# EPIC AND ROMANCE: A COMPARISON OF SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Barbara Wessinger

1959

# EPIC AND ROMANCE:
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by

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An abstract submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
at
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

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Department of History

During the ten centuries commonly known as the Middle Ages, man's social and religious ideas underwent significant changes. Although making no attempt to treat exhaustively so broad a topic, this study is concerned with a comparison of social and religious attitudes as reflected in epic and romance literature for the purpose of illuminating changes in outlook between the early and the later Middle Ages.

The major difference in social views between the two periods resulted from a definite change in the structure of society. The epic poems describe an aristocratic society, but one in which the aristocrat was not isolated from, nor contemptuous of, the common people. The romance, however, reflects a caste-like social system in which an aristocracy based upon birth existed apart from other segments of society. From its privileged and isolated position, the aristocracy displayed a disdainful attitude toward those not of its own caste.

It was the rare author of romance who raised a voice in protest against the established order.

Distinct changes between the two periods are discernible in the attitude toward kingship and toward the lord-vassal relationship. In the epic the king was a strong, just, and highly respected figure. The king was considered indispensable, for he supplied leadership in war and provided for the material welfare of his followers. The relationship between the vassals and the king was characterized by unswerving loyalty. The writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries portray two outstanding kings, Charlemagne and Arthur, who were similar in that both were weak politically. Charlemagne as he appeared in romance, in addition to being weak, was unjust, unreasonable, and incompetent. He was incapable of controlling his vassals, who forced the king to submit to their will by withdrawing from his service. In the romance the rights of vassals were emphasized, whereas in the epic the duties of vassals were stressed. Arthur, the ideal king of romance, was little concerned with political affairs. His main function was to preside over a

court dedicated to the ideals of chivalry.

The value system reflected in the epic differed from that presented in the romance. The epic was written about serious and realistic subjects. Whether partially pagan or thoroughly Christian, the tone of the epic was reverent and religious. In the Christian epics the cleric was presented in most favorable terms, fulfilling the dual role of a brave warrior and a devoted pastor. The themes of adventure and courtly love which characterized the romance imply an emphasis upon the pleasures of this world. Most of the romances were unreligious, if not irreligious. Moreover, the aristocracy had lost contact with the clergy, who in the age of romance had ceased, at least ideally, participating actively in temporal affairs. The romances also displayed an increasingly critical attitude toward the clergy.

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Acknowledgement

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Richard E. Sullivan for his encouragement, assistance, and criticism in the writing of this thesis.

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# Introduction

A specific date can seldom be assigned accurately to historical movements of a cultural or an intellectual nature. A date given such a movement must, of necessity, be determined arbitrarily, for the roots of any age lie within and evolve from the preceding period. By the same token it is equally impossible to mark the termination of an age. Yet certain salient characteristics of a period cause us to speak of the Italian Renaissance, the Age of Reason, the Victorian Age, or the Age of Science. Such are the reservations that must be recognized, when in this paper the early twelfth century is used to mark the pivotal point between the heroic or epic age and the age of chivalry or romance.

The contrast between the spirit of the twelfth and that of preceding medieval centuries could be variously approached. This study, however, will be confined to the realm of popular literature, with the epic illustrating the earlier period and the romance representing the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries. The literature of any period tends to reflect not only common practices and widely held attitudes of the age, but it also suggests the ideals of the period. It is not the purpose of this study to analyse literature from a stylistic nor a linguistic approach, but rather to view literature as a reflection of the attitudes, thoughts, and aspirations of medieval man toward the social and religious aspects of his culture. This paper does not purport to be an exhaustive study; a highly selective bibliography is used with the hope that the sources chosen are representative, at least from the standpoint of content, of the body of epic and romance literature.

Following a résumé of the historical background of the primary sources, the body of the paper will contain an analysis and comparison of the social and religious ideas found in the two types of literature. The first consideration is to ascertain the differences in the structure of the society represented by the epic and by the romance. Both types of literature were written for an aristocratic audience. Between the ages of

epic and romance, however, the aristocratic point of view was altered significantly. As a result, changes occurred not only in the aristocracy's concept of its own position, but also in its view of the lower classes. Moreover, the attitude toward kingship changed between the two periods, as did the relationship between lord and vassal.

Although the purpose of both the epic and the romance was to entertain an audience, the religious views of the audience were mirrored in the literature. Basic to the changed religious views was a fundamental difference in the values of the audience to whom the literature appealed. Manifestations of the changed value system are discussed with reference to the emphasis placed upon religion, religious practices, and the representation of God and the supernatural. Similar differences also appear in descriptions of the clergy and in the esteem accorded clerics. Through a discussion of these aspects of social and religious life the contrast in points of view between the age of epic and the age of romance will be demonstrated.

## Chapter I

## SURVEY OF MEDIEVAL NARRATIVE LITERATURE

A definition of epic literature and romance literature is of fundamental importance, for the primary sources are drawn from these genres. Since literature mirrors the ideas and attitudes of the place and period of composition, it is also necessary to provide some background for the literary works used in this study. For these reasons a survey and brief explanation of the primary sources precedes the analysis and interpretation of the sources.

The epic is a narrative poem celebrating the heroic deeds of men or gods. It is characterized by simplicity and naturalness; it presents realistic situations in a concrete setting, and the primary emphasis is upon the character of the hero. Romance is fictitious narrative relating imaginative accounts of

adventure and love. It is characterised by fantasy and exaggeration; it presents unrealistic situations in a vague setting, and its characters are usually idealised types. The epic springs from "the impulse to realise; romance from the impulse to idealize."[1] "Epic accepts and intensifies reality; romance protests against it."[2] Perhaps W. P. Ker expresses in another manner the essential contrast: "Whatever Epic may mean it implies some weight and solidity; Romance means nothing, if it does not convey some notion of mystery and fantasy."[3]

The heroes of epic emerge as distinct persons who control and sustain the story. The action is realistically motivated, usually by the threat of foreign invaders or by an enemy from within the tribe. The hero fights an evenly matched opponent and he depends primarily upon his own strength and courage. A further realistic touch is

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1 Charles Sears Baldwin, Three Medieval Centuries of Literature in England: 1100-1400 (Boston, 1932), p. 58.

2 Ibid., p. 55.

3 W.P.Ker, Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature (New York, 1957, new Dover ed.), p. 4.

frequently given by the hero suffering defeat, usually not at the hand of a superior opponent, however, but because of superior numbers. In contrast the knights of romance are much alike without any clear expression of their individual character emerging. Rather than being presented as real men they are idealised types and rarely do they control the events of the story. Because the hero of romance has been stripped of a vivid personality, so that character no longer sustains interest, the author resorts to sensational and novel incidents. Unlike the epic hero who avoids fighting except when necessary, the hero of romance is never so happy as when some dangerous adventure awaits him. Although there may be theoretically a good reason for fighting, there is never any "real urging motive . . . the primary motive is the recital of adventure." In relating these adventures ". . . each succeeding romancer strove to make his hero greater than all previous ones by accrediting him with greater exploits. . . ."[4] The hero becomes so unhuman that none of the spirit of heroic poetry

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[4] A. B. Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance (London, 1930), pp. 10-11.

remains and as the exaggeration continues even the spirit of true romance dies.

To understand more fully these two types of literature a brief résumé of the outstanding works is required. "[The epic and romance] literary classification corresponds in general history to the difference between the earlier 'heroic' age and the age of chivalry. . . . The history of these two orders of literature . . . is parallel to the general political history of the earlier and the later Middle Ages. . . ."[5] The origin of the epic extends back to the Germanic tribal period between the fourth and the sixth centuries,[6] when in oral epic songs the Germanic tribes celebrated their famous men and events. Although almost nothing remains of the original lays, some of the material was orally transmitted through the centuries, until an unknown poet eventually took these stories and fused them according to his own ideas to form a well developed poem.[7] Such seems to be the manner in which Beowulf

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[5] Ker, Epic and Romance, pp. 3-4.

[6] Ibid., p. 21.

[7] Baldwin, Three Medieval Centuries of Literature, p. 18.

developed, "the sole survivor in complete form of all the West-Germanic epic."[8] This Anglo-Saxon epic celebrates the deeds of an heroic Scandinavian ancestor. "The manuscript is written in West-Saxon of the tenth century; . . . it is evidently based on successive copies of an original . . . which probably belonged to the seventh century." There is no positive evidence, however, for any date of origin, although all critics place it before the ninth century.[9] Whatever the date, the important thing for this paper, is that the poem, although concerned with primitive Scandinavian legend, reflects not so much the spirit of Scandinavia as "English life of the seventh and early eighth centuries."[10]

A few other fragments of Germanic poetry written in Anglo-Saxon remain, although their value for this study is slight compared to Beowulf. The Finnsburg, sung at Hrothgar's court in Beowulf,

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[8] Francis B. Gummere, The Oldest English Epic (New York, 1927), p. vii.

[9] Ibid., p. 1.

[10] Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic, tr. with intro. by Charles W. Kennedy (New York, 1940), p. ix.

is a short, but rapidly moving, and direct account of a battle occurring between feuding Danes and Frisians. The lay illustrates the ". . . type of the epic songs which roving singers were want to chant before lord and liegemen in hall and which were used with more or less fidelity by makers of complete epic poems."[11] Another lay, the Hildebrand, is the only fragment remaining in Old German. The written form dates from around 800, but the story revolves about the Theodoric legend and is attributed to the Goths.[12] The Hildebrand theme illustrates the clash between duty to lord and to family. By placing primary allegiance with his lord, Hildebrand, in this lay, was forced to do combat with his son. A short episode remains from what was probably an epic, in the Waldere fragment, which is concerned with an interlude between battles during which the battle boasts were made. Such are the existing remains of ". . . narrative poetry which Englishmen brought from their

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[11] Gummere, The Oldest English Epic, p. 159.

[12] Ibid., pp. 171-72.

continental home and handed down by the agency of professional singers."[13] Written in the tenth century about a contemporary event, but in the spirit of the earlier epic was The Battle of Maldon. Maldon is an account of the defeat of the English by the invading Danes in 991 and the poem gives a careful description of the battle and the fighters, depicting loyalty and courage as the dominant ideals.

The heroic age of the Franks was the period of the Carolingian dynasty and more particularly the reign of Charlemagne.[14] No leader of Charlemagne's stature appeared in France for several centuries after him, so Charlemagne, the conqueror, converter of pagans, Emperor, and as such temporal leader of Christendom, became the central figure of French epic. Even the deeds of other Carolingians, such as Charles Martel's defeat of the Saracens, were attributed to Charlemagne. His ". . . deeds of conquest and the memory of his

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[13] Ibid., p. vii.

[14] Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance, p. 8.

great personality lived on in the minds of men and found vigorous, though blurred reflection in the later chanson de geste."[15] Although often using the events of the Carolingian period as subjects, the chansons de geste date not earlier than the eleventh century.[16]

Various theories, worthy of brief comment, have been advanced to explain the origin of these epics. The cantilena theory as expressed by Jacob Grimm assumes that lyric poems arose on the battlefield and were preserved by soldiers and jongleurs, until one day they were put together in epic form. Gaston Paris, doubting "a spontaneous rising from the soil," modified the theory by seeking authors and dates for the cantilenae, which were composed immediately after the events. A second and unconvincing theory points to the similarities between the German and the French epic, concluding that the French epic had a Germanic origin. Urban T. Holmes suggests,

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15 Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr., A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300 (New York, 1938), p. 17.

16 Ibid., p. 66.

however, that the similarities pointed to are also found in the popular literature of peoples which have never undergone Germanic influence. He also illustrates differences between the French and German epic that are as striking as the similarities. The theory of recent French origin developed by Joseph Bédier is directly opposed to the Grimm-Paris theory. Briefly stated this theory proposes that the chansons de geste were consciously composed as an advertising campaign for certain churches, monasteries, and shrines in order to attract pilgrims. Certain religious sites might contain the remains of a famous knight of Charlemagne's time, plus a charter or chronicle giving a meager bit of information about the hero. Some jongleur spun such information into a long narrative which benefited both him and the clergy. Holmes agrees that the chansons grew best along pilgrim routes, but argues,

> It seems impossible to admit that folktales could exist, be repeated from generation to generation by the people, and then deny that memories of great battles, traditions concerning celebrated individuals,

> could be passed on in the same way, suffering extensive alterations as they went. One might add to Bédier's theory, therefore, the belief that battle songs, saints' lives, chanson de geste in a primitive form, and forms existing in popular traditions, did exist in a scattered way in the tenth and possibly in the ninth centuries.[17]

Perhaps the most reasonable conclusion to reach is that of Dorothy Sayers: "What no scholar has yet succeeded in tracing is the stages by which history transformed itself into legend and legend into epic."[18]

Regardless of its origin, the old French epic or the chanson de geste took form in the period between 1000 and 1100.[19] Little remains from this type of literature, with The Song of Roland being the best and most famous French epic. The poem has been assigned a date between 1098-1100,[20] and the story is based on a distorted account of Charlemagne's campaign into

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17 Ibid., pp. 66-72.

18 The Song of Roland, tr. and intro. Dorothy L. Sayers (London, 1957), p. 9 (Intro.).

19 Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, p. 29.

20 Ibid., p. 73.

Spain in 778. At the request of certain Saracen princes from Spain, Charlemagne entered that country to offer assistance against enemies who were also Saracens. Two cities fell to Charlemagne's forces, but an attempt to besiege Saragossa failed because an outbreak of Saxon hostilities forced Charlemagne to leave Spain. While crossing the Pyrenees, the rear-guard was fallen upon and destroyed by Basques.[21] When the event reappeared in epic form both the subject and the spirit were changed, so that Charlemagne, now presented as two hundred years old, was the champion of Christianity and the Basques had become a huge Saracen army. Roland, a Duke of Brittany, had become the world's greatest warrior. Thus the poem reflects the sentiment of the century in which it took form, and although an epic, certain elements, to be discussed later, mark it as a transition work between epic and romance.

The French epic did not immediately give way to romance, but as Ker points out:

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[21] The Song of Roland, tr. Sayers, p. 7 (Intro.).

> The French epic in the twelfth century, long after its best days were over, came into the keenest and closest rivalry with the younger romantic schools in their first vigour. . . . In all this there is the interest of watching one of the main currents of history, for it was nothing less than the whole future imaginative life of Europe that was involved in the debate between the stubborn old epic fashion and the new romantic adventurers.[22]

Illustrative of the late feudal chansons are Huon of Bordeaux and The Four Sons of Aymon. It is believed that these works in their original form closely followed the epic tradition, but the extant versions, dating from the late twelfth century,[23] reflect the attitudes of that period and hence will be discussed with the romances.

Another work included among the epics is the Spanish Cid. This poem, one in a long literary tradition devoted to the Cid, was composed around 1150[24] about the contemporary Rodrigo de Vivar, a national hero of Spain.

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[22] Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 288.

[23] Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 83, 94.

[24] The Lay of the Cid, tr. R. Selden Rose & Leonard Bacon (Berkeley, Calif., 1919) p. viii.

When Ferdinand I of Castile died in 1065, his kingdom was divided among his five children with Sancho receiving Castile and Alphonso Leon. Sancho set out to unite his inheritance with Rodrigo serving as his "standard bearer against Alphonso."[25] In 1072 Sancho was slain,[26] with suspicion cast upon Alphonso, the successor to the Castilian throne, as an instigator of the regicide. Alphonso cleared himself of the charges by taking an oath administered by Rodrigo, who according to Castilian jongleurs thus incurred "the King's lifelong displeasure."[27] The Cid's actual exile in 1081 seems to have been prompted by jealous courtiers who misrepresented to Alphonso the Cid's motives in military expeditions to Granada and Toledo.[28] The poem also suggests that the Cid was falsely accused

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25 Ibid., p. ix.

26 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, The Cid and His Spain, tr. Harold Sunderland (London, 1934) p. 108.

27 Ibid., pp. 115-16.

28 For a fuller discussion see Pidal, Chap. VII.

of not giving to his monarch an equitable share of tribute.[29] The Cid, in order to vindicate himself to his king, devoted himself while in exile to subduing the Moors. His military activities, all contributing to the unification of Spain, were climaxed by his taking Valencia. For his military successes and his personal virtues the Cid became the celebrated national hero of Spain. Says Pidal,

> He is the last hero who fully deserves the title [of an epic hero]; the last to fill the pages of national poetry. None of the neighboring countries could show in the eleventh century an epic poetry woven around a hero of the time, whereas Spain was still living in the last heroic age of the western world and, therefore, could produce at a relatively advanced stage of civilization the gest of the Cid. . . .[30]

In a body of literature, treating diverse subjects and written over a span of several centuries, certain differences are apparent. Perhaps the most fundamental change is that the French and Spanish epics contain larger and more

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[29] The Lay of the Cid, p. 4.

[30] Pidal, The Cid and His Spain, p. 472.

general motives for individual action, namely religion and patriotism. The Anglo-Saxon poet, however, was concerned with the simpler motive of individual heroism, without any larger conception of historical background. Other details are changed or enlarged, such as the size of armies, the scale of the settings, and the complexity of society. All of these differences, however, are differences in degree rather than in kind. As Ker points out in comparing the Teutonic and the French epic: "The difference ought not to be exaggerated. As far as heroic poetry is concerned, the difference lies chiefly in the larger frame of the story."[31]

The twelfth century marks a turning point in the cultural history of the Middle Ages.

> This century . . . was in many respects an age of fresh and vigorous life. The epoch of the Crusades, of the rise of towns, and of the earliest bureaucratic states of the West, it saw the culmination of Romanesque art and the beginnings of Gothic, the emergence of the vernacular

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[31] Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 52.

> literature; the revival of the Latin classics and of Latin poetry and Roman law; the recovery of Greek science, with its Arabic additions, and of much of Greek philosophy, and the origins of the first European universities.[32]

The replacement of the epic by the romance was thus but one aspect of this century of change and not an unimportant change either. In the opinion of W. P. Ker:

> One of the largest and plainest facts of medieval history is the change of literature in the twelfth century, and the sudden and exuberant growth and progress of a number of new poetical forms . . . .The French Romantic Schools of the twelfth century are among the most definite and most important appearances even in that most wonderful age . . . . French romance is part of the life of the time, and the life of the twelfth century is reproduced in romance.[33]

This author goes on to state that the literary changes of the twelfth century were

> . . . as momentous and far-reaching in [their] consequences

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32 Charles Homer Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), p. viii.

33 Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 322.

> as that to which the name "Renaissance" is generally appropriated. The later Renaissance, indeed, in what concerns imaginative literature, makes no such abrupt and sudden change of fashion as was made in the twelfth century.[34]

Rather Renaissance literature naturally followed Medieval literature, which had made the initial effort ". . . to secure the inheritance of ancient poetry for the advantage of the new tongues and their new forms of verse."[35]

The rise of romance resulted from a number of influences. The revival of interest in Latin classics, an important aspect of the twelfth-century Renaissance, was one such influence. Haskins points out that the Latin classics available in the twelfth century were much the same as those known today. The fact that they were available, however, does not mean that they were all used; the two most influential classic authors were Vergil and Ovid. The works of both were copied, cited, allegorized, and used as sources by vernacular poets.[36] The

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[34] Ibid., p. 323.

[35] Ibid., p. 323.

[36] Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, pp. 104-07.

jongleurs, writing romance in France, were often clerically trained and hence were acquainted with the Latin sources. The courts of kings and nobles provided centers for these poets and through them the Latin material passed into the vernacular.[37] The earliest romances were largely imitations of Latin works, into which were introduced contemporary details and to which was gradually added the love motif.[38]

The Provençal troubadours, whose lyrical poetry had reached its height in the south of France by the twelfth century, also had a profound effect on romance. The essence of the troubadour literature was the courtly love theme and this tradition passed into northern France primarily through the influence of certain noble ladies, who in the twelfth century were the chief literary patrons. Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of these interested in the poetry of the troubadours and upon her marriage to Henry of Anjou their court became a poetic center. Eleanor's

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37 Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, p.37.

38 Ibid., pp. 137-38.

daughter, Marie of Champagne, was the most famous of the patronesses, for it was under her patronage that Chrétien de Troyes, the most influential of the romancers, wrote.[39]

Another source influencing the romance authors was Celtic legend and mythology. When and how the Celtic materials were introduced into continental literature remains an unsolved problem, with as many different theories having been advanced as there have been scholars probing the question. None deny, however, the influence of the Celtic tradition on French romance, for the legends dealing with Arthur were probably of Celtic origin.[40]

A small literate audience, composed largely of women, must not be underestimated as an influence upon the development of romance literature.[41] The authors were fully aware of the literary preferences of their audience and

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[39] Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance, pp. 235-36.

[40] Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 163-64.

[41] Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance, pp. 13-14.

hence wrote their romances accordingly. Ker asserts that romances

> . . . are not the spontaneous product of an uncritical and ingenuous imagination; they are not the same sort of thing as the popular stories on which many are founded; they are the literary work of authors more or less sophisticated, on the look-out for new sensations and new literary devices . . . The twelfth-century dealers in romantic commonplaces are . . . fully conscious of the market value of their goods. . . .[42]

By catering to the readers' demand for tales of love and adventure romance writing became easily reduced to a "mechanical art." Yet the romancers must be given credit for not following ". . . any great man of their own time, [rather] they chose their own way freely, not as bungling imitators of a greater artist."[43] From classical writers, Provençal love poetry, and Celtic folklore the romance authors borrowed materials which they refashioned to suit the tastes of their medieval audience.

With the development of the Arthurian legend, the cycle of romances centering around

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[42] Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 324.

[43] Ibid., p. 326.

this illusory figure became the greatest theme of medieval literature. The exact identity of Arthur remains unknown. It has been proposed that Arthur may be traced to a Romanized Celt, Arthurus, of the early sixth century; other scholars have viewed Arthur as ". . . a mythical, folklore personification, as though he were a a composite of the Celtic ideal, of pan-Celtic hero worship." Still another theory proposes that " . . . the Britons conceived of Arthur as successor of the Roman Count of Britain, after the withdrawal of the Romans." It is in the eleventh century, however, that the Arthurian legend made its appearance, with the first references to Arthur found scattered in saints' lives. William of Malmesbury, in his Latin Chronicle of the Kings of England completed about 1137, was the first Anglo-Norman chronicler to refer to Arthur. Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Britons, finished toward the middle of the twelfth century, introduced a full account of Arthur. Wace's Brut is a translation of Geoffrey's History. Wace also made certain additions to

Geoffrey's work, including the introduction of the Round Table.[44] It cannot necessarily be assumed that the chronicles were the sole, nor even the primary, source used by the earliest French romancers. In the chronicles Arthur is presented as ". . . a typical Norman king, ambitious of conquest and military fame," and the most popular of Arthur's knights, Lancelot, Tristram, and Galahad, are not mentioned.[45] It is possible that romance authors drew upon popular, oral traditions to form short lays which were in turn incorporated into the long romances of such writers as Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Baron.[46]

Little is known concerning the life of Chrétien, except that he lived at the Court of the Countess Marie de Champagne between 1160 and 1172 where he wrote his romances.[47] At the opening of Cligés, Chrétien indicates that he

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[44] Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 158-62.

[45] Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance, pp. 43-4.

[46] Ibid., pp. 50-1.

[47] Arthurian Romances, tr. with intro. W.W.Comfort (London, 1914), pp. v-vi.

had translated Ovid and had written a Tristram romance[48] which has been lost. Although probably not the first author to use the Arthurian tradition, Chrétien's four romances, Erec et Enide, Cligés, Yvain, and Lancelot,

> . . . together form the most complete expression we possess from a single author of the ideals of French chivalry. . . . Chrétien belonged to a generation of French poets who took over a great mass of Celtic folk-lore which they imperfectly understood, and made it what, of course, it had never been before: the vehicle to carry a rich freight of chivalric customs and ideals.[49]

In Chrétien is not found a realistic picture of twelfth-century life. Rather he gives an ideal expression of aristocratic life conducted according to an elaborate code of chivalry with emphasis on courtesy, service, and gentleness.

Chrétien also wrote part of a long poem, Perceval, introducing the Grail theme, which brings up the knottiest of all problems in medieval literature. Chrétien at the time he wrote his Perceval was enjoying the patronage of Philippe d'Alsace, whom he claimed provided

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[49] Ibid., pp. vi-vii.

[48] Chrétien de Troyes, "Cligés," in Arthurian Romances, p. 91.

him with a book from which he took the material for his romance.[50] Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for scholars interested in speculations, such a book has never been found. There are three principle theories of the origin of the Grail legend, each strongly defended by its exponents often with a paucity of evidence. Briefly summarized these theories are:

1) The Christian theory of origin in which all symbols are given a Christian interpretation, associating the lance with that of Longinus, the Grail with either the Last Supper or the Crucifixion, the Fisher King with Christ, and the Grail procession with the Byzantine version of the Mass.[51]

2) The Celtic theory of origin, in which the symbols are associated with Celtic mythology;

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50 Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, p. 285.

51 Wolfram von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," tr. with intro. Edwin H. Zeydel & Bayard Quincy Morgan (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1951), p. 6 (Intro.); Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 288-289.

the Grail itself representing the marvellous cauldron of the Celtic god, Dagda.[52]

3) The ritual theory which some scholars incorporate into the second theory, speculating that the Demeter cult influenced the development of the Celtic vegetation cult. Jessie L. Weston goes further in associating the Grail theme with the ancient vegetation cult of Adonis, the Fisher King representing the slain Adonis and the Grail and the lance serving as phallic symbols.[53]

Regardless of origin, the Grail theme was incorporated into the Arthurian legend and was treated by several authors, with Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival climaxing the Grail tradition. Parzival, probably written between

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52 Zeydel & Morgan, The Parzival, p. 7; Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 288-89. Both Zeydel-Morgan and Holmes tend to support this theory which is presented in detail by A.C.L. Brown, The Origin of the Grail Legend (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), and William A. Nitze, ed., Medieval Studies in Honor of J.D.M.Ford (Cambridge, Mass., 1948).

53 Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 289-290. Jessie L. Weston's theory is presented in detail in The Quest of the Holy Grail (London, 1913), and From Ritual to Romance (New York, 1920).

1195 and 1210[54] and although set in the milieu of chivalry, emphasizes the spiritual struggle of the knight who finally becomes Christendom's spiritual leader.

Another popular subject of medieval romances was the Tristan story, which is assumed to have first appeared in French about the middle of the twelfth century.[55] No [redacted] copy of Chrétien's Tristan romance exists. An Anglo-Norman writer known as Thomas composed a Tristan in the latter twelfth century, only fragments of which have been found.[56] Other fragments also exist, but it is the Tristan and Isolde of Gottfried von Strassburg that ranks as the finest expression of this popular romance. This romance is unfinished and it is assumed that the author's death, probably around 1215, accounts for its

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54 Zeydel & Morgan, The "Parzival," p. 1 (Intro.).

55 Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, p. 181.

56 Gottfried von Strassburg, The "Tristan and Isolde," tr. with intro. Edwin H. Zeydel (Princeton, 1948), p. 10 (Intro.).

incomplete state.[57] Fortunately the last part of Thomas' version is complete, so by a combination of the two romances, it is possible to reconstruct a full account of the legend.

The most widely read romance of the thirteenth century was The Romance of the Rose.[58] This romance incorporated three of the main features of medieval literature - allegory, dream literature, and the conception of love as an art. Guillaume de Lorris wrote the first 4203 lines of the poem sometime between 1225 and 1237. Some years later, but probably before 1277, Jean de Meun wrote a lengthy conclusion to the poem,[59] in which he roughly followed the allegory of Guillaume. Much of de Meun's writing, however, involves digressions in which he makes known his extensive learning and in which he expresses his opinion on a wide variety of subjects. Although

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57 Ibid., p. 4 (Intro.).

58 Mary Morton Wood, The Spirit of Protest in Old French Literature (New York, 1917), p. 15.

59 Holmes, A History of Old French Literature, pp. 300-04.

inferior as literature, it is Jean de Meun's portion of The Romance that is most fertile in ideas and attitudes.

The literature of the thirteenth century generally lacked the originality of that of the preceding century. Twelfth-century authors, particularly Chrétien, were imitated and used as sources.[60] The thirteenth century saw England develop a literary tradition separate from that of France, which could be dated roughly from 1214 when the Angevin Empire passed to Philip Augustus.[61] Illustrative of the thirteenth-century English romances is Sir Bevis of Hampton, a fantastic tale of adventure covering three generations with action constantly shifting from England, to the Near East, to Cologne, and back again. Bevis provides an excellent example of degenerate romance at its worst. Guy of Warwick is but little better. Guy, however, expresses a truer spirit of chivalry, with events less crowded and less dispersed. The extant copy of

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60 Ibid., p. 269.

61 Ibid., p. 217.

Richard Coeur de Lion is thought to date from the reign of Edward I. This romance purports to give an account of the Third Crusade. It is believed that a French original, or the earliest English versions, gave an authentic history of Richard's reign, but the extant version takes unlimited liberties with historical fact by introducing absurd and fantastic fictions which give ". . . an air of fable to the whole narrative."[62] Among the Middle English prose romances dealing with King Arthur and his knights are Merlin, Morte Arthure, and Le Morte Arthur. These works offer a narrative of Arthur's life and are thought to follow closely the Geoffrey and Wace chronicles.[63]

The use of epic and romance literature as an historical source requires a word of explanation and caution. In spite of assertions

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62 "Introduction to Richard Coeur de Lion," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, ed. George Ellis, new edition revised by J.O.Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 282-84.

63 Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance, p. 51.

of historical accuracy contained in the literature, particularly in the romance, neither type is reliable as far as accounts of events, personalities, and chronology are concerned. The value lies rather "behind the scenes," by reflecting the attitudes, ideals, and spirit of the period in which the work took its final form. Thus it is the purpose of the following chapters to compare the religious and social attitudes presented in the epic with those found in the romance.

## Chapter II

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Before comparing social attitudes reflected in the epic with those in romance, the difference in the audience to which the two types of literature appealed must be pointed out. The subject of the epic, which celebrates the heroic deeds of men, appealed to a widely diversified audience. The listener need not have been of any particular class to appreciate those unadorned accounts of battle. Of heroic poetry A. B. Taylor states, "[It] voice[s] the opinions not of the author as an individual, but of the nation as a whole; the virtues, vices, crimes portrayed represent the ethical code of the nation, and the character of the hero represents the ideals of the nation."[1] On the other hand, romance, with its themes of adventure and courtly love, represented the interests of a particular group of people and the appeal of this type of literature

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[1] Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance, p. 7.

would be to that class familiar with these ideas. This change in the scope of the writing immediately implies a change in social structure.

Both the epic and the romance are written about outstanding individuals from the upper levels of society and both reflect birth as a significant factor in determining social status. In each type the important characters are either kings, princes, or persons of noble birth. The epic reflects an emphasis on lineage, although the matter of birth is not belabored. It was through references to lineage that introductions were made and a wide familiarity with noble families appeared a point of honor. When Beowulf presented himself at Hrothgar's court, the king proudly recited his knowledge of Beowulf's family history.[2] Hildebrand, in confronting Herebrand prior to combat, asked the latter who his father was or what race he was from, adding, "'if thou namest one only, the others I know,'"[3] which illustrates the popularity of genealogies. High birth alone,

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[2] Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 15.

[3] "The Hildebrand Lay," in The Oldest English Epic, l. 13.

however, was not in and of itself sufficient to provide heroic status automatically, as the author of Beowulf pointed out, "'Tis by earning honor a man must rise / In every state."[4] The characters in epic poetry -- Beowulf, Roland, Oliver, and the Cid to mention the most prominent -- enjoyed high birth, but they had also "earned honor."

The romances reflect a very similar attitude, but with the difference that birth and social position have become more significant and sensitive issues. Erec, son of King Lac, married Enide, whose father had lost, mortgaged, or sold all his land because of involvement in a long and costly war. When Erec presented his bride to Queen Guinevere he was scrupulously careful to explain that in spite of adverse circumstances "'. . . her father . . . is gentle and courteous . . . And her mother is a very gentle lady, the sister of a rich Count. She has no lack of beauty

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[4] Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 3.

or lineage, that I should not marry her.'"[5] Nowhere in the epic is there expressed such social snobbery; the aristocracy of epic was not so self-conscious of its position.

The romance, Guy of Warwick, further illustrates the aristocrat's sensitive attitude toward social position. Guy's father had possessed an estate in Northumberland, but the king whom he served was defeated in battle. Guyraldus Cassibilanus, Guy's father, then went to Warwick where the king's governor made him his steward. There Guy fell in love with the Earl's daughter, but he meditated, "'She is Earl Roband's heir, and born too high to listen to such poor designs as mine. For though I am a gentleman by birth, yet I have no earldoms, nor lordships neither. . . .'" In response to his confession of love, the maiden answered, "'Besides, it is in thee too great a boldness, for thou art far inferior to my degree. . . . [L]et thy desires be equal to thy fortune, and aim not at those things that are above it. Thou

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5 Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec et Enide," in Arthurian Romances, tr. W. W. Comfort (London, 1914), p. 21.

owneat, thyself, princes have courted me; then why should I, that have refused their courtship, stoop down so low as to my father's steward; nay, lower yet, unto his steward's son.'" Not yet subdued the persistent Guy made a second plea to which Phaelice replied, "'You know my father's greatness in the land, and if he should (as he probably will) refuse the love he thinks too mean, how could we bear the stroke disgrace would strike. No remedy but death could ease my sorrow, and shame would soon become my winding sheet.'"[6] Phaelice's words suggest a thoroughly entrenched elite, not only extremely conscious of its position, but also dedicated to maintaining its exclusiveness. Guy, however, enjoying the privilege of high birth was able to overcome his temporary reversal of fortune by following a martial career and by performing outstanding deeds, which allowed him to marry the Earl's daughter, to inherit the Earl's title, and to be honored by kings and princes throughout the land.[7] Without the asset of noble birth, it does

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6 "The History of Guy Earl of Warwick," in Early English Prose Romances, ed. William J. Thoms (London, n.d.), pp. 332-39.

7 Ibid., p. 383.

not seem that he could have so appreciably improved his status.

The epic and the romance reflect a contrast not only in the aristocracy's conception of its own position, but also in the aristocratic attitude toward the lower classes. The occasional references in epic to those not of the high nobility are made in general but respectful terms. In Anglo-Saxon epic the lesser vassals were known as "loyal thegns," in Roland as simply "the Franks" who willingly fought and died; and in The Cid the rank and file were respectfully spoken of as "faithful vassals," who were always remembered by the Cid when dividing the spoils of war. Anyone not attached to the fighting retinue received no mention. This of course does not mean that the low-born did not exist, nor, as W. W. Lawrence points out in discussing Beowulf, does the fact that freemen were not mentioned mean that they were despised. Heroism was not their business and hence they were simply ignored.[8] Although those of humble status were

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[8] William Witherle Lawrence, Beowulf and the Epic Tradition (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 52.

ignored in the epic, nowhere is a contemptuous attitude toward them displayed.

No low-born man appeared as an important character in romance; neither were the lower classes entirely ignored. The aristocracy looked down upon those who were not of noble birth. One way this attitude is suggested is through absurd and grotesque descriptions of lowly individuals. Calogrenant, in relating an adventure, described a herder he came upon in the following manner, indicating that little differentiation was made between the herder and his herd:

> "I saw sitting upon a stump, with a great club in his hand, a rustic lout, as black as a mulberry, indescribably big and hideous; indeed, so passing ugly was the creature that no word of mouth could do him justice. On drawing near to this fellow, I saw that his head was bigger than that of a horse or any other beast, that his hair was in tufts, leaving his forehead bare for a width of more than two spans; that his ears were big and mossy, just like those of an elephant; his eyebrows were heavy and his face was flat; his eyes were those of an owl, and his nose was like a cat's; his jowls were split like a wolf, and his teeth were sharp and yellow like a wild boar's; his beard was black and his whiskers twisted; his chin merged into his

> chest and his backbone was long, but twisted and hunched. There he stood, leaning upon his club and accoutred in a strange garb, consisting not of cotton or wool, but rather of the hides recently flayed from two bulls or two beeves: these he wore hanging from his neck."[9]

The lout's crudity was further emphasized when the knight asked information about the adventure he sought. The herder replied, "'Thou wilt have to do without, for I know nothing of adventure, nor did I ever hear tell of such.'"[10] Without stretching the imagination unduly, it can be assumed that such a response would have been humorous to an aristocratic reader. More important the entire passage illustrates not only a stratified society, but one in which no contact occurred between the members of different classes. Such an exaggerated description shows the knight's misconception of the herder. Similarly the herder's unfamiliarity with anything so commonplace to the knightly class as "adventure," reflects his complete severance from the nobility and its activities.

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[9] Chrétien de Troyes, "Yvain," in Arthurian Romances, pp. 183-84.

[10] Ibid., p. 184.

A comparable example occurs in Aucassin and Nicolete. Aucassin, while searching in a forest for Nicolete, met a peasant who:

> . . . was tall and marvellous and ugly and hideous. He had a great pow blacker than a lump of charcoal, and had more than a full palm's breadth between his two eyes, and had two great cheeks and a very large flat nose and two great nostrils and two great lips redder than a live coal, and some great yellow ugly teeth, and he was shod with some leggings and shoes of oxhide laced with strips of limetree bark to above the knee, and was muffled up in a cloak with two wrong sides and was leaning on a great club. Aucassin . . . was full of fear when he looked on him.[11]

Aucassin was weeping because he could not find Nicolete, although he told the rustic his sorrow was caused by the loss of a fine dog. The peasant reprimanded him, "'Indeed, if I were as rich a man as you are all the world would never make me cry.'"[12] As if to put Aucassin to shame, the rustic recounted his troubles, which not only contrast with those of Aucassin, but which also illustrate the poverty and the problems of the peasant. While ploughing for a

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[11] Aucassin and Nicolete, tr. Harold Childs (London, 1911), pp. 83-4.

[12] Ibid., p. 85.

rich farmer, the rustic lost one of the farmer's oxen.

> "And I have neither eaten nor drunk these three days past, and I dare not go to town; they would put me in prison, because I have nothing to pay for him with. Of all the goods in the world I have nothing of more value than you see on the body of me. A poor mother had I, and she had nothing of more value than an old mattress, and they have dragged it from under her back and she lies on the bare straw, and that weighs heavier on me than my own case."[13]

The peasant insisted he could never pay for the oxen, so Aucassin gave him the money for the animal. Although Aucassin's gift of money suggests pity for the unfortunate, their problems were so different as to make any real understanding impossible. After describing his troubles, the peasant addressed Aucassin, "'And you weep for a dunghill dog! Black luck to him that shall ever esteem you.'"[14]

Jean de Meun indicated other ways the lower classes suffered. He pointed to legal discrimination

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[13] Ibid., pp. 87-8.

[14] Ibid., p. 88.

against the poor:

> Scarce can a man's estate be worse
> Than when stark bare he finds his purse;
> For those who on the laws have writ
> Declare the indigent unfit
> To testify as witnesses;
> And in the statute books it says,
> That poor, impoverished men must lie
> In the same bed with infamy.[15]

He also spoke of the harsh laws dealing with petty theft, saying that if one were caught stealing "a farmer's golden sheaves" or "rob[bing] a clothes-line" the law made him pay at least four times the value of the goods stolen.[16] De Meun further attacked corrupt judges who ". . . poor and helpless men beguile / Of land or chattels"[17] and who ". . . shut their door / To claimants cursed in being poor."[18] In the same category with judges, de Meun placed lawyers and leeches who,

> Will eagerly for lucre sell
> His soul, and both deserve right well
> The gibbet.[19]

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15 W. Lorris and J. Clopinel, The Romance of the Rose, tr. F.S.Ellis, Vol. II (London, 1900), ll. 8587-594.

16 Ibid., II, ll. 7747-751.

17 Ibid., I, ll. 5897-898.

18 Ibid., I, ll. 5997-998.

19 Ibid., I, ll. 5405-407.

The contempt of the aristocracy for the low-born and the separation of the two social classes is further illustrated by the barring of peasants from certain social functions. At the coronation of Erec and Enide: "There was no great crowd of chaplains or of silly, gaping yokels, but of excellent knights and of people well equipped."[20] After the coronation ceremony, all attended Mass where: "Never were seen so many kings, counts, dukes, and nobles together . . . No low-born man could enter there, but only ladies and knights."[21] A similar situation is presented in Parzival when the knight engaged a peasant to direct him to Arthur's Round Table. The peasant guided Parzival within sight of Nantes and told him to proceed to the city. The knight invited his escort to accompany him farther, but the peasant declined:

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[20] Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec et Enide," in Arthurian Romances, p. 85.

[21] Ibid., p. 89.

"May that not come into my mind!
That retinues of such a kind,
If e'er a peasant should encroach,
His presence would incur reproach."[22]

The peasant obviously understood his position clearly and lived within its limitations, as did the herdsman whom Guy of Warwick asked to deliver a ring to his wife. The herdsman answered, "'I shall be ashamed who never yet spoke to a lady in my life: besides, I may perhaps come into trouble, to carry rings to the Earl of Warwick's countess.'"[23] This again illustrates the caste-like isolation of the simple folk from the nobility. The herder's hesitancy to carry out the mission on the grounds he might "come into trouble" implies that the lower classes were kept in a subservient position by a force greater than mere social pressure.

While generous hospitality was one of the customs of polite society, inhospitable manners were associated with the lowly. At the end of day Parzival, tired and hungry,

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22 Wolfram von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," 144, 13-16. All quotations from Parzival are cited first by manuscript page number then by line number.

23 "Guy Earl of Warwick," in Early English Prose Romances, p. 405.

> Beheld a house of moderate size.
> Here dwelt a stingy host and mean,
> As mid the lowly oft are seen.

The peasant declined Parzival's request for food saying,

> "I only heed my interest
> And then my children's nothing more.
> Today you'll enter not my door.
> If you had coin or other pay,
> Why then I'd welcome you to stay."[24]

Parzival then offered the peasant a broach for which he received food and lodging. This episode points out what the nobility believed to be the difference between their social customs and those of the peasantry. Also shown is the practice of stereotyping the low-born, this particular example illustrating the common association of stinginess and meanness with them.

It is in romance that the first mention of burghers is found. In the twelfth-century Erec and Enide ". . . so many burghers and dames" came out to greet Erec when he brought home his bride "that no one could tell the number of them."[25] The

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[24] Wolfram von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," 132, 14-16 and 26-30.

[25] Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec et Enide," in Arthurian Romances, p. 31.

references to merchants are sparse, but contemptuous as were the remarks about the peasantry. Gawan on one occasion in Parzival loaned his horse to a wounded knight who sped away with the animal, leaving Gawan with a poor horse that was unable to bear his weight. Gawan was forced to walk and lead the miserable creature, for which he was chided by Orgeluse, through whose land he was traveling,

> . . . "What, bear you huckster's trash
> Here in my land for vending?
> . . .
> Look out for tolls along your track!
> My men, toll from you taking,
> Will see your joy forsaking."[26]

Thus Gawan, traveling afoot leading a poor horse, might be mistaken for a merchant. In another sub-plot of Parzival, Gawan approached the castle at Beorosche, where the Duke's wife and daughters speculated on his identity. The older girl believed him to be a merchant, but her mother pointed out that his men were bearing shields. The girl replied, "'That's what many merchants do,'" thus suggesting that merchants attempted to associate themselves with the nobility by adopting certain of the

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[26] Wolfram von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," 502, 12-18.

recognizable features of the latter. The younger daughter rebuked her sister,

> "Thy charge his bearing doth belie.
> Sister, thou shouldst be ashamed,
> A merchant he was never named.
> He is so beauteous to see."

As Gawan dismounted the mother addressed her elder daughter,

> "What merchant, daughter wouldst thou find
> With such behavior knightly?
> Pray treat him more politely."[27]

This emphasis upon "knightly behavior" is part of the social code of chivalry, which tended further to separate classes. Knightly deportment could not be disguised easily. When presenting himself at the Irish court for the purpose of obtaining Isot as a bride for King Mark, Tristan introduced himself as a foreign merchant. Isot, however, observed "his form so beauteous, / [and] his ways so glorious," which showed his bearing to be such as should entitle him to rule a kingdom, rather than to travel from land to land to eke out a living.[28]

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[27] Ibid., 352, 12-30; 353, 1-16.

[28] Gottfried von Strassburg, The "Tristan and Isolde," ll. 10008-036.

Demeanor was thus a most significant criterion for determining social position. The courtly society of romance embodied an elaborate and often ostentatious social code. Those not thoroughly conversant with the code were automatically beyond the pale of genteel society. The manners reflected in the epic were those of a polite society--dignified and gentle yet simple and unpretentious. Hrothgar "knew courtly custom" and his dignified queen was of "gentle manners."[29] Yet "beauty" and "behavior" were not emphasized as designating rank or position as they did in romance. The implication is that the aristocracy presented in the epic had not yet fortified its exclusive position with a code of conduct, which in the age of romance served as a barrier between social classes.

Although sharp class distinctions, with the nobility disparaging and despising those not of their caste, is the prevailing attitude revealed in romance, occasionally a voice is lifted in protest against the system. It is not unusual for a knight, at the end of a long and spectacular career, to

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[29] Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 14 and 22.

retire from the world and to assume the habit of a hermit. This is usually done as personal penance and there are two outstanding examples of such hermits meditating on the equality of man. Guy of Warwick, while on a religious pilgrimage, stopped in a graveyard to examine skulls. He speculated that a particular skull might have belonged to a monarch, a counsellor of state, or a beautiful woman, but death reduced all to a common degree so that even a monarch's poorest subjects would no longer envy him.[30] A similar, but even more explicit equalitarian spirit is shown in The Four Sons of Aymon. After Renaud assumed a pilgrim's dress, his social outlook was presented in the following manner:

> Renaud considered all men as equal, and only distinguished them by their virtues; he considered as child's play those distinctions that fortune and birth create amongst men; he had no respect for conventional merit, which only exists in opinion, and in this sense, he considered himself on a level with the poorest and lowest of men. . . .[31]

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[30] "Guy Earl of Warwick," in Early English Prose Romances, p. 393.

[31] The Four Sons of Aymon; or, The Days of Charlemagne. A Romance of Chivalry, tr. W. Haslitt (London, 1851), p. 237.

In his wanderings Renaud came upon some masons laboring to build a monastery. He considered:

> "What . . . is the object of such fatiguing and dangerous labour? To gain food, to save them from starving. These men, condemned from their birth to misery--are they not, like me, children of nature? Why have they not had an equal share of her favours?--have they not the same rights to them? Ah! they have rights, no doubt; but it is we who powerful and rich, who, abusing weakness and innocence, have usurped the rights and made victims of their fellow-creatures. Oh, cruel and unjust race! can nature give you no advantages, without your employing them to abuse her? Well, then, let us revenge her. I might have had a mason for my father, as I am born of Aymon, allied to Charlemagne. Let me leave the station fate has fixed for me, and let me enter upon one I might have had."[32]

With this he went to work as a laborer, performing his job so well that the mason wanted to put Renaud in charge of operations, ". . . but an enemy of all distinctions, Renaud saw that to be a master-mason would be to oppose this law of equality. . .," so he left his job to continue his wanderings.[33] Such espousals of equalitarianism

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[32] Ibid., p. 238.

[33] Ibid., p. 239.

in aristocratic reading matter, however rare, indicate that some concern was felt over the injustices inherent in a stratified society. Both examples are of men withdrawn from society, Guy expiating the sins of his youth, and Renaud disillusioned with worldly matters. The egalitarian sentiments of the two men reflect the influence of Christian teachings and thus appear to have been religiously inspired.

Jean de Meun's portion of The Romance of the Rose contains a strong protest against the social order of his day. Instead of drawing upon Christian doctrine, de Meun follows a more rationalistic argument. He turned to the Latin classicists, primarily Ovid, for the basis of his argument. De Meun lauded the primitive simplicity of the Golden Age when men were free:

> "From bondage, yoke, and slavery,
> And peaceably they shared their good
> In perfect love and brotherhood."[34]

But with the introduction of covetousness, avarice, and other evils, which he maintained

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[34] W. Lorris and J. Clopinel, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Ellis, II, ll. 9950-952.

appeared as a result of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, the human race became corrupt and land was unequally divided. War resulted as those with property attempted to keep it ". . . and thus the strong / Beat back the weak. . . ."[35] "Idle raving bands of rascals" grew up that foraged and pillaged. With the world in this sorry state, it was necessary to select a king:

> . . . who might give heed
> To all men's surety, and adjudge
> Each plaint of fraud, misdeed, or grudge
> With upright, fair, impartial voice. . . .[36]

Most significant for a thirteenth century writer, and certainly a credit to the tolerance of the period, is the author's choice of a king, which further illustrates de Meun's regard for the humble.

> Then from the host men set apart
> A sturdy peasant, bold of heart,
> Of mighty strength, and towering height
> Called him their lord, and gave him right
> Above the rest.[37]

He guarded his subjects in return for the living they provided him. The compact worked well until robbers fell upon the king;

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[35] Ibid., II, ll. 10049-050.

[36] Ibid., II, ll. 10056-059.

[37] Ibid., II, ll. 10061-065.

> And then men met and made appeal,
> Each unto each, a tax to pay,
> Whereby their king from disarray
> To guard, and all the people vowed
> From out their lands should be allowed
> A fair and wide domain, and thus
> Began the burden onerous
> Of kings and princes, as ye see
> Writ plain in many a history.[38]

Assigning such humble origins to kingship, it is not surprising that in various other ways de Meun emphasized and reemphasized the essential equality of man. Apparently a popular superstition of his day was that comets were interpreted as signs announcing the deaths of princes. De Meun did not deny that comets "[c]ontrol[led] things men count as chance," but as for predicting deaths of kings he asserted,

> No! No! the heavenly powers deign not
> More to note deaths of kings I wot,
> Than those of honest churls, nor are
> King's bodies dead, one dab of tar
> More worth than those of clerk and squire,
> Or honest men who work for hire;
> Each cries alike on gossip's knee
> Newborn -- what difference can we see?[39]

Clearly "[t]he democrat speaks in every line."[40]

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[38] Ibid., II, ll. 10080-088.

[39] Ibid., III, ll. 19403-410.

[40] Wood, The Spirit of Protest, p. 49.

Instead of associating nobility with birth and social position, de Meun repeatedly stated that true nobility depended upon the possession of virtues that ". . . rude folk, who are but born / To till the earth" might also possess.

> For all men will agree, I wot,
> That nothing can confer noblesse
> On any living man, unless
> His hand some noble work hath done;
> For glory by a father won
> Can no more give his children fame
> Than can his misdeeds shadow blame.[41]

Particularly caustic are the author's comments when speaking of those who:

> . . . love hawking by the river,
> Or following up with horse and hound
> The merry chase, the full year round,
> And though but idle oafs they be,
> Pose as the flower of chivalry.
> Such men are not of noble birth,
> But only trade upon the worth
> Of others, and when they appeal
> To ancient lineage make, but steal
> The honored name of those who won
> Nobility in days bygone.
> For though all men are born through [nature]
> Equal, straightway they wish to be
> Of other nobleness than that
> [Nature] give[s] . . .[42]

De Meun referred here to that romance-reading class, whose decadence was contained in its very mode of

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[41] W. Lorris and J. Clopinel, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Ellis, III, ll. 19622-628.

[42] Ibid., III, ll. 19680-694.

existence. No group can set itself apart as an isolated caste and avoid the decay that de Meun observed even in the thirteenth century.

Further evidence of de Maun's radicalism is found in his economic ideas, which are thoroughly communistic. One of the greatest attributes of the Golden Age, of which he spoke so reverently, was that personal possessions were unknown.[43] With his disdain for private property it is only natural that he looked upon theft with leniency. He saw poverty as the cause of crime:

> Drear Poverty, of wit bereft,
> Led by the hand her infant, Theft,
> Who to the gibbet goes straightway,
> Seeking his mother's needs to stay.[44]

And again:

> But Poverty is far more fell
> And cruel than grim Death: to soul
> And body both it bringeth dole,
> Without the respite of an hour,
> And urgeth men to actions dour,
> Of murder, theft, and perjury,
> And whatso other vice may be
> Wherewith man's race is pestered.[45]

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[43] Ibid., II, l. 8767 and l. 8810.

[44] Ibid., II, ll. 9997-10000.

[45] Ibid., II, ll. 8560-567.

De Meun's entire social outlook was at variance with the accepted system of the day. In discussing problems he supported his opinions by an appeal to reason. Reason and nature were accorded the highest positions in his allegory. This, plus his indebtedness to the Latin classical writers, places de Meun more nearly in the spirit of the Renaissance than in that of the Middle Ages.

The attitudes toward the structure of society that are revealed in popular literature may be summarized in the following manner: 1) The epic implies the existence of a definite aristocratic class, but one not sufficiently conscious of itself to be completely isolated from, or contemptuous of the rest of society. The foundation, however, for the points of view expressed in the age of romance are herein laid. 2) The dominant attitude found in romance implies a rigid class system with the nobility displaying contempt and ridicule for any not of their caste. W. P. Ker very competently summarizes the difference in the aristocracy of the two periods.

> The form of society in an heroic age is aristocratic and magnificent. At the same time, this aristocracy differs from that of later and more specialized forms of civilization. It does not make an insuperable difference between gentle and simple. There is not the extreme division of labour that produces the contempt of the lord for the villain. The nobles have not yet discovered for themselves any form of occupation or mode of thought in virtue of which they are widely severed from the commons, nor have they invented any such ideal of life or conventional system of conduct as involves an ignorance or depreciation of the common pursuits of those below them.[46]

3) The beginnings of a third attitude, which stands in protest against the established system, is found in romance. Scattered examples suggest the development of a consciousness of the inequities and absurdities inherent in the social system.

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[46] Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 7.

## Chapter III

## KINGSHIP

In both the epic age and the later romance period a king stood at the apex of the social hierarchy. A contrast, however, is found in the presentation of the king. Not only is there a contrast in the personality and influence of the king, but also striking differences occur in the relationship between the king and his counsellors and between the king and his vassals.

The king is presented in the epic as a powerful figure commanding respect. A strong king was a necessity, particularly to provide leadership in war; to be without a king was disastrous, as is suggested by the announcement that a son had been born to Scyld for ". . . God saw the distress / The leaderless nation had long endured."[1] The good king was the successful king -- successful, primarily in a military sense. The description of Scyld, the Spear-Dane king, might define any good

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[1] Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 3.

king reflected in the epic:

> Many a mead-hall Scyald, . . .
> Snatched from the forces of savage foes.
> . . .
> He throve under heaven in power and pride
> Till alien peoples beyond the ocean
> Paid toll and tribute. A good king he![2]

In addition to being a conqueror the king was expected to provide for the material welfare of his followers. Beowulf was a king fulfilling both of these obligations:

> His was the hand that defended the hoard,
> Heroes, and realm against ravaging foe,
> By noble counsel and dauntless deed.
> Let us go quickly to look on the king
> Who brought us treasure. . . .[3]

In The Song of Roland, Charlemagne was the "portrait of the ideal earthy sovereign,"[4] who like the Teutonic king, provided military leadership. On the field of battle Charlemagne rode and fought with his men; he was courageous and strong and commanded the respect, loyalty, and love of his followers. More than this he was a devout, courageous, and dignified sovereign, who stood as a

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[2] Ibid., p. 3.

[3] Ibid., pp. 92-3.

[4] The Song of Roland, tr. Sayers, p. 14 (Intro.).

symbol of justice. When the Frankish council, out of fear of Pinabel, implored the king to pardon Ganelon, Charlemagne:

> Made wrathful answer: "Cowards are you all!"
> And the King's face darkened, when he saw
> That all were faithless. Crying out as one
> Pierced to the heart, he cursed them all.[5]

With the king's demand for justice, the council then declared a traitor's death for Ganelon.[6] As Charlemagne stood for justice, so did Alfonso, at whose court the Cid received legal retribution for injustices done him and his family by the Heirs of Carrión. King Alfonso addressed the court he had called to hear the Cid's plea for justice, thus:

> "See that you render justice. All falseness I gainsay.
> On one side and the other let us keep the peace this day.
> Who breaks our peace, I swear by the Saint Isidore,
> Shall be banished from my kingdom, nor have my favor more.
> His side I will maintain it whose cause is right and fair."[7]

The epic king is further shown as a person of authority. Roland volunteered to serve as ambassador

[5] The Song of Roland, tr. Frederick Bliss Luquiens (New York, 1952), pp. 94-5. Unless otherwise indicated all quotations from Roland refer to this translation.

[6] Ibid., p. 100.

[7] The Lay of the Cid, p. 110.

to the court of the Paynim King, Marsila. Charlemagne, however, made it clear that neither Roland nor any of the great peers would be allowed to go, "And the Franks / Were silent all, none dared gainsay their King."[8] Although the crown was guided by decisions of the council, it seems that when the king's command was explicitly expressed no objections were raised. Similarly, when banishing the Cid, Alfonso issued an order to the inhabitants of Burgos that none were to make welcome or give shelter to the exile. The inhabitants:

> Fain had they made him welcome, but none dared to do the thing
> For fear of Don Alfonso, and the fury of the King.
> . . .
> [T]he Compeador departed unto his lodging straight.
> But when he was come thither, they had locked and barred the gate.
> In their fear of King Alfonso had they done even so.[9]

In contrast to the king presented in the epic, who was a military leader, a provider of material necessities, and a dispenser of justice,

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[8] The Song of Roland, p. 11.

[9] The Lay of the Cid, p. 2.

the kings in romance have shrunk in stature, power, and dignity. A direct comparison to the Charlemagne of Roland is provided in Huon of Bordeaux and The Four Sons of Aymon. In the thoroughly romanticized extant version of Huon, Charlemagne can only be described as weak, vascillating, unjust, unreasonable, and quarrelsome. He was subject to the influence of corrupt counsellors and acted according to the wishes of the last person speaking to him -- in a word the king had become thoroughly degraded.

The tale opens with the king whiningly complaining that he "'. . . can no longer bear the travail and pain of the government . . .,'" which sets the tone for his character. He asked counsel concerning the disposition of the throne, for one of his sons was too young to rule and the other's "'. . . manners and conditions are not meet to have the government. . . . As long as I live, I will not consent that he shall have the government . . .,'" the king asserted. The counsellors conferred and decided that the incompetent son should rule ". . . at which the Emperor was right

joyful," thus showing his susceptability to influence. His traitorous, but trusted counselor, Earl Amaury, then suggested the land of the late Duke Seguin (Huon's father) should be taken from Huon and his brother and given to Charlot, Charlemagne's older son, so that the heir might prove his governing abilities. Charlemagne thanked the Earl for his suggestion and readily agreed. Then the good Duke Haymes reminded the king that Seguin had served him well "'. . . and never did thing whereof you ought to disinherit his children . . .,'" therefore his sons should be sent for to do homage and if they failed to obey then there would be cause to take action against them. Charlemagne answered, "'Sir Duke, I know certainly that Duke Seguin both served us truly, and the reason you have shewed is just therefore I grant it shall be as you have spoken.'"[10] Numerous similar examples could be provided, but these sufficiently reveal a weak, easily influenced king -- a type which does not exist in the epic.

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[10] Huon of Bordeaux, tr. John Bouchier, Lord Berners and retold by Robert Steele (London, 1895), pp. 3-6.

When Charlemagne acted unjustly toward Huon, the peers severely criticized their king. Duke Naymes, speaking against Charlemagne's arbitrary order exiling Huon, threatened the king if the order were carried out "'. . . neither I nor any other man shall trust you, and every man, far and near, that heareth of thine extortion shall say that in the end of your days you are become childish, and more like a sot than a wise man.'" The king remained unmoved and Naymes asserted that Charlemagne was acting against right and reason, but because he "'. . . is our sovereign lord, we must suffer his pleasure.'" But by "suffering his pleasure," Naymes apparently meant not actively opposing the crown for the Duke announced he, "'. . . [would] depart and never return again to a place where such extortion and unreasonableness is used. . . .'" Following this assertion of passive resistance all the barons walked out, causing the king to reconsider, "'I see well I am forced somewhat to follow their wills,' and therewith he wept piteously. 'Duke Naymes and all my barons, I require you to return again, for of force I must grant your

desires, though it be against the promise that I made before.'"[11] Not only does this reflect an attitude of contempt for kingship, but it also illustrates that the council definitely held the upper hand. The king was at the mercy of his advisers who could force him to honor their wishes by deserting him.

A similar, although not quite so despicable, picture of the king is drawn in The Four Sons of Aymon. Here Charlemagne is presented, not so much as an evil king, as one guided by evil counsellors. He was weak and unable to control his council, which continually reproached him for what it considered unjust decisions. The peers frequently refused to carry out the king's commands. For example, when Charlemagne ordered the execution of Renaud's brother, who was in rebellion against the crown, none of the barons would escort the condemned man to the site of execution; hence his life was spared.[12] Oliver took the rebelling Maugis prisoner, but refused to turn him over to the king. Maugis

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[11] Ibid., pp. 50-2.

[12] The Four Sons of Aymon, pp. 116-17.

boasted, "'. . . it is a very gratifying sight, and a glorious triumph for me to have turned one against another the knights errant. . . .'"[13] This division accounts for the ineffective war the king executed against the rebelling vassals. When Maugis succeeded in escaping from his captors, "Charlemagne and his peers remained for some time motionless with terror, and after some time only recovered their presence of mind to debate as to what was to be done. . . . They consequently, did not come to any decision, but proceeded on their return to the camp, the knights secretly laughing at the result of this adventure."[14] The king's total inability to control his own men was again illustrated by his destruction of the catapults used in besieging Renaud. He feared others might follow the example of Aymon, who used the catapults to shoot provisions rather than stones into the besieged town.[15] When the four sons and their men finally escaped from the besieged city ". . . the peers rejoiced in secret. . . ."[16]

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[13] Ibid., p. 132.

[14] Ibid., p. 142.

[15] Ibid., p. 167.

[16] Ibid., p. 172.

The peers finally resorted to the same tactics they had used in Huon to coerce the crown into submitting to their wishes; they deserted Charlemagne taking their men with them, thus reducing his forces by half and ". . . the peers . . . would not return into Charles' service till he had made peace with the sons of Aymon."[17] It would be difficult to imagine a more complete contrast than the attitude toward the king as reflected in epic and the attitude found in certain of the romances. The king of romance had ceased being an effective military leader; instead of representing justice, he was unjust; and instead of his authority being respected and obeyed, he could no longer control his own men.

The other outstanding king found in romance is the legendary Arthur, a unique figure requiring special consideration. In the romances of Chrétien and the Grail legends, Arthur is a nebulous figure, who is ever in the background. A really clear picture of him is obscured by his entourage of knights errant, who occupy the

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[17] Ibid., p. 193.

foreground in the romances. Arthur is looked upon with honor and respect; his fame is universal; and to serve at his court is the ultimate ambition of virtuous knights. Arthur's court is presented as a place where those wronged or in trouble could seek assistance and secure justice. As Yvain pointed out to an unfortunate person plagued by an evil giant, "'Sire, I am sorry and distressed about this trouble of yours; but I marvel greatly that you have not asked assistance at good King Arthur's court. There is no man as mighty that he could not find at his court some who would be glad to try his strength with his.'"[18] As for real political influence Arthur had little. Arthur was not, however, completely powerless, as a statement made by Chrétien showed. Arthur issued a general summons to his liege men and "None dare[d] to hold back and not go to court at the King's summons."[19] Primarily his court was a place ". . . where men and women lived in conformity with the rules of

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18 Chrétien de Troyes, "Yvain," in Arthurian Romances, p. 62.

19 Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec et Enide," in Arthurian Romances, p. 24.

courtesy, where truth was told, where generosity was open-handed, where the weak and innocent were protected by men who dedicated themselves to the cult of honor and to the quest of a spotless reputation."[20] Arthur was the arbiter in these affairs. Reigning in this idealized situation, King Arthur had little need to be concerned with invading foes or rebelling vassals.

The concept of kingship which Arthur personified is illustrated by Chrétien. Arthur, in addressing his knights regarding a courtly decision, asserted,

> "If any one wishes to protest let him straightway speak his mind. I am King, and must keep my word and must not permit any baseness, falsity, or arrogance. I must maintain truth and righteousness. It is the business of a legal king to support the law, truth, faith, and justice. I would not in any wise commit a disloyal deed or wrong to either weak or strong. It is not meet that anyone should complain of me: nor do I wish the custom and the practice to lapse, which my family has been wont to foster. You, too, would doubtless regret to see me strive to introduce other customs and other laws than those my royal sire observed.

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20 Arthurian Romances, pp. x-xi.

> Regardless of consequences, I am bound to keep and maintain the institution of my father Pendragon, who was a just king and emperor. Now tell me fully what you think! Let none be slow to speak his mind, . . . I wish to know what you truly think."[21]

Unlike the king of the epic, who was primarily concerned with providing for the elemental needs of his people, the important function of the Arthurian king was to establish and maintain an ethical society. Arthur's conception of the duty of kings, together with a court devoted to service, reflect a new social ideal. It may seem incongruous that both the Charlemagne and the Arthurian types of king were found in romances of the same period. The former, however, represents the more realistic view of kingship, while Arthur symbolizes the ideal of what kings might have been.

The epic and the romance reflect different bases for, as well as different relationships between lord and vassal. The leader in the epic commanded the allegiance and respect of his men because of superior strength, skill, and leadership,

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[21] Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec et Enide" in Arthurian Romances, p. 24.

and not because of a rigid system of subordination. For example,

> To Hrothgar was granted glory in war,
> Success in battle, retainers bold
> Obeyed him gladly; his band increased
> To a mighty host.[22]

Without a rigid social system, the leader must be particularly conscious of gaining the support of his people. The Beowulf poet clarified this point:

> So must a young man strive for good
> With gracious gifts from his father's store,
> That in later seasons, if war shall scourge,
> A willing people may serve him well.[23]

Perhaps these words suggest a partial explanation for the lack of aristocratic contempt in the epic age for those of inferior status.

The epic reflects a deep sense of duty on the part of vassals toward their lords. This duty is based primarily upon loyalty and to a lesser extent upon the practical basis of repaying benefits received from the lord.[24] The bond of personal loyalty is well illustrated by the Anglo-Saxon epic,

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[22] Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 5.

[23] Ibid., p. 3.

[24] The Oldest English Epic, p. 135 (fn.).

Maldon. The death of the Saxon earl, Byrhtnoth, inspired his men the more:

> . . . these loyal thegns kept forward and advancing,
> Uncowardly men eagerly fighting;
> Every one of them wished but one of two things:
> To give up his life, or avenge his dear lord.[25]

The dual obligations of kinship and vassalage inspired Aelfwine:

> "Never will my fellow thegns have reason to twit me,
> That I from this troop was willing to flee,
> To seek my home, now my chief lies dead,
> Hewn in the battle; greatest of harms to me,
> For he was both my kinsman and my lord."[26]

Leofsunu asserted,

> "I promise this, that I will not hence
> Flee the space of a foot; but I will go forward
> To avenge in battle my friendly lord."[27]

When Offa was slain the poet commented,

> But yet he made good what he had vowed to his lord,
> . . .
> That they should both ride back to their town
> Safe to their homes, or both fall in battle,

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[25] The Battle of Maldon; An English Poem of the Tenth Century, tr. Charles C. Fries (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1925), ll. 205-08.

[26] Ibid., ll. 220-24.

[27] Ibid., ll. 246-48.

> On the field of slaughter to die of their wounds.
> He thus lay thegn-like near to his lord.[28]

An old veteran, Burhtwold, climaxed these statements of loyalty thus:

> "Here lies our lord cut down and slain,
> Our lord in the dust; always may he rue it
> Who now from this war-play even thinks of escaping.
> I am old in years, hence will I never,
> But I for my part by the side of my lord,
> By so dear a man expect to lie slain."[29]

It is only to rally the cowards that reference is made to the practical obligation due the lord in return for ". . . all the good things / Which their lord while he lived had done for their welfare."[30] Wiglaf issued a similar reminder to the thegns who deserted Beowulf when he fought the dragon.[31] The predominant attitude, however, is that of personal loyalty to an honored and loved lord, with emphasis on the thegns' duties and responsibilities to their lord.

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28 *Ibid.*, ll. 289-94.

29 *Ibid.*, ll. 314-19.

30 *Ibid.*, ll. 196-97.

31 *Beowulf*, tr. Kennedy, pp. 84-5.

The Cid offers an excellent, although not so dramatic, example of a vassal's loyalty to his lord. Due to the influence of enemies at court, the Cid had been exiled by his king.[32] Instead of seeking revenge, the Cid immediately set out to vindicate himself and thus regain favor with the king. In reconquering Spanish territory from the Moors, he was careful not to plunder needlessly. After taking Castejon, the Cid instructed his men, "'Let us on the morrow morning prepare to ride away,/ For against my lord Alfonso the strife I would not stir.'"[33] Following each raid the Cid sent a portion of the booty "'[u]nto the King Alfonso that is my lord by right.'"[34] After negotiations were opened between the Cid and his king, Alfonso arranged for the Compeador's family to join him. The Cid presented Alfonso with two hundred horses: "'That of him who rules Valencia [i.e., Cid] the king no ill may say. / . . . While I have breath within me,

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[32] Pidal, The Cid and His Spain, pp. 168-70.

[33] The Lay of the Cid, p. 19.

[34] Ibid., p. 44.

I will serve him evermore.'"[35] When the meeting for reconciliation occurred between the Cid and his king, the vassal:

> Forthwith to earth he bent him on hand an on the knee.
> And the grass of the meadow with his very teeth he rent,
> And wept exceeding sorely so great was his content.
> How well unto Alfonso to do homage doth he know,
> And there before his sovereign's feet he cast him even so.[36]

It was a joyful Cid who was restored to his lord's favor, but while banished no trace of disloyalty occurred. Pidal points out that the Cid:

> . . . though grossly insulted by Alfonso, . . . bore with him and treated him with respect. According to law, he owed no fealty to the King, and yet his loyalty was unswerving. . . . This attitude would be incomprehensible if, as is possible, we were to assume that the motives of the Spanish here were purely personal .. . . But if on the other hand, the Cid of poetry is on all occasions respectful toward his royal persecutor, it is because the longed-for pardon means reconciliation with "fair Castile"; which he puts before his personal pride.[37]

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[35] Ibid., pp. 63-4.

[36] Ibid., pp. 70-1.

[37] Pidal, The Cid and His Spain, pp. 420-21.

Pidal thus suggests that the loyalty of the Cid was motivated by a love of country, rather than by the narrower personal loyalty of a vassal toward his lord. It is undoubtedly true that the Cid had the interests of Castile firmly in mind, but it also seems that a personal loyalty and feeling of duty toward his lord strongly motivated him; otherwise some disrespect for the king would have appeared.

The Frankish hosts, fighting at Roncevel, were fighting for "sweet France" and the "Christian faith," but The Song of Roland also reflects the simpler and more direct motive of service for "Charles [their] glorious King." Oliver announced the approach of the Paynims and Roland answered,

> "God give your words be true! Then for our King
> Here may we stand and fight as brave men should.
> For his liege lord a knight ungrudgingly
> Must bear distress and aching toil, nor shrink
> From scorching sun or blast of winter wind,
> Nor reck of life or limb."[38]

And as the battle began Roland again expressed duty to his lord:

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[38] The Song of Roland, p. 36.

> "It is Frankish law
> That every man must suffer for liege lord
> Or good or ill, or fire or wintry blast,
> Ay, truly, must not reck of life or limb.
> Bestir you comrade! Grasp your lance, and I
> My Durendal, bestowed by the King's hand.
> Whoever wears it after me shall say:
> 'This was the sword of one who fought till death.'"[39]

Maldon, Cid, and Roland all prove the intimate, personal relationship between vassal and lord. The epic illustrates the vassal's deep sense of duty based more upon personal loyalty than upon a rigidly enforced system of subordination.

The literature of the age of romance shows a trend away from emphasis on duty to the lord toward the rights of vassals. Not all romances suggest such a change. Even when the rights of vassals are emphasized in order to justify criticism of, or disloyalty to, the lord, an apologetic note is often added. Yet the change in spirit is sufficiently clear in some romances to provide a definite contrast with the epic. The mere fact that vassals, opposing their king, are the "heroes" of certain romances indicates this change. Considerable importance was placed upon the legal limitations of the lord's

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[39] Ibid., p. 40.

power over his vassals. When Charlemagne announced the conditions governing combat between Huon and Earl Amaury, the barons and peers reminded their king that such conditions would be against "'. . . the statute of the noble realm of France and the empire of Rome. . . .'"[40] After Huon subdued his opponent, however, the king issued a decree of banishment. Huon told Charlemagne that in "'. . . execut[ing] your own unreasonable will [you are acting] against all statutes royal and imperial. . . .'"[41] In spite of the king's injustice, the wronged vassal would not go so far as to sever relations with his lord. Rather Huon insisted, "'. . . to obey you there is no thing in this mortal world that any human body may do, but that I shall undertake to do it; . . . if I may thereby be reconciled with your Grace.'"[42] In this obedient spirit he went forth to carry out the "adventurous" exile his king forced upon him. The vassal technically remained

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40 *Huon of Bordeaux*, p. 44.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

loyal to his lord, but by reminding the lord of his obligations a new tone is introduced.

Renaud is even more explicit in reminding the king of the reciprocal nature of the feudal contract. Aymon and his sons reproached Charlemagne for allowing Ganelon's treachery to the Duke Beuves d'Aigremont to go unpunished:

> . . . but Renaud, finding their efforts useless, ventured to tell the Emperor that the oaths taken by Suzerain lords and their liegemen were reciprocal; and that, if the vassal promised to serve his lord, the lord in his turn, tacitly engaged himself to protect his vassal. Consequently, the oath became of no effect from the time that the conditions were not faithfully adhered to on both sides; and, therefore since Beuves's relatives possessed the power, the king, by not punishing their oppressor, gave them also the liberty to take the law into their own hands.[43]

The king did not kindly welcome the reproach and his reply indicated that he considered himself above honoring his obligations:

> "Rash young man! Who art thou, that presumest to pass judgment on kings? I know that the oath which unites kings to their people, obliges them to protect them; but dost thou in thy pride flatter thyself thou canst read in the hearts of sovereigns, penetrate their motives,

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[43] The Four Sons of Aymon, p. 27.

> and so decide whether they act properly or not? Were it so, the very lowest of their subjects would possess the right to accuse kings of injustice, if their ideas did not accord with their own."[44]

While a breach of feudal obligations on the part of the king was considered sufficient cause for a vassal "to take the law into [his] own hands," the tale indicates that sheer strength alone did not entitle a vassal to rise against his lord. At the opening of the story Duke Beuves reasoned that he need not contribute his forces to fight his king's wars because:

> "By what right . . . does Charlemagne pretend to oblige me to assist him? Is it because he reigns over states more vast than mine? If he measures his empire by its extent, may I not also measure mine by the passive obedience of my subjects? If he considers himself my sovereign because he is the stronger, what becomes of his title when I can pretend to as much as he? It is true that I swore to obey and assist him, but you all know the value of political oaths wrung from the weakness of a sovereign, or caused by imperative necessity, but whose obligation ceases with the inability to repulse the superior power.. . . [A]bsolute sovereign over my

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[44] Ibid., p. 28.

> subjects, stronger than Charles owning to the situation of my states . . . I fear but little the menaces of which Lothaire /Charlemagne's son and ambassador/ is the bearer.. . . As an ambassador I owe him courtesy, but as the son of a sovereign I owe him nothing . . . ."[45]

This Machiavellian sentiment did not win the sympathy of Aymon nor his sons; rather they criticized Charlemagne for his failure to fulfill his obligations.

The ill feeling between the sons of Aymon and their lord eventually resulted in open war. The struggle continued for fifteen years with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. During the struggle the rebels refrained from holding the king personally responsible; rather they considered him the victim of evil counsel. Renaud lamented, "'Alas! the people's sufferings are not always attributable to their kings; but more frequently to the courtiers, who make use of the king as a tool with which they work out their own projects of revenge.'"[46] Renaud again expressed

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[45] Ibid., p. 4.

[46] Ibid., p. 104.

the same attitude upon learning that the king would forgive all the rebels if one of the brothers would surrender his person to the crown. "'Charlemagne is great and generous; and had he been allowed to follow the dictates of his own heart, he would long since have accepted the proposal I made him to take ourselves out of his dominions; but Finabel and Ganelon have made him avoid clemency as a dangerous weakness.'"[47] The rebels were careful never to harm the person of the king; even while holding Charlemagne prisoner Renaud argued, "'. . . Charles is our sovereign; however unjust he may be toward us, it is not for us to punish his unkindness.'"[48] And again Renaud reasoned, "'Whatever be the king's will, . . . it is our duty to submit, and to implore his clemency; we are his subjects, and our lot is to serve him when he commands us as a king, and to protest ourselves when he treats us as enemies.'"[49]

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47 Ibid., p. 195.

48 Ibid., p. 156.

49 Ibid., p. 158.

As the tale moves forward the critical attitude Renaud displayed at the opening is greatly mitigated, until near the close he counsels his sons, "'Never forget he is your sovereign, and always keep in your memory all I have told you relative to your duties toward him, . . . The history of my life will teach you the fatal consequences of an appearance of forgetfulness of this duty. Innocent as I was, the Heavens allowed Charles to be inflexible toward me. . . .'"[50] He is saying in effect that it was really he who was misguided in opposing his lord. Whatever may have induced the author to offer this lame retraction, which sounds like an apology for the entire story, the fact remains that the tale was concerned with a vassal, who rebelled against what he considered unjust treatment from his lord and this lord was finally forced to offer peace on the vassal's terms.

An explanation for the change in attitude toward kings and the vassals' relationship to the sovereign may in part be attributed to the fact

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50 Ibid., p. 237.

that authors of romances enjoyed the patronage of feudal barons. The expected tendency would be for the author to extol the baron at the expense of the king. On the other hand the minstrels sang the epic lays at the royal court and Chadwick cautions that court poets might have exaggerated the power and influence of the royal family.[51] Allowing for such distortions, a further explanation for the differences may be that the romances were composed at a time when kings, particularly in France, the home of the romance, were consolidating power and building nations at the expense of the barons; hence the romance reflects resentment against strong kings. With due regard for influences which affected poets and authors, the fact remains that the epic and the romance reflect different concepts of kingship, with a very different relationship between lord and vassal.

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51 Hector Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age (London, 1912), p. 372.

## Chapter IV

## RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Although epic and romance were popular forms of literature written about secular subjects for a secular audience, religious ideas were woven into these stories. The religious views of the aristocratic layman, however, were seldom presented in theological terms. Rather religious beliefs and attitudes were revealed by implication.

The epic, far more than the romance,[1] reflects a serious interest in both worldly and otherworldly affairs. The subject matter of the epic is grim struggle, often resulting in death for the hero. Moments of pleasure are pictured occasionally; for instance, in Beowulf, the warriors' revels in the mead-hall,[2] but such

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1 The Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach is excluded from any general references made to romance in this chapter. The unique place Parzival holds among the romances is discussed on pages 113-119.

2 Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 22 and pp. 33-40.

examples are rare. The epic contains no expressions of joy in natural phenomena, in sensual pleasures, nor in material luxuries. If the tone of the epic is not always entirely religious, it is never frivolous, materialistic, nor irreverent.

With death a commonplace in the epic, much concern is shown in preparing for life in the next world. Beowulf, after his encounter with the dragon, revieved his life and prepared to meet death with composure.

> "For fifty winters I've ruled this realm,
> And never a lord of a neighboring land
> Dared strike with terror or seek with sword.
> In my life I abode by the lot assigned,
> Kept well what was mine, courted no quarrels,
> Swore no false oaths. And now for all this
> Though my hurt is grievous, my heart is glad.
> When life leaves body, the Lord of mankind
> Cannot lay to my charge the killing of
> kinsmen!"[3]

The more orthodox prayers of Byrhtnoth and Roland show their earnest preoccupation with the fate of their souls in the hereafter. Byrhtnoth implored God,

> "I give thanks to Thee, Ruler of peoples
> For all the joys I have had in this world.
> Now, merciful Lord, I have greatest need
> That Thou to my spirit wilt render good,

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[3] Ibid., p. 88.

> That my soul be permitted to fare to Thee,
> In Thy protection, King of angels,
> With peace to journey, I pray to Thee earnestly
> That the hounds of hell be allowed not to harrass me."[4]

Equally sincere and repentant were the last words of Roland,

> "Forgive, O God
> The wrongs that I have wrought Thee, since the day
> When I was born unto this day when here
> I am fordone."[5]

He concluded his prayer,

> "Father whose word is truth, who from the grave
> Didst ransom Lazarus, and from ravening lions
> Didst rescue Daniel, rescue now my soul
> From suffering for the sins which I have sinned
> All my life long."[6]

The romance does not provide any direct comparison with these final supplications, since the "hero" of romance was seldom confronted with a situation as serious as death. The romance authors wrote pleasant tales of love and adventure, which were exciting enough to be entertaining, but not

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[4] The Battle of Maldon, ll. 173-80.

[5] The Song of Roland, p. 80.

[6] Ibid., p. 81.

realistic enough to be unpleasant. The absence in romance of serious problems and realistic situations reflects a frivolous attitude toward this life, while seldom was consideration given to otherworldly affairs.

Romance manifests an absorption in the pleasures of this world, which can be illustrated through the appreciative view some authors displayed toward nature. Gottfried von Strassburg's description of the "Maytime", when King Marke held a tournament, indicates such an attitude:

> The gentle, sweetest summertide
> has summoned all its labor sweet
> with zeal, and laid it at their feet.
> The singing birds one often hears
> in wooded glens, a joy to ears,
> grass, flowers, leaves, and blossoms bright,
> to all men's eyes a sheer delight,
> giving the noble heart full pleasure--[7]

Such enthusiasm for this world implies a diminished regard for the next.

Not all romancers saw such an ideal world. For instance, Jean de Meun, with his critical eye, found the world beset with evils and injustices. But his secularism was revealed by his desire to improve

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[7] Gottfried von Strassburg, The "Tristan and Isolde," ll. 544-51.

the conditions of this life, rather than to turn exclusively to the next.

> Although Jean de Meun subscribed himself a believer in the tenets of the Church, he was untouched by the spirituality of its message. His concern was with the establishment on earth of a community wherein theft and violence should exist no more because poverty and oppression were unknown.[8]

The love theme, common to most romances, is further evidence of the emphasis on earthly matters. Not only was the courtly love idea exclusively concerned with this world, it was also contrary to Christian morality. The Tristan legend and the Lancelot story, to mention two of the most popular medieval romances, are tales of adulterous love. Chrétien de Troyes, who authored Lancelot and who wrote a Tristan romance, was clearly aware, as his apologies indicate, of the immorality of these stories. He opened Lancelot by saying that his patroness, Marie of Champagne, provided him with the material for the romance and that he was merely writing it out of devoted service to her.[9] In

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[8] Wood, The Spirit of Protest, p. 159.

[9] Chrétien de Troyes, "Lancelot," in Arthurian Romances, p. 270.

Cligés, Chrétien used necromancy to avoid an explicit case of adultery, so that, as he has Fenice tell Cliges ". . . men should /not/ speak of us as they speak of the loves of Iseut and Tristan. . . ."[10]

Aucassin and Nicolete epitomizes the worldly, sensual, pleasure-seeking aspect of the romance. Aucassin was determined to marry Nicolete, a slave purchased from the Saracens. If he married her, he was warned, "'. . . all the days of the world your body would be shamed by it and afterwards your soul for this would be in hell, for into paradise you would never enter.'"[11] Instead of attempting to refute the contention that salvation or damnation depended upon the nationality or social status of his wife, Aucassin issued a lengthy tirade on his preference for hell.

> "In paradise what have I to do? I do not seek to enter there. . . .For into paradise go none but such folk as I shall tell you. Thither go this old priest and that old cripple and the other maimed man, who all night crouch before these altars and in those old

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[10] Ibid., pp. 131-32.

[11] Aucassin and Nicolete, p. 18.

> crypts, and those that wear those old worn cloaks and those old rags, who are naked and barefoot and tattered, who are dying of hunger and of thirst and of cold and of wretchedness. These go into paradise; with them no part have I."[12]

These words illustrate contempt for the cleric and for the poor, and in essence are a renunciation of Christianity. The emphasis on material and sensual pleasures is shown by Aucassin's concept of hell.

> "But into hell would I go; for into hell go the fair clerk and the fair knight who have died in the tourneys and in the rich wars, and the stout man-at-arms and the noble man. With these would I go. And there go the fair courtly ladies, such as have two lovers or three besides their lords; and there go the gold and the silver and the furs white and gray; and there go the harper and minstrel and king of the world. With these would I go. . . ."[13]

The entire romance ". . . breathes . . . [a] spirit of absorption in the goodliness of this earth and of unconcern for the future,"[14] and as such illustrates a basic departure from the epic.

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[12] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[13] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[14] Wood, The Spirit of Protest, p. 172.

Not all romances were as completely oriented toward this world as Aucassin and Nicolete. It is not uncommon to find a knight's youth spent in the pursuit of love and adventure with later life devoted to the expiation of sin resulting from knight-errantry. Guy of Warwick was such a knight, for he saw

> . . . those things that gave him his renown were vain and wicked in the sight of Heaven. Oft would he sit and meditate alone, on those vain steps that his rash youth had trod; then to himself with groans and grievous sighs would he cry out, "O pardon me, just Heaven! I have done nothing yet thy grace to purchase, but spent my time about a woman's face. . . . How many days have I wasted for a wife, but for my sins never spent one weeping hour! It is now high time repentance to begin: Henceforth the remnant of my days I will spend in contrite sorrow for my former sins, that Heaven may pardon all the erring ways whereby fond flesh and blood deceived me. Unto the world I will now go learn to die, let me be censured for it as men list; I will please my Maker in whatever I can: ambitious pride hath been my youth's disease: I will teach age meekness ere my glass be run, and bid farewell to honour, wealth, and beauty; I will go through hell itself to purchase heaven."[15]

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15 "Guy of Warwick," in Early English Prose Romances, p. 384.

Such an admission of sin, incurred through the pursuit of love and adventure, indicates that the author was clearly aware of the unreligious, if not the irreligious, nature of the romance themes. Adding a pious ending to a romance to mitigate the secular emphasis suggests the author attempted to compromise secularism with religion.

Jean de Meun did not fail to criticize the practice of withdrawing from the world after having devoted youth to sensual pleasures.

> In youth run lawless passions wild,
> Till folly is on folly piled.
> By loose companions led aside
> Man changeth oft, and roaming wide,
> Becomes at last, perchance, a monk;
> Within some dreary convent shrunk,
> He casts off Nature's glorious gift
> Of freedom, in the hope to lift
> A fool to heaven when in the pew
> Of vows he lives, like hawk in mew.
> And then perchance he finds too great
> The load, and out the convent gate
> Flees. . . .[16]

The manner in which God was presented, and the role He played in man's life, suggests much about the view of the aristocrat toward religion. The early Anglo-Saxon epics, which represent an incomplete

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16 W. Lorris and J. Clopinel, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Ellis, I, ll. 4723-735.

blending of paganism and Christianity, contain references both ". . . to the blind and inexorable power of Wyrd, or Fate, and to the omnipotence of a divine Ruler who governs all things well."[17] Those passages in Beowulf, containing explicit reference to the latter concept, show no New Testament influence; there are no references to Christ or to the Atonement. God is presented neither as a solely inspirational force, nor is He presented as a mere mechanical agent, who puts His omnipotent power at the disposal of those enjoying His favor. His favor, although not made overtly manifest, was nevertheless necessary for success, as Hrothgar's words imply,

> "Thanks be to God for this glorious sight!
> I have suffered much evil, much outrage
> from Grendel,
> But the God of glory works wonder on wonder.
> I had no hope of a haven from sorrow
> While this best of houses stood badged with
> blood,
> A woe far-reaching for all the wise
> Who weened that they never could hold the
> hall
> Against the assaults of devils and demons.
> But now with God's help this hero has
> compassed
> A deed our cunning could no way contrive."[18]

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17 Beowulf, tr. Kennedy, p. 1 (Intro.).

18 Ibid., p. 31.

The help from God to which Hrothgar made reference was not revealed in any concrete way, and unlike many romances, it was not simply assumed that God would grant automatic and complete victory to those whom He favored. Beowulf, speaking of Grendel's escape, said,

> "By the favor of God we won the fight,
> . . .
> But I might not hold him or hinder his going
> For God did not grant it, my fingers failed."[19]

God intervened indirectly in behalf of Beowulf during the battle with Grendel's mother. Beowulf related the incident in the following manner:

> ". . . and death had been swift
> Had God not granted His sheltering strength.
> My strong-edged Hrunting, stoutest of blades,
> Availed me nothing. But God revealed--
> Often His arm aided the friendless--
> The fairest of weapons hanging on wall,
> An ancient broadsword . . ."[20]

With this weapon, which was "[so] heavy no hand but his own could hold it," Beowulf slew Grendel's dam. Although Beowulf attributed his discovery of the weapon to God, nevertheless his own superior strength made use of the broadsword possible.

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19 Ibid., p. 32.

20 Ibid., p. 54.

The literature of this half-pagan, half-Christian age indicates that God's favor, or lack thereof, was considered contingent upon the actions of men. Hearing of the dragon's devastation of the countryside, Beowulf ". . . in his wisdom . . . weened / He had grievously angered the Lord Everlasting."[21] The same implication is contained in Waldere:

> "Yet One Only availeth the victory to give,
> Ready to aid whatever is right!
> Whoso hopes for help from the Holy One,
> Grace of God, will get it surely,
> If his ways have earlier earned him that."[22]

The supernatural element was held to a minimum and in Beowulf was represented primarily by monsters. Grendel and his mother were considered progeny of Cain and thus were associated with evil. Beowulf's enormous strength was not entirely of a natural order,[23] but the supernatural was not emphasized to the extent that the character of the hero was obscured.

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[21] Ibid., p. 75.

[22] "Waldere," in The Oldest English Epic, ll. 25-29.

[23] Chadwick, The Heroic Age, p. 121.

The Song of Roland ". . . is not merely Christian in subject; it is Christian to its very bones."[24] Archbishop Turpin's words, issued prior to the first battle, summarize the spirit of the poem, and illustrate man's view of his duty to God.

> ". . . when King Charles left us here,
> He deemed us soldiers of the Christian faith,
> Willing to die for God. The hour of proof
> Is come. The foes of Charles and God are here
> Before you."[25]

Throughout the poem man remained a servant fighting and dying for God. The supernatural, which was entirely of a Christian order, served primarily ". . . to influence men's minds and actions, and not to provide a machinery for the story."[26] Charlemagne had numerous visions of Gabriel, who was the king's special guardian. On only one occasion was circumstance manipulated supernaturally to the direct advantage of Charlemagne. Upon hearing Roland's horn, Charlemagne hurried with his forces to the assistance of the rear-guard. He arrived too late, however, to do more than avenge the slaughter of the Franks. As evening approached Charlemagne prayed

[24] The Song of Roland, tr. Sayers, p. 19 (Intro.).
[25] The Song of Roland, p. 44.
[26] The Song of Roland, tr. Sayers, p. 19 (Intro.).

that the sun might stay its course in order that immediate vengence might be taken upon the fleeing Paynims.

> And lo! an angel came
> From heaven, who cried to Charles: "Ride on! for day
> Shall fail you not."
> . . .
> Through God's great love for Charles a wonderous thing
> Was wrought, for the red sun stood still
> While Paynims fled, and Franks pursued, and so
> They caught them in the valley that men call
> The Vale of Darkness.[27]

The directness and simplicity of the religious beliefs presented in Roland are noteworthy. Men fought for God, died for God, and then God received His heroes directly unto Himself. Upon Roland's death

> . . . there came
> On golden wings a spirit, and beside
> Saint Michael of the Peril of the Deep,
> And the Archangel Gabriel, and these three
> Carried his soul to heaven, and to God.[28]

The warriors offered their simple prayers directly to God Himself. Throughout the poem religion provided the inspiration, the unity, and the strength that are

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[27] The Song of Roland, pp. 83-4.

[28] Ibid., p. 81.

revealed in every thought and action of the Frankish hosts.

The frequent prayers of the hero give a ritual-like quality to The Cid. The Cid received divine inspiration but never direct divine assistance; his military successes resulted from his skill as a leader and tactician. The Cid, however, never failed to offer thanks to God for His grace. Riding into battle the Cid cried, "'Now swiftly let every man strike in, / By the Creator's favor this battle we shall win.'"[29] And at the close of battle, "'To God in Heaven and all his saints great thanks and praises be.'"[30] Without God's grace it was implied that success would be impossible for ". . . the Cid a glad man was he / That God had given him succor and gained that victory."[31] Again, "For in winning of the battle God's grace to them was shown."[32] The only obvious manifestation of the supernatural occurred as the Cid began his exile. Gabriel appeared in a

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[29] The Lay of the Cid, p. 21.

[30] Ibid., p. 21.

[31] Ibid., p. 41.

[32] Ibid., p. 61.

vision, telling the hero,

> "Ride, Cid, most Noble Campeador, for never
> yet did knight
> Ride forth upon such an hour whose aspect
> was so bright.
> While thou shalt live good fortune shall be
> with thee and thine."[33]

In the epic God's favor was considered necessary for success; in romance God's direct aid, administered usually through His angels, assured success. The romance knight always fought for Right; with God and Right being synomonous, the knight automatically enjoyed divine assistance. This reasoning underlaid the theories of trial by ordeal and trial by combat. As Yvain told an opponent with whom he was to do battle, "'For, if the truth be known, God always sides with the righteous cause, for God and right are one; and if they are both upon my side, then I have better company and better aid than thou.'"[34] The assurance of divine assistance guaranteed the success of any venture, thus accounting for the gross exaggerations found in romance. When embarking upon his great adventure,

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[33] Ibid., p. 14.

[34] Chrétien de Troyes, "Yvain," in Arthurian Romances, p. 238.

Huon expressed typical confidence in God's help: "'. . . for by the grace of God we shall right well escape; for whom God will aid no man can hurt.'"[35] Chrétien stated a similar idea when an evil count plotted to kill Erec and steal his wife. The author remarked, ". . . God will be able to lend him aid, and I think He will do so."[36] Although these acts show that God was personally interested in the affairs of individuals, when divine aid repeatedly and automatically takes physical form, God is reduced to what A. B. Taylor describes as "the greatest enchanter of all."[37] God's manipulation of men and events becomes mere machinery in the romance.

The authors' employment of God as a mechanical agent was carried to absurd lengths. While King Arthur was in Brittany, those to whom he had entrusted England turned traitor and planned to defend London against the king's forces. After Arthur began his attack, the rebels realized they

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35 Huon of Bordeaux, p. 91.

36 Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec et Enide," in Arthurian Romances, p. 113.

37 Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romances, p.223.

could not defend the city. One night when ". . . neither star nor moon had shed a ray across the sky" they planned a sneak attack on Arthur's camp. "But before they reached the tents, the moon began to show itself, and I think it was to work them woe that it rose sooner than was its wont. Thus God, who opposed their enterprise, illuminated the darkness of the night . . ." The moonlight shining on their shields and helmets caused the traitors to be detected immediately.[38]

King Richard was the recipient of almost unlimited divine assistance. At one point his Crusade was going very badly; the Saracens had destroyed the rear-guard, and heat and clouds of dust inhibited the Christians.

> The king, almost exhausted by fatigue,
> Began to despair of success,--
> On his knees he gan down fall;
> "Help!" to Jesu he gan call,--

No sooner had he called for help than St. George appeared. Instantly the Christians recovered their strength and spirit, and won a great victory over

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[38] Chrétien de Troyes, "Cligés," in Arthurian Romances, p. 113.

the infidel.[39] On another occasion Saladin challenged Richard to meet him in single combat. Accompanying the challenge was the offer of a war horse, which in fact was a fiend conjured into the likeness of a horse by a necromancer. Richard, ignorant of the diabolical nature of the horse, accepted it. But the night prior to the battle ". . . an angel had appeared to the Christian hero; had related the machinations of the Saracens; had given him full instructions for the management of his diabolical steed; and had presented to him a spearhead, which no armour, however enchanted, was able to resist."[40] These examples, which are but a few of the numerous ones existing in romance, all point up the moral that serving the righteous cause earned God's help, while espousing the unrighteous cause led to the abandonment of man by God. God, instead of acting as an inspirational force upon men, however, became a mere device that never failed to do the expected. In short the spiritual nature of God was ignored.

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[39] "Richard Coeur de Lion," in Specimens of Early Metrical Romances, pp. 324-25.

[40] Ibid., p. 329.

The supernatural in romance went far beyond those acts directly associated with the hand of God. Many of the supernatural features were connected with religion; others were clearly manifestations of magic. In the romance religion and magic become hopelessly confused. Bevis, while fighting a dragon, fell into a well in which ". . . a female saint had bathed . . . thereby impart[ing] to it such efficacy, that, whilst it healed the wound and restored the almost exhausted strength of the Christian hero, it effectually impeded the attack of the dragon."[41] Other waters, thought to have originated in Paradise, possessed miraculous qualities, which not only healed the sick, but also restored youth to the aged. Romance abounds with miraculous stones, rings, and gems which protected the wearer from injury. Knights were also blessed with armor, swords, and horses, the supernatural powers of which were limitless. The opponents of the knights were frequently monsters, giants, and semi-demons.

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41 "Sir Bevis of Hamptoun," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, p. 265.

In addition, there were wizards equipped with praeternatural powers. One such wizard was Merlin, whose birth was arranged by the fallen angels that had remained in mid-air, while Lucifer descended into hell. These bad angels retained the ability to assume any shape in order to tempt and pervert mankind. The birth of Merlin was planned to counteract the birth of Christ, and his function was to have been the dissemination of wickedness. The plan of the bad angels failed because Merlin was baptized immediately upon birth, ". . . thus disappoint[ing] for ever the hopes of the fiends." His unusual lineage, however, provided him with the capacity to know all things past, present, and future.[42] No less amazing was Oberon, King of the Fairies. Because of extraordinary ancestry and remarkable gifts bestowed upon him at birth, he had, among other powers, but to wish himself a particular place and at once he would be there with as many men as he chose.[43] Needless to say his

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[41] "Sir Bevis of Hamptoun," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, p. 265.

[42] "Merlin," Part I, in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, pp. 82-88.

[43] Huon of Bordeaux, p. 81.

friendship with Huon proved invaluable to the latter. The extensive use of magic suggests a bored, thrill-seeking audience, who made little distinction between natural and supernatural phenomena or between the Christian supernatural and mere magic.

Christianity and Islam were compared on the basis of concrete benefits provided. The Mohammedan faith was considered false because it did not help the Saracens win battles. When Charlemagne pursued the Paynims and pushed them into the waters of the Ebro, "They called upon their god / Of stone, and so leapt in--he helped them not."[44] Upon Bevis' arrival in Damascus,

> . . . /he/ presently found himself entangled in a crowd of Saracens, who were preparing a sacrifice to an idol representing Mohomet . . . . /He/ pressed through the multitude, forced his way to the idol, seized it by its golden crown, and threw it into the dirt, desiring the people to go and help a god who was now evidently incapable of helping them.[45]

Likewise Renaud advised a Saracen king whom he had overcome to "'quit your absurd prophet who has not

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[44] The Song of Roland, p. 84.

[45] "Sir Bevis of Hamptoun," in Specimens of Early Metrical Romances, p. 255.

been able to save you. . . .'"[46] King Richard and Saladin engaged in personal combat in order to determine which combatant represented the true faith.[47] In each of these examples Christianity was adjudged the true faith because the Christian knight was victorious.

Most romances lack the all-pervasive religious atmosphere that characterizes the thoroughly Christian epics. Chrétien, the foremost romance author, was neither religious nor anti-religious. "Religion was part of the furniture of his stories. . . But the Christianity of Chrétien is an affair of externals. . . ."[48] The romances emphasized external religious practices, which appear to have left the heart untouched. Passing references were frequently made to mass, to confession, and to pilgrimages. A. B. Taylor states that although these externals of religion are ". . . not the most ideal guides of human conduct, they must have had a beneficial

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[46] The Four Sons of Aymon, p. 159.

[47] "Richard Coeur de Lion," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, p. 329.

[48] R.W.Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages (London, 1953), p. 245.

influence upon the audience, who were thus constantly reminded that the ideal hero was not only a good fighter and a devoted lover, but a loyal Christian as well."[49]

Further evidence of emphasis upon the externals of religion is shown by the attitude toward conversion. The mere act of baptism was assumed to change the infidel into a Christian. No consideration was given to the intellectual or spiritual aspects of conversion; only the overt act itself was deemed worthy of mention. Baptism not only made devoted Christians of the converts, but apparently severed all former family and cultural ties also. Claramond, a Saracen princess, exchanged the Islamic for the Christian faith because of her love for Huon. Her incorrigible father, however, refused to become Christian. With this provocation Huon struck the father so ". . . that his head flew off his shoulders," without the daughter uttering a word of protest or regret.[50]

The Cid, like the Anglo-Saxon epic, contains little evidence of religious militancy. The Cid's

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[49] Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romances, p. 169.

[50] Huon of Bordeaux, p. 171.

military offensive against the Moors was not religiously inspired. "The discomfiture of the Moors is not an end in itself [to the Cid] but the means of vindicat[ing himself to his lord], and, be it said, of support."[51] The Cid treated the Moors justly, not resorting to ruthless annihilation. Upon taking Castejón the conqueror decided,

> ". . . to destroy the castle seems in no way good to me.
> An hundred Moorish women in that place will I set free
> And of the Moors an hundred. Since there, as it befell
> I captured them. Hereafter shall they all speak of me well."[52]

As for the Moors who were not killed in defending Alcocer, the Cid reasoned, "'Surely we cannot sell them the women and the men; / And as for striking off their heads, we shall gain nothing then.'"[53] When the hero left the town:

> The Moors both men and women cried out in bitter woe:
> "Lord Cid art thou departing? Still may our prayers go
> Before thy path, for with thee we are full content."

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[51] The Lay of the Cid, p. viii.

[52] Ibid., p. 19.

[53] Ibid., p. 22.

> For my lord the great Cid of Bivar, when
> from Alcocer he went,
> The Moors both men and women made lamentation
> sore.
> . . . in the town of Alcocer 'twas grief to
> all and one,
> For many a deed of mercy unto them the Cid
> had done.[54]

Although The Cid was written a few years after The Song of Roland, it is the latter which typifies the militant Christian spirit that animated the crusading movement. Charlemagne was the temporal, as well as the quasi-religious leader of Christendom, while Roland represented the crusading soldier, whose duty was to fight for the Faith. Charlemagne, in taking vengence upon the Paynims, clarified the nature of the struggle in his words to the Emir;

> "Never to Paynims may I show love or peace.
> Do thou confess the Faith by God revealed,
> Take Christendom, and thy fast friend I'll
> be.
> The King Almighty then serve thou and
> believe."
> Quote Baligant: "Thy sermon's but ill
> preached."
> Once more with swords they battle, each
> to each.[55]

The struggle was clearly between ". . . Emperor and Emir, West and East, Christ and Islam."[56]

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[54] Ibid., p. 30.

[55] The Song of Roland, tr. Sayers, ll. 3596-3601.

[56] Ibid., p. 24 (Intro.).

Religious militancy became impassioned fanaticism in those romances dealing with the conflict between Christians and Moslems. The Christian romancers considered all heathens Saracen. Merlin opens: "There was once in Britain a king whose name was Constans. In his youth he had been distinguished by his wisdom and valour, having resisted, and finally driven out of his country, King Hengist of Denmark and his whole army of Saracens."[57] Christian heroes delighted in the slaughter of conquered Saracens who refused conversion to Christianity. Oberon came to the aid of Huon who was surrounded by Paynims: ". . . he and his men fell on the Paynims and slew them till their blood ran down the streets like a river, but first he made it to be cried that as many as would receive baptism their lives should be saved, so that thereby many were christened."[58]

Richard Coeur de Lion reflects an attitude of intense fanaticism toward the Saracen, which

[57] "Merlin," Part I, in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, p. 77.

[58] Huon of Bordeaux, p. 107.

was temperèd by no civilized sense of decency. While in the Holy Land, Richard, recovering from the ague, was overcome by a great desire for pork. As none was available, an old knight ordered a young, fat Saracen slain, cooked, and served to Richard. Unknown to the king "[he] ate the flesh, and gnew the bones" and gained strength; later he demanded to see the swine's head. "'What devil is this?'" the king cried, / And gan to laugh as he were wode," declaring that no longer would he or his army go hungry for meat.[59] At the time, Richard held captive some distinguished Saracen princes. Saladin sent an embassy to Richard to arrange ransom for the prisoners. The king invited the ambassadors to dine with him, giving secret orders to his marshal to "select a certain number of the most distinguished captives . . . cause their heads to be instantly struck of: that these heads should be delivered to the cook, with instructions to clear away the hair, and, after boiling them in a caldron, to distribute them on several platters, one to each guest. . . ." At dinner the Moslem guests watched

59 "Richard Coeur de Lion," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, pp. 311-13.

with abhorrence while Richard ". . . [swallowed] the morsels as fast as they could be supplied by the knight who carved them" and observed ". . . the smoking heads before them; . . . trac[ing] in the swoln and distorted features the resemblance of a friend or near relation; and receiv[ing] from the fatal scroll which accompanied each dish the sad assurance that this resemblance was not imaginary." This barbarous fanaticism was climaxed when ". . . Richard gave orders for the immediate execution of sixty thousand [Saracen] captives."

> They were led into the place full even.
> There they heard angels of heaven;
> They said, "Seigneures, tuez, tuez!
> Spares hem nought, and beheadeth these!"
> King Richard heard the angels' voice,
> And thanked God, and the holy cross.[60]

This grand slaughter of infidels apparently induced an emotion in the author comparable to that which he felt at the return of springtime. Immediately after giving an account of the massacre, he added a few lines about the joys of spring. The entire episode reveals a fanatical, and degraded

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60 Ibid., pp. 314-18.

attitude toward the crusading movement. The sincere religious zeal expressed in The Song of Roland, as the Franks fought and died for God and the Faith at Ronceval, is strikingly absent in the romance concerned with Richard's expedition. He was diverted from his main objective by arguments with Philip of France, and his men were diverted by their haste to secure riches whenever a town was taken. The authors inclusion of a choir of angels, which serenaded Richard after he had completed his cannibalistic feast and had ordered his captives executed, seems in bad taste and expresses a debased attitude toward religion.

The theme of chivalrous adventure is combined with the theme of spiritual struggle in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival. "Wolfram presents the knightly and the religious elements not in juxtaposition, still less in conflict; although the latter wins predominance, the two combine into a unit."[61] The romance tells of Parzival's fall into sin and his subsequent struggle to find his way to God.

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61 Wolfram von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," p. 2 (Intro.).

Parzival, as a young lad, light-heartedly left his mother to become a knight at King Arthur's court. When he left her,

> This faithful, loving woman fell
> To earth, where grief, a savage knife,
> So cut her that it took her life.[62]

The young knight all but forgot his mother. Once he determined to visit her but was side-tracked by adventure. His first sin was to forget his mother. His second was the cold-blooded slaying of Ither, for the purpose of providing himself with knightly regalia.[63] This offence was the more serious since Ither was a kinsman of Parzival. While at the Grail Castle, Parzival failed to manifest any pity for the Fisher King, Anfortas, as he did not ask the nature of the King's sufferings and thus incurred another sin. For this omission he was treated to derisive language by Cundry in the presence of Arthur and his court.[64] Parzival interpreted this scorn as a manifestation of God's defection, and he climaxed his sins by turning from God.

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[62] Ibid., 128, 20-22.

[63] Ibid., 155, 1-10.

[64] Ibid., 314, 20 to 318, 4.

"Woe, what is God?
Were He almighty, scorn so odd
To . . . me He'd not have sent,
If He had been omnipotent,
To serve Him e'er was in my mind
Since I had hoped His grace to find.
But now His service I forswear.
If me He hate, that hate I'll bear."[65]

Parzival expressed overt defiance of God by riding armed on Good Friday, explaining that,

"One time I served a lord called God,
Ere I upon His scornful nod
With deep disgrace was favored.
My loyalty had not wavered
To Him who I was told would bless:
His help has now grown powerless."[66]

After being reprimanded for his conduct on the day of the Lord's crucifixion, he meditated,

"If God commands such force
That He can guide both beast and horse,
And show men right behavior,
I'll praise Him as a savior.
If God have help for such a deed
As pointing this Castilian steed
Upon the best of roads for me,
A test of His help in that I'll see.--
Now take the road that God ordains."[67]

Thus Parzival was brought to the cave of the holy hermit, Trevrizent, who gradually led the knight to atonement.

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65 Ibid., 332, 1-8.

66 Ibid., 447, 25-30.

67 Ibid., 452, 1-9.

> Trevrizent prepared him by speaking of the introduction of sin into the world, of the fallen angels, of the sin of man's progenitors, of the sins of the Grail folk and of his own, Trevrizent's sin, and of the sin of Parzival's kin in general. Sin thus becomes more than an act of commission or omission: an agent, a force, a power with which man must reckon. It cannot be abolished, and therefore ethical perfection is impossible on earth. The Grail and its kingdom, however, the symbol of peace in life, can indeed be attained and can become a lay ideal of life.[68]

With the aid of the hermit, Parzival's search for his Redeemer was rewarded, which renewed his faith in God and brought earthly peace and happiness to the knight--now the Grail King.

Wolfram emphasized both the justice and mercy of God. The Supreme Being pictured is a source of spiritual, rather than mechanical aid to men.

> "What greater love was ever shown
> Than toward us was exemplified
> When Christ for us was crucified?
> . . .
> His precious life He gave away,
> With His own death our guilt to pay,
> Through which mankind was wholly lost,
> A guilt whereof hell was the cost."[69]

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[68] Ibid., p. 18 (Intro.).

[69] Ibid., 448, 10-18.

Trevrizent spoke to Parzival of God in the following manner:

> "From the Bible I've been gaining
> The truth . . .
> How man should serve with all his might
> Our God, whose help is great and true,
> Whose help no flagging ever knew
> To keep men's souls from sinking.
> Be faithful without shrinking,
> Since God Himself is loyalty
> And hates all falsity to see
> To God we must show gratitude:
> For our sake He has done much good
> Since his noble, lofty race
> For us put on a human face.
> God's name and essence is the truth:
> False doing finds in Him no ruth.
> Let this be your reflection:
> God cannot show defection.
> This thought take for your guiding
> In God show faith abiding."[70]

The hermit further expressed the goodness and glory

> "Of Him whose love is true and great
> . . .
> He's a transcendent light above
> And never wavers in His love.
> On whom our Lord His love bestows,
> True happiness that mortal knows.
> But here there's a division;
> Each one must make a decision:
> Here's His love and there's His hate.
> Decide which is the better fate.
> The guilty, by not repenting,
> To love is not consenting;
> Who for sin makes restitution,
> Of God seeks absolution.
> . . .
> Good thoughts are by Him respected.

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[70] Ibid., 462, 12-30.

> Since God sees through our every thought,
> Alas for the evil deeds we've wrought!
> When one for his acts by God is blamed,
> So that of him God is ashamed,
> To whom is he left by courtoisie?
> Whither can the poor soul flee?
> But if to God you would do ill,
> Who can be kind or stern at will,
> Who's prone to wrath or favor,
> Then you are lost for ever."[71]

In these few passages Wolfram summed up the main tenets of the Christian faith. Wolfram thus presented the highest concept of God and the clearest definition of Christianity found in either the epic or the romance. Zeydel and Morgan, two authorities on Parsival, assert that in Wolfram's Parsival, ". . . written seven hundred years after the conversion of the Franks, the full impact of the Christian faith was finally revealed to the Germans."[72]

Parzival is also unique among the romances because Wolfram, instead of presenting the courtly love theme, displayed the greatest respect for marriage and conjugal fidelity. Parsival said of King Anfortas' sister, who loaned him a cloak upon

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[71] Ibid., 466, 1-30 to 467, 1-8.

[72] Ibid., p. 19 (Intro.).

his arrival at the Grail Castle,

> ". . . her commandments I will heed
> Who lent her new cloak at my need
> In kindness without measure.
> I would it were her pleasure
> A knight as devotee to take:
> That I'd welcome for her sake,
> But not to win her love I mean.
> My wife, Condwiramur, the queen,
> If just as fair as this one here,
> Or even fairer, that is clear."[73]

When Parzival visited Trevrizent, he mentioned grieving for his wife, from whom he had been separated during his years of wandering. The hermit answered,

> "You're truly in unhappy plight,
> Since for your wife your grieving,
> Thus woe for your own heart weaving.
> If you are true to your marriage tie,
> What though in hell you come to lie,
> Your suffering there will swiftly cease,
> From the bonds of hell you'll find release
> Through God's assistance, without fail."[74]

Epic and romance are clearly secular in spirit of conception and in subject matter treated. Each had the same primary function; namely, to entertain an audience. Although both types of literature are secular, a consideration of the

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[73] Ibid., 246, 13-22.

[74] Ibid., 467, 2-9.

Christian faith and ethics is never wholly absent. The aim of this chapter, however, has been to show that attitudes toward religion and the supernatural did undergo significant change between the period when the epic was the dominant literary form and the time of its replacement by romance.

## Chapter V

## THE CLERGY

The epic and the romance reflect distinctly different attitudes toward the clergy. The emphasis placed upon the clergy, the roles played by its members, and the comments offered about representatives of the Church suggest that the aristocratic view of the clergy changed between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. The fragments of Anglo-Saxon epic, which are either clearly pagan or which represent the primitive blending of Christianity with paganism, naturally contain no references to ecclesiastics. In both The Song of Roland and The Cid are found clergymen who held important secular positions and who were presented in most favorable terms.

Archbishop Turpin of Rheims held a particularly honored position in The Song of Roland and was characterized as one of the most admirable and admired persons in the poem. His duties, like those of Bishop don Jerome in The Cid, were both secular and spiritual. Of Turpin it was said, "Never

did priest sing mass, who with his hands, / Did greater deeds in battle."[1] He was a strong and brave warrior who fought side by side with Roland and the peers. His military prowess earned him the honor of leading the assault against the Paynims in the second battle.[2] Both his words and his deeds inspired the Frankish host. The Franks seeing Paynims on all sides "cried. . . out in sudden dread," but Turpin, speaking as a warrior and as a clergyman, encouraged them by

> . . . [bidding] them think no craven thought,
> Nor yield an inch of the red field, lest men
> Sing shameful songs thereof. "Much better die
> In fight," he said. "And die we must. This day
> Shall be our last in life. But of one thing
> May I be surety - blessed Paradise
> Is opened wide for you, and with the Saints
> Shall you be singing ere the sun hath set."
> And when they heard, the Franks forgot straightway
> The fear of imminent death, and cried, "Montjoy."[3]

His ferocity as a warrior was shown by his reaction to the battle boast of a Paynim made in his presence.

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1 The Song of Roland, p. 56.

2 Ibid., p. 52.

3 Ibid., p. 53.

> And hatred for the Paynim filled his heart,
> And spurring with his golden spurs, he rushed
> Upon him, broke his buckles, rent in twain
> His useless haubark, thrusting his heavy lance
> Through flesh and bone and heart, and threw him down
> Crashing headlong to death. And then he checked
> The mad rush of his charger, turned about,
> And, bending from the saddle, looked upon
> The mangled corse and cried: "What say you now?"[4]

The Archbishop justified his lack of "Christian love," and hence his slaughter of the enemy, by:

> Communing with his heart: "The wretch, methinks,
> Is far the worst of unbelievers -- yea --
> If now I slay him I shall do no wrong
> Whatever tide, a coward love I not."[5]

Similarly the Bishop don Jerome of Valencia was an active participant in battle, who "[w]as at a loss to number the Moors that he had slain." The following passage gives a typical description of the bishop:

> Lo! don Jerome the Bishop was armed in gallant style,
> He stopped before the Campeador. Fair fortune had he aye.
> "The Mass of Holy Trinity I sang for thee this day,
> For this cause from mine own country did I seek thee and ensue,

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[4] Ibid., pp. 45-6.

[5] Ibid., p. 52.

Since in the slaughter of the Moors such
great delight I knew.
And I am fain to honor both mine order and
mine hand.
In the forefront of the battle it is my
desire to stand.
And crosses on my pennant, and blazoned arms
have I.
If it be God his pleasure, I am fain my
arms to try,
That so at least my spirit in perfect peace
maybe,
. . ."

Receiving the Cid's permission ". . . don Jerome the Bishop went spurring thence away,/ . . . At the first stroke he delivered two Moors before him fell."[6]

These bishops of epic were not only warriors, but they were also devout men who faithfully performed their religious functions. In the songs of battle their military deeds were most glorified, but their religious devotion was also clearly presented. Prior to the battle at Ronceval Turpin granted general absolution to the Frankish host. His words illustrate the simplicity of his piety.

"Soldiers of France, when King Charlemagne
left us here
He deemed us willing, in extremity,
To suffer death for his dear sake. Nay, more,
He deemed us soldiers of the Christian faith,
Willing to die for God. The hour of proof
Is come. The foes of Charles and God are here

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6 The Lay of the Cid, p. 84.

> Before you. Now confess your sins, and pray
> God's bounteous mercy. Then shall I absolve
> you,
> And if you die, the crown of martyrdom
> Is yours, and yours great Paradise." He
> spoke,
> And so the Franks, dismounting, knelt them
> down,
> And Turpin signed them with the cross of God,
> And for a penance bade them deal stout
> blows.[7]

As a pastor Turpin offered counsel and settled arguments. He mildly but firmly resolved the quarrel between Oliver and Roland. Oliver accused Roland of causing the French defeat by stubbornly refusing to sound his horn, which would have notified Charlemagne of the difficulties of the rear-guard. The Archbishop, hearing the quarrel, reproached the warriors,

> ". . . in the name of God
> Dispute not thus together. True, the horn
> Will not save us. It is too late. And
> yet
> It is the better way. Let the King come;
> He will avenge us . . . ."
> . . .
> He spoke; and Roland winded loud and long
> His ivory horn.[8]

Roland, the greatest warrior of the Franks, whose

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[7] The Song of Roland, p. 41.

[8] Ibid., p. 61.

proud, stubborn nature could not be moved by the arguments of his best friend, Oliver, did not hesitate for a moment to carry out Turpin's suggestion. The selflessness and true nobility of Turpin are illustrated by his final earthly act. Although fatally wounded, the Archbishop's last gesture was an attempt to aid the swooning Roland.

> . . . [Turpin] put forth his hand
> And took the horn from Roland's side, for down
> Through Ronceval there ran a limpid stream,
> And so he thought to help his friend. In pain,
> With little, tottering steps, he turned him there,
> But could not reach the goal, so weak was he
> For loss of blood. A furlong did he grope --
> Then his heart failed him utterly, and he fell
> Upon the grass, and knew that death was near.[9]

Likewise Bishop Jerome was a good bishop as well as an outstanding warrior, "Excelling was his knowledge and prudent was his rede,/ 'Twas a mighty man of valor afoot or on the steed."[10] Prior to each battle ". . . mass for them Jerome did chant / And mass said, absolution in full to them did grant."[11]

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[9] Ibid., p. 75.

[10] The Lay of the Cid, p. 46.

[11] Ibid., p. 60.

Never were these bishops too preoccupied with their secular affairs to attend to their religious duties.

The respect accorded the cleric may be illustrated by the comments the outstanding heroes made about Turpin. Roland, admiring the prowess of Turpin, called to Oliver

> "Look, The Archbishop handles lance and sword as well
> As hallowed crosier." And his friend replied:
> "In very sooth, the man of God shall teach
> The men of battle."[12]

After Turpin had "riven clean in twain" a Paynim, the Frankish warriors cried their approval, "'Here is true knighthood! / In the Archbishop's hand the Cross is safe.'"[13] This tribute implies the double function that the Archbishop fulfilled throughout the poem. "[T]he cross is safe" in the sense that Turpin was a brave warrior who actively fought for the faith and also inthe sense that he was a good pastor who was equally attentive to his spiritual duties. Roland's final tribute to the Archbishop, who died for the faith, epitomized the admiration for Turpin that was shown throughout the poem.

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[12] The Song of Roland, p. 58.

[13] Ibid., p. 53.

"O noble comrade, you do I commend
To God in heaven, for never mortal man
Served him more faithfully, nor since the time
Of the apostles has a better man
Upheld the Faith and saved the perishing." 14

Further evidence of high esteem for the clergy is shown by the manner in which the cleric was addressed by the warriors or referred to by the poets. Turpin was frequently spoken of as "the good Archbishop Turpin" and Bishop don Jerome was referred to as "that very noble cleric." There was also an Abbot, Don Sancho, in The Cid who commanded the respect and the trust of the Campeador. Reference was made to this cleric as "Don Sancho the good Abbot" and again, "God's Christian was the Abbot." The only slighting comment about the clergy in either The Song of Roland or The Cid came from the Archbishop himself and was made with reference to the regular clergy. Turpin asserted,

". . . it is well
He who bears arms, and sits on a good steed
Is thereby bounden to be brave and strong
Though facing fearful odds. Stands he not firm,
Nor fights with double strength, I should not give

14
Ibid., p. 76.

> Two farthings for him. Better he turned monk,
> And found some peaceful cloister, where at least
> His prayers might aid us."[15]

The Archbishop's words imply that the poet preferred the secular to the regular clergy. The ideal cleric as represented in epic was expected to participate actively in secular affairs and at the same time to perform religious functions. Of the religious aspect of The Song of Roland R. W. Southern wrote,

> The poem reflects the ideas of men who have not been stirred either to enthusiasm or to opposition by the church doctrines which were becoming widespread in the years following the death of Gregory VII. It was taken for granted that an archbishop would be in his place among the fighters and that his counsel and strength in battle would be as good as another's or better. The wisdom of the clerk was not distinguished from the wisdom of the layman. And the wisdom of the layman was that of shrewd and practical men.[16]

The presentation of the clergy in romance offers diverse contrasts with the position of the cleric in the epic. The most obvious contrast is one of omission -- the references to clergymen are

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[15] Ibid., pp. 64-5.

[16] Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages, p. 242.

sparse in romance. The clerics that are mentioned are definitely background figures, who are given only minor roles. Fleeting glimpses of the clergy are caught as they say Mass, perform marriages, preside over trials by ordeal, or execute other religious functions. No clergyman, however, of the stature of Turpin or Jerome appears in the romance. This may be partially accounted for by a new concept of the functions of the clergy. The clergyman represented in romance was not expected to take an active part in secular affairs. The same Archbishop Turpin who performed so heroically in The Song of Roland reappeared briefly in The Four Sons of Aymon. In the latter, Turpin had become an insignificant character who, when he appeared on the battlefield, was told by Renaud, "'Reverend knight, . . . priest of the God of peace, return to the fact of the altar, the field of battle is not a place suited to you.'"[17] In Huon of Bordeaux, an abbot of a Cluniac monastery, who was traveling with Huon and his brother when they were ambushed by Charlemagne's son, expressed a similar sentiment. He told the boys "'. . . have no

[17] The Four Sons of Aymon, p. 77.

trust to be succoured by me, for you know well I cannot aid you in this case; I am a priest and serve God, I may not be where man is slain.'" As Huon rode forth to avenge his brother's injury the Abbot "prayed our Lord God to defend them from death" and then proceeded on his way.[18] Thus both the layman and the cleric understood the duties of the clergy to be spiritual. This concept of the clerics' position shows the influence of the reform movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The abbot's response was in keeping with the reforms of his house, which were aimed toward a return to stricter spiritual standards. Similarly Renaud's reminder to Turpin to "return to the fact of the altar" suggests the influence of the Gregorian reforms, which were intended to remove the clergy from active participation in temporal affairs. The less frequent references to clergymen, however, seems to indicate that the clergy's new role did not interest greatly the romance-reading class. While the clergy was turning to more spiritual matters, the secularism of the aristocracy was increasing. This seems to have led to a loss of contact between the two

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[18] Huon of Bordeaux, pp. 22-3.

groups. The implication to be drawn from popular literature is that when the clergy refrained from participating in affairs appealing to the imagination of the romance audience, their interest in the clergy declined.

Remarks disparaging the clergy are found frequently in romance. Unlike the epic which reflects admiration and respect for the clergy, the romance reveals the development of a critical attitude toward certain members of the clergy and particularly toward the regular clergy. Criticisms similar to those found in Chaucer and Langland are present in twelfth- and thirteenth-century works. Chrétien, who displayed only a mild interest in either religion or the clergy, at one point wrote, "'But a man may give another counsel, which he would not take himself, just as preachers, who are deceitful rascals, and preach and proclaim the right but who do not follow it themselves.'"[19] A derogatory note is also found in The Four Sons of Aymon. King Yon retired to ". . . the rich abbey of St. Idlefonso, the peaceful

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19 Chrétien de Troyes, "Yvain," in Arthurian Romances, p. 213.

retreat of about twenty reformed Augustine monks, who divided their time between eating, hunting, sleeping, and praying for worthy knights and their ladies."[20]

Jean de Meun's portion of The Romance of the Rose is an indictment of the theory of renunciation, which underlaid the celibate ideal. His rationalistic argument was that celibacy denied "Nature's glorious gift / Of freedom."[21] In the allegory, Reason carried the argument further, asserting that celibacy opposed God's desire for the perpetuation of the human race.

> ". . . in his wisdom God supplied
> The purse and staff, which might provide,
> By natural force, the race of men
> In undisturbed succession . . .
> For when one dies another lives;
> That sire God takes, this child he gives."[22]

The allegory of the poem is carried to a conclusion consistent with the author's opposition to celibacy, when Venus interceded in behalf of the lover during his attempt to obtain the Rose.[23]

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[21] W. Lorris and J. Clopinel, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Ellis, I, ll. 4729-730.

[22] Ibid., I, ll. 7343-350.

[23] Ibid., III, ll. 21600-624.

In his digressions from the allegory de Meun attacked evil clergymen and more particularly the regular clergy, the mendicant friars, and the system under which the latter functioned. The friars were subject only to the authority of the pope, and hence were free from the jurisdiction of either secular or temporal authorities.[24] This situation allowed them to accumulate private fortunes.

> . . . [T]hose stout
> And thriving blades, the begging friars,
> Who show themselves as rough as briars
> In open street, but love to win,
> With oily tongues, the way within
> The goodmen's houses whom they cheat
> With lying words, while drink and meat
> They batten on; and though they sing
> Their poverty, they're gathering
> Fat livelihood, and many a heap
> Of deniers have they dolven deep
> Beneath the earth.[25]

Particularly objectionable were the friars' privileges as confessors, which interfered with the functions of the secular clergy. False-Seeming spoke of the friars,

> "But willingly
> I leave both priests and prelates free
> Poor men and women to confess,

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[24] Ibid., II, ll. 11729-35; 11787-796.

[25] Ibid., II, ll. 8510-521.

Who for most part are penniless;
. . .
The good fat sheep I bear away,
And to the pastors leave the poor
Lean hungry ones, who growl therefore.
And if the prelates dare to scold,
. . .
I'll give them such a mortal bruise
That cross and mitre both they'll lose.
Full many I make peccavi cry,
Such mighty privilege have I."[26]

The Romance also contains numerous insinuations about the fat and high feeding "abbot, canon, monk, or prior,"[27] and about lascivious conduct within "convent cell and abbey cloister."[28] De Meun considered avarice not only one of the most prevalent evils besetting the human race, but an evil to which the clergy was particularly susceptible:

. .. divines who all the earth
O'errun that they may gather worth
Of worldly goods, and power and place,
Foremost in vice, and last in grace:
Most evil lives these preachers lead,
Treading in their unholy greed
Vainglory's treacherous path, and eke
Thereby their soul's damnation seek.[29]

In an apology to those who may have been offended by anything he wrote, de Meun made clear

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[26] Ibid., II, ll. 11, 853-870.

[27] Ibid., I, ll. 2663-664.

[28] Ibid., II, l. 9451.

[29] Ibid., I, ll. 5415-422.

that he was not criticising virtuous clergymen.

> Then here declare I before all,
> I ne'er from out my lips let fall
> A word to injure living man,
> Who doth his life on virtue plan
> Beneath the Church's holy care,
> Whatever robe or frock he wear.
> But though a sinner I confess
> Myself to be, I ne'ertheless
> Catch up my bow, and thence let fly
> My arrows, which shall grievously
> Wound such vile folk (and tear to bits
> Their mask) as Christ for hypocrites
> Condemned, all one it is to me
> If monks or secular they be . . . .[30]

Of the Church he wrote,

> And were there found, by closest search,
> One word in slight of holy Church
> Ready am I to make amend,
> For 'neath her rule my soul I bend.[31]

False-Seeming, in disclosing the treachery of the friars, warned,

> Believe me, wolves no meager few
> There are 'mong these apostles new:
> Ah! holy Church, thou wilt be sacked
> If thus thy city be attacked
> By soldiers of thine own domain.
> Alas! thy power is on the wane,
> For those but seek to spoil thee who
> Thou hast thy safety trusted to.[32]

Gottfried von Strassburg, while neither condemning religion nor specifically indicting the clergy, did lament man's abuse of religion. Isolde

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[30] Ibid., III, ll. 15979-992.

[31] Ibid., III, ll. 16027-030.

[32] Ibid., II, ll. 11631-638.

was to undergo trial by ordeal to prove her fidelity, or lack thereof, to her husband, King Marke. Very cunningly she and her lover, Tristan, plotted to maintain the appearance of innocence at her trial. Tristan, thoroughly disguised as a pilgrim, was selected by Isolde to bear her to the site of the trial.

> . . .[the] pilgrim stumbled
> As though by accident he tumbled.
> The fall occurred in such a way
> that now th' unhappy pilgrim lay
> in Isot's arms and at her side.[33]

At the trial Isolde testified,

> ". . . not at any tide
> in arms or at my side
> have e'er I had another man,
> save [Marke] and him . . .
> Whom thou with thine own eyes
> hast seen in mine arms lying--
> the pilgrim. . . ."[34]

Thus when she seized the hot iron no burns showed on her hands indicating that at least the letter of truth had been maintained. Gottfried commented,

> And so it was made manifest
> and proved to all the world by test,
> that Christ's law can be made to strain

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[33] Gottfried von Strassburg, The "Tristan and Isolde," ll. 15597-601.

[34] Ibid., ll. 15713-720.

like any windswept weathervane.
It can be twisted to any bent,
whatever may be man's intent [...][35]

A notable exception to the derogatory tone of references to clergymen in romance is found in Parzival. The poem contains no specific references to the Church nor were any of its representatives directly involved in the story. The hermit, Trevrizent, was a layman who had withdrawn from the world to live a holy and ascetic life. Concerning priests, the hermit advised Parzival:

"Yet priests the love of God possess:
Serve them with constant faithfulness;
If thou wouldst have thine ending good,
Show priests an ever trustful mood.
Whatever thou on earth canst see,
Unlike to priests that thing must be.
Their lips Christ's martyrdom proclaim,
That saves us all from hellish flame.
Their consecrated fingers take
The highest pledge and holiest stroke
That e'er for guilt the Lord could give.
The priest who such a life can live,
That toward this pledge is reverent --
Could he a holier life have spent?"[36]

The hermit's words are the most laudatory of any references to clergymen found in romance. This, plus the hermit's emphasis on the spiritual

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35 Ibid., ll. 15737-742.

36 Wolfram von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," 502, 9-22.

attributes of the priest, is further evidence that Parzival holds a unique place in medieval romance.

The Christian epics reflect an attitude of admiration and respect for the cleric, who was presented as fulfilling both secular and spiritual roles. The clergy is deemphasized in the romance, implying that the aristocratic layman had slight regard for a clergy which no longer participated in secular affairs. The criticisms of the clergy found in romance suggest a deterioration in the quality of certain representatives of the Church, coupled with an emergent critical humanism, best typified in the work of Jean de Meun.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The dominant attitudes reflected in the epic and in the romance may be summarized briefly. The epic narrative was serious, unsentimental, unadorned, and vigorous. The primary theme of the epic was warfare motivated by the presence of a dangerous foe. The highest ideals of the heroic age were courage in battle, loyalty to a lord, and faith in God. The tone of the epic was aristocratic, yet the relative absence of class consciousness suggests a comparatively homogeneous society.

The romance, which in the twelfth century replaced the epic as the dominant form of narrative literature, portrayed social and religious attitudes that were antithetical to those held in the early Middle Ages. Society was divided into distinct classes; as the romance was written for and about the entrenched aristocracy, the attitudes found in romance represent this isolated group. The aristocracy in setting itself above and apart from all other segments of society, held not only a distorted view of the lower classes, but the

aristocracy also developed a hypersensitive attitude toward itself and its position. Most significant was the system of values maintained by the aristocracy. The main themes of romance, love and adventure, were characterized by fantastic exaggeration, which gave a frivolous, unrealistic tone to this type of narrative writing. In many romances religious values were clearly subordinated to the secular sphere and, when religion was emphasized, it was presented as a mechanical affair devoid of a spiritual faith in God. The writings of some thirteenth-century romance authors, particularly Jean de Meun, reflect a rationalistic spirit, which foreshadows the writings of the Renaissance. The ethical system revealed in romance was based upon the code of chivalry, which encompassed Christian virtues, but which at the same time emphasized the distinctly anti-Christian theme of courtly love. Only in The Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach were Christian faith and morality satisfactorily combined with the theme of knightly adventure.

The essential contrast between the epic and the romance is epitomized by W. W. Comfort: "A fleeting comparison of the noble end of Charlemagne's Peers fighting for their God and their King at Ronceval with the futile and dilettante careers of Arthur's knights in joust and hunt, will show better than mere words where the difference lies."[1]

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1 Arthurian Romances, tr. W. W. Comfort, p. xv.

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

## I. Primary Sources

No attempt will be made to analyze the primary sources used in this study, since that was the purpose of Chapter I. The sources used are merely listed below with full bibliographical information.


Aucassin and Nicolete, tr. Harold Child (London, 1911).

The Battle of Maldon, tr. Charles C. Fries (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1925).

Beowulf. The Oldest English Epic, tr. Charles W. Kennedy (New York, 1940).

Chrétien de Troyes, "Cligés," Arthurian Romances, tr. W. W. Comfort (London, 1914), pp. 91-179.

_____ "Erec et Enide," Arthurian Romances, tr. W. W. Comfort (London, 1914), pp. 1-90.

_____ "Lancelot," Arthurian Romances, tr. W. W. Comfort (London, 1914), pp. 270-359.

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"Florice and Blauncheflour," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, ed. George Ellis. New edition revised by J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 453-73.

The Four Sons of Aymon; or, The Days of Charlemagne. A Romance of Chivalry, tr. W. Hazlitt (London, 1851).

Gottfried von Eschenbach, The "Parzival," tr. Edwin H. Zeydel and Bayard Quincy Morgan (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1951).

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"The History of Guy Earl of Warwick," in Early English Prose Romances, ed. William J. Thoms (London, n.d.), pp. 331-408.

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Lorris, W. and Clopinel, J., The Romance of the Rose, tr. F. S. Ellis, 3 vols. (London, 1900).

"Merlin," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, ed. George Ellis. New edition revised by J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 77-142.

"Morte Arthur," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, ed. George Ellis. New edition revised by J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 143-87.

Morte Arthur: Two Early English Romances, ed. Lucy Allen Paton (London, n.d.).

The Oldest English Epic: Beowulf, Finnsburg, Waldere, Deor, Widsith, and the German Hildebrand, tr. Francis B. Gummere (New York, 1927).

"Richard Coeur de Lion," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, ed. George Ellis. New edition revised by J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 282-341.

"Sir Bevis of Hamptoun," in Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, ed. George Ellis. New edition revised by J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 239-81.

The Song of Roland, tr. Frederick Bliss Luquiens (New York, 1952).

The Song of Roland, tr. Dorothy L. Sayers (London, 1957).

II. Secondary Sources

The use of secondary material was held to a minimum in this paper. However, a few secondary sources, primarily literary histories and literary criticisms, were consulted for background and bibliographical information.

The most comprehensive history of Old French literature, and a work which was used extensively, is by Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr., A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300 (New York, 1938). Written with a notable partiality for French literature, this scholarly work traces writing movements from the Carolingian period to the fourteenth century. The author analyses briefly extant literature; he also includes summaries and evaluations of outstanding critical and interpretative works in the field of Old French literature. The bibliographical value of Holmes' work cannot be overemphasized.

Numerous histories of English literature were consulted, although no single work does for English literature what Holmes has done for French literature. One of the better histories of Medieval

English writing is by Kemp Malone and Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England, The Middle Ages, 4 vols. (New York, 1948). This comprehensive history covers both religious and secular writings; the work is well documented, well organized, and readable. C. S. Baldwin, Three Centuries of Literature in England, 1100-1400 (Boston, 1932), gives a brief and very general survey of English literature from Beowulf to Chaucer. The author, who is an ardent admirer of the Middle Ages, has produced but an elementary account of the literature of the period. A similar book by the same author is An Introduction to English Medieval Literature (London, 1914). Baldwin states that this work was intended as a "student's guide" and not as a book for scholars, which may indicate that he was aware of its mediocrity. W. P. Ker, English Literature: Medieval (New York, n.d.), contains a brief history of literature from Anglo-Saxon writings to Chaucer. Helpful background material on the similarities and differences between the epic and the romance as literary types is found in this work. George Kane, Middle English Literature, A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious

Lyrics, "Piers Plowman" (London, 1951), was of little value to the study since the author's purpose is to reevaluate the literary quality of medieval romance. It is Kane's opinion that the literary aspect of the romance has been neglected because of scholars' emphasis on the historical, social, and religious content of this type of literature. Almost no information on popular types of medieval literature is contained in Rev. Joseph Berington, The Literary History of the Middle Ages, Comprising an Account of the State of Learning from the Close of the Reign of Augustus to its Revival in the Fifteenth Century (London, n.d.). Although titled a literary history, this ambitious endeavor might more correctly be termed a sketchy intellectual history, with emphasis on Italian learning.

Of fundamental importance to this paper is W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature, New Dover edition (New York, 1957). This work, which reveals an extensive knowledge of medieval literature, contains a "general description of some of the principal forms of narrative literature, in the Middle Ages." Ker does not make the mistake of attempting to treat the entire field

of medieval literature, as do so many of the literary critics. Rather he concentrates on the Teutonic epic, the French epic, and the Icelandic histories. Included for purposes of contrast with the epic is a brief discussion of romance. Ker contrasts epic and romance in terms of both literary technique and content; the author's preference for the epic is obvious. Albert B. Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance (London, 1930), gives a general survey of romance, concentrating on English versions of French romances. He includes a discussion of the influence of religion, chivalry, sensationalism, and the love element upon romance. Although critical of the romance as literature, Taylor, in a work that is not highly scholarly, does reveal a sympathetic understanding of romance as an expression of medieval life. H. O. Taylor, The Medieval Mind. 2 vols. 4th edition (London, 1938), includes a brief section on romance, although he paraphrases the plots of a few romances rather than presenting an analysis or interpretation of romance as a whole.

Interpretative analyses of specific primary sources were consulted. Hector Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age (London, 1912), is a comparative study of the Greek and Teutonic "heroic ages" and particularly of heroic poetic traditions. Valuable as background material for this paper was his analysis of society, government, and religion in the heroic age. The scholarly and heavily documented work of R. W. Chambers, Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn (Cambridge, England, 1932), is generally considered the definitive Beowulf study. Chambers includes a discussion of the historical background of the poem and of parallel versions in Scandinavian folklore. He also discusses and evaluates various interpretative theories of the poem. W. W. Lawrence, Beowulf and the Epic Tradition (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), is less technical than Chamber's work. Lawrence states that his book aims "to review the subject-matter of the poem, both the main plot and the chief subsidiary material, and to show how this appears to have been gradually combined into an epic, giving due attention to the social and political

background." Within the limits set by the author, the book is good--it is readable, informative, and fairly well documented. Ramon Menéndez Pidal, The Cid and His Spain, tr. Harold Sunderland (London, 1934), gives valuable information on the history of the Iberian Peninsula in the eleventh century. Drawing upon a wide range of sources, historical as well as literary, Pidal, a recognized authority on the literary history of medieval Spain, weaves the life of both his own and Spain's hero, the Cid, into Spanish history.

Only a small fraction of the scholarship on the origin of the Arthurian and Grail legends was examined and of the material examined only some of the most significant works will be commented upon here. The book by Jessie L. Weston, The Quest of the Holy Grail (London, 1913), contains a discussion of the literature comprising the Grail cycle. The author's main concern is to determine the origin and true meaning of the Grail. She discusses and discounts the Christian and folk-lore theories of origin and then presents her ritual theory, which is elaborated and

clarified in Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (New York, 1920). Miss Weston's works reflect a wide knowledge of comparative religions, her interpretation of the Grail symbolism leaves fewer unanswered questions than most analyses, her books are clearly and carefully written; but her arguments lost force when she directly connects early Celtic and Welsh religious practices with ancient Eastern fertility cults. James D. Bruce, Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings down to 1300, 2 vols. (Gottingen, 1928), covers the earliest Arthurian traditions. Bruce believes Arthur to have been either of Roman descent or a Romanized Celt. He feels that scholars have exaggerated the debt of the Arthurian romance authors to Celtic sources and he suggests that the personal inventions of the romance authors were the most significant factor in the creation of the romances. As for the origin of the Grail legend, Bruce prefers the Christian theory. R. S. Loomis, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance (New York, 1927), tends to accept the idea of an historic Arthur, who was at least partially Roman and who aided the Britons against the Saxons. Arthur's conquests

grew into myth and thus Loomis sees Arthur as both a man and a god. He also finds a connection between Arthur's knights and Celtic gods. Arthur C. L. Brown, The Origin of the Grail Legend (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), traces the Arthurian and Grail legends to the mythology of the Irish. Two works by Alfred Nutt, who subscribed to the theory of Celtic origin of the Arthurian and Grail legends, were briefly scanned. Alfred Nutt, Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail with Especial Reference to the Hypothesis of Its Celtic Origin (London, 1888), and Alfred Nutt, The Influence of Celtic upon Medieval Romance (London, 1904).