Si garde molt loig devant lui
Et ne vit rien fors ciel et terre (*Perceval*, ll. 2973-2977)

[climbed until he reached the top of the hill; but when he reached the top he looked all around him and saw nothing but sky and earth. (Kibler, p. 33)]

Just when Perceval has all but given up hope in finding the castle, and has berated the Fisher King for the 'false directions' that he believes that he has been given, 'Lors vit devant lui en un val/ Lo chief d'une tor qui parut' (*Perceval*, ll. 2988-2989) ['in a valley nearby, the top of a tower caught his eye' (Kibler, p. 33)]. Chrétien describes the Fisher King's castle in an almost cinematographic style, starting with the top of the tower and slowly moving down over the turrets, hall, and lodges.³⁹

As I discussed in Chapter Two, in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal adventures* are only revealed to characters whose spiritual state ensures that they are in an appropriate place (both physically and mentally) to receive them. The miraculous revelation of the Fisher King's castle in Chrétien's text occurs at a point at which Perceval is arguably far from understanding the way in which he should behave to bring this *aventure* to an end. Instead, the sudden appearance of the Grail castle follows the pattern of revelation more similar to that secular romances, in which a knight can set off without knowing the object of his quest but 'find his way' without any insurmountable difficulties. Faris argues that

the physical setting of the adventure has no existence separate from the knight and the knight's pursuit of self-fulfilment. For this reason, in part, one can say that geography

³⁹ Corinne Saunders suggests that the cinematographic style that characterises the appearance of the Fisher King's castle in *Perceval* is a common feature of twelfth century romance: 'the world of twelfth century romance tends to be marvellous, governed by a dream-like logic in which events are often left unexplained and the narrative unfolds in a cinematographic manner'. Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Brocéliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 95. In *Perceval*, the sudden appearance of the Fisher King's castle draws on the marvellous elements of Celtic and Breton narratives to create the impression that the Fisher King's castle exists in an 'otherworld' of its own.

in romance is subservient to the demands of the plot, or alternatively, that the hero enjoys the ability to generate conditions necessary for his self-realisation.⁴⁰

The sudden appearance of the Fisher King's castle, at the point at which Perceval has all but given up hope of finding it, illustrates Faris's explanation of the relationship between predestination and adventure. Perceval does not know what he is pursuing but his innate potential to achieve the Grail gives him the ability to 'generate conditions necessary' to begin the *aventure*. The instruction that Perceval has already received from Gornemant de Gohort ensures that he has progressed to the stage that this innate potential can be seen.

The Fisher King's castle should not be understood in the same way as Gornemant de Gohort's castle (although the two do materialise upon the horizon of the narrative in a similar manner). The conversation that Perceval has with a grieving girl as he leaves the Fisher King's castle indicates that a distinction should be drawn between the geographical reality of the Fisher King's castle and other castles of Arthurian romances. The girl asks Perceval where he has spent the night, making the point that

L'en porroit, se Dex me gart,
Chevauchier, ce tesmoigne l'an,
Cinquantes liues an cest san
Tot droit, ensin con vos venez,
C'uns osteus n'i seroit trovez
Qui fust leiaus ne bon ne sains,
Et vostre chevaus a toz plains
Lex flanz et lo poil apalaigné,
Qui l'aüst lavé ne baignié
Et fait lit d'avaine et de fain,
N'aüst mielz lo vantra plain
Ne n'aüst il mielz lo poil assis
De vos meïsmes m'est avis
Que vos avez anuit esté
Bien aaisié et repossé (*Perceval*, ll. 3406-3420)

[you could ride, so they say, forty leagues the way you've come, and you wouldn't find any good or honest or wholesome lodging, yet your horse is well fed and his coat smooth. If he'd been washed and groomed and given a manger of oats and hay he wouldn't have a fuller belly or sleeker coat. And it seems to me that you yourself had a comfortable and restful night. (Kibler, pp. 37-38)]

⁴⁰ Faris, 'The Art of Adventure', 95-96.

When Perceval tells her that he has stayed close by the girl immediately understands where, and gives Perceval an explanation of the Fisher King. Chrétien uses the figure of the girl to draw a distinction between the various places at which Perceval could have spent the night (the hospitable lodging places of Arthurian romance), and the Fisher King's castle, which seems to have an unfixed location and appears only to select individuals. Virginie Greene and others have argued that the Fisher King's castle seems to be under 'an enchantment which makes it alternatively visible and invisible'.⁴¹ I suggest that this visual phenomenon of appearance and disappearance is the effect of a shifting landscape, in which castles, *aventures* and other geographical features appear to move in accordance with how ready the questing knight is to encounter them. The Fisher King's castle can only be approached by the correct knight and at the correct time; those who do not have the potential to fulfil the promise of the Grail and ask the right question at the right time could search forever and never find it. This initial ambiguity in the location of the Fisher King's castle provides the origin for the increased importance of religious significance to the depiction of Arthurian geography, depicted graphically in the *mappaemundi* and amplified in each new retelling of the Grail legend.⁴²

The *Didot-Perceval* builds upon the geographical ambiguity which characterises the location of the Fisher King's castle in Chrétien's version, giving both journeys that Perceval must make a specifically religious significance. The first appearance of the Fisher King's castle indicates a similarly unfixed location and miraculous appearance to the Fisher King's castle in Chrétien's *Perceval*. When Perceval first looks for the castle he is unable to find it

⁴¹ Zrinka Stahuljak, Virginie Greene, Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita, and Peggy McCracken, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), p. 94.

⁴² Some critics have pointed out parallels between the Old French Grail legends and medieval Welsh tales. Both *La Queste del Saint Graal* and *Perlesvaus* were translated into Welsh. In *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (1991), R. S. Loomis discusses the parallels between the Grail and the life-giving 'cauldron of renewal' in the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi* or *Bran*. Loomis also highlights further parallels between Bran and the Fisher King, citing the fact that both characters are wounded through the thighs. These similarities support Helen Cooper's suggestion that French and Celtic Arthurian legends each show traces of influences from one another.

until it suddenly appears ‘de joste le forest u it avoit hui main passé’ (Didot-*Perceval*, p. 206) [‘on the edge of the forest he had crossed that morning’ (Bryant, p. 40)]. However, the way in which Perceval was led to find the castle marks an important difference between the ways in which the two marvels should be understood. Frank Brandsma writes that in interlaced narratives ‘the knights find their way, led by “adventure”, along roads that lead to new encounters, challenges, duels and tournaments’.⁴³ While this may be true for Chrétien’s *Perceval*, in The Didot-*Perceval* Perceval is directed towards the ‘right path’ to the castle by two divine children:

Cevaliers qui nous as conjurés, saces que de par Dieu vivons nous. Et saces que de cel paradis terrestre dont Adans fu jetés venimes nos por parler a toi par le congié del saint Esperit. Tu es entrés en la queste del Graal que Bron tes taions a en garde, que on apele en mainte contree le Roi Pescheor; et tu t’en iras ceste voie a destre par devant toi, et saces que ançois que tu en isses verras tel cose par quoi tu afineras ton travail se tu es teus que venir i doies. (Didot-*Perceval*, pp. 203-4)

[Know, enquiring knight, that we are indeed God’s creatures; and from the earthly paradise from which Adam was exiled we have been sent by the Holy Spirit to speak to you. You have embarked upon the quest for the Grail, which is in the keeping of your grandfather Bron, known in many lands as the Fisher King. Take the path to your right, and before you leave it, be assured, you will see something that will bring you to the end of your quest – if you are worthy to achieve it]. (Bryant, p. 139)]

That Perceval finds the castle indicates that he is worthy to achieve the Grail. Instead of being led by *aventure*, Perceval is already following the ‘path of God’ when he first reaches the castle, and its sudden appearance can therefore be understood as an overtly religious miracle.

The Didot-*Perceval*’s description of Perceval’s second journey to the Fisher King’s castle provides the source of the relationship between spiritual and physical progression, later amplified by the writer(s) of the *Queste*. After his first failure at the Grail castle Perceval is informed that he has done too few ‘fait d’armes ne de proëces ne de biens que tu aies en garde le precious vaissel’ (Didot-*Perceval*, p. 211) [‘deeds of arms and prowess and too few acts of goodness to have the precious vessel in [his] keeping’ (Bryant, p. 143)]. Perceval must

⁴³ Frank Brandsma, *The Interlaced Structure of the Third Part of the Prose Lancelot* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 94.

improve both his martial prowess and moral understanding before he is allowed to physically move towards the Grail. Like the geographical meeting of the spiritual and Arthurian worlds in Chrétien's *Perceval*, indicated by the marvellous appearance of the Fisher King's castle, the journey that Perceval must make towards the Grail in the *Didot-Perceval* indicates the coexistence of two types of *aventure*. Perceval must encounter both successfully before he can return to the Grail castle. Merlin's instruction that the way back to the Fisher King's castle is complex, as 'encore anuit i poroies tu venire; mais tu i venras ains un an' (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 238) ['you could be there by tonight, but you'll make it in under a year' (Bryant, p. 154)], emphasises the individuality of each knight's journey. Just as the Fisher King's castle belongs to a spiritual landscape that interacts with, but is not a static part of, the Arthurian 'map', the journey from the secular Arthurian world into the world of the Grail is flexible and dependent upon each individual knight's performance.

Perlesvaus replaces the unfixed and mysterious geographical location of the Fisher King's castle with a spiritual rewriting of the narrative landscape of the Arthurian quest. In this text the castle and lands of the Fisher King remain static, and the illusory appearance and disappearance which obscures the location of the Fisher King's castle in the earlier narratives are replaced by a physical barrier which prevents the knights from approaching it. At the entrance to the Fisher King's land stand 'ii. vilains massiz de coivre qui fischié estoient o mur, e descochient par enging carriax d'aubaleste par grant force e par grant air' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 91) ['two ghastly figures of copper, which by an ingenious device could fling forth crossbow-bolts with great strength and fury' (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 161)].⁴⁴ As opposed to the dynamic location of the Fisher King's castle in the two earlier Grail narratives, in *Perlesvaus* the Fisher King's lands remain static parts of the Arthurian world.

⁴⁴ This interest in scientific mechanism can also be seen in the description of the 'turning castle'. The text tells us that the castle was built by Virgil whose 'device called the 'Salvatio Romae' had given him a reputation by the thirteenth century as a 'mechanical necromancer' (fn. P. 161). As well as turning, this castle is protected by copper archers 'qi treoien[t] de si grant vertu qu'il n'ets arme o monde qui vers leur cox eüst garant' (p. 247) ['which fired with such power that no armour in the world could withstand their shots' (p. 159)].

In this text the ‘marvellous’ arises from the mechanical, and the ‘miraculous’ nature of geography in the earlier narratives is replaced by a barrier of engineering ingenuity. It is the problem of physical access, and of not ‘finding the right way’, which determines whether a knight is able to reach this Grail castle.

However, *Perlesvaus* does not diminish the religious significance of the Grail castle, which is referred to as the ‘Chastel des Armes’ (*Perlesvaus*, p. 133) [Castle of Souls] and includes the inclusion of the Chapel of the Holy Grail. Religious conviction is explicitly connected to physical progression via the three bridges that Gawain must cross to enter the Grail castle. Once Gawain has recovered the sword of St John, and is allowed through the Gates of the Fisher King’s lands, he is confronted by three bridges, all of which appear to the eye to be perilous and impossible to cross. However, when Gawain remembers the advice given to him by a hermit, to ‘ne soiez pas esfreez por chose que vos voiez a l’entrée du chastel’ (*Perlesvaus*, p. 113) [‘not be afraid of anything that you see at the entrance of the castle’ (Bryant: *High Book of the Grail*, p. 75)] and rides onto the bridges, they are transformed into safe and wide structures.⁴⁵ The physical transformation of the bridges through the strength of Gawain’s faith illustrates the importance of religious conviction to physical progression, similar in nature to the relationship between spiritual sight and Christian understanding discussed in the first chapter.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Bridges also have a symbolic function in Chretien’s *Lancelot*. In this text the story of how Lancelot crosses the sword bridge seems to bridge the gap between the physical features of the secular Arthurian world and the symbolic topographical features of the Grail quest. Lancelot’s journey to find the sword bridge is made up not only of physical chivalric challenges but also of a moral test, when he must decide whether to give the head of a knight he has defeated to a damsel who asks for it or to show the knight the mercy that he requests.

Furthermore, the cuts on Lancelot’s hands and feet that he receives when he takes off his armour to retain a better grip on the bridge itself mirror the wounds that Christ receives on the cross. As discussed in Chapter Two, this text presents Lancelot’s love for Guinevere as an almost pseudo-religious devotion. His journey to find and cross the sword bridges emphasises not only his physical chivalric prowess, but also his sense of morality. From the Didot-Perceval onwards, the importance of a knight’s morality and faith to his ability to achieve the Grail is amplified in each Grail text.

⁴⁶ The ‘Ship of Faith’ that Galahad, Bohort and Perceval must enter in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* is similar in nature. In this case, only knights who have a firm belief and pure faith are able to enter and remain in the boat. Any who try to enter it without these qualities are drowned.

The importance of religious conviction to physical progression in *Perlesvaus* is also depicted by the Christian interpretation of the *aventures* that the knights meet. The most significant example of this can be seen in Gawain's visit to the 'Chastiax del Enqueste' (*Perlesvaus*, p. 108).⁴⁷ Gawain recounts the *aventures* that he has experienced to the priest, recreating his journey using the kind of narrative geography described by Calogrenant in *Yvain*. The priest then transforms this secular 'narrative geography' into a 'Christian geography', explaining the *aventures* that Gawain met as signifying various stages in the development of Christianity. This rewriting of Gawain's quest can, once again, be related to concepts of geography and space. Curry writes that 'the topographic aims to describe places by describing what one experiences when one moves around within a place'.⁴⁸ Gawain's description of his journey recreates his experience of travelling on a quest through the Arthurian world. Simultaneously, the priest's reinterpretation of this narrative journey suggests that the knights on the Grail quest move through a spiritual as well as a physical environment. As opposed to depicting a religious and allegorical otherworld into which the knights step at the start of the Grail quest (as in the *Queste*), *Perlesvaus* writes a religious meaning over the Arthurian setting. The type of *aventures* that a knight expects to encounter on the quest do not change and the knight encounters them in the same manner as he would any other challenge in the Arthurian world. Instead, the priests and hermits who interpret the *aventures* for both the reader and the knights create a religious reading of the chivalric feats by rearticulating the significance of the geography and *aventures* encountered.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Another example is the Hermit King's explanation of Perceval's *aventures*. In both instances the reinterpretation of the knight's journeys as Christian allegories occurs just before they enter the Grail castle. Understanding the Christian significance of his physical journey thus becomes one of the final steps that the knight must make before he is allowed to move closer to the Grail itself.

⁴⁸ Curry, 'World Without Maps', p. 683.

⁴⁹ It must be noted that this 'rewriting' of the Arthurian world and landscape is not completed with the subtle artistry of the author(s) of the *Queste*. Instead, *Perlesvaus* seems to present the Arthurian quest, and then rewrite a Christian interpretation of the events in retrospect. While it is not difficult to see Gawain's vision of the three maidens who become one as representative of the Trinity, the woman who is killed by her lover is a (sadly) recurrent feature of Arthurian romance, unconnected to the religious mystery of the Grail. The Priest's

An exploration of the three Grail romances in which Perceval is the protagonist shows the development of an unfixed and Christian geography. This indicates a palimpsest of priorities within the Arthurian landscape, in which the distinct properties of Arthurian geography are transformed by the heightened priority of religious values. The unstable geographical location of the Fisher King's Castle in Chrétien's text is given a specifically Christian context by the *Didot-Perceval*. In turn, the *Didot-Perceval*'s description of the flexible and personal journey that each knight must make to reach the Grail castle provides the origin for the relationship between Christian faith and physical progression later expanded by *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste*. *Perlesvaus* exchanges the otherworldly marvels and Christian miracles of the earlier two Grail narratives for a spiritual rewriting of the *aventures* that constitute each knight's journey. In this text, the world of the Grail is a fixed part of the Arthurian landscape and the journey that each knight makes towards it is reconstructed to signify the development of Christian history. Burrow suggests that the unique nature of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 'is surely characterised, not so much by a single, all inclusive mode of reality, as by a complex and sometimes problematical combination of rival modes'.⁵⁰ The unusual competition between 'rival modes' of reality can also be seen in the Grail narratives. The ways in which *Perceval* and *Perlesvaus* construct the landscape of the Fisher King's castle is symptomatic of the way in which the story of the Grail is fitted into the larger framework of the Arthurian legend. The *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* draw upon techniques of Christian reinterpretation and marvellous and otherworldly geography to construct an allegorical and religious otherworld into which the knights step as they first enter the transformed forest. In these later texts the relationship between free will and predestination is projected onto the physical landscape, and the forest and the sea provide the narrative medium through which this allegorical journey is explored.

interpretation of this *aventure* as signifying the overthrow of the Old Law by the New does not seem to bear any direct relationship to the events themselves.

⁵⁰ Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, p. 177.

Predestination and Free Will: Finding the Grail in the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Tale of the Sankgreal*

Similar to the example of the ‘appearance and disappearance’ of the Grail castle in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, depictions of geography in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* are complicated by the dynamic nature of each text’s landscape. This movement illustrates the relationship between predestination and free will that controls the knights’ movement between *aventures* and, thus, movement towards the Grail. The conflation of the ‘path through the forest’ and ‘path towards God’ renders any measure of geographical proximity to the Grail castle impossible. As Muriel Whitaker argues, ‘it is part of [Corbenic’s] mystery that, like the Grail itself, it seems to move about, as elusive as the spiritual state it represents’.⁵¹ Since proximity to the Grail is controlled by the state of each individual’s relationship with God, the knights cannot simply ride up to Corbenic in the same way in which they might approach Camelot. As we have seen, although the knights have a definite purpose (to find Corbenic and achieve the Grail), the actual location of the Grail castle remains unknowable. As the knights travel through the forest the location of the Grail seems to move, remaining the same relative distance from them until they have made a personal spiritual improvement.

Recognising the mobility of the Grail landscape is integral to an understanding of the differences between the landscape of Grail quest and that of non-Grail Arthurian romances. Helen Cooper writes that ‘the romance quest is closely related to the discourse of desire, since the seeking, the aspiration that constitutes the quest, requires a goal somewhere ahead of you: potentially always ahead of you, like desire itself’.⁵² For the majority of the Knights of the Round Table the Grail remains an object of desire that will always be beyond their

⁵¹ Whitaker, *Arthur’s Kingdom of Adventure*, p. 89.

⁵² Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 48.

physical and spiritual reach. The knights are aware that they will not succeed in the quest before they depart from Camelot, yet the desire for the Grail, and the spiritual state it represents, drives them onwards. At the same time, the allegorical nature of the landscape ensures that however far and for however long the knights ride they are unable to get any closer to the object of their quest. The mobility of the Grail landscape suggests the futility of normative questing practices in the Grail quest, but also encourages the knights to continue to seek the Grail by invoking the possibility that it could lie just beyond their reach.

This spiritual geography makes the landscape of the Grail narratives appear to be fluid. In the Grail narratives it is not just the knights, but the various settings of the quest which seem to move. The relative difficulties that each knight encounters in finding Corbenic provide clear examples of this. As Whitaker argues,

in the early visits of Bors and Lancelot, Corbenic seems not far from Camelot. When Elaine leaves Arthur's court, the king and a hundred knights bring her on her way through a forest, as if her home were located just on the other side. Yet the Grail knights traverse endless forests and wastelands and are borne far across the sea before they reach their destination.⁵³

It is through the *aventures* of the journey that the knights improve their Christian perception and attain the spiritual state for which the Grail stands. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, the landscape through which each knight rides is both self-determining and a product of his own potential to achieve the Grail. In this section I will argue that in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* the landscape provides a spatial illustration of the relationship between predestination and free will. To be successful in the Grail quest and be allowed to physically approach the Grail the knights have to fully align their will with that of God. As opposed to exercising their individual chivalric prowess as they would when faced with secular *aventures*, in the Grail quest the knights must allow themselves to trust in their faith as opposed to their arms to protect them. When a knight has learned this lesson he is allowed to progress into a new

⁵³Whitaker, *Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure*, pp. 89–90.

landscape and to meet a new *aventure*. An examination of this use of the landscape can be split into two subsections: the Quest on land and the Quest at sea.

The Quest on Land

The landscape most commonly associated with Arthurian quests is the forest. The literal density of the forest obscures the path, concealing any indication of what lies ahead and accentuating the mystery and intrigue that characterises romance quests. As Corinne Saunders writes, ‘the forest is a sought-after landscape, rendered partially believable by its portrayal as a hunting preserve, and yet remaining a highly symbolic world’.⁵⁴ Throughout the Vulgate Cycle, the beginning of a quest, of *aventure* itself, always necessitates stepping into the forest. In this respect the Grail quest begins in the same manner as non-Grail Arthurian romances. When the knights leave the castle of Vagan in the *Queste* it is at the edge of the forest that they pause, before each knight chooses his own path and begins an individual and unique journey.⁵⁵ The movement into the forest signifies the real beginning of the quest. The point at which the knights leave one another is also the point at which the narrative threads separate, and the transformation of the interlaced pattern begins. However, the allegorical nature of the Grail forest means that what might initially appear to both the knights and the reader as a familiar landscape has been transformed.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Brocéliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 60–61.

⁵⁵ Malory omits the mention of the forest, and writes instead ‘on the morne they were all accorded that they sholde departe everych from othir. And on the morne they departed with wepyng chere, and than every knyght toke the way that hym lyked beste’ (p. 677). Although Malory does not mention the forest explicitly, all of the adventures that follow take place in the forest, and the emphasis on the individual path remains in the assertion that each knight took the path ‘that hym liked beste’.

⁵⁶ As Corinne Saunders has pointed out, the Grail forest has many similarities with the biblical wastelands, and ‘from the start, the forest seems to conceal an unknown world of the supernatural, much as the classical forest betokens encounters with the divine’. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 124. Each of the *aventures* that the knights meet, for example, has a clear Christian significance, and needs to be interpreted in this light to be successfully completed. As I mentioned earlier, the lack of paths in the Grail forest is indicative of the unique, and often solitary, journey that each knight must undertake before reaching the Grail, and from the moment that the knights enter the Grail forest they move through a landscape which is specifically generated by their religious understanding.

As opposed to the reiterative fabric of memory that characterises the landscapes described in secular romance narratives, the *aventures* and landscapes that form the geography of the Grail quest tell a religious narrative. They do not remind the readers of past events that have happened in the Arthurian world, but rather of Christian history and the eternally relevant lessons for which they stand. Bohort's journey, for example, begins with a discussion with a hermit about free will and genealogical predestination, and the nature of transubstantiation, as cited in Chapter One. When he leaves the hermit, he witnesses the miracle of a bird who revived its lifeless young by striking 'de son bec [ki ert argus & trenchans] en mi le pis si quil en faisoit le san[c] saillir' (*Queste*, p. 120) ['its breast so hard with its beak, that blood came forth' (Burns, p. 54)]. This is later explained to him as signifying Christ's sacrifice for mankind (*Queste*, pp. 131-132 [Burns, p. 59]). After this point he spends the night at a castle and has two divine and prophetic dreams which illustrate the differences between the Grail quest and secular Arthurian quests. This is later explained to him by an abbot, who concludes, 'et si mait diex se vous fuissies terriens ia si haute aventure ne' (*Queste*, p. 134) ['in God's name, if you were an earthly man, you would not have been given such a lofty adventure' (Burns, p. 60)]. As this example shows, the landscape of Bohort's quest thus tells a religious narrative as well as an Arthurian one.

Although romance landscapes often serve multiple purposes, this coexistence of religious and Arthurian narratives shows a similar prioritisation of religion to the geographical depiction of Christian history on the Hereford *mappamundi*. It is the failure to understand this new landscape, symptomatic of a failure to understand the increased priority of religious rules and logic, which causes the unsuccessful knights to lose themselves within the spiritual wilderness of the Grail forest. While knights frequently get lost in the forests of secular romance, the spiritual dimension of the Grail quest means that it is not until they have made a

moral improvement that the knights are able to find any *aventure* or recover a sense of direction.

One of the most important lessons that the knights must understand before approaching the Grail, and that the reader must likewise grasp in order to follow the dynamic landscape of the Grail quest, concerns the relationship between predestination and free will. This relationship is most obviously depicted in Perceval's Grail journey, in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* during which he travels through a series of different landscapes before boarding a silk ship. Perceval is first mentioned in both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* when he and Lancelot unsuccessfully attempt to confront Galahad in combat.⁵⁷ The way in which each knight decides to act after his defeat is indicative of his understanding of the Grail Quest. Lancelot, struggling to free himself from normative chivalric logic, tries to follow Galahad, trusting to the secular conventions of *aventure* and chance, and is subsequently lost within the forest:

Lancelot cheualche après le cheualier tot le trauers de la forest en tel maniere quil ne treue voie ne sentier . ains sen vait ainsi comme auenture le maine . & ce li fait moult mal quil ne voit ne loing ne pres ou il puisse prendre so voie car moult faisoit oscur (*Queste*, p. 41).

[Lancelot pursued Galahad through the forest. Allowing chance to guide his way, Lancelot deserted the established trail and tried to follow a course of his own. But to his dismay he could see no way to proceed, whether close by or in the distance (Burns, p. 20)].

Perceval, on the other hand, turns back to receive religious instruction from a recluse, thus placing his faith and agency in a spiritual agent.⁵⁸ Perceval's choice to receive dialectic illumination is subsequently rewarded by instrumental geographical knowledge in the form of

⁵⁷ Malory writes that when Perceval stops to speak to the recluse 'Syr Lancelot rode overthwarte and endelonge a wylde foreyst and hylde no patthe but as wylde adventure lad hym' (p. 692). Once again, Lancelot's choice to let *aventure*, rather than God, dictate his path leads him to get lost.

⁵⁸ Perceval's decision to return and receive instruction rather than to continue can also be compared to Gawain's later decision to reject the advice offered to him by a hermit (Malory p. 692; *Queste*, p. 40; trans. p. 19).

the places to which Galahad is heading. The path that each knight chooses to take thus becomes symptomatic of the approach that he takes in the Grail quest.⁵⁹

Perceval's choice to place his faith in God, as opposed to following the rules of secular romance and trusting to chance and individual chivalric prowess, becomes increasingly important throughout his journey. It is Perceval's frustration at his lack of agency, caused by the death of his own horse, which causes him to make a rash promise to a woman who offers him a horse on the condition that he 'wolt fulfyller my wylle whan I somon the' (*Morte*, p. 705). Perceval agrees instantly and 'ensured hir to fulfyller all hir desire' (*Morte*, p. 705). Perceval's failure to remember that he will only act in accordance with God's will in his haste to recover his agency places his soul in peril. When the horse carries Perceval towards a river, Perceval's instinctive reaction to make 'a sygne of the crosse in hys forehed' (*Morte*, p. 705) places the outcome of the *aventure* in the hands of God, and it is this action that subsequently saves him. This episode marks the beginning of a chain of *aventures* through which Perceval explores the relationship between predestination and free will.

Perceval's successful completion of the *aventure* of the horse allows him to progress into another *aventure*, and as day breaks 'si regarde perceual entor lui & uit quil estoit en vne grant Montaigne merueilleus & moult durement sauuage & estoit enclose tot entor de la mer si largement quil ne voit dune part ne dautre terre se de moult loing non' (*Queste*, p. 67) [Perceval 'looked around him and saw he was on an amazingly large and wild mountain, surrounded by large expanses of water on all sides, and far from any other land' (Burns, p. 31)]. The miraculous transition between landscapes explains the movement of geographical features as conforming to a symbolic, rather than an accurate geographical order. Knights move between landscapes when they have successfully completed an *aventure*, and not in accordance with how long they have been riding. This type of transition between places

⁵⁹ Lancelot's desire to trust in his own agency can also be seen in the episode with the lions at Corbenic, discussed in chapter two (Malory pp. 772–773; *Queste* pp. 178–179; trans. p. 79).

occurs several times in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* and always signifies the end of one *aventure* and the beginning of the next.

The importance of a perfect faith in God to the outcome of the *aventures* recurs throughout Perceval's stay on the island and is made explicitly clear in the description of Perceval's response to the *aventure*: 'il voit bien que par proece de chaulerie ne puet il escaper ne autrement se diex ni met conseil' (*Queste*, p. 67) ['he saw well that he could not escape from the island by deeds of chivalry or otherwise if God did not counsel it' (Burns, p. 31)]. It is this lesson, to trust in God as opposed to actively trying to alter the course of events, on which Perceval is subsequently tested throughout his stay on the island, and which Lancelot fails to perceive at the entrance to Corbenic. When Perceval says that he wants to leave the island to 'join my brothers of the Round Table on the Quest for the Holy Grail', his first visitor, '.j. preudome uestu de souplis & daube en semblance de prestre' (*Queste*, p. 71) ['a man dressed like a priest, wearing a surplus and an alb' (Burns, p. 33)], tells him that:

Quant il plaira a dieu fait li preudons vous en isteres . car il uous en aura moult tost giete quant il li plaira . se il vous tenoit a son seriant & se il veoit que vos fuissies mieux a son preu alliors que chi sachies que il vous en osteroit asses tost . mais il vous ests ses feel serains & ses urais cheualiers ensi comme lordre de cheualerie le requiert. (*Queste*, p. 72)

[you'll leave when God wills it; when he's ready, he'll cast you out of here. If he considered you to be a soldier who could better serve his cause somewhere else, he would remove you without delay. But he is keeping you here to test you and see whether you are as faithful a servant and as loyal a knight as those who follow the order of chivalry. (Burns, p. 33)]

To leave the island and progress on the quest Perceval first has to accept his stay on it, and await God's decision with patience. When Perceval is later tempted by a woman who visits him in a ship, the first thing that she offers him is an escape from this island: 'tu vois bien chi na home par qui tu aies secors & iris ten couient il ou morir . dont te couient il se tu ne veus morir que tu faces plet a aucun par qui tu en soies fors. Et tu nen pues ester ietes se par moi non' (*Queste*, p. 76) ['You can see plainly that no one will come to your aid here and that you

must either leave or die. You will have to appeal to someone who can help you escape, if you want to avoid death, and I am the only one who can save you' (Burns, p. 35)] Perceval's reply that he will not go against God's will (*Queste*, p. 76 [Burns, p. 35]) indicates that he is beginning to understand the importance of this lesson (even if other temptations still overcome him). Finally, Perceval's prayer for forgiveness after he is almost tempted into committing a mortal sin emphasises the importance of subordinating individual agency to an acceptance of divine providence: 'ne iamais sire diex fait il ne me quier de chi mouoir ne por mort ne por vie se vostre volente ni est' (*Queste*, p. 79) ['dear God, I will never ask to leave this place against Your will, whether I live or die' (Burns, p. 36)]. Although it was not through wanting to leave the island that Perceval was tempted, the episode begins and ends with Perceval affirming his faith in God's will. Perceval is rewarded for this decision by an invitation to board the silk ship, the *aventures* of the island completed and the next phase of the quest open before him.

The relationship between progression on the Grail quest and the choice to subordinate individual agency is not only significant to Perceval's Grail journey. As discussed above, when Lancelot chooses to ride after Galahad and trust in his own prowess rather than turning back with Perceval to accept guidance he is quickly lost in the forest. It is not until Lancelot reaches the 'watir of Mortays' (*Morte*, p. 770) and is physically unable to travel any further that he stops to sleep and await God's guidance. Lancelot is instructed in his dream to enter the first ship that he sees and the next morning his patience is rewarded when a rudderless boat appears. The time Lancelot spends on the boat marks his greatest test in choosing not to act, as will be discussed in more detail in the next part of this chapter, but it is this boat that eventually takes him to Corbenic and the Grail. Throughout Bohort's Grail journey, Bohort's choice to subordinate his own agency in favour of following the will of God is depicted through the way in which he interprets each *aventure* that he encounters according to his

understanding of Christian truths. When Bohort is faced with the tower of maidens who threaten to kill themselves for his love, his understanding that to grant them their request would be to put his own soul in jeopardy leads him to do nothing. This is proven to be the correct course of action, and once the *aventure* has been explained to him Bohort is able to move on to the next *aventure*. In each knight's journey a willingness to abdicate individual agency in favour of allowing God to choose one's path is translated into a physical progression towards the Grail. As Bohort's journey illustrates, this model of interpretation instructs each individual to interpret the physical world according to spiritual truths, and it is this towards which the *Queste* encourages the reader to strive.

This abdication of individual agency, however, stands in opposition to the chivalric code depicted in earlier parts of the Vulgate *Lancelot*, in which a knight has to rely upon his own physical prowess to escape from seemingly impossible situations. While being in the right and having God 'one one's side' does help a knight to triumph, it is through a heightened physical prowess that the knights are victorious. The first book of the Vulgate *Lancelot* states that

sil en a droit si se desfende securement contra le millor cheualier del monde . Car desloiautes fait au besoig de boin cheualier mauuis . Et loiautes fait bon cheualier & seur de cheli qui onques ne laura este. (*Lancelot I*, p. 25)

[if a knight is in the right he should defend himself against the best fighter in the world, because disloyalty turns a good fighter into a bad one, and a knight who is true fights well and confidently even if he has never done so before (Lacy, p. 14)].

The nature of *aventure* is transformed in the Grail quests, and the knights are explicitly informed that they should not 'quidier que ces auentures qui auient ore soient domes tuer ne de cheualiers ochire. nenil ains sont des choses celestiaus & espritex qui sont mieudres & valent asses plus' (*Queste*, p. 115) ['believe that these *aventures* involve killing men or slaying knights. Rather, they involve spiritual deeds that are more substantial and even more valiant' (Burns, p. 52)]. It is the choice not to exercise one's physical abilities, and instead to

trust in God, that conversely allows a knight to accomplish these *aventures*, moving between landscapes and thus towards the Grail.

The Quest at Sea

While the knights are riding through the Grail forest they can at least retain the appearance (misleading though this may be) that they are exercising their own energies and agency in traveling towards the Grail and forming the shape of their journey as they might in the pursuit of more secular quests. Once at sea, however, the knights are forced into a position of inactivity that highlights the suppression of their own physical agency. To reach this stage, the knights have to actively choose to put their lives and success in the hands of God. In the Grail texts they do this through choosing to enter a rudderless boat.

The motif of the rudderless boat best expresses the relationship between predestination and free will in both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*. Once the knights have successfully completed a series of *aventures* on land they are instructed (usually by a mysterious voice) to leave their horses and enter the first ship that they see. Their choice to follow this instruction and unquestioningly enter the ship signifies a voluntary relinquishment of physical and chivalric agency in favour of leaving the outcome of the *aventure* to God. As Helen Cooper writes, ‘the transition to the ship from the chivalric quest, the quest on horseback, marks a transition to a new level of experience altogether’.⁶⁰ The *aventures* that the knights encounter at sea subsequently become indicative of their providential ability to achieve the Grail. The sea also acts as a development of the transformed Grail forest, allowing the knights to move closer to God and the Grail through distancing them from the conventional Arthurian landscape. Each knight’s choice not to exercise his own agency signifies a readiness to move closer to the Grail, and although the boats do not take the

⁶⁰ Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 135.

knights in any set direction, it is only through completing this part of the quest that they are able to 'find' Corbenic and progress towards the Grail.

The use of nautical metaphors to explain the relationship between predestination and free will first occurs in the *Queste* in a conversation between Bohort and a hermit:

Li cuers de lome est aussi comme auirons de la nef qui le maine quel part quil veult ou a port ou a peril . & lauirons fait li preudons est al maistre part quil le tient & maistroie & fait la nef aller quel part quil veult ou a port ou a peril . aussi est il del cuer al home . Car ce quil fait de bien li vient del tentement a lanemi. (*Queste*, p. 118)

[‘A man’s heart is like the helm of a ship, which steers him where it wishes, whether into port or into danger’.

‘But the helm has a master who holds and guides it’ said the hermit, ‘making it go where he wants. It is the same for a man’s heart. His good deeds come from the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit; his evil deeds are instigated by the devil’. (Burns, p. 53)]⁶¹

The relationship between individual choice and the guidance of either God or the devil is depicted in dynamic terms that correspond with the movements of the knights on the Grail quest. The knights have the ability to exercise their free will (borne in their hearts—the helm of the ship), and choose the path that they will take, while the many *aventures* that they encounter, devised either by God or the devil, act as tests of their faith which guide their souls either towards or away from God, and their bodies either towards or away from the Grail. Later in the texts, this metaphor of the ship is realised in the form of real ships which the knights can only enter once they have proved their faith and which are directed by God.

The rudderless boat, both as a historical object and a literary motif, has a close relationship with ideas of divine judgement. V. A. Kolve (1984) and, more recently, Helen

⁶¹ This explanation is comparable to Hugh of St Victor’s discussion of the Flood: ‘let a man return to his own heart, and he will find there a stormy ocean lashed by the fierce billows of overwhelming passions and desires, which swamp the soul as often as by consent they bring it into subjection. For there is flood in every man, as long as he lives in this corruptible life, where the flesh lusts against the spirit. Or rather, every man is in this flood, but the good are in it as those borne in ships upon the sea, whereas the bad are in it as shipwrecked persons at the mercy of the waves’. Aelred Squire, intro., *Hugh of St Victor: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. by a religious of C. S. M. V (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 143. The image of those without faith as ‘shipwrecked persons at the mercy of the waves’ is reflected in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* by the warning on the ship of faith, which reads ‘thou man which shalt entir into thys shippe, beware that thou be in steadfast beleve, for I am Faythe. And therefore beware how thou entirst but if thou be stedfaste, for and thou fayle thereof I shall nat helpe the’ (p. 752).

Cooper (2004) have written extensively about the motif of the rudderless boat in medieval literature. They note that rudderless boats were used for a number of different purposes, the most common of which were as an alternative to execution or exile on land, and for penitential journeys.⁶² The rudderless boat allows God to decide the fate of its occupants, thus freeing the human persecutors from any responsibility for the outcome. As J. R. Reinhard explains,

the notion seems to have been that the sea could not endure within itself or upon its surface anything that was sinful or impure [...]. The sea would not injure the innocent, and [such] persons accidentally or purposefully cast upon its surface were safely conveyed to shore.⁶³

While rudderless boats appear across a variety of genres, medieval romances made a particularly prolific use of this motif. The rudderless boat is also used in this capacity in the *Joseph of Arimathea* section of the prose Trilogy, in which Vespasian ‘threw’ the Jewish person who told him where Joseph was to be found and his family ‘upon the mercy of Christ by putting them in a boat and casting them out to sea’ (p. 33). Many romances, from Marie de France’s twelfth-century *Guigemar* to the anonymous late fourteenth-century *Emaré*, also use the rudderless boat for a wide range of purposes, including to convey characters between *aventures* and to illustrate the miracle of divine protection.

A particularly poignant example of God’s protection of a faithful heroine can be seen in the ‘Tale of Constance’ in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1390). This tale is one of a number of texts which narrate the tale of Constance (Custace in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s*

⁶² Cooper cites an example from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the entry for the year 891 in which ‘three Irishmen came ashore in Cornwall ‘without any oars’. They spent a few days recovering, but insisted on being put to sea again, since their object was to seek exile from men for the sake of God’. Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 123. Cooper also discusses the legend of St Brendan in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*. Cooper draws a direct comparison between the way in which Brendan and his followers leave Ireland in a rudderless boat to ‘return [...] in order for their *aventures* to be recorded, rather as Malory’s knights have their deeds chronicled back at court’. Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 124. Cooper also highlights the way in which the journeys and *aventures* faced by Brendan and his followers are temporally marked only by mentions of religious feasts, such as Easter and Christmas. As in the Grail narratives, concepts of time in this narrative appear to follow a liturgical rather than a natural seasonal calendar, while conventional spatial coordinates of the journey appear to be lost.

⁶³ J. R. Reinhard, ‘Setting Adrift in Medieval Law and Literature’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 56 (1941), 33–68 (pp. 35–36).

Tale), who is sent overseas to marry and spread the Christian faith, and is twice cast out from society in a ‘nakid schip withoute stiere’ (l. 709).⁶⁴ In Gower’s narrative, Constance, cast adrift in a rudderless boat for the second time, reaches the coast of Spain and is almost immediately attacked by a deviant steward. Gower writes that in response,

Sche preide God, and He hire herde,
And sodeinliche he was out throwe
And dreynt, and tho began to blowe
A wynd menable fro the lond,
And thus the myhti Goddes hond
Hire hath conveied and defended. (Gower, ll. 1120-1125)

The *Confessio Amantis* suggests that it is Constance’s prayer to God, and not her physical actions, which lead to the steward being suddenly thrown out of the boat and drowned. This depiction of divine deliverance can also be seen in the popular romance *Emaré* in which Emaré remains in a rudderless boat

A good seven nyghth and more,
As hyt was Goddys wylle;
Wyth carefull herte and sykyng sore,
Such sorow was here yarked yore,
And ever lay she styll.
She was dryven ynto a lond,
Thorow the grace of Goddes sond,
That all thyng may fulfyll. (*Emaré*, ll. 326-333)

While ‘Goddes sond’ protects Emaré through driving her towards land, in the *Confessio Amantis* ‘myhti Goddes hond’ (Gower, l. 1124) directs Constance’s boat back onto the sea and away from harm.⁶⁵ In each narrative the character’s choice to pray to God for deliverance rather than actively trying to alter the course of events themselves indicates a reliance on

⁶⁴Russel A. Peck, ed., *John Gower: Confessio Amantis*, Three Volumes (Kalamzoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), Vol II, ll. 1120–1125. The source for Gower’s ‘Tale of Constance’ is thought to be Nicholas Trevet’s *Chronicle*. Chaucer uses both Gower’s and Trevet’s texts as sources in *The Man of Law’s Tale*.

⁶⁵In *The Man of Law’s Tale*, which uses Gower as a source, Chaucer changes the emphasis of Custance’s escape, writing: ‘blisful marie help hire right anon;/ For with hir struglyng wel and mightily/ The thief fil over bord al sodeynly’ (ll. 920–922). In this text the thief’s falling overboard is presented as the result of his struggle with Custance, and not an unexpected action caused by the hand of God. Although it can be presumed that God ‘helped’ Custance (through references to Christ and Mary) this is the kind of help that the knights receive from God when encountering a physical combat against one another in the moral right.

God's protection. In each case this course of action is rewarded by God's redirection of the rudderless boat.

The lack of ability that the occupant of the rudderless boat has to control his or her fate is accentuated by the fact that, as both Cooper and Kolve emphasise, the occupants of the rudderless boat are 'more likely to be women or children than grown men'.⁶⁶ Using characters who may not have the physical ability to help themselves heightens the miraculous nature of God's protection. In stark contrast to this, in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* it is not just knights who enter the rudderless boats, and, moreover, it is the most able and successful of knights. This accentuates the importance of the ideal relationship between predestination and free will: the best knights are shown to be those who are willing to forego their individual agency to align their will entirely with God's. By doing this they improve their relationship with God and chances of achieving the Grail. Their choice to step into the rudderless boat is not made out of necessity, or because the knights are unable to act, but because they decide to leave their fate in the hands of God. The journeys undertaken in the rudderless boats in the Grail Quest thus signify a total submission to God's will.

In both the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* it is only the boat that Lancelot enters (and which contains the body of Perceval's sister) that is explicitly 'without sayle other ore' (p. 594). Cooper notes that:

the coherence [of the rudderless boat motif] lies in the phrasing and the cadence that describe the rudderless boat, and which remain essentially the same across many centuries and languages; a boat without oars, sail, mast, or any kind of tackling; with

⁶⁶ Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 107. Both the *Morte Darthur* and the Vulgate *Lancelot* use the motif of the rudderless boat in a similar manner. In the *Morte Darthur* Arthur casts all the sons 'that were borne in May-day' into 'a shyppe to the se; and som were four weeks old and som lesse' (p. 37) in response to Merlin's prophecy that 'he that sholde destroy hym and all the londe sholde be borne on May-day' (p. 37). True to the narrative conventions of the rudderless boat, when the boat crashes against some rocks and all of the other children perish, a good man finds Mordred and fosters him until he is fourteen. The relationship between women and rudderless boats can also be seen in three examples: the story of the Fair Maid of Astolat; the death of Perceval's sister; and at Arthur's death. In each of these examples a ship is used to convey the body of a dead or dying character. One thing that all of these examples have in common is the passivity and physical helplessness of their passengers (whether it be because they are women, children, dead, or injured).

neither sail nor oar; no rudder, oar, nor helmsman; neither sails, nor oars, rudder nor rigging; no tackle, sail, nor mast.⁶⁷

The ship in which Perceval, Bohort, and Galahad travel does have sails, if not a rudder or oars, and it moves between *aventures* as the result of the wind, which appears as soon as the knight enters the ship and (as in the *Confesso Amantis*) signifies divine intervention. The remarkable feature of this ship is not its lack of ‘oars, sail, mast, or any kind of tackling’, but lack of any attempt made to control its direction. That the ship may have the equipment for steering is of little importance, since no attempt is made to use it and the knights who enter it seem content to let it move as it likes, ‘one whyle backwarde, another foreward’ (*Morte*, p. 748).

The way in which the knights decide to enter the boat is indicative of their spiritual state and potential to achieve the Grail. Perceval, Bohort, and Galahad all enter the same boat willingly after completing a series of *aventures* on land. Once Galahad has joined Perceval and Bors, the wind drives the ship into ‘mervaylous’ (*Morte*, p. 752) place where the knights find and enter the ship of Solomon. The next morning the ship takes them back to land at the castle of Carcelois/Carteloyse, the *aventure* complete. Once on the boat, Galahad, Bohort and Perceval at no point wish to leave it, and are content to continue their journey, nourished only by their perfect faith in God, until they are instructed otherwise.

It is the landscapes by which Lancelot finds himself surrounded that finally encourage him to place his trust in God, rather than his own prowess, and which encourage him to enter the rudderless boat. The *Queste* explains that:

Lancelot fu venus a laigie de marchoise & li vit enclose de . iij . choses qui poi le recomfortoient . Car dune part est la forest qui grande est & desuoiable . & dautre part auoit . ij . roches qui hautes estoient . & dautre part est laigie qui fu parfunde & noire . Ces . iij . choses ne le laissoient remuer diluec ains atendi la merci nostre signor. (*Queste*, p. 174)

⁶⁷ Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 106.

[Lancelot came to the river Marcoise and found himself surrounded on three sides by landscapes that offered no comfort. On one side was the deep forest where one could easily be lost. On another there were two ancient and high cliffs, and on the third side the deep black river. These features convinced him not to stir from that place, but to await God's help instead. (Burns, p. 77)]

Lancelot's decision to await God's help results from his awareness that he cannot escape from the landscapes that surround him. In the *Sankgreal*, Malory omits the reference to the landscape, writing 'whan Sir Launcelot was com to the watir of Mortays as hit ys reherced before, he was in grete perell. And so he leyde hym downe and slepte, and toke the aventure that God wolde sende hym' (, p. 770). Malory's omission of the landscape gives Lancelot's decision to await 'the aventure that God wolde sende hym' a more overtly positive reading. In both texts, this choice signifies that Lancelot is ready to progress to the next part of the quest which means entering the 'shippe withoute sayle other ore' (*Morte*, p. 770). Unlike the knights who have already proved that their will is entirely aligned with God's, and thus whose ships have sails and drive them in a purposeful direction, Lancelot spends the next month adrift in the rudderless boat without encountering any *aventures*, sustained by God and accompanied only by the body of Perceval's sister. Lancelot's journey in the boat thus becomes a trial of his patience and understanding, comparable in nature to Perceval's time on the miraculous island.

That Malory's Lancelot is still some way from the perfect acceptance of God's will is made clear by an addition that Malory makes to his source. The *Queste* states that 'apres li auint vne fois tout par nuit quil ariua leis vne forest' (*Queste*, p. 176) ['One night, after Lancelot had sailed for a long while without ever leaving the ship, he went ashore near the edge of a forest' (Burns, p. 78)]. Lancelot sees a knight approaching the water and Galahad arrives and enters the ship. Malory adds a further explanation of how Lancelot and Galahad meet, writing 'so on a nyght [Lancelot] wente to play hym by the watirs syde, for *he was somewhat wery of the shippe*' (*Morte*, p. 770) (emphasis mine). Although Lancelot has

learned that to be successful in the Grail quest he must abandon the old order of ‘erthley’ chivalry in favour of aligning his will with God, the suggestion that he continues to find the process ‘wery’ emphasises an internal conflict. The struggle between earthly and celestial modes of behaviour remains a constant presence in Lancelot’s Grail journey, and it is the pull of martial and romantic pursuits that prevents him from achieving the Grail. Instead, after completing a series of secular *aventures* with Galahad (about which both texts decline to write for ‘tho *aventures* were with wyld bestes and nat in the quest of the Sankgreall’ (*Morte*, p. 771)), Lancelot’s ship finally takes him to Corbenic, where he experiences his final ‘*aventure del saint Graal*’ before making his way back through the forest to Camelot and the Arthurian court.

The final sea journey made by Bohort, Galahad, and Perceval carries them out of the Arthurian world entirely, and towards Sarras, the final resting place of Perceval, Galahad, and the Grail. In the *Queste*, the ship that carries the knights to Sarras is explicitly described as the ship of Solomon. We are also told that Galahad prays to God ‘soir & main’ (*Queste*, p. 193), suggesting that the journey covers multiple days. In the *Sankgreall*, Malory writes that, ‘so longe were they in the shippe that they seyde to sir Galahad, ‘Sir, in thys bedde ye oughte to lyghe, for so seyth the lettirs’ (*Morte*, p. 785). It is not until Galahad has slept upon the marvellous bed that the journey comes to an end. As with the journeys through the Grail forest, this suggests that space and distance conform to a symbolic rather than an accurate geographical order: it is not until Galahad has completed the *aventure* by lying on the bed that the boat reaches its destination.

Only Bohort returns from this journey, and the two other successful Grail knights, like so many of the unsuccessful ones, continue their spiritual journey beyond the limits of earthly life and into eternity. When Bors re-enters the ship, Malory writes that ‘by good adventure, he cam unto the realme of Logrus’ (*Morte*, p. 788). As Galahad continues his journey after

death in the religious realm, Bohort travels back to the secular Arthurian world, characterised by *aventure* and chance. The two spatial layers that create the palimpsest of the Grail landscape separate once again, carrying the two knights in opposite directions. Neither the *Queste* nor the *Sankgreal* suggests that the reader should try to follow Galahad's path, but rather that each person should put his or her faith in God, and allow divine providence to shape the events that he or she encounters. The *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* illustrate this lesson through the three different ways in which Galahad, Perceval and Bohort end the Grail quest. Elizabeth Edwards describes Galahad as 'a figure of closure, of the end of the cycle of romance'.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Grail quest marks an end to the questing in search of unknown *aventure*, typical of the earlier parts of the Arthurian cycle, and the beginning of the disintegration of the Arthurian ideals. There is, however, a difference in the tone with which the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* each view this end to the cycle of Arthurian *aventure*. While the *Queste* seems to celebrate this end 'as though [the *aventures*] were an unpleasant interruption to normal life [...] In Malory, the ending of *aventures* brings a sadness as well as a sense of fulfilment'.⁶⁹ This difference reflects the different ways in which each text makes use of time, to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. While the Vulgate *Queste* highlights the relationship between the biblical past and the Arthurian present, Malory's text articulates stronger links between the Grail quest and the rest of the Arthurian cycle through the inclusion of the *Tale of Balyn*.

Conclusion

That the writers of Old French and Middle English Arthurian romance created a literary and narrative landscape based on an idea of a mythical 'golden age' of Britain is widely accepted. However, the ways in which medieval Arthurian texts present concepts of geography and

⁶⁸ Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative*, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Jill Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 203–220 (p. 220).

space vary across different narratives, languages, and times. This chapter has suggested that it is possible to identify a continuum of romance landscapes that starts with the narrative geography presented by secular Arthurian texts, and which is complicated and developed through texts which make use of the supernatural to include fairy Otherworlds. From this supernatural Other, the continuum moves into the religious and allegorical worlds represented by the Grail narratives. Depictions of space and landscape in the Grail narratives conform to a chronological continuum, in which the initial geographical ambiguity surrounding the apparent mobility of the Fisher King's castle in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* is developed and expanded by each Grail narrative until the creation of the almost entirely allegorical landscape of the *Queste*. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, it is not just the visual *aventures* that a knight encounters that are controlled by his religious perception, but the very landscape through which he travels.

The transformative property of individual perception mobilises the Arthurian landscape, as the location of the Grail castle in each of the Grail narratives indicates. Since a knight can only encounter *aventures* in accordance with his own personal and spiritual progression, the features of the landscape have to be capable of constant movement, appearing only to the correct knight at an appropriate time. The 'competing models of reality' suggested by Burrow to be an unusual feature of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* provide a useful way of understanding the tension between different controlling forces in the Grail texts. As the focus of the narratives shift from the problems of the secular Arthurian world, dominated by fate, chance, and *aventure*, to the religious lessons presented by the Grail, the landscape in which the quests are set is transformed to allow distance and space to portray spiritual understanding. Since spiritual understanding equates to physical proximity to the Grail, the landscape of the Grail quest thus illustrates the mental and spiritual difficulties that each knight must overcome before he reaches the Grail.

This change in priority also results in a change in the ways in which the knights are expected to behave. In non-Grail Arthurian texts a knight moves between landscapes and successfully completes *aventures* as the result of his chivalric and physical agency. That God is ‘on the side’ of the knight who is in the right is shown by the martial victories that knight wins. To a certain extent this is also true of Galahad, who is able to physically overcome any number of knights whom he meets as the result of his superior physical and spiritual prowess. However, it is not chivalric success that determines a knight’s progression in the Grail quest. Instead, it is the choice not to act, and to voluntarily abdicate agency to leave his fate in the hands of God, that allows a knight to move forwards and between different landscapes.

The dominance of religious features on medieval maps, as in the geography of the Grail quest, suggests these texts’ participation in a shared medieval geographical imagination, in which the spiritual priorities that predominated in medieval everyday life dictate depictions of space. As opposed to standing purely for the physical landscape by which an individual is surrounded, geographical features signify the various tests of faith and belief that people encounter in life, as well as marking historical events that provide an outline for the shape of Christian doctrine. The depiction of historical events alongside geographical places that existed in the medieval present also presents questions about time. As Woodward writes,

The *mappaemundi* may thus be seen as analogous to the narrative medieval pictures that portray several events separated by time and included within the same scene. Instead of being placed in a sequence as in a frieze or cartoon they are placed in their logical positions in the picture. For the *mappaemundi*, this meant the approximate geographical or topographical location.⁷⁰

The landscape of the Grail narratives is similarly constructed from a fabric of Christian lessons, *aventures*, and figures, some of whom have returned from the dead, and others who have lived for hundreds of years.

⁷⁰ Woodward, ‘Medieval Mappaemundi’, p. 290.

Chapter III: Temporal Transformations: Grail Time

Introduction

The Grail narratives combine diverse models of time to create a unique timescale in which events from the past, present, and future are able to exist simultaneously. This interaction collapses the distinctions between times, thus foregrounding the eternal relevance of the religious lessons that are signified by the Grail miracles. When discussing the temporal aspects of the chronotope, Bakhtin suggests that ‘time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible’.¹ In the Grail narratives time literally ‘takes on flesh’ as different episodes and characters from salvation history reappear as features in the Arthurian *aventures*. In the Grail narratives time and space interact to allow the knights to travel between the Arthurian present and the biblical past, their geographical surroundings responding to their ability to understand and remember the religious lessons of the Grail.

Connecting the significance of past events to present actions is something with which Augustine suggests that mankind inherently struggles:

homines autem, quorum vita super terram brevis est, quia sensu non valent causas conexere saeculorum priorum aliarumque gentium, quas experti non sunt, cum his quas experti sunt, in uno autem corpore vel die vel domo facile possunt videre quid cui membro, quibus momentis, quibus partibus personisve congruat. (I, pp. 114 and 116)

Human beings [...] whose life on earth is brief, are incapable of understanding how to link causal factors from earlier times and other races, of which they have no knowledge, with factors that they do know about: whereas when dealing with one body, or day, or household, they find it easy to see what is proper to each member, and moment, and part, and person. (I, pp. 115 and 117)

Making these sorts of connections, however, is exactly what the aspiring Grail knights must learn to do to give themselves any chance of approaching the Grail. As opposed to understanding the Grail *aventures* according to the expectations of secular Arthurian *aventures* (corresponding to the single body, day or household described by Augustine), the

¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84.

knights must learn to interpret present events in accordance with biblical history. This model of interpretation relies upon each knight regularly improving and deploying his knowledge of Christian faith.

The eternal significance of the religious lessons that the Grail miracles signify is illustrated through the reappearance of events from different periods of time which mirror, reflect and replicate one another. This conjoins the biblical past to the Arthurian present (still set in the past), the medieval present of the contemporary reader, and the future audience to come. This particular form of temporal manipulation, along with the spatial manipulations discussed in Chapter Two, forms the Grail chronotope, as distinct from the wider chronotope of Arthurian romance. As Augustine describes, wisdom '*fuisse et futurum esse non est in ea, sed esse solum, quoniam aeterna est: nam fuisse et futurum esse non est aeternum*' (II, p. 46) ['does not have the capacity either to have existed, or to come to exist. It simply is, because it is eternal' (II, p. 47)]. In this chapter I will argue that in the Grail narratives concepts of time are deliberately manipulated to foreground the eternal and eternally relevant nature of salvation. This is the 'wisdom' that the Grail *aventures* illustrate, and that the Grail narratives direct their reader to learn.

The temporal elements of the Grail chronotope seek to situate the Grail narratives in the gap between the temporal experience of natural hours of light and darkness and the eternal nature of God's grace and salvation. The events of the Grail narratives are regulated according to the measures of time that ordered the experience of a medieval audience. There were two primary ways in which time was measured and recorded in the Middle Ages: the natural fluctuations of the seasons and the diurnal rhythms of day and night; and the larger providential and biblical framework that dictated that 'the end had come, and yet it had been

indefinitely postponed'.² The interaction between these different methods of recording time can be seen across different genres of medieval literature, including romance narratives, hagiographical narratives and chronicles. Michelle Wright writes at length about the references to different methods of recording time in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and the *Prologue of the Canterbury Tales*.³ The practice of recording time according to both natural and biblical measures is significant to methods of interpreting and understanding the Grail narratives. The Grail texts insert representations of events from salvation history into the context of the Arthurian world to motivate the knights (and thus the reader) to improve his or her spiritual understanding and relationship with God. As methods of recording and measuring time changed throughout the Middle Ages, evidence suggests that people's lives were governed by an increasingly complex combination of different temporal systems that combined natural measures of daylight with religious offices and, finally, the hours marked by the mechanical clock.⁴ Temporal references in the Grail narratives are similarly transformed alongside the change in cultural perceptions and experiences of time. The first part of this chapter examines the different ways that time is recorded in each of the Grail narratives, paying particular attention to how these references change throughout the different Grail texts. The way in which time is recorded in each of the Old French and Middle English Grail narratives under discussion is suggestive of the way in which the texts frame the Grail

² Robert Markus, 'Living within Sight of the End', in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 23–35 (p. 24).

³ Michelle Wright, 'Time, Consciousness, and Narrative Play in Late Medieval Secular Dream Poetry and Framed Narratives', PhD Thesis (Cardiff: September 2007).

⁴ Chris Humphrey demonstrates the many different ways of measuring time utilised in the 'Rules for the conduct of the Masons of York Minster'. The rules dictate that the masons should be in work 'as early as they may see skilfully by daylight for to work. And they shall stand there truly working at their work all the day after, as long as they may see skilfully for to work, if it be all workday; otherwise till it be high noon smitten by the clock when holy day falls at noon'. This text also insists that 'at the time of meat, at noon, they shall, at no time of the year, stray from the lodge nor from the work aforesaid, more than the space of the time of an hour, and after noon they may drink in the lodge. And for their drinking time between Michaelmas and Lent they shall not cease nor leave their work passing the time of half a mile away'. These rules make 'use of several different schemes for reckoning daily time, including sunrise, estimates of how the amount of daylight in which it is reasonable to work, estimates of how long it is appropriate to be away from work, equal hours as measured by a clock, and measures of activity such as the amount of time that it takes to walk a particular distance'. Humphrey, 'Time and Urban Culture', p. 107.

quest. The type of temporal references used also highlights the way in which each text conceptualises the relationship between past and present, to be discussed in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

The Grail narratives also show a greater interest in marking and explaining the progression of time than other secular romance narratives. The prose Trilogy and the *Queste* utilise a complex combination of pseudo-historical lineages and religious exposition to explain how figures such as the Maimed King can live for unnaturally long periods of time.⁵ An interest in tracing ancestry and lineage back to a significant figure to Christian history complicates the interaction between linear and cyclical patterns frequently seen in secular medieval romances. From the prose Trilogy onwards, the Old French Grail narratives share a concern with constructing a historical lineage which illustrates the connections between the biblical past and the events of the Arthurian present. As the narratives substantiate their truth claims they create a further (fictional) textual lineage that charts the development of the Grail quest over time as well as providing a historical origin for the legend. The Grail chronotope is thus created from the intersection of the linear elements of this pseudo-historical timescale with cyclical romance time and the questing pattern of withdrawal and return. The second part of this chapter will examine the structural significance of history and lineage in more detail, to argue that the combination of different ‘histories’ and genres leads to the creation of a fully interlaced model of time. In this interlaced model of time linear, cyclical and vertical time patterns co-exist and are woven together to accentuate relationships between events of the past and present. This thus focus the readers’ attention on the eternal relevance of the Grail miracles. and encourages the readers, like the knights, to improve their spiritual understanding.

⁵ Friedrich Wolfzettel, ‘Fictional History as Ideology: Functions of the Grail Legend from Robert de Boron to the Roman de Perceforest’, in *Romance and History*, ed by Jon Whitman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 90–104 (p. 92).

The final part of this chapter focuses on defining ‘Grail time’ in more detail to foreground how each text utilises the relationship between biblical past and Arthurian present. This relationship, in turn, highlights the eternal relevance of the Grail miracles. In addition to the interlaced pattern of time formed by the combination of linear and cyclical time patterns of the romance and chronicle forms, the Grail narratives also use flashbacks and flash-forwards, prophetic dreams and exegetic explanation and illumination to create a complex relationship between the past, present and future. In the *Confessions*, Augustine writes that

Quod sitem nunc liquet et claret, nec futura sunt nec praeterita, nec proprie dicitur, “tempora sunt tria, praeteritum, praesens, et futurum,” sed fortasse proprie diceretur, “tempora sunt tria, praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris”. Sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam et alibi ea non video. (II, p. 230)

[What is now patently clear is that neither future nor past events exist, and it is incorrect to say, “there are three times: the present respecting things past, the present respecting things present, and the present respecting things future”. These three things do somehow exist in the soul, and I do not perceive them anywhere else. (II, p. 231)]

The model of time used across the Grail narratives illustrates Augustine’s conceptualisation of the relationship between past, present and future. As opposed to remaining distinct, events from the past, present and future coincide. Their existence is described in relation to their relevance to the present moment, a moment that, as Augustine also suggests, is constantly changing. Thus, the Grail narratives collapse temporal distinctions at the same time as foregrounding them. As the hermits explain the biblical significance of the various *aventures*, they make use of Augustine’s conceptualisation of time as ‘*praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris*’ (p. 230) [‘a present of things past, a present of things present, [and] a present of things to come’ (p. 231)]. The Grail narratives’ unique ability to utilise this conceptualisation of time is primarily related to the fact that the journey presented by the Grail quest is an interior journey of spiritual improvement. Augustine’s suggestion that these aspects of time are only present in the soul is thus also particularly applicable to the

Grail narratives. As such, the temporal distinctions between past, present, and future are collapsed to illustrate God's eternal grace, and the eternally relevant nature of salvation.

Temporal References in the Grail Narratives

The three primary ways in which time was recorded in the Middle Ages – by daylight hours, religious offices, and the mechanical clock – were interdependent. Until the rise in popularity of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the hours at which religious offices were celebrated were determined by the natural alternation of day and night. Matins, for example, was always celebrated at sunrise, even in the winter months when this brought it closer to the office of Prime. Chris Humphrey explains that:

up until the fourteenth century in Europe, the day was organised according to the temporal hours system. Under this convention each hour is variable in length, because it is calculated by dividing the period of daylight into twelve parts, and the same at night. A daylight hour in the summer was therefore longer than its winter counterpart.⁶

Due to the variability in the length of summer and winter hours and the relationship between monastic services and the temporal hours system, the daily routines of the monks also changed in different seasons. Janet Burton's reconstruction of the monastic day in accordance with the *Regularis Concordia* demonstrates the way in which 'the summer timetable has been modified to fill the increased hours of daylight'.⁷ The eight hours allocated to sleep in the winter, for example, are reduced to just five in the summer, while summer services begin one hour earlier (as measured by the equal hours of the mechanical clock) and finish an hour and a half later.⁸

Wright suggests that 'medieval Christian culture, by dint of its historical and teleological character, focused attention on the relationship between this world, the world of

⁶ Chris Humphrey, 'Time and Urban Culture in Late Medieval England', p. 106.

⁷ Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 161.

⁸ Burton, 'Monastic and Religious Orders', pp. 160–161.

time, and the next world, the eternal kingdom of God'.⁹ Marking the times of religious offices by daylight hours meant that monasteries were simultaneously able to organise their religious duties (duties that pertain to the 'eternal kingdom of God') according to the temporal reality of natural time. The French Grail narratives illustrate a similar relationship between references to daylight hours and hours marked by religious offices. The author(s) of the *Queste*, for example, frequently combine references to daylight with the religious offices that a knight hears, and the days are divided by a series of sunrises and sunsets, complete with the appropriate Christian offices. The combination of the two types of reference allow the Arthurian *aventures* to be organised in the same space between the eternal time of God and the temporal reality of the natural world as that created by the routines of religious communities.

This is not to say, however, that the Old French Grail narratives all combine temporal references in the same way or to create the same effect. This section will argue that the type of temporal references in each text illuminate each narrative's conceptualisation of the Grail. Chrétien's text foregrounds references to daylight and seasonal fluctuation, for example, which correspond to the theme of natural growth and maturation important to the narrative. The *Didot-Perceval* marks the passing of the days with references to 'prime' (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 210), 'none' (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 214), and 'vespre' (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 251), thus accentuating the religious nature of the Grail. In the prose Trilogy allusions to the length of the quest, and the number of days between *aventures*, also emphasise the importance of historical lineage and the origin of the legend. The Vulgate *Queste*, as mentioned above, combines references to the practical experience of daylight alongside the monastic service celebrated at that hour. On the morning that the knights intend to leave Camelot at the opening of the Grail quest, for example, the text states that

⁹ Wright, 'Time, Consciousness, and Narrative Play', p. 17.

Quant il plot a nostre seignor que les tenebres de la nuit furent abaissies por ce que li iors sestoit aparus. si se leuerent li cheualier qui estoient en cure & en pensee de ceste chose. si se vestirent & atornerent. Et quant il fu aiorne li rois se leua de son lit. Et quant il fu apareilles si vint a la chambre ou mesire Gauuain & lancelot [estoient] qui la nuit ieu ensamble. si trouua quil erent ia vestu & appareillie por oir messe. (*Queste*, p. 17)

When God willed that the darkness should pass and daylight appear, the knights who were troubled by these thoughts got up and dressed. When it was completely light the king got up, readied himself, and entered the room where Lancelot and Gawain had slept [He found] them dressed and ready to hear mass. (Burns, p. 9)¹⁰

In this example, the natural alternation of night and day is explicitly connected to God's grace. The narrative also draws a distinction between the different ways in which the King (who does not partake in the Grail quest) and the two knights (who are preparing themselves to enter this holy quest) experience time. While Arthur does not wake up until the sun is 'well advanced', dresses himself and then immediately goes to his knights (an eminently 'earthly' concern), Gawain and Lancelot arise and prepare themselves for mass, setting their thoughts on the Christian trials to come. Through relating the human experience of the passing of time with reference to the sunrise and sunset to the religious offices celebrated at that hour, the *Queste* organises the Arthurian *aventures* according to measures of both natural time and the eternal time of God.

The opening lines of Chrétien's *Perceval* draw the audience's attention to the importance of lineage and the passing of time. The prologue to the tale begins with the warning that

Qui petit seime petit qui aut
Et qui auques recoillir viaut
En tel leu sa semence espande
Que furit a cent doble li rande,
Car en terre qui rien ne vaut
Bone semence seiche et faut. (*Perceval*, ll. 1-6)

¹⁰ In the *Sankgreal* Malory omits the emphasis placed on significance of sunlight to the break of the day, and instead writes 'And as sone as hit was day the kynge arose, for he had no reste of all that nyght for sorow. Than he wente unto sir Gawayne and unto sir Launcelot that were arysen for to hyre masse' (p. 523).

[He who sows sparingly, reaps sparingly, but he who wishes to reap plentifully casts his seed on ground that will bare him fruit a hundredfold; for good seed withers and dies in worthless soil. (Kibler, p. 381)]

Although Chrétien then applies this moral to himself, the romance that he is to recount, and his intended audience, Count Philippe de Flandres, the warning also has a clear application to Perceval himself. The importance of biography and lineage to the narrative of *Perceval*, noted by Wolfzettel, is enhanced by an early explanation of Perceval's ancestry. Perceval's mother tells him that

N'ot chevalier de si haut pris
Tant redoté ne tant cremu,
Biauz filz, com vostre peres fu
En totes les illes de mer.
De ce me puis je bien vanter
Que vos ne descheez de rien
De son lignaige ne do mien,
Que je sui de ceste contree,
Voir, des meillors chevaliers nee. (*Perceval*, ll. 388-396)

[there was no worthier knight, no knight more feared or respected, fair son, than your father in all the Isles of the Sea. You can confidently boast that neither his lineage nor mine is any disgrace to you, for I too am from a knightly line – one of the best in this land. (Kibler, p. 386)]

Chrétien informs the audience that Perceval has an impressive chivalric ancestry at an early stage of the narrative. However, his mother fears for his safety, leading her to conceal all mentions of chivalric *aventure* from him, thus leaving him initially unable to fulfil his innate potential as a knight. At the opening of the text, then, Chrétien presents Perceval himself as an example of good seed sown onto worthless soil.

The significance that ideas of natural maturation will have in the narrative is reinforced by the opening of the tale itself, which begins with a reference to the time of year:

Ce fu au tand qu'aubre florissent
Foillent bochaische, pré verdisent
Et cil oisel an lor latin
Docemant chantent au matin
Et tote riens de joie enflame,
Que li filz a la veve dame
De la gaste forest soutaine

Se leva et ne li fu paine
Que il a sele ne meist
Sor un chaceor et preïst
Trois Javeloz et tot ensin
Ors do menoir sa mere issi (*Perceval*, ll. 67-78)

[It was in the season when trees flower, shrubs leaf, meadows grow green, and birds in their own tongue sing sweetly in the mornings, and everything is aflame with joy, that the son of the widow of the Waste forest arose, effortlessly placed the saddle upon his hunter and, taking three javelins, left his mother's manor. (Kibler, p. 382)]

This springtime opening is frequently used as the temporal setting for secular texts, one of the most famous examples of which can be seen in Chaucer's *General Prologue*. It carries associations of new growth, maturation, fecundity and new love. Chrétien draws upon these secular and natural images of growth and ripening to illustrate Perceval's age and position in life: like the buds which gradually unfurl to become leaves, Perceval enters the narrative at the point at which he is ready to mature and assume the office of knighthood. As Tether suggests, the repetition of words which emphasizes the senses mirror Perceval's initial immaturity.¹¹ At the same time, the reference to sowing seeds at the opening of the text alludes to the parable of the sower from Matthew 13. The dual threads of secular chivalric improvement and growing religious comprehension are important to Perceval's progression towards the Grail in Chrétien's text, and also in the Didot-Perceval and *Perlesvaus*. In each of these texts positive natural growth and a progression in religious understanding are depicted as mutually dependent processes. Perceval leaves the Waste Forest and his mother's house and travels, first, to Camelot to be knighted by King Arthur, and then back out into the Arthurian world, to be fully 'made a knight' through experience and knowledge of chivalric *aventures* and Christianity. It is through his various experiences that he begins to gather the knowledge and understanding necessary to fulfil his potential and achieve the Grail, a process suggested by the springtime opening of the text.

¹¹ Tether, 'Perceval's Puerile Perceptions', p. 228.

During this journey, references to the passing of time continue to be given in relation to the natural rhythms of diurnal and seasonal alternation, with specific attention paid to the movement of the sun. A particularly clear example of this can be seen in the description of Perceval's contemplation of the three drops of blood left in the snow by a wounded goose, discussed in Chapter One. Chrétien writes:

Percevaus sor les goutes muse
Tote la matinee i use,
Tant que fors des tantes issirent
Escuier qui muser lo virent,
Si cuiderent qu'il someillast. (*Perceval*, ll. 4145-4149)

[Perceval mused upon those drops of blood throughout the hours of dawn and spent so much time there that when the squires came out of their tent and saw him they thought he was sleeping. (Kibler, p. 433)]

After Perceval is challenged by Kay and Sagremor, and has overcome them both, the narrative reminds the reader of the sun, by affirming that

N'encor n'estoit mie anuiez
De son panser que molt li plot,
Et neporquant li solauz ot
Dos des goutes do sanc remises
Qui sor la noif erent assises,
Et la tierce aloit remetant. (*Perceval*, ll. 4356-4361)

[he was still not tired of his pleasing reverie, even though the sun had melted away two of the drops of blood that had lain upon the snow, and was then melting away the third. (Kibler, p. 435)]

In this description, the amount of time that has passed between Perceval's first finding the drops of blood and Gawain's eventual approach is measured in terms of the rising sun's effect on the snow. These references to the movement of the sun and the natural effects of heat on the snow reinforce the relationship between natural measures of time and Perceval's natural growth and progression to maturity throughout the narrative. Perceval is caught in contemplation until the right amount of time has passed for him to be able to turn his attention back to the world of chivalric adventure. Similarly, the reader can only assume that after his first failure at the Fisher King's castle, Perceval would have to wait until he had

matured before he would be able to go back and achieve the Grail (if the narrative was complete).

At the same time, however, Chrétien makes use of the liturgical temporal framework through references to the religious feast of Easter. Later in the narrative, when Perceval has tried and failed to achieve the Grail, the years he has spent in ignorance of God are marked by the note that

.V. foiz passa avris et mais
Ce sunt .V. anz trestuit antier,
Ainz que il entrast en mostier,
Ne Deu ne sa croiz n'aora. (*Perceval*, ll. 6146-6149)

[April and May passed five times – that is five full years – without his having entered a church or adored God of His cross. (Kibler, p. 457)]

Perceval's confusion and his lack of religious contemplation is presented as a lack of temporal comprehension. As the narrative explains, Perceval

[...] n'aveit nul espanz
De jor ne de nul autre tans,
Tant avoit en son cuer enui. (*Perceval*, ll. 6187-6189)

[was so troubled in his heart that he had no idea of the day or the hour or time. (Kibler, p. 458)]

Without an understanding of the religious significance of time, Perceval is unable to record how much time has passed. At this stage in the narrative, it is not that Perceval does not understand the significance of the liturgical calendar, but rather that he has forgotten it, further foregrounding the importance of memory. The point at which he is 'brought back to his senses' and reminded of the events of Good Friday is thus presented in the context both of a yearly return to the springtime season during which he left his mother's house, and the religious feast of Easter.

Easter had a particular importance in relation to methods of recording time to early medieval Christians. The fact that the date for the celebration of Easter moves each year in accordance with the lunar calendar meant that ensuring that people were celebrating Easter at

the same time of year required a reliable method of calculating dates. As Deborah Deliyannis notes,

as is well known, the calculation of the date of Easter was controversial in the early Middle Ages, and those who claimed to be doing it the ‘right’ way needed to have a way of disseminating the information so that the feast could be observed properly. The solution that was developed was to have the dates of Easter calculated for some period of time into the future, written on a table, and sent out to the churches of Europe.¹²

This need for a collective agreement about when Easter should be celebrated resulted in a wider interest in recording and measuring the passing of months and years. In Chrétien’s text, the use of Easter as a point of orientation for Perceval’s perception of time within the narrative reflects the significance of Easter as a time of rebirth and renewal. In the late Middle Ages Easter was also seen as the start of the new year. Perceval’s re-engagement with the Grail quest at Easter, indicated by his sudden temporal awareness following a period of disorientation, is thus further highlighted as the beginning of a new chance: Perceval is now ready to ‘try again’ and can begin his quest afresh. *Perceval* thus illustrates religious time through the natural measures of human experience with the natural and cyclical return to the springtime.

In contrast to the abundance of natural imagery given by Chrétien at the beginning of *Perceval*, the *Joseph d’Arimathie* opens with an account of salvation history, which connects the events of this first narrative to the virginal conception of Christ. The events of the narrative are therefore immediately situated in the context of Christian history. This marks an important shift in the significance attached to measuring time in the Grail narratives. As Katalin Halasz suggests,

beginning with Robert’s verse romance of the Grail, the eschatological perspective is also taken into account: the events that are recounted have a finality; human time is

¹² Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 5–22 (p. 7).

interpreted and revitalized by the end (in both senses of the word) and what comes thereafter – *joie parduable*.¹³

The repetition of the phrase ‘at this time’ throughout this early section reinforces the importance of a specific ‘past’ as a context for the narrative and reinforces the mutability of time. Mentions of the Grail connect the actions of Joseph of Arimathea to the Arthurian present. Thus, they become the ‘past of things present’, described by Augustine. The prose Trilogy combines eschatological time and human time by offering a clear record of the number of days that pass between *aventures*, but ensuring that this record can be traced back to the birth of Christ.

To further reinforce the connection between events in the Arthurian world and salvation history, the space between *aventures* is measured in terms of distance from religious celebrations. When Perceval reorders his temporal perception after his seven-year ‘madness’, for example, the narrative states that he remains with his uncle for two months, and then sets out ‘et cevauca tant parmi le forest que ce vint al witime jor de le Pentecoste’ (Didot-Perceval, p. 222) [‘and rode through the forest until the eighth day of Pentecost’ (Bryant, p. 147)]. The ‘vagueness’ that characterises romance time, the quality often ascribed to Chrétien’s romances, is replaced by a greater interest in recording the length of liturgical time that has passed throughout the narrative. The text provides frequent references to the number of hours and days that have passed between events, and the references to religious celebrations and services give this measurement a religious frame of reference.

The Arthurian use of religious ceremonies to orient the passing of weeks and months is mirrored on a micro-level by the number of references made to canonical hours, noted above. Lewis Mumford writes that ‘the monasteries [...] helped to give human enterprise the regular collective beat and rhythm of the machine; for the clock is not merely a means of

¹³ Katalin Halasz, ‘The Representation of Time and its Models in the Prose Romance’, in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (New York, NY and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 175–186 (pp. 178–179).

keeping track of the hours, but of synchronising the actions of men'.¹⁴ Similarly, in the Grail narratives references to liturgical time provide a temporal frame that synchronises the actions of the knights. Wright relates the 'tolling of the bells' to signal religious services to this synchronicity:

synchronising an event or activity by the tolling of the bells, was a means of imposing one time for all, an eternal time and space for a community to inhabit. It was the autonomous time of the monastery, the time allocated by rule. Beyond that was God's eternal time and the continuity of the round-the-clock monastic routine sought to imitate that ubiquity.¹⁵

In the *Didot-Perceval*, frequent mentions of the canonical hours mark the points at which actions take place and provide a measure for the lengths of journeys. Thus they synchronise the actions of the knights in a way comparable to the function of monastic bells, which synchronised the actions both of the monastic community and of medieval communities more generally.¹⁶ The fact that the knights frequently wake up, set off and encounter *aventures* at the same times ('prime' and 'nones' being those most frequently referenced) organises the seemingly random events of romance into a religious framework that would have been familiar to a medieval audience. These temporal references also make it possible to construct a linear chronology of events, the actions of the knights punctuated and measured by the regular rhythm of monastic life, chiming like the bells which signify the hour in the background of the narrative.

The idea that spiritual distance from God can result in temporal disorientation is also suggested in the *Queste* by the difference in the number of temporal references given in descriptions of each knight's journey. The *Queste* states, for example, that 'mesires Gauvain cheualcha des la pentecoste iusqua la magdalaine sans aventure trouer qui a conter' (*Queste*,

¹⁴ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilisation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1934), pp. 12–13.

¹⁵ Wright, 'Time, Consciousness, and Narrative Play', p. 52.

¹⁶ Chris Humphrey, for example, suggests that the bells at York minster 'provided a reference point for internal services and also seem to have featured as a point of reference for the wider public life of the town. For instance, in a set of ordinances regulating the Fishmongers guild from 1301, it was ordered that no fish was to be sold after vespers was struck at the church of St Michael on Ouse Bridge, until Prime was struck at York Minster the next day'. Humphrey, 'Time and Urban Culture', p. 111.

p. 105) [‘Sir Gawain rode from the time of Pentecost to the feast of St Mary Magdalene without having an adventure worth telling’ (Burns, p. 47)]. While the length of Gawain’s travelling is measured in terms of religious holidays, and thus retains a Christian frame of reference, his lack of *aventures* results in a lack of further temporal references. Even when Gawain and Hector travel together the text simply states that ‘lendemain sen partirent & se remistrent en lor chemin & chaulchoient lonc tans sans aventure trouer qui a conter face’ (*Queste*, p. 116) [‘the following day, they set out and rode for a long time without finding any adventure worth recounting’ (Burns, p. 52)]. As formerly discussed, it is Gawain’s lack of religious perception that prevents him from being able to interpret *aventures* using a form of spiritual sight, and his misperception of the religious significance of the journey that leads to a lack of *aventures* in the Arthurian landscape. Similarly, his choice to refuse confession and remain ignorant to the path of salvation offered by the Grail quest leads to a lack of temporal orientation. Not only does Gawain not perceive the relevance of salvation history and religious lessons to his life in the present moment, he is unable to position himself in any kind of time scheme.

Where temporal references are given for the journeys of more successful knights, the *Queste* combines canonical hours and the religious offices appropriate to certain times of the day with descriptions of human experiences of the passing of natural time. The time that Perceval spends in conversation with a demon disguised in the shape of a woman while on the island, for example, is marked both by the movement of the sun, and a reference to the canonical hour: ‘tant parlerent ensamble que miedis fu passes [& li eure de none auques aprochie . et lors fu li solaus caus & ardans [...]’ (*Queste*, p. 77) [‘They talked until afternoon, nearly until the hour of nones. As the sun shone down brightly [...]’ (Burns, p. 35)]. By placing the canonical hour next to a description of the sun, the *Queste* recreates the temporal experience of living between the natural rhythms of time experienced in the human

world, and the teleological eternity of the kingdom of God, replicated by the regular religious services of the monastery. By marking the days and *aventures* of the Arthurian knights through references to the canonical hours, the *Didot-Perceval* and the *Queste* organise the Arthurian *aventures* by a Christian temporal framework. At the same time, references to the natural passing of day and night tie this framework to a mundane experience of the passing of time.

The temporal references given in the *Morte Darthur*, however, take a different form, representative of the change in contemporary methods of measuring time in the fifteenth century. The growing use of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth and fifteenth century began the process of dissolving the relationship between monastic and daylight hours. The process was encouraged by the relatively quick acquisition of clocks by medieval monasteries, cathedrals and universities compared to urban organisations.¹⁷ As opposed to dividing the hours of daylight and hours of darkness by twelve, clock hours divided one cycle of daylight and darkness into twenty four equal hours.¹⁸ As mechanical clocks became increasingly popular in medieval communities, equal hours began to infringe upon diurnal hours as a method of organising daily monastic life. Chris Humphrey, for example, describes the effect that the introduction of a mechanical clock at St Mary's Abbey in York had on the times at which the eight offices of the day were to be celebrated:

By the late fourteenth century the times at which the abbey's daily round of services were celebrated were determined in part by clock time rather than in relation to daylight hours alone. For instance, the abbey's customary ordered that the office of prime, the first service of the day and traditionally celebrated at dawn, should begin when the clock struck seven at all times of year [...] The severing of the link between dawn and the first service of the day represents a crucial first step in the demise of a

¹⁷ Humphrey, 'Time and Urban Culture', p. 109.

¹⁸ This type of timekeeping was not unheard of before the fourteenth century. As Humphrey suggests, 'equal hours were clearly known about in the early Middle Ages, as shown for instance by wax candles marked with equally spaced intervals'. Humphrey, 'Time and Urban Culture', p. 110. However, before the fourteenth century temporal hours, as opposed to equal hours, were used both in monastic and secular environments as the primary method of measuring time.

traditional system of time-keeping that was based around the observation of religious services at the corresponding hours of daylight.¹⁹

The gradual process of measuring time in equal hours as opposed to temporal hours lead to a hybridisation of communal and day to day methods of recording time in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. By the 1460s, when Malory wrote the *Morte Darthur*, the temporal hours system had largely been replaced by the use of clock hours. Miriam Edlich-Muth notes that in Malory's *Morte Darthur* 'the concrete time references contained within [its] sources are removed or rephrased'.²⁰ I suggest that the removal of many of the references to the passing of time fits with the severance of the relationship between daylight and monastic hours. This can be seen most clearly during Perceval's *aventures* on the island, discussed in more detail in the last part of this chapter. The detachment of the two measures of time as the result of the rising popularity of the mechanical clock, means that this relationship was not as relevant to Malory's contemporary experience of telling time. Thus, the description of the passing time and rising sun given in the *Queste*'s description of Perceval's time on the island becomes simply 'and at that tyme the wedir was hote' (*Morte*, p. 710). Through omitting many of the references to the passing of time, Malory reduces the parallels between the daily routine of his fifteenth-century audience and the daily routine of the knights.

An examination of the ways in which time is recorded and measured in each of the Grail narratives requires an understanding of the way in which time was recorded at the point at which each text was written. The combination of references to the natural and seasonal passing of time with the regular rhythm of monastic offices situates the frame of temporal reference in the Old French Grail narratives in a religious context familiar to a contemporary

¹⁹ Humphrey, 'Time and Urban Culture', p. 110.

²⁰ Miriam Edlich-Muth, *Malory and his Eurpoean Contemporaries: Adapting Late Arthurian Romance Collections* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), p. 63. Edlich-Muth cites the example of Mellyagant's abduction of Guinevere, which Malory reduces from a paragraph in the French text to a single sentence and from which removes the references to the Christian holidays and times of year.

audience. This mixture of secular and religious references also reflects the position of the Grail narratives themselves in the medieval literary canon: neither wholly secular nor orthodoxly Christian, the Grail narratives make use of pseudo-biblical histories and stories to authenticate the ‘true’ spiritual lessons for which the Grail miracles stand. The Grail narratives thus occupy a space between orthodox religious literature and non-Grail romance narratives. Furthermore, the reference to religious holidays alongside the record of the number of days and months between each *aventure* establishes a temporal framework for each narrative, which carves a place for the Grail quest within salvation history and thus foregrounds the eternal significance of the Grail miracles.

The Interaction between Linear and Cyclical Temporal Structures

As discussed, critics of medieval literature have frequently noted the ‘timeless’ nature of many secular romance narratives. As Elizabeth Edwards argues, ‘the characteristic mood of romance is in part caused by the dilation of time which is governed by a monumental future still to come, *a venir*’.²¹ This ‘dilation of time’, described by Edwards, holds the romance world in a static and unchanging present. Between the moment at which the knight leaves Arthur’s court and that at which he returns, nothing at the court appears to have changed. The time frame given for the typical Arthurian quest, however, is surprisingly specific. In Chrétien’s *Yvain*, Laudine gives Yvain a year to pursue *aventures* with the other Arthurian knights before he must return to her (*Yvain*, ll. 2570-2578), while throughout the Vulgate Cycle, the knights make frequent references to the fact that ‘droite queste ne dure que . vn . an & vn iour’ (*Lancelot*, p. 270) [‘a proper quest lasts a year and a day’ (Lacy, p. 252)]. The pattern continues into later Middle English romances. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,

²¹ Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative*, p. 70.

to cite perhaps the most famous example, Gawain's *aventures* last just over a year, the two celebrations of Christmas and New Year forming the focus of the narrative.²²

In these single-hero Arthurian romance narratives, spatial and temporal structures are intrinsically interconnected in a manner which reflects of Bakhtin's description of the romance chronotope. The spatial structure of romance narratives, which sees the protagonist leave a specific geographical point (the court) to travel through a generic landscape of *aventure*, and then return to that same specified point a year later, is reinforced by cyclical nature of romance time. In the romance timescale, the knight leaves and returns to the court at the same time of year, and thus to the same seasonal conditions (and, as often as not, celebrations) which he left. This creates a gap in the chronology of romance time, in which the audience is told that a year has passed, and as such all of the characters, conflicts and events are a year older, and yet nothing at the court appears to change: in many cases the knight could almost have left the hall and returned immediately. Bakhtin notes a similar temporal gap in Greek romances:

in this type of time nothing changes: the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings do not change, people do not even age. This empty time leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing. This [...] is an extratemporal hiatus that appears between two moments of real time sequence.²³

The 'extratemporal hiatus' described by Bakhtin characterises the time pattern prevalent in romance narratives. Chrétien's (non-Grail) romances have often been argued to exemplify this structure of time. As Elspeth Kennedy notes,

Chrétien's romances have often been treated as ahistorical, suspended in time and space, with the main emphasis being on the adventures of the individual hero and little direct link being made with the progress of events in Arthur's reign.²⁴

²² The passing of the year itself is given through a brief description of the changing of the seasons which begins 'Forthi this Yol overyede, and the yere after,/ And uche sesoun serlepes sued after other' (ll. 500–501). The text then gives a thirty-four line description of the natural conditions brought about with each season, while the account itself is framed by references to the religious festivals of 'Crystenmasse (l. 502), 'Lentoun' (l. 502), and 'Meghelmas' (l. 532). As in Chrétien's *Perceval*, then, the natural alternation of the seasons is describe as operating within the Christian temporal framework.

²³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 91.

²⁴ Elspeth Kennedy, 'Intertextuality between Genres in the Lancelot-Grail', in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 71–90 (76).

In many Arthurian narratives, then, a gap appears to exist between the eventful year experienced by the protagonist, and the static time of the court. The cyclical temporal structure, accentuated by the seasonal alternation and physical yearly withdrawal from and return to the court, characterise this empty time prevalent in the romance chronotope.

In the long Arthurian cycles, however, the cyclical structure is complicated through the insertion of this empty time into the historical framework provided by chronicle accounts of Arthur's life, reign, and death.²⁵ The simultaneous existence of linear and cyclical time patterns creates a timescale that seems to progress forwards historically, but not biographically. As such, in the Vulgate Cycle, although the years following Arthur's coronation are filled with a variety of *aventures*, and temporal references mark the months and years that have passed with some precision, none of the characters appear to age. As Bakhtin argues of 'adventure time', 'all the days, hours, minutes that are ticked off within the separate *aventures* are not united into a real time series, they do not become the days and hours of a human life'.²⁶ This can also be seen in Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Towards the end of the text, for example, Arthur fights Mordred with no less vigour than he shows with his earlier fights with the Emperor Lucius. In describing this final battle Malory writes that

never syns was there seyne a more dolefuller batayle in no Crysten londe, for there was but russhynge and rydyng, foynynge and strykyng, and many a grym worde was there spokyn of aythir to othir and many a deadly stroke. But ever kynge Arthure rode thorwoute the batayle of sir Mordred many tymes and ded full nobely, as a noble kynge shulde do. (*Morte*, p. 922)

Not only is this battle depicted as particularly grievous, but Arthur himself is depicted as the ideal combatant king, delivering blows and leading the battle with the vigour usually reserved for youth.

²⁵ For an account of the way in which romance and chronicle elements interact across the different Grail narratives see Kennedy, 'Intertextuality between Genres in the Lancelot-Grail', pp. 71–90.

²⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 94.

Bakhtin's analysis of the 'adventure-time' of Greek romance novels thus provides an illustration of the ways in which linear and cyclical temporal patterns are able to interact to combine progressive and static temporal structures in a single narrative. To emphasise the difference between these simultaneously extant temporal patterns, Bakhtin draws a further distinction between time as an entity and time as measured from 'inside' the narrative timescale. From the inside, 'adventure-time'

is composed of a series of short segments that correspond to separate adventures; within each such adventure, time is organized from without, technically. What is important is to be able to escape, to catch up, to outstrip, to be or not to be in a given place at a given moment, to meet or not to meet and so forth. Within the limits of a given adventure, days, nights, hours, even minutes and seconds add up, as they would in any struggle in any active external undertaking.²⁷

Bakhtin's analysis explains the way in which two seemingly contradictory time patterns can coexist within the same narrative, illustrating a temporal structure similar to that seen in the romance cycles. Frank Brandsma notes a similar tendency to record time in the Vulgate Cycle:

the audience knows what time of day it is when an adventure announces itself, it is informed of the number of days a knight spends hospitalised or in captivity, and it is told how many days he roamed without meeting any adventures worth mentioning. Long-term appointments are made and kept meticulously.²⁸

As an entity, then, romance time is essentially cyclical, seeming almost to pause any kind of temporal progression within the Arthurian world and holding all of the characters in their prime. Simultaneously, within this 'timeless' construction, the precise calculation of days and months reinforces the linear temporal structure that presents the narrative as a history of Arthur's reign.²⁹

The emphasis placed on calculating dates and times is related to the importance of lineage, an important characteristic of the Grail chronotope. There are two different types of

²⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 91–92.

²⁸ Brandsma, *The Interlace Structure of the Third Part of the Prose Lancelot*, p. 75.

²⁹ The precise calculation of days and months passed is also important to the *Merlin* section of the Trilogy, as it is the written account of the amount of time measured between Merlin's conception and birth that allows his mother to be found innocent of the charges brought against her.

lineage that interact with one another: familial ancestry and textual lineage. By the phrase ‘textual lineage’ I am referring to the relationship that exists between texts which narrate different versions of a given narrative.³⁰ While both of these elements do play a part in secular romance narratives, their importance is heightened in the Grail narratives.³¹ The lineages both recreate the linear elements of succession and time found within chronicle accounts, and highlight parallels between certain figures and events to recreate the cyclical structure of romance. This section will examine biological and textual lineages in the Grail narratives, to suggest that these two features of the Grail chronotope are used to create a fully interlaced model of time that is unique to this particular sub-genre of romance. This temporal interlacing suggests that the way to understand the lessons of the Grail miracles is to read across different time periods, rather than fitting the events into a purely chronological continuum. This kind of biblical parallelism subsequently illustrates the relevance and importance of these lessons to any given moment.

Just as the spatial characteristics that typify the mobile geography of the Grail narratives develop from the depiction of the Fisher King’s castle in Chrétien’s *Perceval*, so the importance of lineage and history is similarly developed from elements present in this first Grail romance. As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, references to natural growth and maturation at the opening of *Perceval* along with the inclusion of the early account of Perceval’s ancestry reinforce the importance of natural succession to Perceval’s innate chivalric ability. This emphasis on ancestry transforms the ‘ahistorical’ characteristics of Chrétien’s other Arthurian romances. As Richard Trachsler notes, in *Perceval*,

³⁰ The different amplifications and redactions of this narrative form a ‘textual lineage’, similar in structure to biological lineages. Therefore, the Didot-Perceval is a descendant of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, and the Vulgate Cycle is a descendant of the Didot-*Perceval*.

³¹ Biological lineage and ancestry is significant to the close of the Arthurian cycle, and the problem faced by Arthur about the conflict between Gawain and Lancelot. However, this problem belongs to the present moment, and the lineage does not find its significance through a detailed return through past generations.

[s]uddenly one finds the same characteristics as in the Cycle, as if the mere presence of the Grail and the theme of genealogical election inherent in it necessarily suggest [...] that Arthur's court and its values are nothing more than the universe the young knight must surpass.³²

Although Perceval is described as having the innate chivalric ability to overcome any secular *aventure* that he encounters, it is not until he has fully learned to understand Christian history and lives by a Christian routine that he is able to achieve the Grail.

Unlike in Chrétien's other romances, *Perceval* is also located within a larger schematic chronology of the Arthurian world, shown as Perceval's mother relates the decline of his father to the unrest during the end of Utherpendragon's reign:

Apovri et desserité
Et essillié furent a tort
Li gentil home après la mort
Uter Pandragon, qui rois fu
Et pere lo bon roi Artu.
Les terres furent essilliees
Et les povres genz avilliees,
Si s'en foï qui foïr pot.
Vostre peres ce menoir ot
Ici en ceste foret gaste.
Ne pot foïr mais a grant haste
En litiere aporter s'an fist,
Qu'aillors ne sot ou s'en foïst. (*Perceval*, ll. 414-426)

[after the death of Utherpendragon, who was king and father of good King Arthur, the nobles were wrongfully impoverished, disinherited, and cast into exile. Their lands were laid waste and the poor people abused; those who could flee, fled. Your father had this manor here in this wild forest; he could not fell but he quickly had himself brought here in a litter, for he couldn't think of any other retreat. (Kibler, p. 386)]

The problems that feature at the end of Uther's reign cause Perceval's father to send his two older sons to serve King Escavalon and King Ban, and the two young men are killed in combat after receiving their arms. That we are specifically told that it is on their return to their home that the pair are killed in armed combat signifies a break in the cyclical romance pattern of withdrawal and return. This break suggests that Perceval's journey to find his arms,

³² Richard Trachsler, 'A Question of Time: Romance and History', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. by Carol Dover (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 23–32 (p. 27).

the story that becomes the quest for the Grail, would have been similarly devoid of a return, a feature which all of the later (and finished) Grail narratives amplify.³³ Two of the structural temporal elements of the Grail chronotope present in this first romance, genealogical succession and an interest in creating a comprehensible time scheme, are therefore interrelated.

Biological genealogy also provides a means of establishing a direct connection between Perceval and the Grail itself. In Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Fisher King (the keeper of the Grail) is Perceval's maternal uncle. The *Didot-Perceval* retains this emphasis on a familial ancestor, illustrating the importance of textual genealogy and historical origin. As in Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Fisher King (here called Alain le Gros) is Perceval's uncle. Both the Fisher King and Perceval, however, are also related to Joseph of Arimathea, the first keeper of the Grail, through Perceval's paternal ancestry. This emphasis on biological genealogy is replicated in the model of succession of the Grail keepers. As Wolfzettel notes, in the *Estoire*

instead of imitating the apostolic succession of the church, Joseph resorts to the aristocratic principle of lineage. Bron, who is the brother-in-law of Joseph [...] will be the future "*riche pescheur*" (Fisher King). His children will spread out as new apostles, and in particular his chaste son Alain will be the prototype of Galahad.³⁴

Thus, the succession of the Grail and the ancestry of the Grail knight are interconnected. The creation of this narrative history of the Grail thus provides a historical and religious origin for the Grail, as well as illustrating the way in which this origin interacts with the genealogical succession of the true Grail knight, Perceval himself.

In the Vulgate *Queste*, the relationship between historical and genealogical succession is further amplified by the creation of Galahad. In the *Queste*, Lancelot's vision of the nine rivers that issue from Nascien's son's stomach mark the nine male descendants of Nascien's

³³ As discussed in Chapter Two, in *Perlesvaus*, Perlesvaus moves to the Grail castle, never to return or be seen from again, while in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* Galahad and Perceval both die in Sarras, and do not make a final return to the Arthurian court.

³⁴ Wolfzettel, 'Functions of the Grail Legend from Robert de Boron to the *Roman de Perceforest*', p. 94.

line, of whom Lancelot and Galahad are the final two.³⁵ While both knights have a genealogical connection to Nascien, one of the companions of Joseph of Arimathea, Galahad is further connected to Joseph of Arimathea directly through his mother's ancestry. In this text King Pelles, the guardian of the Grail, is Galahad's maternal grandfather. This provides Galahad with a connection to the Grail on both sides of his family.³⁶ Through creating a complex genealogical connection between the Grail hero and the first appearance of the Grail itself, each of the Grail romances establishes a connection between the biblical past and the Arthurian present.

This connection is reinforced by a series of *aventures* which act as exempla, signifying and paralleling Christian lessons, to be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter. Through creating connections between the events of salvation history and the characters and events of the Arthurian world, the Grail narratives highlight the significance of religious understanding to the present moment. In the prose Trilogy, the Vulgate *Queste*, and Malory's *Sankgreal*, the explanations of *aventures* and occurrences offered by Merlin and various hermits, priests, and other religious figures highlight the relevance of both the biblical and the Arthurian *aventures* to a contemporary audience.

As in my earlier discussions of space, the fact that the importance of biological succession is contained within the first Grail narrative and then amplified by each retelling of the Quest of the Grail is reinforced by the creation of a complex, and often fictional, textual genealogy. As discussed in Chapter One, claiming a textual source for a narrative is related to medieval concepts of originality. In the Grail narratives, however, the importance of sources and storytelling is further amplified by the number of different genealogies cited as sources. Robert de Boron cites the book dictated by Merlin and written down by Blaise as source for his Trilogy. References to Merlin dictating to Blaise bookend most of the significant

³⁵ For a full explanation of this dream see the *Queste*, pp. 96–98, and the *Sankgreal*, pp. 554–555.

³⁶ Both Chrétien's Perceval and the Galahad of the *Queste* are related to the keeper of the Grail through their mother's biological ancestry, rather than their father's.

aventures in the text. The Vulgate Cycle makes use of a complicated array of textual genealogies. On one hand, the audience is informed that the knights' *aventures* are recorded by scribes at the court once the knights have returned. On the other hand, the text also refers to Robert de Boron as a source for the text, and Walter Map as an (impossible) author. As E. Jane Burns suggests,

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.' [...] *Auctoritas* has here become a kind of secular inter-textuality.³⁷

These textual genealogies perform the same structural function as the biological genealogies, creating a direct link between the events of the biblical past, the Arthurian present, and the ever changing present moment of a contemporary audience. The mixture of references to the biblical past alongside the Arthurian present also allows the Vulgate Cycle to provide its own authentication for its version of the Grail story.

E. Jane Burns argues that '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'.³⁸ The authors of the Vulgate Cycle combine accounts of the recoding of the oral testimonies of the knights with references to Robert de Boron and other medieval authors, and the fictional account of Walter Map's creation of the narrative to create a complex and interlaced source of authority for the text.³⁹ For the purpose of this discussion, the texts on which I will focus are the fictional written sources which are claimed to be recordings of first-hand experiences of the *aventures*. There are two examples of this kind of source: the book that Merlin dictates to Blaise in the prose Trilogy, and the written record

³⁷ E. Jane Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), p. 41.

³⁸ For an account of the way in which the Vulgate Cycle invokes different sources see E. Jane Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985).

³⁹ Similarly, the Post-Vulgate Cycle opens by citing Robert de Boron as a source for its text, although it is clear that the authors are not merely translating Robert's text as it suggests.

created by the clerks who document the knights *aventures* in the Vulgate Cycle. As discussed in my first chapter, a testimony reliant on visual experience was one of the ways in which a miracle or marvel could be formally authenticated.⁴⁰ The author(s) of the *Queste* create a clear illustration of this process in their description of the clerks recording Gawain, Hector and Lancelot's *aventures*, cited in the introduction to this thesis. By claiming an experiential source for these romances, suggesting that they were first told and recorded by a person who witnessed the events, the *Queste* creates a first fictional source of origin and authority for their narratives.⁴¹

In *Merlin* the significance of recording of events experienced first-hand is complicated by the figure of Merlin. Merlin himself acknowledges the importance of experiential testimony, and relates this directly to difficulties surrounding the idea of authority faced by the book he dictates to Blaise.⁴² Merlin begins his narrative account by explaining the love between Christ and Joseph of Arimathea, and then explaining the events of his conception. This explanation marks the point at which the narrative past catches up with the present moment. Merlin then tells Blaise that,

Toz jorz mains sera ta poine et ton livre retraitr et voluntiers o pourroit ce donc estre voirs que hom se pouiz en toz leus. Mais il ne sera pas en auctorité, por ce que tu n'iespas ne ne puez estre des apostoles, car li apostole ne mistrent riens en escrit de Nostre Seignor qu'il n'eussent veu et oï, se ce non que je te retrai. Et ansi com jhe sui obscurs et seraivers cels cui je ne me voudrai esclarcir, ansis sera tes livres celez et poi avenra que nus en face bonté. (*Merlin*, p. 75)

⁴⁰ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 558–559.

⁴¹ A secular example of a fictional textual source being used to authenticate a narrative can also be found in the unnamed 'British book' of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. In this text the fictional source claimed by Geoffrey is used to authenticate the more fabulous elements of the narrative. Lewis Thorpe, trans., *The History of the Kings of Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). Similarly, the Grail narratives rely upon the authentication of visual testimonies contained within fictional textual sources as a source of authority for their accounts of religious events not contained within orthodox accounts of biblical history.

⁴² This is the second time that the prose Trilogy defends its authority and truth in the face of its obvious problem, in being excluded from orthodox histories of the Christianity. The first example is in *Joseph d'Armathie*, in which the audience is told that 'of [Joseph of Arimathea's] imprisonment nothing is said by the apostles or those who established the scriptures, for they knew nothing about Joseph except that, because of his affection for Christ, he had asked to be granted his body. Some of the apostles did hear of Joseph's disappearance, but they did not speak of it, since they committed nothing to the scriptures except what they had seen or heard themselves; and having seen and heard nothing of Joseph they had no wish to write about him – and they did not want his disappearance to make people uneasy about the faith, but such fear is wrong, and Our Lord says why when he speaks of the false glory of the world. Joseph stayed imprisoned for a long time' (p. 23).

[For evermore men will tell of your work and your writings, though your book will have no authority, for you are not and cannot be an apostle; and the apostles write about Our Lord only what they'd seen and heard themselves, but you're writing nothing from experience – only what I've told you. Just as I am a figure of secrecy, and always shall be to those I do not choose to enlighten, so shall your book remain a mystery and few will recognise its wonders. (Bryant, p. 62)]

In this explanation, the prose Trilogy acknowledges both the centrality of experiential accounts to religious testimony and provides an explanation for one of the central problems of the Grail narratives: their lack of a place in the orthodox biblical and religious history. This fictional genealogy further interacts with other textual sources given for each text. The text's mention of Chrétien's *Perceval* indicates a recombination of different contemporary sources. Merlin's discussion with Blaise about the recording of his prophecies also draws upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini* (c. 1130) as a source of the Grail narratives. At the same time, his reassurance that these books of prophecies differ from the book he writes with Blaise – because 'they will only record what has already happened' (Bryant, p. 88) – separates the temporal attributes of his account, thereby shown to be able to record events from the past and future simultaneously, from other textual sources.

The fictional record of the events in the Vulgate Cycle similarly interacts with other textual sources to create what Burns describes as a 'complex fictive genealogy' in which the oral tales of the knights and a series of textual and literary sources are combined. The Vulgate Cycle implies the connection between these oral accounts and different written sources through the reference to the storage of this fictional manuscript in the library at Salisbury. At the end of the *Queste*, the narrative states that:

Quant il ot mangie li rois fist venir les clers qui metoient en escrit les auentures as chauliers de laiens . et quant bohort ot contees les auentures del [saint] graal teles comme il les auoit veues . si furent mises en escrit & gardes en labeie de salesbieres dont maistre gautiers map les traist a faire son liure del saint graal por lamor del roi henri son signor qui fist lestoire translater du latin en franchois. (*Queste*, p. 198)

[after they had eaten the king summoned the clerks who were putting into writing the adventures of the knights at court. When Bors had recounted the adventures of the

Holy Grail, as he had seen them, they were recorded and kept in the archive at Salisbury. Master Walter Map withdrew them to write his book about the Holy Grail, for the love of his Lord King Henry, who had the story translated from Latin into French. (Burns, p. 87)]

The account of the way in which the stories and miracles of the Holy Grail are recorded and preserved connects the biblical past (contained within the explanation of miracles within the quest) to the Arthurian past, the medieval present, and the implied present of future readers. The inclusion of Bors telling the *aventures* of the Grail ‘teles comme il les auoit veues’ [‘as he had seen them’] emphasises visual experience as the primary mode of authoritative testimony. As Walter Map had died before the Vulgate Cycle was composed, he could not be the real author of the cycle. That, however, does not matter to the fictional historical succession created by the author(s) of the cycle. The creation of a fictional but uninterrupted textual genealogy for the stories of the *Queste* provides a source of authority that is protected by the lack of a historical hiatus in its preservation. The narrative accounts exist in an unbroken chain of texts from the moment in which they first occur to a present that is constantly changing.⁴³ This both authenticates the narratives and connects the lessons of the Grail to a present-day audience, which further marks their eternal significance.

Katalin Halasz suggests that ‘in the intellectual context of the period, elucidation most often means a return to origins’.⁴⁴ The biological and textual ancestries described in the Grail narratives interact with one another to create a model of time that uses both the linear elements of chronicle texts and the cyclical structure of romance. Through creating lines of unbroken biological succession between the first keeper of the Grail and the successful Grail knight in the Arthurian present, the narratives illustrate a linear conception and explanation of

⁴³ Deliyannis suggests that ‘there were two parts of a [medieval] historian’s task: first he had to work out a chronological structure by which he could organise his work, using whatever dates he felt relevant: and second, he had a figure out how information from his sources fitted into his chronological time scheme’. Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 14. The authors of the later Grail narratives performed a similar role as that of the medieval historian, creating the temporal structure for their narratives through a search for the Grail’s origin.

⁴⁴ Halasz, ‘The Representation of Time and its Models in the Prose Romance’, pp. 175–186.

the Grail's movement across time. The parallels drawn between the successful Grail knight and Christ also draw this linearity into a cyclical structure, through which the Arthurian present and the biblical past are connected. As Burns argues,

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.⁴⁵

The intervening years between Nascien and Galahad become, like the 'extratemporal hiatus' described by Bakhtin, time which leaves no significant traces. Although figures such as King Mordrain in the Vulgate Cycle have aged, they remain in a preserved state of life until Galahad, the ender of *aventure*, arrives. Galahad's arrival allows King Mordrain to pass from a state of miraculously preserved temporality into the eternity of death. The textual genealogies create a similar structure in which linear and cyclical patterns interact. In the Vulgate Cycle, the description of the recording of the knights' oral testimonies and the (fictional) account of Walter Map's translation of this manuscript act as two temporal markers for the indefinite period of time during which the manuscript was supposedly stored at Salisbury, creating a further textual 'extratemporal hiatus'. The references to other texts that each of the Grail narratives make illustrate a process of writing forwards and creating a new legend, by looking back to past sources as a source of authority. This is a common medieval strategy for creating a sense of authority. For example, Geoffrey of Monmouth, the first author to record the Arthurian story in a written text, opens the *Historia Regum Britanniae* with a reference to a purported source for his work:

*Walterus Oxenefordensis, uir in oratoria arte atque in exoticis hystoriis eruditus, quondam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum qui a Bruto primo rege Britonum usque ad Cadualadrum filium Caduallonis actus omnium continue et ex ordine perpulcris orationibus proponebat. Rogatu itaque illius ductus, tametsi infra alienos ortulos falerata uerba non collegerim, agresti tamen stilo propriisque calamis contentus codicem illum in Ltinum sermonem transferre curauit.*⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Burns, *Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Michael D. Reeve, ed., and Neil Wright, trans., *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Briton* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. 5.

[Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the rhetorical arts and in foreign histories, brought me a very old book in the British tongue, which set out in excellent style a continuous narrative of all their deeds from the first king of the Britons, Brutus, down to Cadualadrus, son of Caduallo. Though I have never gathered showy words from the gardens of others, I was persuaded by his request to translate the book into Latin in a rustic style. (p. 4)]

To progress forwards on the Grail quest, the knights must travel backwards in time, and fully comprehend the religious lessons signified by the *aventures* through an understanding of biblical history.

Grail Time: Manipulations of the Past, Present, and Future

In the Grail chronotope, the way in which time is recorded and referenced, alongside the concision of linear (chronicle) and cyclical (romance) structures, creates a temporal system which situates itself between the reality of the passing of time according to human experience and the perceived eternity of religious time. The connection between the biblical past and the Arthurian present, clearly illustrated in the biological succession of the successful Grail knights, and the suggested textual succession of the legend itself, is further accentuated by a complex interaction between episodes from the past, present and future. This interaction breaks down the distinctions between different time periods, and thus highlights the importance of the religious lessons to the constantly changing present moment.

Rhiannon Goldthorpe argues that literary narratives are able to

combine the linear chronology of [their] purely episodic elements with a new dimension deriving from a sense of closure and totality, whereby the so-called ‘natural’ order of time is reversed, and, in retrospect, events and episodes are seen not as having occurred in simple succession, but as having been ordered in relation to that end.⁴⁷

Goldthorpe’s description of narratives’ ability to place events outside of a chronological continuum is particularly relevant to the Grail romances, in which episodes from the biblical

⁴⁷ Rhiannon Goldthorpe, ‘Ricoeur, Proust and the Aporias of Time’, in *On Paul Ricoeur – Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 84–101 (p. 86).

past, Arthurian past, and Arthurian present are reordered to highlight their relevance to one another. This reordering enables a symbolic reading of the *aventures* that points both the knights towards achieving the Grail. This section will look at the ways in which the narratives manipulate connections between the past, present, and future, retaining a central focus on the Vulgate *Queste* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*. Although the two narratives do share similarities, which are common to the Grail narratives collectively, the way in which each describes connections between the biblical past and Arthurian present foregrounds their individual conceptualisations of the Grail.⁴⁸ The author(s) of the *Queste* narrate biblical and Arthurian episodes alongside one another to remove the story of the Grail from any single historical context, and thus highlight its eternal relevance. Malory, on the other hand, creates a series of connections between different events within the *Morte Darthur*, creating a place for the story of the Grail legend within his Arthurian temporal framework.

Before addressing these texts in detail, however, it should first be noted that it is from the figure of Merlin in *Merlin* that the complex relations between the past, present and future stem. In the *Merlin* section of the Trilogy, the conditions of Merlin's conception are described as creating his unique ability to see the past and future simultaneously. As Merlin explains, his demonic father 'a soufert que ail or sen et lor memoire des choses qui sont faites et dites et alees [...] et Nostre Sire m'a doné tant de sa vertu que je sai les choses qui sont a avenir' (*Merlin*, pp. 68-69) ['bequeathed to me the power and intelligence to know everything that has been said and done [...]. And Our Lord has granted me the knowledge of things to come' (Bryant, p. 60)].⁴⁹ This ability means that Merlin is able to see connections

⁴⁸ Such similarities include the importance of ancestral and textual succession, suggested in the discussions of Galahad's lineage, and the frequent references Malory makes to his sources.

⁴⁹ The *Queste* includes a similar explanation of Merlin's conception in which Merlin explains that 'Te uoel que tu saces & croies que ie sui fils a . j . anemi qui engigna ma mere . & saces que tel manière danemi ont a non esquibedes & repairent en lair . & diex a souffert que iaie lor sens & lor memoire si sai les choses qui sont faites & dites & alees [...] Et nostre sires qui soffri & uaut que ie eusse cee n memoprie par la bonte ma mere & por sa sainte uraie repentance & por la penitence que cis preudoms qui chi est encharga & por sa sainte uraie repentance & por le commandement de sainte eglise quele crut ma diex doune tant de uertu que vie sai les choses que a uenir sont'. H. Oskar Sommer, *Lestoire de Merlin* (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of

between the biblical past, and the Arthurian ‘present’ and ‘future’ simultaneously. As Merlin dictates his book to Blaise, the distinctions between past, present and future, temporality and eternity, begin to blur. Wright describes eternity as ‘the perfect state of being, allowing simultaneous possession of yesterday, today, and tomorrow’.⁵⁰ As opposed to remaining in three distinct temporal categories, Merlin’s possession of the knowledge of all time transforms the past, present and future into the past of things present, the present of things present, and the future of things present, as described by Augustine.⁵¹ It is this ability which, as discussed in the last section of this chapter, differentiates the book created by Merlin and Blaise (and thus the Grail narratives attributed to Robert de Boron) from other narratives that record his prophecies. Thus, Merlin’s position of knowing everything that has happened and everything that is to come provides a source of authority for the narrative, and the fictional book created by himself and Blaise answers the problem of transmitting knowledge and information across different time periods.

Merlin’s omniscient temporal position in the Trilogy and the Vulgate Cycle is mimicked by the narrative voice of the texts themselves. The Vulgate Cycle foregrounds the thematic centrality of the Grail by referencing the Grail quest and figures associated with it in earlier parts of the cycle. The first Book of the *Lancelot*, for example, refers to the tomb of Leucan, a nephew of Joseph of Arimathea, while in the second book Gawain compares the quest to find Lancelot with the quest of the Grail: ‘qui ore voldra entrer en la plus haute queste qui onques fust apres celi del graal si viegne apres moi’ (*Lancelot I*, p. 226) [‘whoever wishes to embark upon the noblest quest that ever was after that of the Grail, let him follow

Washington, 1908), p. 17. [‘I want you to know and believe that I am the son of a devil who ensnared my mother. Know also that one kind of devil is called incubi, and they live in the air. God allowed me to have their intelligence and their memory, so I know all things that are done, said, and past [...] And Our Lord has permitted and wills me to have this in my memory because of my mother’s goodness. And because of her holy and true repentance, the penance that this worthy man imposed on her, and the commands of Holy Church which she believed, God has given me such power that I know the things that are to come’]. Rupert T. Pickens, trans., ‘The Story of Merlin’, in *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle, Book I*, ed. by Norris J Lacy (New York, NY: Garland, 1993), pp. 167–423 (p. 175).

⁵⁰ Wright, ‘Time, Consciousness, and Narrative Play’, p. 4.

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 234.

me' (Lacy, p. 126)]. Gawain's speech suggests a foreknowledge of the Grail quest, despite the fact that the knights are some way from its opening. Throughout the third Book of *Lancelot* references to the Grail legend increase in frequency as Lancelot encounters Simeon's tomb, and then first Gawain and later Lancelot and Bors visit Corbenic and witness the Grail procession. The *aventures* of the *Lancelot* are explained in relation to their relevance to the Grail and the Grail quest.

The interconnected nature of the past, present, and future suggested by these references to the Grail throughout the cycle is replicated by the order in which the books of the Vulgate Cycle were written. Despite narrating chronologically earlier events, the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* were composed after the three books of the *Lancelot*, *Queste del Saint Graal* and *La Mort Artu*. Although the addition of the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* means that the cycle replicates the structure of the prose Trilogy, it also emphasises the importance of returning to the origins of the Grail as a means of substantiating the truth of the legend. At the same time, this composition illustrates a further example of the ways in which linear and cyclical temporal structures interact to transcend models of progressive time. Lee Patterson argues that Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* 'was by definition available to a meditation upon the nature of history', the context of which was,

initially, the contest between Augustinianism, with its supervening transcendentalism, and the late medieval counter impulse to preserve and create a secular historiography. The linked genres by which this secular tradition could be carried out were legendary history and romance.⁵²

The completed Vulgate Cycle represents this kind of interaction between Augustinian 'transcendentalism' and secular historiography. The entire cycle tells the linear history of the Grail, the overarching significance of which casts the secular quests of Arthur's reign as a repetitious cycle of meaningless acts. The way in which the *Queste* depicts the relationship between the linear structure of the pseudo-religious history and the cyclical and secular

⁵² Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 84.

Arthurian quests presents the spiritual lessons of the Grail as transcending the temporal boundaries of progressive time.

Just as Merlin is able to connect events from the past and present through his knowledge of both times, the *Queste* narrates events from the Arthurian present and the biblical past alongside one another to illustrate the relationship between the two eras. It is through this relationship that the knights and the reader can correctly interpret the *aventures* of the Grail. Burns suggests that in the Vulgate Cycle, ‘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 as thematic analogues’.⁵³ Furthermore, just as the thematic analogues interact with one another, the distinction between the three different historical eras is broken down in many places, as the hermits combine references to all three in their interpretation of the *aventures*, an example of which is discussed below. This creates a further interlacing in the temporal structures of the Grail chronotope. As Halasz remarks,

if Eugène Vinaver could speak of *entrelacement* in regard to parallel intrigues, we can do as much in regard to temporal perspectives, even about a single thread of the narrative: the story advances while making detours all the while, now towards the past, now toward the future.⁵⁴

These temporal ‘detours’, which prevent the miracles and episodes of the narratives from being tied to any single historical context, imitate the geographical movements of the knights as they ride through the mobile topography of the Grail quest. This exemplifies Bakhtin’s suggestion that ‘time becomes artistically visible’ in the relationship between temporal and spatial features encapsulated by the chronotope.

Each *aventure* in the Grail quest is made up of a series of different temporal perspectives which are provided by different groups of people. The *aventures* of the knights,

⁵³ Burns, *Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ Halasz, ‘The Representation of Time and its Models in the Prose Romance’, p. 180.

for example, constitute the present, while the biblical past exists in the explanations of these *aventures* provided by the priests, hermits, and other religious figures. At the same time, the miracles themselves, the significance of which is found through interpreting the past and present alongside one another, signify eternal Christian truths, and thus transcend any model of progressive time. Bors' vision of the Pelican, which kills itself to save its young, provides an example of this type of temporal manipulation. Riding through the forest, Bors sees a large bird circling a rotten tree in which its young lie dead in their nest. When the bird sees that its young are dead

il se feroit dec son bec [ki ert agus & trenchans] en mi le pis si quil en faisoit le sanc saillir. & tantost comme il sentent le sanc chaut si reuinrent en uie li oiselet] & il moroit entreles. Et ensi prenent commencement de vie par le sanc del grant oisel (*Queste*, p. 120)

[it struck its breast so hard with its beak, that blood came forth. As the warm blood touched the young, they came back to life. Then the great bird died in their midst; their life had been restored by its blood (Burns, p. 54)].

Although Bors is unsure about the meaning of the *aventure* 'tant connoist il bien que cest semblance merueilleuste' (*Queste*, p. 120) ['he thought it must contain a wondrous significance' (Burns, p. 54)]. Later in the narrative, an abbot explains to Bors that 'li oisiaus senefie nostre creator qui forma lome a sa samblance' (*Queste*, p. 132) ['the bird represents our Creator, who made man in his image.' (Burns, p. 59)], relating this to the time at which Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden. He continues to explain that:

Li pou[h]in senefient luman lignage qui ert [adont] si perdus quil aloient tuit en ynfer aus[s]I bien li boin comme li maluais . si estoient tuit paringal en merite. Quant li fiex dieu vit ce si monta en larbre. Ce fu en la crois & fu ferus del glaiune desous la poitrine el coste destre si que li sans en issi. Et del sanc receurent vie li pouchin. [Ce vsont li vrai crestijen] cil qui ses oeures orent faites. Car il les osta dinfer ou toute mors estoit & est encore sans point de vie. (*Queste*, p. 132)

[The young birds represent human beings of that time who were all lost and condemned to hell, the good and bad alike, without consideration of individual merit. When the Son of God saw this, He climbed onto the tree, that is, on the Cross, and was stricken with the beak, I mean the tip of the sword in his right side where blood issued forth. From that blood the young birds who had done His work regained their

life. He drew them out of Hell, where every person was and still is without life. (Burns, p. 59)]⁵⁵

In this example, the events of the Arthurian present are explained through a return to the biblical past, and an exegetical explanation of Christ's sacrifice. At the same time, the parallel between the point of the spear and the beak of the bird blurs the distinction between the two times. From this point onwards, it is not altogether clear whether the abbot is referring to the events of the biblical past, or the Arthurian present, as he describes the miracle of the redemption of mankind through Christ's sacrifice. The reference to hell as remaining a place 'where every person was and still is without life' reinforces the idea that the lesson to be learned from the events of the Arthurian narrative and the biblical episode retain their relevance to a present audience. Burns argues that

the *Queste del Saint Graal* is perhaps the most problematic of the Vulgate romances because its episodic narrative line is accompanied by a second layer, an overlay of elaborate interpretation offered by resident hermits for each successive adventure.⁵⁶

I would extend this to suggest that the 'separate layers' often named as the literal and the allegorical, should be further understood in terms of temporal layers. As in the case of the example above, the events of the *Queste* are narrated first in the present tense of the Arthurian world, and then interpreted by an official religious figure via a return to the biblical past. It is through understanding the interaction between these different temporal layers that the allegorical reading of the narrative and the miracle itself is reached.

The *Queste* also makes use of a series of images which combine explanations relating to the biblical past and the Arthurian present to create a moment that transcends temporal progression. One of the clearest and most frequently discussed examples of this kind of

⁵⁵ In the *Sankgreal*, Malory makes the connection between Christ's sacrifice and the Grail itself clearer: 'oure Lorde shewed Hym unto you in the lyknesse of a fowle, that suffirde grete anguysshe for us whan He was putte upon the Crosse, and bledde Hys herte blood for mankynde; there was the tokyn and the lyknesse of the Sankgrall that appered afore you, for the blood that the grete fowle bledde reysyd the chykyns frome dethe to lyff' (p. 572). However, the omission of the reference to the point of the spear that pierces Christ's side and which reflects the beak of the bird, severs the connection between two times which seem to be both occurring in the present.

⁵⁶ Burns, 'Rereading the Vulgate Cycle', p. 55.

temporal reordering and manipulation concerns the explanation of the Round Table. In the *Queste*, Perceval's aunt explains to him that 'puis lauenement ihesu crist on teste . iij. Principaus tables el monde. La premiere fu la table ihesu crist ou li apostle managierent pluseur fois' (*Queste*, p. 54) ['since the time of Jesus Christ the world has seen three famous tables. The first was the table where Christ ate on several occasions' (Burns, p. 25)]. She then explains that a second table was created in memory of this first one: 'ce fu la Table del Saint Graal, dont si grant miracles fu[re]nt jadis neu en cestui pais au tens Joseph d'Arimacie' (*Queste*, p. 54) ['It was the Table of the Holy Grail, which was responsible for the great miracles that took place at the time of Joseph of Arimathea' (Burns, p.25)]. Finally, Perceval's aunt connects these two earlier Round Table fellowships with the knights of Arthur's Round Table through explaining that 'apres cele table fu la Table Roonde par le conseil Merlin, qui ne fu pas establie sanz grant senefiance.' (*Queste*, p. 57) [after the table of the Holy Grail there came the Round Table, established according to Merlin's advice and laden with symbolic meaning' (Burns, p. 26)]. The Round Table 'represents the world' (Burns, p. 26). The connection between these three fellowships and the repeated image of the three Round Tables locates the significance of the quest for the Grail outside of any single historical context. Instead, the Round Table stands for a value, or set of values, that transcend any temporal structure, retaining an eternal and universal significance. In the *Estoire dou Graal*, Christ explains the significance of the various religious articles to Joseph of Arimathea, stating that

Le pein, le vin y beneï,
 Et leur dis que ma char menjoient
 Ou pein, ou vin mon sanc buvoient;
 Ausi sera representee
 Cele taule en meinte contree.
 [...]
 Li dras ou fui envolepez
 Sera corporaus apelez.
 Cist veissiaus ou men sanc meïs,
 Quant de men cors le requellis,

Calices apelez sera.
 La platine ki sus girra
 Iert la pierre seneftee
 Qui fu deseur moi seelee
 Quant ou sepulchre m'eüs mis.
 Ice doiz tu savoir touz dis,
 Ces choses sun senefiance
 Qu'en fera de toi remembrance.⁵⁷

[I bless the bread and the wine, and those who eat my body in the bread, and drink my blood in the wine. The altar will also be represented in many countries. [...] The cloth in which I was wrapped will be called an altar cloth. The vessel in which my blood is poured when people receive my body will be called a chalice. The rock that was above me when I was put into the holy tomb and which was lifted [from me] will be signified by the paten. All this that I say is true: [I want] you to know that these things and their significance will be your remembrance.]⁵⁸

The three Round Tables described in the Vulgate Cycle act as an extension of the altars set up in memory of Joseph of Arimathea described in the *Estoire dou Graal*. The three fellowships described in the Vulgate Cycle (the disciples, the fellowship of Joseph of Arimathea and the knights of the Round Table), are thus connected in the eternal nature of their service to God, a service which transcends the progression of time.

A second image which transcends temporal structures, and provides a clear illustration of the unique interaction between spatial and temporal features in the Grail chronotope, is the Ship of Solomon. In the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* it is the rudderless boat, discussed in Chapter Two, that carries Galahad, Bors, Perceval and Perceval's sister to the ship of Solomon. Straight away, then, the Ship of Solomon is associated with a geographical remove from the Arthurian world. This geographical remove is accentuated by the explanation of the ship's origin provided by Perceval's sister, who informs the knights that as soon as it was complete, the ship 'maintenant empainte en mer & [s]en ala si grant oire quil e not perdu la veue en poi deure' (*Queste*, p. 161) ['slid down into the sea and sped away so

⁵⁷ William Nitze, ed., *Robert de Boron: Le Roman de L'Estoire dou Graal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1927), ll. 890–916.

⁵⁸ I have chosen to produce my own translation of this section as the published translation gives preference to a more poetic rendering of the passage.

quickly that [Solomon] soon lost sight of it' (Burns, p. 71)].⁵⁹ Until the arrival of Galahad, Bors, and Perceval, the ship is only otherwise found and boarded by Nascien and King Mordrain and King Parlan, otherwise known as the Maimed King.⁶⁰ As Douglas Kelly summarises,

the *Queste* links the three histories – biblical, Grail, and Round Table – by the invention of Solomon's ship, destined to sail the seas until reaching the last person of Solomon's line, Galahad himself.⁶¹

That it is only the key figures in the Grail succession who are able to find the Ship of Solomon, and pause its directionless sailing, further illustrates the relationship between faith and space discussed in Chapter Two.

The spatial distance between the Ship of Faith and the Arthurian world is paralleled by its intended function as a means of transmitting knowledge across a large temporal distance. Perceval's sister, assuming the role of religious figure, and thus providing the knights with access to events of the past, explains that when the Holy Ghost revealed to Solomon that Galahad will be the last of his ancestors, 'se Salemons qui tant auoit este pensis seust la verite de sa venue il ni eust pas si longement pense' (*Queste*, p. 158) ['Solomon thought about how he might communicate to the last man in his line that he, Solomon, who had lived so long before him, has known he was coming' (Burns, p. 70)]. As in the example of the book dictated by Merlin to Blaise, Solomon's wife suggests the creation of the ship as a solution to the question of how to transmit knowledge of different times to an audience constrained by a structure of progressive time. In this case, however, it is not through a written (and thus linear) genealogy that the information is transmitted, but instead through the creation of a series of symbolically charged objects. As Paul Vincent Rockwell argues, 'once

⁵⁹ In the *Sankgreal*, Malory redacts the explanation of the *Queste*, but retains the same meaning, writing that 'the shippe was anone shovyn in the see. He wente so faste that he had loste the syght of hym within a litill whyle' (p. 760).

⁶⁰ Again, although Malory redacts the explanation of each figure's experience with the ship, it is the same figures that find and enter it, giving Solomon's ship a similar significance in each text.

⁶¹ Douglas Kelly, 'Interlace and the Cyclic Imagination', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. by Carol Dover (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 55–64.

completed, the *nef* remains something incomprehensible to all, including its artisans. Only divine intervention can reveal its *senefiance*.⁶² Elizabeth Edwards writes that ‘the Grail Quest is a semiotic plot in that it involves the pursuit of signs’.⁶³ It is through understanding the relationship between past and present that the ‘signs’ of the Grail Quest become comprehensible to the reader and the knights.

Of all the objects on the Ship of Faith, the white, green, and red spindles, created from the tree of life, best signify the complex interrelationship between biblical past and Arthurian present. The creation of the spindles from the descendants of the tree of life during its three different incarnations both denote a large section of biblical history, and signify the lessons learned by each generation.⁶⁴ These lessons (initially learned by Adam and Cain) are shown to be particularly relevant to the experience of the principal unsuccessful knights in the Grail Quest. Lancelot, for example, is prevented from achieving the Grail, and indeed finding the ship of Solomon, by his adulterous love for Guinevere, illustrating the problems of lust and love in a post-lapsarian world. Gawain, on the other hand, blinded by his inability to perceive the true nature of the Grail Quest, unknowingly recreates the sin of Cain through killing many of his sworn brethren of the Round Table.⁶⁵

While the succession of the French Grail narratives chronologically builds up to the *Queste*’s reinterpretation of time and space, in the *Morte Darthur*, Malory severs the connections between different time periods and anchors his story of the Grail to the Arthurian time scheme. In the *Sankgreal*, for example, Malory omits the connection between the three Round Tables, instead only mentioning the last and writing simply that:

⁶² Paul Vincent Rockwell, “‘Je ne suiz mie soffisanz’”: Insufficiency and Cyclicity in the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle’, in *Transtexualities*, ed. by Sara Sturm Maddox and Donald Maddox (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), pp. 71–91 (p. 87).

⁶³ Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory’s Morte Darthur*, p. 103.

⁶⁴ See Sommer, *Queste*, pp. 151–161 [E. Jane Burns, trans., *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, pp. 67–69].

⁶⁵ The Post Vulgate cycle accentuates Gawain’s role as the unlawful slayer of his brethren. Just after the appearance of the Grail a maiden appears with a sword that will turn bloody when removed from its scabbard by the knight who will kill more of the Knights of the Round Table than any other knight on the Grail quest. When Gawain removes the sword from its scabbard it does indeed turn bloody, and Arthur asks Gawain not to go on the Grail quest.

Merlyon made the Rounde Table in tokenyng of rowndnes of the worlde, for men sholde by the Rounde Table undirstonde the rowndenes of the worlde, for by the Rounde Table is the worlde signyfyed by ryght. For all the worlde, crystenyd and hethyn, repayryth unto the Rounde Table, and whan they ar chosyn to be of the felyship of the Rounde Table they thynke hemselff more blessed and more in worship than they had gotyn half the worlde. (*Morte*, p. 700)

Malory's choice to omit the explanation of the connection between these three tables, fellowships, and times, and instead to explain the '*sanz grant senefiance*' of the Round Table as simply standing for the position that the Round Table occupies in the Arthurian world, destroys the timeless moment created in the *Queste*. Instead, the Round Table becomes a part of the temporal world of the Arthurian present. As Edlich-Muth suggests, 'the distance between 'pseudo-historical' time and the time of Arthur's court is increased'.⁶⁶ As this distance increases, the spatial and temporal distance between the events of the *Sankgreal* and the *Morte* as a whole is decreased. This has the effect of creating a continuous Arthurian history, in which the events of the *Morte Darthur* are depicted as a self-contained whole rather than finding their significance in biblical history.

A second indication that the ability to locate the Grail in the Arthurian world is an important part of the *Sankgreal* can be seen in Malory's choice to include the *Tale of Balyn and Balan* in the *Morte Darthur*. In the *Sankgreal*, as Galahad draws the sword from the stone, he refers to this tale, drawing a direct parallel between himself and Balyn as he says

now have I the swerde that sometyme was the good knyghtes Balyns le Saveaige, and he was a passynge good knyght of hys hondys; and with thys swerde he slew hys brothir Balan, and that was grete pité, for he was a good knyght. And eythir slew other thorow a dolorous stroke that Balyn gaff unto my grauntefadir Kyng Pelleans, the whych ys nat yett hole, nor naught shall be tyll that I hele hym. (*Morte*, p. 671)

In this speech Galahad's knowledge of the past events of Balyn in conjunction with his knowledge of the future and end of the Grail quest seems to parallel Merlin's position of temporal omniscience in *Merlin* and in the *Merlin* section of the Vulgate Cycle. It also explains the events of the Grail quest as a circular return to the beginning of Arthur's reign,

⁶⁶ Edlich-Muth, *Malory and his Eurpoean Contemporaries*, p. 76.

as opposed to the events following the death of Christ, as in the *Queste*. As with Malory's omission of the explanation of the three Round Tables, Galahad's reference to this earlier part of the *Morte Darthur* (events not recounted in the Vulgate Cycle) suggests that it is through a comparison between these different times and characters, the unhappy Balyn and the Christ-like Galahad, that the religious significance of the *aventure* can be understood. In the *Sankgreal*, Galahad's healing of the Maimed King's wound, initially caused by Balyn, and the restoration of prosperity to the Waste lands parallels Christ's redemption of mankind. This method of interpretation is similar to that required for an understanding of temporal manipulation of the *Queste*, but the times that are compared are different.

In Malory's text, the omission of many of the longer biblical explanations and the creation of links between the events of the *Sankgreal* and other parts of the *Morte Darthur* not found in the Vulgate Cycle suggest that Malory uses the secular Arthurian world to illustrate the Christian importance of the *aventures* and lessons of the Grail.⁶⁷ Halasz writes that:

At Corbenic, which is the secret centre of the narrative and the source of its meaning, everything converges, everything can be encompassed within a single experience – serpents killing one another, a harpist martyred by snakes, and that healing light that is the Grail, which fortifies the soul, restores courage and confidence, and inspires hope for a victory after death.⁶⁸

It is in the miracles of the Grail that the three different historical ages (the time of Christ, the time of Joseph of Arimathea and the time of the Arthurian knights) converge. Through showing the replication of events and figures across different time periods, the Grail narratives indicate the continuing relevance of biblical teachings. As the reader learns to

⁶⁷ The idea that Malory wanted to tie his explanation and descriptions of the Grail to a specific time can also be seen in his transformation of the religious elements of the Grail to reflect lay fifteenth-century religious practice. As Felicity Riddy writes, 'In his understanding of the Grail Malory has assimilated the monastic values of the *Queste* into the introspective and interior religion of the fifteenth-century gentry, with their private pews, their personal chapels and their cultivation of devotional texts which nurture the inner life'. Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 130.

⁶⁸ Halasz, 'The Representation of Time and its Models in the Prose Romance', p. 184.

interpret the *aventures* of the Grail alongside the knights, the interaction between different times suggests that the lessons described could be just as easily applied to their own time.

Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that the temporal references in the Grail quest seek to place the events of the Grail narratives in the space described by Wright as between ‘this world, the world of time, and the next world, the eternal kingdom of God’.⁶⁹ This is most obvious in the *Queste*, in which descriptions of the movements of the sun and detailed records of the amount of time between *aventures* create the superficial impression that time is passing in a linear and temporally realistic fashion. At the same time, objects such as the Ship of Solomon and its three spindles create connections between different time periods. Physical and mental progression on the quest relies upon an understanding of the present which can only be reached by a return to the past; this draws the religious lessons of the Grail into a moment that transcends the boundaries of temporal progression. Closing the space between the past, present, and future thus accentuates the eternal and eternally relevant lessons of the Grail, as significant to a contemporary audience as to the knights themselves. Throughout the different Grail narratives, the implications of this model of time remain unchanged.

As with the depictions of space discussed in the second chapter, the unique conceptualisations of time in the Grail quest are first seen in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, and are amplified in each of the successive Old French Grail narratives. Thus, the timeless and cyclical structure of romance, found in Chrétien’s other romances, is suggested by *Perceval*’s journey towards and away from Arthur’s court, while the explanation of *Perceval*’s lineage alongside reference to events outside the narrative emphasises a linearity to the narrative structure. The emphasis on lineage is amplified in the prose Trilogy, in which

⁶⁹ Wright, ‘Time, Consciousness, and Narrative Play’, p. 17.

Perceval's ancestry is expanded to provide a direct link between Joseph of Arimathea in the time of Christ, and Perceval himself in the Arthurian present. Similarly, the textual origin of the legend is explained through the story of the book created by Merlin and Blaise, and the record of the events kept by Joseph of Arimathea. Instead of forming distinct temporal categories, the past, present, and future appear alongside one another to highlight the didactic purpose of the narrative. In the *Queste*, this relationship between the biblical past and the Arthurian present is amplified once again by the exegetical explanations of the *aventures*, which retell the knights' journeys through biblical parallels and analogues. In these explanations, references to the events of the past and the events of the present lose their distinction, and the *aventure* is depicted as eternally significant.

The relationship between contemporary methods of recording time and the conceptualisations of time in the Grail narratives can be further seen through the effects of the growth in popularity of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The *Morte Darthur* not only separates references to the movement of the sun from references to the monastic service held at each time, but also contains a significantly reduced number of temporal references overall. Furthermore, as opposed to emphasising connections between the events of Christian history and the Arthurian present, Malory instead creates further connections between different parts of the *Morte Darthur*.⁷⁰ These connections emphasise the relationship that the events of the *Morte Darthur* have with one another, and reinforce an almost cyclical relationship between *The Tale of Balyn* and the *Sankgreal*. Jill Mann describes how the use of *The Tale of Balyn* 'makes the coming of Galahad into the completion of history; the wound opened up by Balyn is healed by Galahad'.⁷¹ In the *Sankgreal*, the past, present, and future of the *Morte* itself are important to an understanding

⁷⁰ This is not to say, however, that Malory omits all references to Christian history. Enough references remain in the *Sankgreal* to identify similar temporal features in this text as in the Old French Grail narratives, one example of which is the importance attached to Galahad's lineage.

⁷¹ Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', p.211.

of the *aventures*, marking a significant distinction between this text and the Old French Grail narratives. While the *Sankgreal* retains the biblical framework of the *Queste* in the use of religious holidays as temporal markers, the relationship between the events of Christian history and the Arthurian present is eclipsed by the relationship between Arthurian past and Arthurian present. Again, I argue that this does not reduce the religious significance of the *Sankgreal*, but rather that the comparison between different secular Arthurian times and characters allows the reader to interpret and understand the Christian significance of the events. This emphasis on manipulations of time as a way of foregrounding eternal religious truths characterises the model of history created in each of the Grail narratives.

Bakhtin argues that the type of temporal references given in a distinct type of narratives is suggestive of the need for a specific logic, unique to that genre of narratives. He suggests, for example, that in Greek adventure novels the type of temporal references given

provide [...] an opening for sheer chance, which has its own specific logic. This logic is one of random contingency [...], which is to say, chance simultaneity [meetings] and chance rupture [nonmeetings].⁷²

Bakhtin then argues that the logic which dictates the chance meetings of the characters is ‘a logic of random disjunctions in time as well’.⁷³ In this thesis I have suggested that depictions of sight and the process of seeing illustrate the knights’ progression in spiritual understanding, that it is this spiritual understanding that dictates the journeys and landscapes that the knights encounter, and that these conceptualisations of space and time are interrelated so as to collapse the distinction between different times and spaces, and illuminate the *aventures* of the Grail in an eternally significant light. I have also suggested that all of the features important to structural elements of the Grail narratives can be seen in some form in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, and are subsequently amplified in each retelling of the Grail legend. The use of similar methods of interpretation throughout all of the Grail narratives

⁷² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 92.

⁷³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 92.

suggests that this genre of text should be understood through the recognition of a unique and distinct 'Grail logic'.

Conclusion

This thesis has offered a new understanding of perception in Grail quest narratives, demonstrating the connections between sight, space, and time in Christian experience. It has analysed these elements of perception in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, *Joseph d'Arimathie*, *Merlin* and the Didot-*Perceval*, *Perlesvaus*, the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* and Thomas Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* in relation to medieval theories of logical argumentation. Unlike in non-Grail Arthurian romance narratives, everything the knights who seek the Grail see, each journey that they take, and even the formulations of time that dictate their experience respond to their (in)ability to perceive the divine truth of the Grail miracles: that is, every aspect of the knights' experience is interconnected. At the same time, the models of demonstrative and dialectic logic around which presentations of the Grail miracles are structured draw the reader into the same dialogue as the knights, with the similar aim of enhancing their spiritual perception. Understanding this process allows the reader to 'de-code' many of the seemingly random and idiosyncratic *aventures* of each Grail narrative. Each *aventure* becomes a focal point of learning to which the knights are encouraged to apply their Christian understanding. In turn, each the Grail quest narrative as a whole encourages the reader to apply a similar process of logic to their own lives and, by following the *aventures* of the knights, to make more positive and informed decisions than many of their literary counterparts.

Presentations of sight, space and time also illustrate a clear process of chronological amplification in the level of self-conscious detail through which the narratives discuss and explain the relationship between decisions made and an individual's experience of life. This amplification also highlights commonalities – such as the focus on individual perception – across the Grail narrative that connect Malory's *Morte Darthur* to each of his Old French predecessors. This thesis analyses the commonalities between the *Sankgreal* and the *Queste* against a context of earlier Grail narratives and thus contributes to recent scholarship that

sees Malory as a purposeful redactor of his sources. Malory draws not just upon the *Queste*, but upon literary traditions in the depiction of the Grail that can be traced back to Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*. As we have seen, the interaction between the Grail narratives is best conceptualised as a dialogue, in which each new retelling of the story draws upon an all-encompassing conceptualisation of perception that is apparent in each of the earlier narratives. This indicates that the *Sankgreal* can be more fully understood when read and analysed in comparison with other Grail narratives rather than just alongside other parts of the *Morte Darthur*.

The way in which these Grail quest narratives draw upon similar ideas and depictions of perception across time and genre also highlights the differences between the Grail quest narratives and non-Grail Arthurian romances. In non-Grail Arthurian romances, chance is the overriding organising principle of each quest and narrative. The knights' *aventures* are depicted as being accidents of chance and fate, and their outcome is directly related to a knight's physical prowess. In the Grail narratives, however, nothing happens by chance, because complex connections between sight, space, place, and time, connections that centre on ideas of Christian perception, dictate every aspect of a knight's experience. At the same time, the model of what constitutes a 'successful knight' is transformed as physical prowess is depicted as proportionate to a knight's level of Christian understanding.

Possible Worlds

This thesis has suggested that the *aventures* that the knights encounter function as examples of demonstrative argumentation, while the explanations provided by priests, hermits and other religious figures provide the dialectic counterpart. The result of this logical interaction can be further understood in relation to 'possible worlds theory'. As James Wade summarises, 'possible worlds theory' suggests that

in relation to the ‘actual world’ (the world where I am located and that I consider to exist independent of me), there exists an infinite number of possible worlds that are products of mental activities, such as dreaming, imagining, and storytelling.¹

Wade uses this theory to examine the place of fairies and otherworlds in medieval romance, but it can also be used to distinguish between the secular Arthurian world and the world of the Grail. At the opening of each Grail quest, the knights move from the secular Arthurian world (to be read in this instance as the knights’ ‘actual world’) and into a world that is a product of their ‘mental activities’. In the place of ‘dreaming, imagining and storytelling’, however, as discussed in this thesis, the mental activity that controls the distinct Grail journey that each knight will make is the improvement of his Christian understanding and the quality of his interaction with ‘Grail logic’. Marie-Laure Ryan argues that ‘it takes a doctrine of unicity of the actual world to formulate the paradox of fictional worlds in which forking paths are simultaneously taken leading to parallel realities’.² As each knight responds to the Grail miracles, the texts propose that there are a myriad of possible journeys and worlds into which they could pass, and their progression on the quest is entirely dependent on how successfully they can interpret the logic of the Grail *aventures*. The suggestion made in the *Morte Darthur* just after the end of the Grail quest regarding Lancelot’s potential to have succeeded clearly illustrates the possibility of alternate realities in the Grail quest: ‘had nat sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the quene as he was in semyng outewarde to God, there had no knyght passed hym in the queste of the Sankgreall’ (p. 611). A different path chosen and action taken could lead to an entirely different journey and a diverse range of outcomes.

¹ Wade, *Fairies*, p. 2. Ruth Ronan lists the ‘diverse purposes’ that possible worlds can serve: ‘they are used as a metaphysical term, as a concept of modal logic, as a way for describing epistemic accessibility and even as a metaphor in the philosophy of science denoting relationships between mutually exclusive paradigms’. Ruth Ronan, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 5.

² Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Introduction: From Possible Worlds to Virtual Realities: Approaches to Postmodernism’, *Style*, 19:2 (Summer 1995), 173–183 (pp. 174–175).

Part of the problem that the knights have in learning how to interpret the world of the Grail is that, at times, it appears to resemble the secular Arthurian world. The possible worlds theory suggests that:

these text-worlds may share affinities with, and therefore remind us of, our own actual world, or of other fictional worlds, but ultimately they contain their own unique entities (characters, objects, places) and organising principles (spatio-temporal relations and event and action sequences).³

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Perceval and Lancelot both struggle to decipher exactly how they should act when faced with situations that resemble the secular Arthurian *aventures* that form part of their ‘actual world’. Their choices determine the spatial and temporal construction of their individual Grail journeys. As in the description of possible worlds above, the Grail world also contains ‘unique entities’ (the Fisher King and the Grail castle, to name the most obvious) and a unique conceptualisation of its organising principles, as discussed in each of the chapters of this thesis. To disambiguate the expectations of the Grail world from those of the secular Arthurian world, and progress towards the Grail, the knights must learn to think according to this spiritual logic to ensure that they not only improve their Christian understanding but also engage with this way of interpreting the Grail miracles. As this thesis has shown, this process allows the knights to negotiate the unique organising principles of the Grail world and move in the desired direction towards the Grail.

In turn, the distinctive ways in which the ‘organising principles’ of each text are conceptualised highlight the importance of individual understanding, as well as chivalric prowess, to the reader. This focus on the relationship between individual understanding and physical progression is one thing that all of the Grail narratives addressed here have in common. In Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the quests for both the Grail and the bleeding lance are presented as personal quests (for Perceval and Gawain respectively) and the other Arthurian knights do not attempt to find these mysterious objects. Instead, they satisfy themselves with

³ Wade, *Fairies*, p. 2.

looking for each knight, and receiving news of their journeys and *aventures* from the envoys and prisoners that are sent back to the court. Again, in the *Didot-Perceval*, Perceval is the only knight who pursues the Grail, and the flexible geographical and temporal constructs of his quest are highlighted by Merlin's comment, cited earlier in this thesis, about how long it will take Perceval to reach the Fisher King's castle: 'encore anuit i poroies tu venire; mais tu i venras ains un an' (*Didot-Perceval*, p. 238) ['you could be there by tonight, but you'll make it in under a year' (Bryant, p. 154)]. The narrative of *Perlesvaus* assumes that its readers are familiar with the story of Perceval's first lost opportunity at the Grail castle. The second branch of *Perlesvaus*, for example, opens with three maidens arriving at the court to tell Arthur about all of the bad things that have happened since Perceval failed to ask the question at the Grail castle. Although the quest for the Grail is presented to be Perceval's personal quest both Gawain and Lancelot also witness the Grail procession, and the Fisher King's castle remains in a static location, rather than appearing to move in line with the knights' progression.

The Vulgate *Queste* highlights the importance of individual progression in a different way. Through the introduction of narrative threads that simultaneously follow many of the knights, successful and unsuccessful, the *Queste* signifies the importance of individual improvement and understanding by prompting the reader to compare each knight's journey and progression. This focus encourages the reader to engage not just with the story, but with the methods of interpretation important to the knights' progress on the Grail quest. Through doing this, the reader is encouraged to improve his or her own Christian understanding. Malory's *Sankgreal* follows a similar pattern to its primary source, in which the interlaced narrative structure and multiple stories allow the reader look across the Grail story and actively compare the ways in which each knight responds to the *aventures* he faces. The additions that Malory makes to his source highlight religious practices important to fifteenth-

century England, giving the miracles of the Grail a contemporary relevance. In all of the Grail narratives discussed in this thesis, each knight therefore travels through a unique configuration of time and space, which guides represents his Christian understanding and forms one of many ‘possible worlds’ that is contained within the Grail landscape. In turn, Grail quest narratives encourage the Christian reader to approach decisions that they must make in their own lives through a religious perspective by illustrating a connection between the knights’ decisions and every element of their surrounding worlds.

Experiencing the Grail Miracles: Sight, Space and Time

The idea that Grail quest narratives constitute a clear and distinct subgenre of romance is reinforced by the way in which Grail quest narratives were collected and published. In *Publishing the Grail in Medieval and Renaissance France* (2017), Tether treats Grail quest narratives as a subgenre of romance and analyses the ways in which medieval publishers (in both pre and post print cultures) approached and handled Grail quest narratives. Tether suggests that the way in which Grail quest narratives were compiled indicates a close interaction between the texts. Tether notes that

despite the later Vulgate Cycle *Estoire du Saint Graal*’s apparent design as a replacement for Robert’s *Joseph*, three *Vulgate Cycle* manuscripts place extracts of the *Joseph* either before or after the *Estoire*, while six further manuscripts interpolate sections of the *Joseph* into the *Estoire*.⁴

This interaction between the texts can also be seen through the way in which manuscripts containing Grail quest narratives were compiled. Tether identifies three primary trends in the compilation of Grail quest narratives: ‘the Independent, Anthology and Cycle trends’. Tether argues that ‘these clearly distinguishable trends [...] provided evidence that medieval and early modern audiences were increasingly aware of a generic resemblance between Grail

⁴ Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, p. 82.

texts'.⁵ Tether also suggests that the way in which Grail quest narratives were compiled suggests that 'publisher and authors treated Grail literature considerably differently from other forms of vernacular literature'.⁶ Again, this provides further evidence for the need for modern scholars to treat Grail quest narratives as a distinct subgenre of romance that are different to Arthurian narratives featuring more secular priorities.

It is through through an analysis of the differences between Grail quest narratives and more secular Arthurian narratives that the importance of reading Grail quest narratives through the lens of a distinct logical style is most apparent. I have shown how differences formerly accepted as idiosyncratic choices on the part of one Grail quest author in fact form an integral part of an intricate logical system that both knights and readers must follow to understand the significance of the Grail. This system effects every part of the Grail world and has been revealed to exist in some form in each of the Grail narratives. Once the knights step into the forest, crossing the liminal boundary that signals their engagement with this holy quest, every part of their interaction with the world around them is affected by the transformed priorities of the Grail world.

This thesis has illustrated the way in which the structural principles of the Grail are manipulated in accordance with the logic under which Grail quest narratives operate with the effect of highlighting the relationship between individual perception and Christian understanding. Grail quest narratives suggest that each decision an individual undertakes has significant implications for his or her lived experience of the world as well as their fate after death. In all of the Grail texts addressed here, miracles associated with the Grail are presented as distinctly visual phenomena. Chapter One extends Tether's work on the relationship between sight and understanding in Chrétien's *Perceval* to suggest that this relationship is a shared feature in each of the Grail narratives under discussion. From the Grail procession of

⁵ Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, p. 172.

⁶ Tether, *Publishing the Grail*, pp. 172–3.

the early Perceval romances in Chrétien's *Perceval*, the *Didot-Perceval* and *Perlesvaus*, to the individual transformations of the host that the knights witness in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, achieving the Grail in each text relies upon the relationship between sight and knowledge. Medieval optical theories, which explored the connection between eye and object, and the relationship between sight and truth evidenced across a range of medieval texts, underlie the knight's experience of the Grail miracles. When a knight witnesses a Grail miracle he witnesses a divine truth granted a fleeting visual form. The spectacle becomes a form of visual demonstrative argumentation, the first step in the logical process with which the knights must engage in order to progress on the quest, and it is left for the knight to make the number of deductive steps necessary to perceive how to act. This chapter emphasises the chronological development in visual responses to the Grail miracles that highlights the increase in the number of visual miracles and length of exegetic explanation as responding to to shifting attitudes towards logic in the thirteenth century.

Chapter Two builds upon previous work focussing on the landscape of romance, to look in detail at the effect that the arrival of the Grail has on concepts of place and space. The logical process through which I have proposed Grail quest narratives can be 'de-coded' is illustrated through the unique conceptualisations of time and space that each knight encounters. The seeming mobility of the Grail landscape can be further understood when the world of the Grail is interpreted as a kind of Otherworld, one of a number of different 'possible worlds', which is both a part of and wholly encompasses the secular Arthurian world. The Grail world mirrors medieval geometric conceptualisations of God as '*sphera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferential nero nusquam*' [an infinite sphere of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere].⁷ Once the knights step into the Grail quest, the landscapes in which they find themselves are generated by the mental activity

⁷ Françoise Hudry, ed and trans., *Le Livre des XXIV Philosophes* (Sainte-Agnès: Jérôme Mignon 1989), p93.

of improving their Christian understanding. Although in *Perlesvaus*, the Fisher King's lands are conceptualised as a separate and static kingdom on the edge of the Arthurian map, the relationship between the Grail world and the more secular Arthurian world in each of the other Old French and Middle English Grail narratives is more complex. For as long as the knights partake in the Grail quest, and attempt to engage with the mental activities required to increase their Christian understanding and progress toward the Grail, they move within the Grail world, itself a product of this process. This means that the way in which we view space and place must be adjusted to encompass a world that is capable of constant change in accordance with personal progression. Once the knights give up and decide to head back, however, disengaging from this mental activity, they are once again governed by more secular conventions of Arthurian space. It is notable that although in each Grail narrative every knight struggles to find the Grail castle, none of the knights who give up mid-quest finds it difficult to find his way home. When Gawain states that his 'queste ys done' (*Morte*, p. 578) in the *Sankgreal*, for example, he not only means that he will no longer seek to progress forwards physically, but that he will disengage mentally from the Grail quest.

Chapter Three illustrates the complex temporal system which governs Grail quest narratives. This chapter suggests that manipulations of time and the movement between biblical past and Arthurian present help the knights to interpret the Grail miracles. The frequent parallels drawn between the two times, and the relationship drawn between past, present and future, help the knights both to perceive the divine truth of the Grail miracles, and discern from these how they are supposed to act in the present. In the *Joseph D'Arimathie*, *Merlin* and *Didot-Perceval*, for example, the story of Moyse's attempt to sit at the Grail Table is supposed to inform Perceval about the dangers of sitting in the empty seat at the Round Table. At the same time, the collapse of the distinction between different time periods – as when characters such as the Maimed King in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal* live

for hundreds of years and thus have a role to play both in the past and the present – foregrounds the eternal nature of the divine truths. The more perceptive a knight becomes through interpreting the relationship between past and present events, the more nuanced his understanding of Grail logic – and through it, Christian grace – becomes.

The knight who struggles to engage with the mental activities required to navigate the Grail world finds that the spatio-temporal relations of his landscape fail, and the map of his journey becomes unexpectedly blank. This, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, is the position in which Gawain and Ector find themselves in the *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*. It also characterises Perceval's wandering during the five or seven years that he forgets to think of God in Chrétien's *Perceval* and the *Didot-Perceval* respectively. This emptiness, characterised not only by a lack of miracles, but also by a lack of structure, is the indirect effect of the knight's inability to engage with the logic of the Grail (the direct effect being, of course, that he is unable to progress towards the Grail). While the visual spectacles that the knights witness represent the true axiom of the demonstrative argument, the individual spatio-temporal structures of each knight's Grail world illustrate his attempts to make the deductive steps necessary to interpret the logic of the Grail, and through interpreting it, to achieve it.

This thesis also opens up several potential avenues for future research. As Arthurian scholars begin to re-examine the romance landscape through the use of digital humanities, we must open up questions about how to situate mobile, supernatural and imaginary spaces and places on the 'map' of the Grail landscape, for which this thesis provides thorough groundwork. Furthermore, an analysis of the relationship between the presentations of time in Grail quest narratives and religious narratives could also help to situate the unique presentation of time in Grail quest narratives, as discussed within this thesis, within a larger religious temporal framework. This thesis has focussed on Old French and Middle English

Grail narratives, and the scope of the research could be broadened to include Grail quest narratives written in a variety of different languages. Such research could draw further connections between Grail narratives written in different languages, and thus further support the idea that Grail quest narratives constitute a clear and distinct subgenre of medieval romance. This thesis has been a primarily literary study that focuses on the relationship between depictions of miracles associated with the Grail in Old French and Middle English Grail quest narratives. This work has been greatly supported by Tether's monograph on the publication and transmission of Grail quest narratives in Old French. However, and as Tether highlights, further manuscript studies could be completed into the transmission of Grail quest narratives in England and in Middle English. Such a study could further reinforce the relationship between Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal* and its Old French predecessors that is discussed in this thesis.

The true beauty of the Grail narratives lies in the divine truths for which the miracles and Arthurian *aventures* stand. The Grail texts seek to illustrate divine Christian truth through the use of fictitious Arthurian events, constructing the Grail quest itself as a fictive allegory. Grail quest narratives encourage the reader to improve his or her Christian understanding through interpreting the events of each narrative, and thus interpreting Grail miracles. Otto von Simson suggests that 'the Middle Ages perceived beauty as the [...] radiance of truth; they perceived the image not as illusion but as revelation'.⁸ The Grail narratives depict miracles as a form of revelation; they are beautiful visual spectacles that illuminate Christian truth. The 'truth' of the Grail narratives lies not in their fictional subject matter, but in the lessons that they illustrate and explain.

The function that the Grail narratives perform is therefore similar in nature to that performed by rose windows in a cathedral. As Cowen suggests,

⁸ Otto Von Simpson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York, NY: Bollingden Foundation, 1956), p. xx.

behind the visible framework of every rose window is a precise hidden geometry. In the greatest roses it defines the exact position of many of the major features, relating the radial elements to the concentric divisions, and all to the centre.⁹

The Grail stands at the thematic centre of each Grail narrative. The way in which each Arthurian event, character and miracle should be interpreted is defined by the presence of the Grail. In the *Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis*, Abbot Suger describes the effect of the stained-glass windows at St Denis as ‘*materialibus ab immaterialia excitans*’ [‘urging us onward from the material to the immaterial’].¹⁰ An audience unable to read could experience the same feelings of transcendence through gazing at the illuminated windows that a literate person may experience through reading a religious text, and the Grail miracles perform a similar function for both knights and readers. We are encouraged to see the immutable Christian truths through enjoying and interpreting the *aventures* of knights we understand to be fictional. The Arthurian setting provides the dialectic explanation for the axiom of divine truth that stands at the heart of each miracle.

Just as a sudden ray of light through a rose window brings the images contained within it to life, so the successful interpretation of the Grail miracles illuminates the knights’ and readers’ Christian understanding.¹¹ Thus, the Grail narratives, by reconfiguring the expectations of perception and logical progression in other romances, urge knights and readers to look beyond the chivalric subject matter of the Arthurian world and to refocus their gaze upwards and towards the path of salvation.

⁹ Painton Cowen, *The Rose Window – Splendour and Symbol* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), p. 246.

¹⁰ Erwin Panofsky, ed. and trans., ‘De Administratione’, in *Abbot Suger* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 74 and p.75 respectively.

¹¹ The use of the structure and geometry of the rose window to further understandings of medieval literary structures is not a metaphor without precedent. In *Body, Heart and Text in the Pearl-poet* (1991), Kevin Marti discusses the interconnected nature of the different stanzas and stanza groupings in the Middle English poem *Pearl* in relation to the interconnected structure of the rose window: ‘multiple formal and thematic “centers” endow *Pearl* with a distinct pattern borrowed from iconographic and architectural renderings of the cosmos; the poem is at once a *Weltbild*, a rose window, and a gothic cathedral’. Marti, *The Pearl-poet*, p. 83.

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