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# The Cistercians and the *Queste del Saint Graal*

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The *Queste del Saint Graal* (or rather the *Aventures del Seint Graal* as it is called in the extant manuscripts)<sup>1</sup> forms the central section of the thirteenth-century romance triptych known as the Prose *Lancelot*.<sup>2</sup> The triptych begins with the *Lancelot* proper, a courtly romance telling of the early life and chivalric education of Lancelot, who is inspired to great feats of prowess by his relationship with Guinevere. It ends with the *Mort Artu*, an account of the destruction of Arthur's kingdom, brought about by the revelation of the adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere, by Gawain's pursuit of revenge against Lancelot for the accidental killing of his brothers, and by Mordred's treachery against his father, Arthur. Here the final tragedy is precipitated by a strong dose of fate and misfortune as well as by the misguided and in some cases sinful actions of the protagonists.<sup>3</sup> Sandwiched between these two rather secular romances is the *Queste*, which depicts Galahad's successful completion of the Grail adventures.<sup>4</sup> It seems that later authors, wishing to explain further the mysteries and history of the Grail, added to the beginning of the Prose *Lancelot* an *Estoire* and *Merlin* and its continuation, thus creating an even longer *Lancelot-Grail* cycle.<sup>5</sup> When considering the meaning of the *Queste* and possible Cistercian influence upon it, it is clearly important to take into account its manuscript context and position within the Vulgate Cycle.

Although the romances making up the Prose *Lancelot* were frequently copied and read together, they were not necessarily composed by the same hand. In the authorship debate the only point upon which critics unanimously agree is that these thirteenth-century romances were not composed by Walter Map, to whom the works are attributed in the explicit of the *Queste*, at the beginning and end of the *Mort Artu* and in some manuscripts of the *Lancelot* proper.<sup>6</sup> Map, archdeacon of Oxford and clerk to Henry II of England, died c.1209, a date deemed to be too early for the Prose *Lancelot*, usually dated 1215-30

(and the *Queste* itself 1225-30); his name was probably cited to give the cycle an air of authority, although the attribution to him of a work of Cistercian influence is problematic, given his vitriolic comments on the order's decadence in his *De Nugis Curialium*.<sup>7</sup>

On the subject of authorship, some critics argue that the whole *Lancelot-Grail* cycle, except for the *Merlin* and its *Suite*, was the work of one man, and was religious in inspiration, the more secular romances providing negative *exempla* to contrast with the positive models of the *Queste* heroes.<sup>8</sup> Others emphasise the inconsistencies between the various parts of the cycle and in particular the differences of spirit within the Prose *Lancelot* itself, and they suggest that there were several authors.<sup>9</sup> Jean Frappier's compromise solution to the problem of authorship was his theory of the architect, who, he believed, devised the overall plan of the cycle and probably composed the *Lancelot* proper, but gave the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* to other writers, who were nevertheless expected to follow the grand plan.<sup>10</sup> Noting the references to Meaux and to the feast of St Mary Magdalen (see *Queste*, 147,7) scholars generally accept that the cycle was produced in the Champagne region of France.

It should be clear from this summary of the authorship debate that any conclusion regarding Cistercian influence on the *Queste* will have repercussions for our view of the authorial stance and meaning of other parts of the cycle. Although this paper necessarily concentrates on the spiritual and monastic aspects of the romance, we must never forget that the *Queste* forms the central section of the biography of the greatest of Arthur's secular knights, Lancelot,<sup>11</sup> and that it is *his* son Galahad, a knight, not a monk, who brings to an end - the phrase is 'mener a fin' - the adventures of the Holy Grail.

Before turning to the Cistercian aspects of this romance a brief plot summary is in order. After Galahad's knighting by his father Lancelot and his recognition by Arthur's court as the elect knight (*élu*) for whom the Perilous Seat at the Round Table is waiting, the Holy Grail is seen at Arthur's Pentecostal court and the knights of the Round Table set off to find it. This quest, instigated by Gawain, is no ordinary one, for although the Grail is an object, a religious relic, the dish in which Christ partook of the Paschal Lamb, it is not a trophy to be sought and won, nor a mere enigma to be solved.<sup>12</sup> Instead the Grail's function is to lead knights to adventures which are no ordinary test of their chivalry. Indeed, its quest is an allegory for an inner journey of spiritual enlightenment, taking the partici-

pants onto the battlefield where God and the devil struggle for supremacy over the soul of man, and where God will only win if man willingly submits to His will.

Many of the Grail adventures appear on the surface to be conventional tests of chivalric prowess, yet if approached by knights concerned primarily to win worldly honour and prove their courage, they lead to failure and much killing, sometimes of fellow knights of the Round Table (see the accusations against Gawain at the beginning of the *Mort Artu*). It is only those knights who understand the spiritual significance of the various tests, who embody virtues such as virginity/chastity, humility and abstinence, and who resist the temptations of the devil, who come close to witnessing the mysteries of the Grail. This is what Gawain learns from a hermit before he gives up the quest:

‘Les aventures qui ore avienent sont les senefiances et les demostrances dou Saint Graal, ne li signe dou Saint Graal n’aparront ja a pecheor [...] Si ne devez mie cuidier que ces aventures qui ore avienent soient d’omes tuer ne de chevaliers occirre;<sup>13</sup> ainz sont des choses esperituex, qui sont graindres et mielz vaillanz assez.’ (160,33-161,6)

As we have just seen, understanding is aided by a series of *preudommes*, hermits and religious strategically placed along the route in order to explain the visions, dreams, divine messages, symbolic words and events which constitute the knights’ spiritual education. One such hermit tells Lancelot he will fail in the quest because of his adulterous relationship with Guinevere and convinces him, after confession, to adopt a life of asceticism and chastity (p.62ff). Gawain’s pride, on the other hand, prevents him from making any spiritual progress, and he returns to Arthur’s court a failure. It is Galahad (a virgin knight) who openly witnesses the mysteries of the Grail and then dies in ecstasy. At this point the Grail and Lance are taken up to heaven by a mysterious hand, and we are told, never seen again (279,3-7). Perceval spends his last days as a hermit and dies in the East, while it is left to pious Bohort to take the story of the adventures of the Holy Grail back to Arthur’s court, where they are recorded by clerks (279,30).

The *Queste*’s emphasis on the interpretation of signs is important, for it helps us to see that the romance in fact functions on three levels:

the tropological or moral and the allegorical, as well as the literal.<sup>14</sup> At the moral level Galahad is the exemplary Christian knight, the soul yearning for union with God, the *sponsa* in the terms of the *Song of Songs*. His role is to indicate through example the way to salvation. At the allegorical level he is what Matarasso (pp.13-16) calls a post-figurative type of Christ and his very name, meaning 'heap of testimony' defines him as such (Matarasso, 38). His destiny is thus to fulfil prophecy, to complete adventures, to lead the way to the New Jerusalem (Sarras). It is through Galahad's life that knighthood is redeemed (Matarasso, 37); his story is the New Testament of Chivalry foretold in the adventures of all the 'Old Testament' figures (e.g. Joseph of Arimathea, Josephus, Seraphe/Nascien, Ewalach/Mordrain) who form the prehistory of Galahad's advent. For example, his healing of the maimed King with blood from the Lance (equated since the *First Continuation* of Chrétien's *Perceval* with the Spear of Longinus), confirms him as a Christ-figure with similar powers of healing. It is Galahad's dual function as both *sponsa* and *sponsus* that contributes towards the complex spiritual message of this romance, along with the polyvalent symbolism of the Grail (see below) and other sacred objects.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Galahad's healing role is also reminiscent of the unspelling powers of Celtic heroes, echoes of which are still to be found in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*. Thus further ambiguity and thematic texture are provided by the fusing of Celtic myth with Christian allegory, and by the process (begun by Robert de Boron in his *Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal*) of combining secular Arthurian tradition and salvation history.

Bearing this in mind we come at last to the question of the Cistercian influence on the *Queste*. It was Albert Pauphilet in his study of the romance published in 1921<sup>16</sup> who first argued for monastic and particularly Cistercian inspiration and even authorship of this work<sup>17</sup> and many of his arguments are still valid today, though subsequent critics have elaborated upon or modified them.<sup>18</sup> What follows owes a great debt to Pauphilet's researches and to Matarasso's judicious comments on them.

The most obvious textual allusions to the monks of Cîteaux in the romance are the references to white monks or white abbeys (26,27; 118,33; 182,25; 261,23; 272,5). Spiritual advice is administered almost entirely by monks or hermits who often seem to be attached to an order<sup>19</sup> (with the exception of two female recluses, not included in Pauphilet's discussion); there is no mention of secular clergy, nor of

the pope; the only bishop being Josephus, son of Joseph of Arimathea. Not all the *preudommes* are designated as white, but many are and it has been argued that this is a reference, to the white, i.e. undyed habit worn by Cistercian monks.<sup>20</sup> However, Payen (*Le Motif*, 446-447), argues that the colour symbolism in the romance, in which white tends to identify good (unless the devil decides to disguise himself this way, as in the incident with the swan, *Queste*, 184ff) and black evil, undermines the equation of white monks or abbeys with the Cistercians. Furthermore, white is the colour of virginity, and this may also be a reason for its association with the religious in the romance. On the whole though, as Matarasso points out (p.216), black and white, when used symbolically, tend to go in pairs, for example the black and white knights (140,12-13) and the white swan and the black raven (though it is the latter which here represents Holy Church), whereas white monks are not paired with black to distinguish them from evil men. Indeed, when the author wishes to present the devil disguised as a monk, he does not put him in a black habit, since this might imply that he is a Benedictine; instead he is mounted on a black horse (177,23; cf. 92,6).

If one consults manuscript illuminations in order to see whether or not illustrators equated white monks specifically with the Cistercians, one finds in the case of two illuminated *Queste* manuscripts in the British Library (Royal 14 E III and Additional 10294)<sup>21</sup> that the artist followed the details of the text very accurately. Thus the *preudomme* who brings Galahad to Arthur's court is dressed in white robes (Royal, fol. 90r) as the text states ('une blanche robe', 7,20), but he is not tonsured and therefore more like a hermit than a monk. While the text tells us that no-one could see who subsequently brought in the Grail, the Royal manuscript (fol. 91v) depicts a tonsured monk in grey garb carrying the Grail covered in a white cloth (15,20). The 'blanche abeie' (26,27) at which Galahad arrives and finds two companions of the Round Table is not depicted as a white building (as it is in at least one other manuscript I have seen), which would suggest a symbolic interpretation of the text, but is a multi-coloured edifice containing clean-shaven, tonsured monks in white habits (Royal, fol. 93v), thus implying that they are Cistercians (cf. fol. 95r, which depicts three white monks witnessing the departure of the devil from a tomb, *Queste*, 36,29ff). Indeed, the rubric for Additional manuscript 10294 (fol. 5v) states: 'Ensi que .i. abaie de blans moines ...' and likewise shows a tonsured monk in white. However, the 'home chenu

vestu de robe de religion' (48,29-30) who gives Galahad the keys to the castle of maidens, although he claims to be a priest, is tonsured but depicted in brown garments (Royal, fol. 97r) and the hermit to whom Lancelot confesses is bearded and in grey (Royal, fol. 109r, cf. Add. 10294, fol. 23r). Likewise, the man Bohort meets on the donkey (162,5-6) dressed in 'robe de religion', who turns out to be a priest (164,16) has a beige habit with a hood (Royal, 118r, Add., 32v). Even the priest 'vestus de robe blanche' carrying a chalice, who reassures Galahad and friends over the killing of several knights (231,8-9) is not really depicted as a white monk. He has a white habit, but is bearded and has a dark hood.<sup>22</sup>

The evidence presented here suggests that at least one fourteenth-century reader of the *Queste* did not identify all the religious dispensers of spiritual advice in the text as Cistercian monks and would not have agreed with Pauphilet that 'En fait, de même que le clergé, dans la *Queste*, est représenté par les seuls réguliers, le monde monastique, à son tour, est représenté par les Cisterciens, les "moines blancs", comme on disait couramment alors' (p.54). Pauphilet supports his argument by reference to manuscript Royal 14 E III, which places the healing of King Mordrain in an 'abeie blanche' (fol. 136v, col.2), when other manuscripts do not stipulate this (cf. Add. 10294, fol. 50r, which also has 'abeie blanche' and which includes in the picture of Galahad holding King Mordrain two Cistercian monks). He claims that eventually the scribe realises that all abbeys in the *Queste* are Cistercian ones, and therefore modifies his exemplar accordingly. This may be so, but the manuscript evidence presented here seems to me to suggest that the original author and later illustrators, while picking out Cistercians for special treatment, did not view the world of monks and especially hermits as being by any means exclusively Cistercian.

The white habit associated with the Cistercians was said to have been given to them by the Virgin Mary and some believed that it had magic, protective powers. This belief may be reflected in the incident when a monk, who is incidentally an ex-knight or 'conversus' is attacked but unharmed because of his habit (121,5-10). It is this same monk who is feared to have met with an unholy death because a fellow religious notices that he is wearing a white linen undergarment:

Car ainsi ne le comande pas notre ordre, ainz le vee tot plainement, que nus ne veste chemise de lin. (120,6-8)

This prohibition was added to the Benedictine rule by the Cistercians and is a clear indication that the author had the order in mind. References to masses for the Virgin may reflect the cult of Mary at Cîteaux, but as Matarasso points out, this particular mass just prior to the communion celebrated by Josephus in Sarras, during which Galahad is allowed to look into the Holy Grail, is appropriate as a prelude to a vision of the mystery of the Incarnation. The link with the Cistercians is therefore rather tenuous.

Many of the religious practices which Lancelot and Bohort in particular adopt after confessing and receiving spiritual advice (p.129ff and 165ff) do, however, echo the *Consuetudines* of the Cistercians, whose ascetic way of life represented a conscious attempt to reform the Rule of St Benedict. The knights are warned against eating meat, which would lead to *luxure* and other sins, and wine is also contra-indicated - the knights drink either beer (139,13) or water. They are given to fasting, vigils over the pious dead, enjoy only short periods of sleep on uncomfortable surfaces, practise mortification through the wearing of hair shirts and of course, they forsake the comfort of undergarments. Regular attendance at mass is a must, though it is not necessary to take communion frequently; confession should be at least once a week (and Bohort (166,21) follows the Cistercian habit of confessing in the morning, Pauphilet, 78); prayer and signs of the cross become habitual, the latter often dispelling the devil in his various disguises. Perceval orientates himself towards the east to pray, another Cistercian custom prescribed by the *Consuetudines* (Pauphilet, 75, note 1).<sup>23</sup>

The Cistercian anxiety about the temptation created by the presence of women (they allowed no women in the monks' or lay brothers' buildings)<sup>24</sup> may be echoed in Nascien's order that no women should be taken on the quest for the Holy Grail: 'nus en ceste Queste ne maint dame ne dameoisele qu'il ne chiee en pechié mortel' (19,15-16). Moreover, it is interesting to note that at the beginning of the romance, Guinevere and her ladies are eating in a separate chamber from the king and the knights of the Round Table (10,1) - a feature which may reflect the author's monastic preferences, though this is in accord with the Trojan custom mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*,<sup>25</sup> who introduced it to writers of Arthurian romance. Yet despite their primary role of leading men into temptation (see Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere and the woman who almost manages to seduce Perceval (p.105ff)), women play



important roles in the romance, especially Perceval's virgin sister and his aunt (one of the two female recluses who dispense wise counsel), factors which seem to be inconsistent with the Cistercian view of the female as incapable of having a beneficial effect on men.<sup>26</sup>

More convincing is Pauphilet's (p.75ff) claim that Lancelot's punishment for his sin and his conversion through confession and true repentance are modelled on Cistercian practices. Lancelot is not able to enter a chapel (57,30ff) where he sees an altar and a candelabra with six candles, so he goes to a nearby cross, takes off his helmet and sword, and lies on his shield on the ground. When the Grail procession passes by he is unable to move (59,23). Then his horse and armour are given to another knight (loss of chivalric status), while he is accused of being a sinner. This episode reflects quite closely the punishment for grave crimes at Cîteaux, which was to make the monk lie prostrate on the floor at the entrance to the sanctuary, his head uncovered and silent during mass. His brothers would then walk by him at the end of the service and his possessions would be destroyed or distributed to the poor. Moreover, the details of this episode, especially the description of Lancelot's trance-like state, half-way between wakefulness and sleep (58,20-29) evoke Conrad of Eberbach's *Exordium Magnum*, a Cistercian work not very widely read outside Cistercian circles (see Matarasso, 223).

As for Lancelot's confession of his sins, this seems to follow the seven stages outlined by Nicholas of Clairvaux in one of his sermons: *cognitio peccati*, *penitentia*, *dolor cordis*, *confessio oris*, penance (mortification, fasting, vigils), *correctio operis* and *perseverantia bonitatis*.<sup>27</sup> However, Payen in his book on the theme of repentance questions the exclusively Cistercian source of these similarities:

Lancelot, certes, se connaît comme pécheur, conformément à une démarche de prise de conscience définie par saint Bernard; mais saint Bernard lui-même hérite ici de toute une tradition.<sup>28</sup>

He concludes that aspects of the *Queste* evoke not so much Cistercian teaching, as doctrinal elements which one finds in Cistercian writings, but also elsewhere. Moreover, he implies that Pauphilet overemphasises the idea of a Cistercian orthodoxy, pointing out the wide differences which existed between the views of St Bernard and William of Saint-Thierry on the one hand, and Hélinant de Froidmont on the other. Given the variation in Cistercian doctrine and the many teach-

ings it shared with other monastic orders, Payen is right to stress the difficulty we have in identifying ideas which were exclusively Cistercian.

Indeed, some of the features of the *Queste* which Pauphilet suggested may be the result of Cistercian authorship in fact indicate no more than general monastic influence. These include:

1. A belief in divine miracles and the enjoyment of stories containing the *merveilleux chrétien*; for example the near hagiographic account of the monk who could not be killed by the sword or by fire, and died in the manner God chose for him (120,11-122,10).

2. An interest in placing historical events within the context of salvation history; i.e. the pseudo-historical Arthurian age here linked with Old and New Testament events through the use of post-figurative typology. It could be objected though that this process was begun by Robert de Boron, who is thought to have been a knight, not a monk, and writers belonging to the *secular* clergy were also concerned to merge literal and salvation history (for example Bishop Otto of Freising's *Chronicon*).<sup>29</sup>

3. An interest in the art of preaching. It is true that the *Queste* with its sermons on every conceivable aspect of the Christian life is a veritable *ars praedicandi*, reminiscent of St Bernard's eloquent sermons. However, St Bernard, in his desire to spread the faith amongst the laity, seems to have been exceptional among Cistercians, the majority preaching only amongst themselves,<sup>30</sup> and Pauphilet was probably not quite right in stating that:

La propagation de la foi parmi les mondains, la prédication y étaient en grand honneur. Avant l'apparition des grands ordres prêcheurs, Cîteaux tient la première place dans l'histoire de l'éloquence religieuse. (p.61)

4. According to Pauphilet, 76-77, the description of humility in the *Queste*, (p.124), bears strong resemblance to Cistercian accounts of the virtue. However, he supports his assertion by quoting the Rule of St Benedict, which although it was followed by the Cistercians, was obviously not exclusively theirs.

Turning now to aspects of Cistercian doctrine as opposed to practice, it seems that the *Queste* reflects the hierarchy of values promoted by St Bernard: namely that *luxuria* is a greater sin than *superbia* (*Patrologia latina*, CLXXXIV, 1241), though pride lies at

the root of all sin (*Queste*, p.45).<sup>31</sup> It follows therefore that the greatest virtue is virginity and this is not simply a physical state (called *puelage* in the romance, p.213), but more importantly, one of spiritual purity.<sup>32</sup> Many of the adventures in the romance involve testing this quality, the most striking being the episode where Bohort has to choose between preserving the virginity of a young girl or saving his brother's life. By choosing the former he pleases God (pp.186-187).

The *Queste* author does extol humility and shows by means of Gawain's prophetic dream how pride will cause the downfall of Arthur's kingdom (pp.149 and 156). However, when dealing with Lancelot, he seems to suggest via the hermit that his lust for Guinevere lies at the root of all his problems: because of *luxure* he has lost humility and become proud. In the hermit's description of Lancelot's prelapsarian state the hierarchy of virtues goes as follows: virginity, humility, patience/abstinence (Old French *souffrance*), righteousness, charity (pp.123-25). In Bohort's case though, loss of virginity while the victim of magic does not prevent him from becoming one of the elect; his humility wins him this privilege.<sup>33</sup>

Of particular relevance to the spiritual education of a knight is the view, espoused mainly by Galahad, that one should avoid killing one's opponent in battle and should show mercy wherever possible so that the enemy might have the opportunity to repent and obtain salvation through contrition.<sup>34</sup> Gawain is chastised for killing seven brothers when Galahad had beaten them in combat but spared them:

Et certes, se vos ne fussiez si pechierres come vos estes, ja li set frere ne fussent ocis par vos ne par vostre aide, ainz feissent encore lor penitance de la mauvese costume [...] et s'acordassent a Dieu. Et ainsi n'esploita mie Galaad [...]: car il les conquist sanz ocirre. (54,22-28)

Later though Galahad and friends do kill some knights who had raped and murdered their sister (230,25), but their consciences are appeased when told that these men were not Christians (232,4) and were worse than Saracens (231,31).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the three elect were simply instruments of God's vengeance (233,11) and were fulfilling prophecy (232,31-33). On this question Pauphilet (pp.35, 58ff) invokes St Bernard's view, expressed in his Letter to the Templars, *De laude*

*militiae novae*, that God will not punish a *miles Christi* for killing a pagan.<sup>36</sup>

St Bernard's writings for the Templars have also been cited as the source of the military metaphors used in the *Queste* to describe the service to God promoted by the romance, such as 'serjant Jhesuchrist', 'mauvais soudoier' and a 'preudomme' dressed in 'les armes Nostre Seignor' (i.e. a monk's habit).<sup>37</sup> It seems though that many medieval writers adopted Job's 'militia est vita hominis super terram' (Job III, i) especially at the time of the Crusades, and this was by no means an exclusively Cistercian image.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the terms *soudoier* and *serjans* are ambiguous, and can describe service of a non-military kind. Thus, when Lancelot is castigated for not fulfilling his early promise and the parable of the talents is invoked, the term *serjant* is used to refer to the biblical servants to whom talents were given (p.63). What is probably more significant than this parallel use of imagery, is the fact that the Cistercians were instrumental in setting up military orders, in particular the Templars, for whom Bernard also wrote his *ad milites Templi*. The Templars wore white habits and bore white arms with a red cross, which are those found on the shield destined for Galahad (28,8) and which soon become associated with the Grail hero (see manuscript illuminations). Given these similarities, the allusions to Solomon's ship and by implication his temple (p.220ff), and the fact that Galahad ends up in the Middle East, it is surprising that more has not been made of the Templar connection.<sup>39</sup> However, whereas the Templars placed knighthood in the service of religion, the *Queste* presents knighthood as religious service, which is a fundamentally different concept.<sup>40</sup>

The *Queste*'s emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to obtain her or his own salvation has also been identified as a monastic trait.<sup>41</sup> Whereas in one version of the *Lancelot* proper Lancelot's father's adultery is blamed for his son's failure, thus introducing the notion of the sins of the father being visited on the son,<sup>42</sup> the author of the *Queste* rejects this view categorically. When Lancelot learns that his son is the 'Bons Chevaliers' so long awaited, he claims that his son will not allow him to be damned, but will pray for his soul. However, he is told not to rely on his son's virtue, for God rewards according to the merit of the individual:

'Des pechiez mortieus porte li peres son fes et li filz le suen; ne li filz ne partira ja as iniquitez au pere, ne li peres ne partira ja

as iniquitez au filz; mes chascuns selonc ce qu'il avra deservi  
recevra loier. Por ce ne doiz tu pas avoir esperance en ton fil,  
mes seulement en Dieu, car se tu de lui requiers aide, il t'aidera  
et secorra a toz besoinz.' (138,29-139,1)

Similarly, when Lancelot asks Galahad to pray for him, his son urges him to pray for himself, i.e. to look after his own soul (252,20-27). The quest for salvation is thus a solitary rather than a collective one, well suited to both *chevalier errant* and hermit. Indeed, the elect knights, in attempting to guess and follow God's will, are urged, as the apostles were, to leave father and mother. Thus Perceval is reminded by his reclusive aunt (the sister incidentally of the mother whose death was caused by her son's departure in Chrétien's *Perceval*) that in order to become a Knight of the Round Table one must leave one's family behind:

'Et quant Diex lor en done tel grace qu'il en sont compaignon,  
il s'en tient a plus boneuré que s'il avoient tout le monde  
gaangnié, et bien voit len que il en lessent lor peres et lor  
meres et lors fames et lor enfanz.' (76,32-77,3)

In this way an action which is criticised by Chrétien and used as an explanation for Perceval's failure at the Grail Castle (*Perceval*, 6392-6433) is, in the *Queste*, extolled as the correct behaviour of the servant of God. Similarly, Bohort is praised for apparently sacrificing his brother in order to preserve the virginity of a damsel in distress (p.175).<sup>43</sup> One could object, of course, that this teaching with its Scriptural precedents is by no means exclusively Cistercian; it does, however, reflect the monastic vocation more than other forms of religious service, except perhaps membership of a military order.

The emphasis on an individual's responsibility for his or her salvation is again in evidence during Bohort's religious instruction. When a *preudomme* implies that Bohort has a good chance of being virtuous since he is the son of pious parents, the knight argues that this is irrelevant, since baptism removes any inherited sin or virtue and from then on the important factor is the 'cuer de l'ome', the rudder which steers the ship either to safety or into danger/perdition. This imagery of the human soul as a boat is then taken up by the *preudomme*, who adds another, more significant factor:

'A l'aviron [...] a mestre qui le tient et mestroie et fet aler quel part qu'il veut; ausi est il dou cuer de l'ome. Car ce qu'il fet de bien li vient de la grace et del conseil dou Saint Esperit, et ce qu'il fet de mal li vient de l'enticelement a l'anemi.' (165,13-17)

Thus it is God who steers man's free will when choosing good or evil. According to Gilson, 327, this view echoes the words of St Bernard in his treatise on divine grace and free will:

Libera voluntas nos facit nostros; mala, diaboli; bona Dei.<sup>44</sup>

However, the same critic notes that St Bernard follows St Augustine here, so yet again we have a feature which is not exclusively Cistercian.

Since the Grail is frequently associated in the *Queste* with 'la grace dou Saint Esprit' (15,13; 159,2), the doctrine of divine grace is fundamental to an understanding of the romance's theology. It seems that without God's gift of grace, man will fail. While God is not obliged to bestow grace on those who have earned it through virtue, man must nevertheless make himself worthy of it through his own efforts. Invoking the parable of the Wedding Feast and its famous words: 'many are called but few are chosen', (Matthew, 22,14) 'mout i a des apelez et poi des esleuz' (128,5), the hermit tells Lancelot that the wedding feast stands for the 'table dou Saint Graal' (128,8), the chosen are those dressed in 'de bones graces et de bones vertuz que Diex preste a cels qui le servent' (128,10-11), while those who are rejected are those who have omitted to confess and to do good works. Although the term 'grace' here is ambiguous, as in the *Queste* generally, where it sometimes refers specifically to God's grace, while at others it simply means virtue, generosity, etc., it is clear here that man's efforts alone are not enough to win him salvation. The Grail seems to be (amongst other things) a source of grace, as we shall see presently, but not one that can easily be sought nor won by right. As Perceval's aunt says:

'toz dis foloieront li compaignon de la Table Ronde a quierre le Saint Graal, jusqu'a tant que Nostre Sires l'envoiera entr'aux si soudainement que ce sera merveille.' (77,17-20)

In other words, Gawain was quite wrong to think that one can set off on a quest for the Grail, as one would for any other marvellous object. Its appearance and the grace it dispenses are in God's gift, and it is God/Christ who removes it from the kingdom of Logres (271,2-11) and then from the world, when he realises that Arthur's knights, apart from the three elect, do not deserve to be served by it.<sup>45</sup>

This leads us to the nature and meaning of the Grail. The physical appearance of the Grail is very vague, perhaps deliberately so. It evokes the dish out of which Christ ate the Paschal lamb, but also the vessel in which Joseph of Arimathea collected Christ's blood. When used for the Eucharist it seems to be both ciborium and chalice, holding the host which becomes the body of Christ through the mystery of transubstantiation and receiving blood from the bleeding lance with which Galahad heals the Maimed King. Perhaps most significantly, the Grail is usually covered, by a lid or cloth, thus preserving its mystery. Various theories have been proposed regarding its symbolic meaning: it represents God ('la manifestation romanesque de Dieu', Pauphilet, 25), the grace of the Holy Spirit (Gilson), the Eucharist (Hamilton), the Trinity (Lot-Borodine)<sup>46</sup> or a combination of these: God *and* the grace of the Holy Spirit according to Bogdanow, 31-32, 'a double manifestation of the Son and the Spirit' according to Matarasso, 194. Passages from the romance can be quoted selectively to support all of these theories; that they are all to some extent valid merely indicates that the author, writing a romance, not a work of theology, has produced a polysemous symbol (Locke, 5), and refuses to pin the Grail down to one meaning.<sup>47</sup> After all, the mysteries of the Grail are, as Galahad says 'ce que langue ne porroit descrire ne cuer penser' (278,4-5).<sup>48</sup>

In order to appreciate the complexity and ambiguity of the Grail a close look at those passages in which it appears is necessary. The Grail is first seen at King Arthur's Pentecostal court. In a scene reminiscent of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles in Acts 2,1-4, the arrival of the Grail (15,9ff) is accompanied by thunder and a ray of light, and those present are as if 'enluminé de la grace dou Saint Esperit' (15,13).<sup>49</sup> However, in contrast to the biblical account, no-one can speak. The Grail enters, but no-one can see who carries it. It is covered with a white cloth (the colour of Christ), it fills the air with wonderful perfume<sup>50</sup> and provides food of their liking for all the members of the Round table.<sup>51</sup> The text here states explicitly that they are being nourished with God's grace: 'repeuz de la grace dou Saint

Vessel' (15,33, cf. 16,11). Gawain, upset that the Grail is covered, vows to seek it in order to see 'plus apertement' (16,22), a phrase repeated by most of the questers during their peregrinations.

In a later episode, Lancelot witnesses the healing powers of the Grail, but is denied closer access (p.58ff). However, it is in fact the silver table on which the Grail is placed that heals the knight when he kisses it, not the Grail itself. While Pauphilet (p.70) thought the table recalled one of the relics brought back from the Holy Land by a Templar who settled at Clairvaux, and notes that the Cistercians disapproved of gold altar vessels, preferring silver, Matarasso, 190, considers the metal from which the table was made to be significant only because it represents Christ's humanity, gold being the symbol of his divinity. She interprets this episode therefore as man's salvation through the Incarnation, and does not see a specifically Cistercian reminiscence here.

Lancelot's second experience of the Grail is only a partial success (255ff). Although he is allowed to see into the room, as on the previous occasion, he is not allowed to enter. The Grail, covered in scarlet satin this time (the colour of the Holy Spirit), is on a silver table and around it Lancelot sees angels carrying silver incense dispensers, candles, crucifixes and other altar vessels. When the elderly priest is about to raise *corpus domini*, i.e. the host, Lancelot thinks he sees three men above the priest's hands, the older two are placing the youngest in his hands, and the priest lifts him up as if to show him to everyone. This is clearly a reference to the doctrine of transubstantiation. The author of the *Queste*, like the Cistercians, held the orthodox view that the bread actually becomes the flesh of Christ during communion, while the followers of Peter of Bruys and of Henry of Lausanne argued that this happened only once, at the Last Supper.<sup>52</sup> A more controversial point of debate was over the precise moment at which the transformation occurred - after the consecration of both the bread and the wine or at the point when the priest consecrates the bread and says 'hoc est corpus meum'. It is clear from the *Queste* passage described above, in which there is no mention of wine, that the author shares the latter, Cistercian (but also orthodox, and widespread) view.

When the priest appears to falter, Lancelot tries to run to his aid but is slapped in the face by a burning gust of wind and is paralysed. This event is interpreted as God's punishment for his audacity. After being in a sort of trance for twenty-four days, equivalent to the twenty-



four years he has spent sinning, he complains that he has been woken too soon for, 'tant je estoie ore plus aeise que ne seré hui mes' (257,32-33). Lancelot has obviously seen 'partie' of the secrets and mysteries of the Grail, but, like his son later, is unable to describe the sweetness of what he has glimpsed:

'Je ai, fet il, veu granz merveilles et si granz beneurtez que ma langue nel vos porroit mie descouvrir, ne mes cuers meismes nel porroit mie penser, come grant chose ce est. Car ce n'a mie esté chose terriane, mes esperitel.' (258, 6-10)

He concedes that had he not been a sinner, he would have seen more - probably 'apertement'. After this experience Lancelot is told that his quest is over. Although he clearly treats the adventure as a positive one, for he has seen more than most, it also functions as an example of God's vengeance (mentioned earlier, 159,18), for Lancelot, the man to whom God lent so many talents, will never see properly what he catches a glimpse of at Corbenic. According to Gilson, 337ff, Lancelot never progresses further than witnessing the Grail in a dream; the higher forms of mystical experience, divine revelation through visions and direct cognition, are reserved for the three elect. So, in this respect the *Queste* seems to be following the distinctions made by St Bernard in his Sermons on the Song of Songs.

More mysteries of the Grail are witnessed at Corbenic by the three elect joined by three knights from Gaul, Ireland and Denmark to make up an apostolic twelve (p.267ff). Once those that do not deserve to be there have left, a bishop, who turns out to be Josephus, virgin son of Joseph of Arimathea, is brought down on a throne from heaven by angels and is placed next to the Grail table. Through the closed door come angels carrying a cloth of red satin, two candles and the bleeding lance, which is held over the Grail so that blood drips into it. Josephus reaches into the Grail, takes out a Eucharistic wafer and holds it up. At this point (at which normally the words 'body of Christ' would be spoken), a child with a fiery red face (imbued with the Holy Spirit) comes down from heaven and enters the bread, so that the wafer takes on the shape of a man. Josephus places it in the Grail and tells Galahad that he who has striven to see 'partie des merveilles dou Saint Graal' will be fed by 'la main meesme de vostre Sauveor' (269,29). Josephus then disappears and out of the Grail rises a naked man with the stigmata - the risen Christ, who addresses the

knights present as 'mi chevalier et mi serjant et mi loial fil, qui en mortel vie estes devenu esperitel' (270, 5-6).<sup>53</sup> Their reward for having sought him is that he will reveal himself to them and let them see 'partie de mes repostailles et de mes secrez' (270,8) and they will sit at his table. When Christ himself administers communion to Galahad, the narrator says: 'cil [...] li done son Sauveor'(270,18) and Christ explains that he is holding 'l'escuele ou Jhesucriz menja l'aiguel le jor de Pasques o ses deciples. Ce est l'escuele qui a servi a gré toz çax que j'ai trovez en mon servise.' (270,27-30). Thus the risen Christ of the transubstantiation acting as a priest refers to the historical Christ of the Incarnation, in the third person, just as the narrator distinguished between the two earlier. Matarasso explains this scene as follows: 'They see not Christ in glory, but the *Verbum exinanitum*, first as a child, conceived anew by the Holy Spirit [...] and reincarnated in the host, then as the crucified Christ' (p.186). Furthermore, she denies the necessity to see as Lot-Borodine had done a reminiscence of Eastern liturgy in the presence of the infant Christ on the altar (Matarasso, p.186, note 23).

For most of the questers, this is the end of their journey, but Christ announces to Galahad that yet more will be revealed to him 'apertement' in the city of Sarras, in the spiritual palace where the Grail will go after leaving Logres for ever. Adopting feudal terminology, Christ claims that the Grail was a fief given to Logres in return for service and honour, but since man has not kept his part of the bargain he is being divested of God's fief (p.271).<sup>54</sup>

In Sarras, Galahad, Perceval and Bohort are imprisoned by a tyrant and kept alive by the Grail, as Joseph was in Robert de Boron's *Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal*. Galahad is then crowned king and has a golden ark placed over the Grail on the silver table (277,15-17). This episode emphasises Galahad's role as a type of Christ, a fulfiller of prophecy and a new Abraham, while the ark of the Grail evokes the ark of the covenant, an analogue which Matarasso stresses in her interpretation of the romance (see pp.18-32). On the anniversary of Galahad's coronation, the three elect find Josephus dressed in bishop's garb, kneeling before the Grail. He begins to celebrate mass, lifts the paten off the holy vessel and allows Galahad to look inside the Holy Grail. What exactly the hero sees is not made explicit; though Matarasso believes he is probably shown the face of God.<sup>55</sup> Galahad's own reaction deserves closer examination:

Sire, toi ador ge et merci de ce que tu m'as acompli mon desirier, car ore voi ge tot apertement ce que langue ne porroit descrire ne cuer penser. Ici voi ge l'a (sic) començaille des granz hardemenz et l'achoisson des proeces; ici voi ge les merveilles de totes autres merveilles! (278,3-7)

His words reveal first, that the Grail experience is indescribable. Second, what Galahad learns has to do with the meaning, causes, the reasons for chivalry; they concern the true vocation of a knight, not a monk. As Baumgartner says (*L'Arbre*, 7 and 154), whereas the question Perceval failed to ask in Chrétien's romance was 'whom does the Grail serve' (4656-4661), the question now is about origins and reasons why. Indeed, much earlier in the romance, the knight healed by kissing the Grail table sets off to find the answers to the following questions: why is the Grail to be seen popping up all over the place in Logres; who brought it to England and why? (60,27 ff), again more a question of origins and primary causes than its function.

Third, what Galahad discovers is seen openly when the Grail is uncovered, when all covering has been removed, all veils lifted.<sup>56</sup> This is, of course the aim of exegesis and is the role adopted by the *preudommes* in the romance. Perceval is told by such a man that the allegory of his dream will be interpreted so that 'vos verrez apertement ce que puet estre' (101,8-9) and later he uses the phrase 'savras apertement' with the same meaning. Perhaps then what Galahad gains in Sarras is a more intimate knowledge of God, presented as the fruits of a training in deeper understanding. In attempting to describe this event the *Queste* author may have had in mind the type of experience described by Gueric of Igny in his third sermon for Epiphany (quoted by Matarasso, p.204):

Now if a man after these three things and through them, faith, justice and knowledge, advances to wisdom, that is to the savour and taste of things eternal, so that he can be still and see, and while he sees, taste how sweet the Lord is; and if what the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard and what has entered into the heart of man is revealed to him through the Spirit - this man indeed I will say is enlightened, magnificently and gloriously, like one who gazes on the Lord's glory with face unveiled and over whom the Lord's glory rises.

According to Gilson, however, if intellectual understanding is the aim of the quest, this is far from Bernardine:

L'idéal dont l'oeuvre s'inspire et l'idée profonde qu'elle exprime ne sauraient être la connaissance de Dieu par l'intelligence, mais la vie de Dieu dans l'âme par sa charité, qui est la grâce. (p.323)

For Gilson, the aim of the quest is the soul's mystical union with God, an emotional experience which engages all the senses rather than an intellectual one. In support of this view there are several details in the *Queste* which recall the sensuous *Song of Songs*, on which St Bernard commented at length: Galahad's ecstasy before he dies, the perfume emitted from the Holy Grail, Holy Church appearing in the form of a black bird and stating: 'Je suis noire mais je suis bele' (185,28), Christ referred to as 'le roi Amant' (184, 31-32). These features make the *Queste*, in Gilson's view, a romance more about love than intellect. However, the gap between love and understanding in Cistercian thinking was not as wide as it may appear, for as William of Saint-Thierry said: 'amor ipse intellectus est' (Matarasso, 202-203). Love and understanding are thus the joint keys to the mysteries of the Grail.

So what can one conclude about the influence of the Cistercians on the *Queste*? Many of the practices and beliefs presented in the romance are also to be found in Cistercian writings, and although several of these are not exclusively Cistercian, the cumulative effect of the evidence suggests that the *Queste* author was familiar with and had a special interest in the order and its doctrines. Fanni Bogdanow demonstrates effectively the many parallels with the teaching of St Bernard, and Myrrha Lot-Borodine has shown the similarities with the works of William of Saint-Thierry. Moreover, Matarasso (218ff), while showing that the *Queste* probably owed more to Scripture, the Church fathers and monastic culture in general (including the Rule of St Benedict), than to the Cistercians in particular, argues that knowledge of certain Cistercian works not widely known outside the order, such as Conrad of Eberbach's *Exordium Magnum*, indicates that the author may have spent some time in a Cistercian monastery.<sup>57</sup>

No-one nowadays claims, as Pauphilet did, that a Cistercian monk wrote the *Queste*, if only because, as Frappier said (p.114), Cistercians did not write romances. Indeed, even if one could believe that a Cistercian monk wrote the *Queste*, how did he gain access to

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the other far more secular parts of the Vulgate Cycle, which he clearly knew, and why did he wish to participate in such an enterprise? While our concentration in this paper on the spiritual teaching and didacticism of the *Queste* highlights the differences in ethos between it and the other romances in the *Prose Lancelot* (making the theory of single authorship untenable), Frappier and Baumgartner are right to emphasise the more secular aspects of the *Queste* which help to link it to the rest of the cycle, but which shed doubt on Cistercian authorship. For despite the moral and religious didacticism of the *Queste*, the romance presents us with the mystical glorification of an elite group of fighting men, bound together by lineage and the conventions of the 'ordre de chevalerie' (2,30).<sup>58</sup> Its hero is a knight with a Messianic mission, not a monk; he follows in the footsteps of Joseph of Arimathea (also called a knight, *Queste*, 32,7; 83,22); his father, although asked to lead a chaste life after confession, is not expected to give up chivalry (p.61ff), and Galahad discovers, when he looks into the Grail 'l'a començaïlle des granz hardemenz et l'achoisson des proeces' (278,5-6). Although the author of the *Queste*, probably with a foot in both secular and monastic worlds, knew that knights had much to learn from their cloistered brothers, he nevertheless gave the greatest role in Christian providential history since the Incarnation to a knight, Galahad, the son of Lancelot du Lac.<sup>59</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See the end of the *Queste*, 279,32; 280,4; the scribal explicits (for example BL. Add. 10294, fol. 58r, 'Expliciont les aventures del saint graal') and incipits, and the prologue to the *Mort Artu*. All references to the *Queste* are to the edition by Albert Pauphilet, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, Paris 1923. There is an English translation of the text by Pauline Matarasso in the Penguin Classics Series: *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, Harmondsworth 1969.

<sup>2</sup> I adopt here the terminology of Jean Frappier in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.S. Loomis, Oxford 1959, chapter 22, 'The Vulgate Cycle'. Other scholars, notably Elspeth Kennedy, use the term *Prose Lancelot* for the work which Frappier calls the *Lancelot proper*. See note 5 below.

<sup>3</sup> See Karen Pratt, 'Aristotle, Augustine or Boethius? *La Mort le roi Artu* as Tragedy', *Nottingham French Studies* 30, 1991, 81-109. Members of the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies at Reading will recognise the allusion in my title to the works of Frederick P. Pickering, whose influence on my

academic progress (along with that of my other teachers in the Centre) I am happy to acknowledge with gratitude here.

<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of the *Lancelot* proper however, the secular/courtly tone changes and various adventures prepare for the more spiritual quest. These include Lancelot's begetting of a son, Galahad, on the daughter of the Grail King Pelles. Galahad's conception is presented as sinful on his father's side, for Lancelot believes he is making love to Guinevere. Galahad's mother, on the other hand, through whom he is related to the Grail keepers, is carrying out the will of God.

<sup>5</sup> It is in the *Estoire, Merlin*, and its *Suite* that we learn of the origins of the grail and of the turbulent early years of Arthur's reign. The whole *Lancelot-Grail* cycle is also referred to as the Vulgate Cycle, although the term vulgate is equally applied to the *Lancelot* proper to distinguish it from the non-cyclic version of this text which existed prior to its inclusion in the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle. The non-cyclic romance (which its editor calls the *Prose Lancelot*) has been identified and edited by Elspeth Kennedy, *Lancelot do Lac: The Non-cyclic Old French Prose Romance*, Oxford 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Pauline Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry*, Geneva 1979, pp.233-36, does however investigate the possibility that Map was the source of Arthurian tales later recorded in the Vulgate Cycle. Henceforth all references to Matarasso will be to this monograph, not to her translation.

<sup>7</sup> See Alan Keith Bate, *Gautier Map, Contes pour les gens de cour*, Turnhout, Belgium 1993, pp.104ff, where Map is also rude about other monastic and military orders. The Latin Text *De Nugis Curialium* was edited by M.R. James and revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford 1983. According to Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *L'Arbre et le pain: essai sur 'La Queste del Saint Graal'*, Paris 1981, pp.23ff and 'Figures du destinataire: Salomon, Arthur, le roi Henri d'Angleterre' in *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ed. Ian Short, London 1993, pp.1-10, Map is given as the *author* of the *Mort Artu*, but as the *translator* of the *Queste*'s source, a book found in the library at Salisbury purporting to be the eye-witness account of events written down in Latin at the time of King Arthur. This distinction is, however, not as clear as Baumgartner suggests, given that the terms 'commencer', 'mettre ensemble' and 'mener a fin' in the prologue and epilogue to the *Mort Artu* (note the interesting parallel here with Galahad's task of bringing the grail adventure to an end) could refer either to composition or translation. Perhaps what is most significant is the parallel drawn between Arthur and his clerks on the one hand, and Henry II and Map on the other, a relationship further underlined by manuscript illuminations depicting a king commanding and a cleric writing at the beginning of the *Mort Artu* (see BL. Add. 17443, fol. 62r and BL. Royal 14 E III, fol. 140r). There is even the possibility that Walter Map is associated with Arthurian material because he was confused

with the Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, from whom Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed to have obtained his ancient book on the history of the British.

<sup>8</sup> See most recently A. Micha, *Essais sur le cycle du Lancelot-Graal*, Geneva 1987, chapter 13.

<sup>9</sup> See Fanni Bogdanow, 'An Interpretation of the Meaning and Purpose of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* in the Light of the Mystical Theology of St Bernard' in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of C. E. Pickford*, ed. A. Adams et al., Cambridge 1986, pp.23-46 (p.46), J. Neale Carman, *A Study of the Pseudo-Map Cycle of Arthurian Romance*, Kansas 1973, and Matarasso, 205ff.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Frappier, 'Plaidoyer pour l'"Architecte" contre une opinion d'Albert Pauphilet sur le *Lancelot en prose*', *Romance Philology* 8, 1954-55, 27-33.

<sup>11</sup> That the triptych's central figure is Lancelot is made plain at the end of the *Mort Artu*: 'Si se test ore atant mestre Gautiers Map de l'*Estoire de Lancelot*', (*La Mort le roi Artu: Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Jean Frappier, Paris 1964), § 204,8-9. Moreover, Lancelot's own quest for the Grail, though not successful, constitutes a substantial proportion of the *Queste* narrative too.

<sup>12</sup> In this it differs from other objects of quest found in Arthurian romance. Gawain seems to have something more conventional in mind when he vows not to return to court until he has seen the Grail more clearly, though he does concede that this may not be given to him to achieve (16,18-25), thus recognising that his worldly chivalry may not suffice on this occasion.

<sup>13</sup> Here the *Queste* author explicitly criticises the concept of worldly chivalry promoted in more secular romances, although to be fair to other writers an un-Christian, antisocial approach to adventure is often presented as a misguided view of chivalry. See Calogrenant's definition of a knight in Chrétien's *Yvain*, a view with which the author clearly does not agree (Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, ed. T.B.W. Reid, Manchester 1942, repr. 1967, 358-366).

<sup>14</sup> See Guibert of Nogent, *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat* for the four levels of scriptural interpretation practised in the Middle Ages: the historical or literal, the allegorical, the tropological or moral and the anagogical or mystical. See also Frederick W. Locke, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, Stanford 1960, p.116, note 36: 'The allegorical refers specifically to Christ and His Church.'

<sup>15</sup> The complex metaphoric and metonymic meanings of the swords are analysed with admirable clarity by Andrea M.L. Williams in her article, 'The Enchanted Swords and the Quest for the Holy Grail: Metaphoric Structure in *La Queste del Saint Graal*', *French Studies* 48, 1994, 385-401.



<sup>16</sup> Albert Pauphilet, *Etudes sur 'la Queste del Saint Graal'*, Paris 1921. All quotations are taken from the 1980 reprint.

<sup>17</sup> Pauphilet believed that a Cistercian wrote the *Queste* for a secular readership, conveying moral and spiritual guidance of a practical kind within an Arthurian romance: 'Plein d'admiration pour l'ordre de Cîteaux, auquel il appartenait probablement en quelque manière, il en reproduit les idées dans toutes les questions qu'il a touchées. Il a parlé en Cistercien du dogme et surtout de la morale pratique' (p.193).

<sup>18</sup> See Etienne Gilson, 'La Mystique de la grace dans la *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Romania* 51, 1925, 321-347; Myrrha Lot-Borodine, 'Les Grands Secrets du Saint Graal dans la *Queste* du pseudo-Map' in *Lumière du Graal*, ed. R. Nelli, Paris 1951, pp.151-174; and Fanni Bogdanow, op. cit.; but cf. Matarasso, 205ff; and especially Jean-Charles Payen, 'Y a-t-il un repentir cistercien dans la littérature française médiévale?', *Commentarii Cistercienses* XII, 1961, 120-132; 'Le Sens du péché dans la littérature cistercienne en langue d'oïl', *Commentarii Cistercienses* XIII, 1962, 282-295, and *Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale (des origines à 1230)*, Geneva 1968.

<sup>19</sup> Significantly two of the monks mentioned are converted knights (44,3; 120,19), the second even leaving the hermitage to conduct war for his family. Matarasso, 216, notes that the *Queste* shares a predilection for white monks with the *Agravain* (the last part of the *Lancelot proper*), not with the *Lancelot proper* as a whole.

<sup>20</sup> See Bate, *Gautier Map*, p.109.

<sup>21</sup> Although the programmes of illuminations of these two manuscripts are not identical, these two fourteenth-century manuscripts look to me as if they were illuminated by the same artist (or one is a copy of the other). They therefore probably provide us with only one reading of the text, not two independent ones.

<sup>22</sup> Other illuminations, which appear in Oxford manuscripts and which Andrea Williams checked for me, present a similar range of monastic/non-monastic and Cistercian/non-specific advisers, while the 'blanche abeie' tends to be depicted as a Cistercian abbey rather than a literally white one; see Rawlinson D.889, fol. 147v; Digby 223, fol. 118r; Rawlinson Q.b.6 fol. 334v; Douce 199, fol. 299v and 310av.

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to Andrea Williams for pointing out to me that different aspects of asceticism are emphasised in the education of the various questers according to the sins they need to correct. Galahad, for example, is not expected to fast as he is not guilty of sins of the flesh.

<sup>24</sup> See Pauphilet, 66 and C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, London 1984, p.184. The Cistercians were not, however, the only order to segregate men and women, as Lawrence's whole chapter on 'Sisters or Handmaids' (pp.176-91) demonstrates. Locke, 114, note 21, quotes the *Regula Templi*, which likewise warns against the nefarious influence of women: 'Perillouse chose est compaignie de feme'. Indeed, the warning against taking women on the quest, rather than being a reflection of a specifically Cistercian attitude, may have been an echo of the Church's discouragement, from the First Crusade onwards, of women going on crusade. See Elizabeth Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading 1095-1274*, Oxford 1985, pp.44-46.

<sup>25</sup> See the English translation by Lewis Thorpe, Harmondsworth 1966, p.229.

<sup>26</sup> See Andrea Williams, 'The Fusion of Gender in *La Queste del Saint Graal*', abstract for paper offered to the International Arthurian Society meeting in Bonn in 1993 and subsequently delivered at the British Branch meeting in York, September 1994. In the latter Williams argued that Perceval's sister could even be interpreted as a type of Christ, especially in her sacrifice to save the leprous lady.

<sup>27</sup> See Pauphilet, 78ff, who goes so far as to suggest that Lancelot's conversion is similar to the process by which a new brother is accepted into the Cistercian order, Lancelot thus combining the chivalric and monastic vocations. However, it is remarkable that after his confession and loss of armour, Lancelot is not expected to give up chivalry. Indeed, the hermit even helps him to acquire new arms from 'uns miens freres chevaliers' (71,16; cf. 116,9ff).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Matarasso, p.207.

<sup>29</sup> Fanni Bogdanow, in a communication to the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society in York, September 1994, analysed Robert's *Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal* as a work of historiography and also argued for the influence of St. Bernard's teachings on this work. The same historiographical approach is to be found in the *Perlesvaus*, which Bogdanow likewise links with Bernard in her *Grundriss* article. However, while it is possible to find similarities between Bernardine thought and the ideologies of these two Grail romances, it is not usual to claim Cistercian authorship or even influence for them.

<sup>30</sup> I am grateful to David Farmer and Roger Middleton for pointing this out to me. It was Tony Grand who drew my attention to the following reference (in Michel Zink's *La Prédication en langue romane avant 1300*, Paris 1976, p.9) to 'l'abbé cistercien qui, aux dires de Césaire de Heisterbach, voyant somnoler son auditoire, le réveilla en prononçant le nom du roi Arthur'. This is, however, a rare reference to a Cistercian (whose audience may, in any

case, have been composed of fellow members of the order), for most of the preachers collected by Zink are anonymous.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard's views on pride, however, echo those of St Augustine and others, as Pauphilet notes, p.37.

<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Perceval's aunt refers to the preservation of one's virginity in chivalric terms as 'une des plus beles *proeces*' (80,14), i.e. a feat worthy of a knight.

<sup>33</sup> Fanni Bogdanow, p.39, reminds us that St Bernard said that one could be saved without virginity, but not without humility, see *De laudibus virginis matris, Patrologia latina*, 183,59. It seems therefore that neither St Bernard nor the *Queste* is completely unambiguous where the hierarchy of values is concerned. According to Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, New Haven and London 1984, p.61, however, the *Queste* does not 'present such a sharp dichotomy as we find in Bernard between the profligacy of worldly knighthood and the religious commitment of the true Christian chivalry' (see *De laude novae militiae templi, Patrologia latina*, CLXXXII, 921-27), but rather shows various degrees of chivalric virtue from Lancelot's partial to Galahad's total success.

<sup>34</sup> This is not, however, a specifically Cistercian idea. In Chrétien's *Conte del Graal* Perceval learns from Gornemant that a Christian knight should show mercy to a defeated opponent, see *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. William Roach, Geneva 1959, 1639-1647.

<sup>35</sup> It is noteworthy that the priest, in praising them, uses a mixture of chivalric and religious vocabulary: 'la meilleur oeuvre que chevaliers feissent onques mes' (231,23-24), the action of killing being called 'bone aumosne' (231,27).

<sup>36</sup> Bernard's writings are as ambiguous on the subject of just killing as they are on the relative merits of humility and virginity and the *Queste* reflects this ambiguity. Matarasso, 217, however, sees little Bernardine influence here. On the subject of pacifism and militancy within the medieval church, see Keen, 45ff.

<sup>37</sup> See *Queste*, 19,23; 29,20; 62,27; 68,33, 81,33; 234,30.

<sup>38</sup> See David Trotter, *Medieval French Literature and the Crusades (1100-1300)*, Geneva 1987, pp.31ff., for the vocabulary of Crusading in Old French. Of course, military metaphors were also applied in romances to the amatory sphere as writers adapted Ovid's concept of the 'miles amoris'.

<sup>39</sup> Since first writing these words I have heard a paper by Stephen Knight (at the International Arthurian Society's British Branch meeting in York, September 1994) which placed the Grail romances firmly within the context of the Crusades (especially post-Hattin) and linked them with the establishment of military orders. I have also had my attention drawn to Helen

Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights. Images of the Military Orders, 1128-1291*, Leicester 1993, where she states (p.96) 'Perhaps the author of the *Queste* considered that the military orders had failed to reform knighthood, and was setting up a new ideal to replace them'. She casts some doubt on the specific relevance of the Solomon connection, as he could simply represent kingship and wisdom (p.114). As Keen, 52, points out, Wolfram von Eschenbach seems to make the Templar connection much more explicit by stating that the Grail castle in *Parzival* is guarded by Templars; the exact meaning and connotations of the word *Templeise* are, however, problematic.

<sup>40</sup> See Jean Frappier, 'Le Graal et la chevalerie', *Romania* 75, 1954, 165-210, repr. in *Autour du Graal*, Geneva 1977, pp.89-128 (to which I refer here), p.99. Nicholson, p.14, suggests rightly that this different conception of chivalry would somewhat weaken the attraction of the military orders, whose members were considered to be more like monks than knights, and consequently weaken the link between Grail romances and the Templars.

<sup>41</sup> However, as Pauphilet shows (pp.29-30), many characters still believe in the power of the virtuous (saints and Galahad) to intercede effectively on their behalf.

<sup>42</sup> See the *version longue* found in *Lancelot: roman en prose du XIII siècle*, ed. A. Micha, Geneva 1978-83, 9 vols, vol. II, 36-41.

<sup>43</sup> This situation is complicated, however, by the fact that Lyonel is presented as sinful in this romance.

<sup>44</sup> The contradictions inherent in theological debate on grace and free will are discussed by Pauphilet and more extensively by Gilson. We are warned not to expect a work of literature to resolve these paradoxes.

<sup>45</sup> See Fanni Bogdanow's discussion (p.42ff) of the end of the *Queste* where she stresses not only God's reward of the elect, but also his punishment of the sinful Arthurian world. Baumgartner, *Arbre*, 143, argues convincingly that the withdrawal of the Grail is not to be read as a removal of divine grace, but rather as the taking back of a fief once a feudal contract has been broken (cf. Christ's words, p.271 and the more scriptural theme of the covenant as discussed by Matarasso). Thus Baumgartner (after Frappier) particularly emphasises the secular/feudal aspects of the *Queste*.

<sup>46</sup> See W.E.M.C. Hamilton, 'L'Interprétation mystique de la *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Neophilologus*, 27, 1942, 94-110 and Lot-Borodine, 'Les Apparitions du Christ aux messes de l'*Estoire* et de la *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Romania*, 72, 1951, 202-223.

<sup>47</sup> The *Queste* (and mystical writings in general) has many features in common with *écriture féminine*, notably the indeterminacy and polyvalence of

the Grail, which eludes the straight-jacket of masculine logic. The 'feminine' qualities of the Grail itself, have also been the object of recent feminist investigations.

<sup>48</sup> See Andrea Williams' article on the enchanted swords, which emphasises the role of metaphor in helping to express the ineffable.

<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, a recluse links the biblical Pentecostal event with the arrival of Galahad at Arthur's court rather than with the first appearance of the Grail: 'Car tot ausi com Nostre Sires vint en semblance de feu, ausi vint li Chevaliers en armes vermeilles...' (p.78).

<sup>50</sup> This detail reminds Fanni Bogdanow (p.31) and Gilson before her of St Bernard's sermons on the *Song of Songs*.

<sup>51</sup> This feature betrays the Grail's probable non-Christian origins in the Celtic horn or cauldron of plenty (see Roger S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*, New York 1949, p.50). It also echoes the scriptural parallels noted by Matarasso, 184ff, such as the Old Testament manna from heaven and the New Testament feeding of the 5,000. Finally, it recalls Robert de Boron's rather far-fetched etymology for the word Grail, connecting it with the fulfilment of desire:

Par droit Graal l'apelera;  
Car nus le Graal ne verra,  
Ce croi je, qu'il ne li agree (2659-2661)

(*Le Roman de L'Estoire dou Graal*, ed. W. Nitze, Paris 1971).

<sup>52</sup> See Pauphilet, 28 and 57, where he concedes that the Cistercians were not alone in rejecting the Peterbruysian view, but claims that the *Queste* author follows doctrine which was compulsory in that order.

<sup>53</sup> This reference to the questers as 'spiritual' recalls I Corinthians 2, 9-16, in which men are told that they will come to know the things of God when they become spiritual. As Matarasso argues (pp.196-197) the whole Grail experience is evocative of many of St Paul's words.

<sup>54</sup> Here again the metaphorical language stresses service to a lord in general (cf. 270,27-30 just quoted) rather than the martial aspects of knighthood, although of course the service a knight owed his lord in return for a fief was military. This vocabulary is reminiscent of that used by the Church in encouraging Crusaders to go to the aid of the Holy land.

<sup>55</sup> See I Corinthians, 2,9-10 ('Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, Neither have entered into the heart of man, The things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.') and 13,12

(‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.’) See also *Queste*, 64,4-5, in which the servant of the parable of the talents in letting down his master ‘se fu esloigniez de la *face* son seignor’.

<sup>56</sup> In medieval exegesis and literary criticism *integumenta* or *involucra* are removed to reveal hidden, deeper truths. An epitaph for Thierry of Chartres shows that the skill of ‘unveiling’ was necessary in a philosopher and teacher: ‘Quod Plato, quod Socrates clausere sub integumentis / Hic reserans docuit disseritque palam’ (quoted by Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, Madison 1992, p.111).

<sup>57</sup> Matarasso, 238, draws our attention to the life (inside and outside the cloister) of Guiart de Laon (c.1170-1248) as a possible model for the life of our anonymous author.

<sup>58</sup> A concept already developed by Chrétien de Troyes in his *Conte del Graal*.

<sup>59</sup> I should like to thank Tony Grand and Andrea Williams for their careful reading of this article and their many fruitful suggestions.