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**HEROES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY
OF FOUR MEDIEVAL ROMANCES**

**By
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**A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

McMaster University

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HEROES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

**DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY (2001)
(English)**

**McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario**

TITLE: Heroes and Their Communities: A Longitudinal Study of Four Medieval Romances

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SUPERVISOR: Professor Anne Savage

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 269

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the principles that shape heroic behaviour in a selection of medieval texts that were directed towards a lay audience. These popular texts, written in the vernacular, both reflect and affirm the value systems of their intended audiences. I consider the nature of the societies they depict in terms of cohesiveness and stability, and then determine the role of the hero within such a structure. The struggles of the heroes, in turn, reveal the preoccupations and assumptions of their social milieu inside and outside of the text. In looking to romance for historical truths, this study reexamines the ways in which we read these texts. Moreover, my findings contribute to the study of individuality by exploring the ways in which medieval society negotiated the relationship between the desires of the individual and the needs of the community.

I begin with an analysis of the *Chanson de Roland*, long read in light of its contributions to historical research, and, from there, apply the same methodology to four twelfth-century French romances: *Partonopeu de Blois*, Bérout's *Roman de Tristan*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and *Robert le Diable*. Close readings of these narratives reveal that they all espouse a communal ethic that values honour, loyalty, and harmony. The next part of this dissertation explores fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English adaptations of the romances: *Partonope of Blois*, Sir Thomas Malory's *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* and the "Knight of the Cart" episode,

and *Robert the Devyll*. The later romances depict a more fragmented society wherein characters are encouraged to pursue their own personal goals within the parameters established by fixed moral codes. By juxtaposing a synchronic study of the early romances with an analysis of their adaptations composed three hundred years later, this project demonstrates the transformation of a culture centered around the protection and promotion of the common good into a more modern ethos that recognizes the autonomy of the individual.

DEDICATION

To the Memory of my Grandmother,

Jill Holmes,

Who taught me to see Beyond the Horizon.

And to my Love,

Trey McBride,

Whose Faith has pushed me There.

This Thesis is for You.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Anne Savage, for her confidence in me and her unfailing support as I ventured on this journey. Her insight into the world of romance and provocative comments helped shape this project. My thanks also go to my readers, Bernice Kaczynski and Cathy Grisé, whose thoughtful, critical responses to my drafts raised the standard of my work. I would like to thank Madeleine Jeay, as well, who was kind enough to verify my translations from the Old French.

McMaster University generously provided me with funding that eased the financial burdens associated with graduate studies. I am especially grateful for the Fifth-Year Bursary that allowed me to focus on my writing during the final stages and see this project through to its completion.

The staff at the British Library and the Bodleian Library were helpful in sourcing obscure references and pointing me in the right direction as I tried to focus my lines of inquiry. I much appreciated their patience with my endless questions and requests.

The support I have received from my friends and family has been immeasurable, I thank you all. To my parents, Marilyn and Michael Holmes, I am deeply grateful. They may not have understood the vagaries of medieval literature, but I could always rely on their love and wholehearted enthusiasm as I followed my dreams.

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INTRODUCTION

Heroes are admired for representing excellence in terms understood and valued by their audience. Indeed, the relationship between heroes and their communities is essential, for without social acclaim, their worth cannot be evaluated and their heroism will never be determined. Each of the heroes discussed in this thesis earns the praise of his (or in the case of Iseut, her) community through deeds of prowess and/or gallantry. They are lauded in superlative terms as, for example, the most beautiful youth, the greatest warrior, or the humblest knight. Yet, in each case, these qualities help the hero pursue a larger purpose. The twelfth-century French works, *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100), *Partonopeu de Blois* (c. 1182-85),¹ Bérout's *Roman de Tristan* (c. 1165-87), Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot ou Chevalier de la Charrette* (c. 1174-79), and *Robert le Diable* (c. 1195) are unanimous in prioritizing the common good, so their heroes bend their efforts towards the defense and improvement of their communities. Within such a cultural milieu, where social order is strictly defined and maintained, loyalty and honour are valued above all else and the hero is not seen in isolation, but depicted within an interlocking web of relationships. The epic agrees in this respect with the four romances, suggesting that both genres may be read as reflections of a single reality. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English authors appropriated the romances for their own audiences and

these works enjoyed a new wave of popularity. However, the later redactors made crucial changes to the texts to reflect a more modern outlook. The heroes in *Partonope of Blois* (c. 1480), Sir Thomas Malory's *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* and his *Knight of the Cart* (1485), along with the prose *Robert the Devyll* (1502?) no longer focus on the common good, but strive for personal success, happiness, or redemption. Each of the later works emphasizes the fragmentation of the social world and the hero's subsequent efforts to succeed in a culture that offers little support. The crucial dilemma of the hero then becomes, not the reconciliation of personal and public goals, but the achievement of personal goals in a way consistent with the restrictions imposed by law or conscience. Thus, we can see the process of evolution that led to the development of a modern ethic centered on the individual.

Loosely defined, the "heroic romance" is a narrative written in the vernacular for a popular audience that describes the actions of a central protagonist who engages in trials of either physical or moral strength in order to prove his worth as a hero. This genre is notable for its emphasis on entertainment rather than overt didacticism and, in a number of ways, lends itself to the study of cultural ethics. Such works were meant to appeal to a wide audience and thus can be understood to express the viewpoint of the dominant social element. In the twelfth century particularly, romances were intended for oral presentation to large groups drawn primarily from the laity. Authors needed to fashion the work to reflect the tastes of the majority in order for it to escape ridicule and gain popularity. Joachim Bumke suggests that

¹ The dates for the romances are taken from Douglas Kelly, *Medieval French Romance* (New

for a courtly poet who was to such a high degree dependent on the favor of his patrons and the goodwill of his listeners, consideration of the intended audience must have played an important role even during the composing of the work, so that the creative process could almost be seen as a continuing dialogue between the author and his audience.²

Early poets did not have the relatively modern luxury afforded by the printing press of mass producing a work in the hopes of reaching a distinct, target audience that would appreciate their views. Unlike modern artists who use various media to express their individuality, the medieval author of romance aimed to please his audience with conventional themes, wisdom, and heroes. It is a mark of their widespread appeal that the works I have chosen to discuss are available in multiple manuscript copies and were widely translated throughout Europe. The translations published in the fifteenth century were also chosen for their broad appeal, so they would bring a solid financial return for the fledgling presses of Caxton or Wynkyn de Worde. In each case, their popularity suggests that they provide valuable literary evidence that may be brought to bear on the study of medieval history.

The actions and thoughts of the hero at the centre of the romance reflect the ethic of the intended audience. "Ethic" is a broad term that refers to the body of moral principles or values that govern a particular culture or group. These principles influence the choices made by individuals who live in that particular social setting and form the underlying basis by which a person judges right from wrong. Because heroes strive to achieve personal excellence through both physical and moral prowess, they epitomize the

York: Twayne P, 1993)

² Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: Overlook P, 2000) 510.

values held dear by their society. The hero's success in this regard is evident in the responses of both the extra-textual and intra-textual audiences. As discussed above, the extra-textual audience, that which exists outside of the text, must find the hero sympathetic in order for the narrative to gain popularity. However, the hero's relationship with other characters within the text, the intra-textual audience, is also important because it offers a more specific response and can show modern scholars how the hero was meant to be perceived. In many ways, it is the latter response that will guide the former, but only when it is compatible with contemporary practice or convention. In each of the works that will be discussed in this dissertation, the central protagonists make choices that reflect their own sense of proper behaviour and, more importantly, their actions are explicitly judged by the intra-textual audience in an ecclesiastical judicial scene. These scenes take the form of either auricular confession or the *Judicium Dei*—two types of trial that agree in function by inviting the judgment of God and of members of the community. By reading the trial scene in the context of the romance, the moral worth of the hero is elucidated. These scenes are pivotal moments in the romances under discussion and bring sometimes complicated moral issues to the forefront for clarification and resolution.

Though not often considered in light of its judicial function, confession operates in a very similar vein to the *Judicium Dei* or judgment of God—both require that the accused voluntarily submit to the adjudication of God and his representative on earth. Following the narrow ecclesiastical sense, confession is “a Christian's private identification of his sins to a priest, receipt of a penance, and absolution from those sins

in the name of the church.”³ A proper confession might also include contrition, satisfaction (such as the repayment of stolen property), and stated intention to perform the penance conscientiously.⁴ In the *Judicium Dei*, the accused must swear an oath attesting to his or her innocence and prove this oath by successfully completing a designated task. The *Judicium Dei* could take a number of forms, but in each case subjected the accused to some physical and/or moral risk based on the supposition that God would perform a miracle in the interests of justice—to protect the innocent from harm and to ensure the punishment of the guilty. In medieval Europe, compurgation by oath, the ordeal, and the wager of battle were commonly accepted patterns for the *Judicium Dei*. The compurgation by oath required that the accused swear either on holy relics or with the help of a certain number of oath helpers, people who would swear on his behalf, that he was innocent of the charge.⁵ As Paul R. Hyams notes, “those swearing understood that God and the saint on whose relics the oath was made would be their witnesses, who could and would punish any perjury.”⁶ The ordeal was a more strenuous test in that the accused would have to prove his oath through a trial that involved a substantial risk of physical harm. He might, for example, be required to submerge his hand in a pot of boiling water

³ Alexander Murray, “Confession Before 1215,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6:3 (1993): 51.

⁴ The twenty-first canon of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) states that “every Christian of either sex after reaching the years of discretion shall confess all his sins at least once a year privately to his own priest and try as hard as he can to perform the penance imposed on him.” *English Historical Documents 1189-1327*, 3, ed. Harry Rothwell (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1975) 654.

⁵ R.H. Helmholz, “Crime, compurgation and the Courts of the Medieval Church,” *Law and History Review* 1 (1983): 13.

⁶ Paul R. Hyams, “Trial by Ordeal: The Key to Proof in the Early Common Law,” *On the Laws and Customs of England: Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorne*, eds. Morris S. Arnold et al. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1981) 92.

or walk barefoot over hot ploughshares.⁷ In the wager of battle, both the plaintiff and the defendant would duel to determine the winner of the suit.⁸ Regardless of the form of the trial, the *Judicium Dei*, like confession, centers on the statement offered by the accused, either an admission of guilt or an avowal of innocence, rather than on an investigation of physical evidence or witnesses.⁹ The human judge will encourage the accused to make a truthful admission but, ultimately, it is the responsibility of God to accept or reject the proffered testimony. In literature, the author may use the characters of angels or saints as intermediaries to express God's will. These scenes in the context of the heroic romance express the medieval ethic more clearly than any others because they clarify the moral worth of the central protagonist.

I use an analysis of the underlying ethic in the *Chanson de Roland* as a starting point for this dissertation because scholars have traditionally looked to the epic for signs of verisimilitude whereas historical readings of romance are rare. George Fenwick Jones looks to the text for evidence of the values that governed interaction between a man and his lord, peers, or God in twelfth-century France.¹⁰ Similarly, John F. Benton analyzes "the social and political values conveyed by the *Chanson* in the Middle Ages"¹¹ and Terence Scully suggests that a close reading "can throw new light upon the poet's conception not only of the meaning of warfare at this time but particularly of the

⁷ Colin Morris, "Judicium Dei: The Social and Political Significance of the Ordeal in the Eleventh Century," *Studies in Church History* 12(1975) 98.

⁸ See Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986).

⁹ An ordeal was only called as a matter of last resort when other evidence was unavailable, yet there was publicly held suspicion of guilt. Helmholz, "Crime, Compurgation and the Courts," 14-15.

¹⁰ George Fenwick Jones, *The Ethos of the Song of Roland* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1963).

relationship between Christians and pagans.”¹² These are only a few examples of the kind of research often applied to the *Chanson de Roland*—each of these scholars uses the narrative as a primary source for the study of medieval culture and my study will, to some extent, follow in their footsteps by discussing the epic as a reflection of the values espoused by its intended audience and, then, applying the same reading to romance. This dissertation will use an edition of the Oxford Version (Digby ms. 23. Bodleian Library, Oxford)—the oldest known version of the tale, transcribed around 1100 or slightly later from an oral preliminary stage of the story’s development with changes that “brought the story into line with 12th-century reality.”¹³ By examining Roland’s confession and Ganelon’s trial by battle in their narrative context, I argue that individuals are praised for seeing themselves as part of a larger collective and acting in accordance with their social responsibility to promote the public good.

The second chapter scrutinizes the hero of *Partonopeu de Blois* by first undertaking a study of the vocabulary used to delimit his character in terms of demeanor, leadership qualities, and subordination. Then, I demonstrate how he lives up the ideals of honour and loyalty valued by his culture at a trial by battle. However, he follows his success with an error in judgment at his confession for which he must atone and strive, once again, to prove his fidelity. Here, as in all four of the twelfth-century romances, the hero is judged according to a communal ethic that rates solidarity with the community

¹¹ John F. Benton, “‘Nostre Franceis n’unt talent de fuir’: the *Song of Roland* and the Enculturation of a Warrior Class,” *Olifant* 6 (1979): 237-58, Rpt. in *Culture, Power, and Personality in Medieval France*. ed. Thomas N. Bisson (London: Hambleton P, 1991) 147.

¹² Terence Scully, “The Ordeal at Rocessalles: *Francs e paiens, as les vus ajustez*,” *Olifant* 7:3 (1980): 214.

more highly than independence. From its inception in France, this romance was widely translated and survives in German, Dutch, English, Italian, Icelandic, and Danish manuscripts.¹⁴ I will use Joseph Gildea's excellent edition¹⁵ that is based on all extant early French manuscripts¹⁶ and, in cases where the manuscripts differ, this dissertation will follow the reading that is reflected by the majority. Thus, the variant portion of the Sornegur episode that is found in verses 3509-3628 of ms. 113, Bern, will be ignored in favour of the consensus displayed among the other available texts regarding this scene. Scholars have dated the French narrative to any time between 1170 and 1190, generally preferring the late 1180's because there is a firm *terminus ad quem* in Aimon de Varennes's *Florimont* that is dated to 1188¹⁷ and that draws extensively on *Partonopeu de Blois*. Recently however, Penny Simons and Penny Eley have put forth an argument for a date around 1170 based on various literary allusions and with reference to the work's historical context.¹⁸

The third chapter considers Bérout's *Roman de Tristan* and looks at the ways in which the lovers contribute to the ongoing life of the community. They are characterized

¹³ "Roland," Willem P. Gerritsen and Anthony G. van Melle, *A Dictionary of Medieval Heroes*, trans. Tanis Guest (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell P, 1998).

¹⁴ A. Trampe Bødtker, *Parténopeus de Blois: Étude Comparative Des Versions Islandaise et Danoise* (Christiania: Imprimerie A.W. Brogger, 1904) 1-14.

¹⁵ *Partonopeu de Blois: A French Romance of the Twelfth Century*, ed. Joseph Gildea, 1 (Pennsylvania: Villanova UP, 1967).

¹⁶ Ms. 2986, Bibl. de l'Arsenal, Paris; ms. 113, Burgerbibliothek, Bern; ms. 4156 (Excerpt) Verses 7209-7400, Lib. of Sir Thomas Phillipps, Cheltenham; fonds français ms. 792 (Fragment) Verses 7507-8054, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; fonds français ms. 19152, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; nouvelles acquisitions française ms. 7516, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; fonds français ms. 368, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; ms. 939, Bibl. Municipale, Tours; Palatinus latinus ms. 1971, Vatican, Rome; and ms. EP-D-6 (Fragment) Verses 3151-3392 and 3877-4120, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

¹⁷ Kelly, *Medieval French Romance*, 30.

¹⁸ Penny Simons and Penny Eley, "The Prologue to *Partenopeus de Blois*: Text, Context, and Subtext." *French Studies* XLIX:1 (1995): 11.

in positive terms according to their commitment to the public good, while their enemies are derided for their selfish motives. The work was likely composed in the late twelfth century¹⁹ and survives as a fragment in a single manuscript, ms. 2.171, Bibl. Nationale, Paris. The legend of Tristan and Iseut was widely known and translated into various Germanic, Latin, Scandinavian, and Slavic languages in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Bérout's narrative is said to belong to the "common" version of the romance because it remains close to the archetype that was composed in the middle of the twelfth century or earlier²⁰ and to distinguish it from the "courtly" tradition that was directed at a more sophisticated audience. Though the first and last sections of the manuscript are missing, the story line can be filled in from the evidence available in other branches of the legend. The section that does survive contains the scene of Iseut's *Judicium Dei* that she voluntarily undertakes to clear her name and Tristan's of charges of adultery, thus effecting their reconciliation with the community.

The fourth chapter explores Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot ou Chevalier de la Charrette* and demonstrates the movement of the text from disorder towards order on individual and social levels, so Lancelot's quest to save Guinevere harmoniously coincides with his duty to king and country. As in Bérout's romance, the equivocal oath at the ordeal allows the community to re-embrace its members, affirm social order, and eliminate those who threaten its stability. Chrétien composed the narrative between 1174 and 1179, and it survives in seven manuscripts—three of them as complete texts and the

¹⁹ Guy R. Mermier, *Bérout: Tristan and Yseut* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987) xxi.

²⁰ See Maurice Delbouille's attempt to reconstruct the archetypal form of the romance, "Le premier Roman de Tristan," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 5 (1962), 273-86, 419-35.

remainder as fragments.²¹ It enjoyed immense popularity, and Chrétien is credited with introducing the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere into the Arthurian myth.²² As in the other early romances, the narrative struggles with issues of personal desire and social obligation. Ultimately, these issues are happily resolved for the contrivances of the plot suggest that the individual is inextricably tied to the community and so the good of one will reflect in the well-being of the other.

The fifth chapter addresses these same themes in *Robert le Diable*, a romance of the late twelfth century.²³ Robert's confession and penance test his resolve to subdue his own violent passions and dedicate his life to the service of the community—including the Emperor, Pope, God, and others. Once his own desires are in line with the needs of the community, he is ready to take his place in the social order. The romance has been preserved in two manuscripts—ms. 25516, Bibl. Nationale, Paris, and ms. 24405, Bibl. Nationale, Paris²⁴—and the popularity of the tale is attested by its survival in a number of later French versions. The works discussed in the first five chapters all advocate a communal ethic whereby the individual should devote his energies to the preservation of common good. Their heroes are bounded by ties to family, lord, God, and peers, and they are valued most highly for loyalty and honour. All these narratives agree in their depiction of societies that are naturally inclined towards order and stability, and each

²¹ Ms. 794, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; ms. 12560, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; ms. 1725, Vatican, Rome; ms. 1450, Bibl. Nationale, Paris; ms. 472, Chantilly; the Escorial ms. and Garrett ms. 125, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

²² Christopher Snyder, *The World of King Arthur* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2000) 105.

²³ E. Löseth, ed., *Robert le Diable: Roman d'Aventures* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et C^{ie}, 1903) xlvii. Jean Charles Payen agrees with this date in *Le Motif du Repentir dans la Littérature Française Médiévale* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1968) 170.

²⁴ Löseth, i.

culminates in visual sequence that pulls everyone together for a final snapshot of personal and social harmony (with the exception of Béroul's fragment where the conclusion is missing). *Partonopeu de Blois* ends in a wedding and a coronation with the entire community in attendance. *Lancelot* reunites everyone at Arthur's court for the final scene, and *Robert le Diable* concludes with a victory celebration attended by all of Rome and visitors from Robert's home town in Normandy. Thus, the personal success of the hero is clearly aligned with the prosperity of the community.

The sixth chapter begins the study of the English adaptations with *Partonope of Blois* that survives in five fifteenth-century manuscripts.²⁵ This dissertation will follow A. Trampe Böttker's edition of Additional ms. 35 288, British Lib., London because it provides the most complete narrative and has better readings than the other texts.²⁶ Unlike the earlier romances, the later works depict a fragmented society marked by specialization, competition, and distance from God. Against this backdrop, Partonope is not so much accountable to his community, as he is to the natural order dictated by the law. The struggles between the individual and the community have been resolved in favour of the former whose free agency is acknowledged even as it is circumscribed by explicit codes of conduct.

The seventh and eighth chapters explore Malory's version of the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* and the *Knight of the Cart* respectively. The story of Tristram is contained within books eight through ten of William Caxton's edition of *Le Morte*

²⁵ Ms. 188, University College C., Oxford; Rawl. Poet. ms. 14, Bodleian Lib., Oxford; Eng. Poet. ms. C. 3, ff. 6-7, Bodleian Lib., (fragment); Additional ms. 35 288, British Lib., London; and a fragment of around 200 lines belonging to Viscount Clifden.

Darthur and my discussion therefore focuses on these books. Launcelot's role spans the entire text and, so, my analysis takes this broader context into consideration. Caxton's preface states that Malory completed his work in the ninth year of the reign of King Edward IV (1470), but it was not printed until 1485.²⁷ Wynkyn de Worde and his successors issued subsequent editions in 1498 and throughout the sixteenth century, indicating its enormous popularity. The fragmentation noted in *Partonope of Blois* is more pronounced in Malory's romance, but he does not advocate accountability to the law. Rather, his heroes pursue their own quests in accordance with the dictates of conscience. They each strive to excel against their peers and each acts to further his own ends, which suggests that the society of fifteenth-century Europe who revered these heroes felt something of this competitiveness in their own lives. Heroes are no longer expected to look to the needs of the community, instead they achieve renown by besting others in contests of prowess and gallantry.

The final chapter considers the Wynkyn de Worde's 1502 edition of *Robert the Devyll*. This story enjoyed a revival in the fifteenth century and made it to England in two streams, that of Robert the Devil and that of Sir Gowther. Because the former is closer to its French roots while the latter is a more creative adaptation of the legend, this dissertation will only look at Robert's struggles to overcome his diabolic nature.

Wynkyn de Worde moved his presses to Fleet Street, London in 1501 and his prose

²⁶ A. Trampe Bødtker, *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois* (London: EETS, 1912).

²⁷ H. Oskar Sommer, ed., *Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas Malory*, 2 (London: David Nutt, 1890)

version²⁸ of the tale was one of the first works issued out of his new location though, unfortunately, it cannot be dated more precisely. The antiquarian, William J. Thoms, has preserved this text in *The Early English Prose Romances*²⁹ and a Photostat of the Cambridge folio is also available on microfilm.³⁰ For convenience, the Thoms edition is used in this dissertation though the microfilm was also consulted to ensure accuracy. As in the other late romances, Robert strives against a world prone to disorder, yet he differs in espousing a more explicitly Christian model for salvation. His confession challenges him to entirely subordinate his own desires to the will of God, who demands absolute obedience and allows the hero no personal initiative. The heroes in the later romances, Partonope, Tristram, Launcelot, and Robert, serve their own needs in the end, and these may or may not coincide with the demands of society. They show the potential for individual success in a world that is constantly threatened with chaos, and reveal the ethic that will spawn modern democracy and capitalism.

I would like to think that my project continues and contributes to ongoing research into the lay population of medieval Europe. It is easy to dismiss practices such as the trial by ordeal as pure superstition or consider confession as a strictly Christian practice without investigating the cultural impulses surrounding their use, but scholars now seek to understand these customs in their original contexts without imposing a

²⁸ Wynkyn de Worde also published a version in verse in 1510.

²⁹ *Robert the Devyll, Early English Prose Romances*, ed. William J. Thoms ([1502?]; London: Wynken de Worde; Edinburgh: Otto Schulze & Co, 1904).

³⁰ *Robert the Devil* Here beginneth the lyf of the most myscheuoust Robert the deuyll which was afterwarde called ye seruauent of god, [London] Enprynted in fletestrete in the sygne of the sonne by Wynkyn de Worde, [1500?], Early English Books, 1475-1640, Microfilm reel item 17 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1951).

modern system of values.³¹ These romances allow us to glimpse the values that propelled early societies, the ways in which they sought to represent themselves, and the characteristics that defined their heroes. Broadly sketched, this dissertation demonstrates a movement from a society that felt stable and secure, wherein everybody was encouraged to contribute to the common good, towards a culture that believed itself inherently unstable and sought different approaches to imposing order from without. Herein we see the roots of our own modern angst and struggles to define the meaning of life. The author of *Partonope of Blois* suggests that meaning may be found in the structures of family and marriage within the parameters of the law. On the contrary, Malory advocates personal exploration so that individuals might find their own answers and follow their own paths towards success. The author of *Robert the Devyll* proposes yet a different approach—obedience to Christian doctrine as a way to achieve salvation. These messages are still culturally relevant in the twenty-first century and provide a historical context whereby we can understand ourselves and others. Thus, this literature becomes more than tales by which we wile away the hours, it represents our past and the foundation of the people we have become.

³¹ See Rebecca V. Colman, "Reason and Unreason in Early Medieval Law," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (1974): 571-91.

CHAPTER ONE – The Communal Ethic in the *Chanson de Roland*

The vibrant and complex society depicted in the *Chanson de Roland*¹ challenges scholars to unravel its ambiguities and plumb its depths for historical verisimilitude. Joseph J. Duggan expresses a basic current in traditional scholarship when he writes that the “relationship between literature and history underlies notions of the epic to a greater extent than it does conceptions of other genres.”² Because of its focus on great men and events that transformed the progress of nations, the epic seems to express the sentiment of a people more than any other type of poetry. At the same time, we should recognize that the literary category of the epic is an artificial construction based on distinctions between its form and that of the romance that were not recognized by medieval audiences.³ Insufficient emphasis has been placed on the continuity between the epic and the romance as articulations of culture though, in his discussion of the differences between the two genres, Eugène Vinaver draws attention to the fact that both share the same “ideological background.”⁴ They both describe the lives of heroes who are “circumscribed by their ties of lordship and vassalage and by the sacred bond of

¹ Luis Cortés, ed., *La Chanson de Roland*, trans. Paulette Gabaudan ([Paris]: Librairie Nizet, 1994). All subsequent references will be to Cortés' edition.

² Joseph J. Duggan, “Legitimation and the Hero's Exemplary Function in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and the *Chanson de Roland*,” *Oral Traditional Literature*, ed. John Miles Foley (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1980) 217.

³ Constance Brittain Bouchard, “*Strong of Body, Brave and Noble*”: *Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998) 106. and Sarah Kay, *The “Chanson de geste” in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1995) 1-5.

comradeship.”⁵ According to Vinaver, the genres do not differ in theme or purpose, merely in style of presentation, and so both genres should be considered works of fiction, yet both can be read as expressions of their contemporary culture. The *Chanson de Roland* is based on an historical event that took place in 778—just over two hundred years before the narrative was transcribed in what is known as the Oxford manuscript, the earliest extant text.⁶ Through his art, the author transformed an account of the slaughter of Charlemagne’s rearguard into an expression of Frankish pride and the death of Roland into the martyrdom of a hero. This chapter will build upon the research of scholars who have applied historical readings to this literary work to demonstrate the communal ethic that defines heroism in the text in relation to two scenes that validate this ethic—those of Roland’s confession and Ganelon’s trial. James C. Russell suggests that a communal ethic was a logical survival trait of early communities:

Since the early Germans [including the Franks] could not rely upon the protection and assistance of a bureaucratic empire when they were threatened with attack or famine, it was incumbent upon each man and woman of the community to adhere to the fundamental sociobiological principle of group survival embodied in the bonds of familial and communal solidarity. One’s status in society depended upon how closely one adhered to this fundamental principle. Those who behaved honorably, thereby contributing toward the advancement of their community, were materially rewarded and thus increased their wealth, power, and influence.⁷

In accordance with this principle, Roland has already gained prestige in his community for conquering many lands on their behalf and is thus ~~is~~ represented as their premier

⁴ Eugène Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971) 3.

⁵ Vinaver, *Rise of Romance*, 3.

⁶ It is generally accepted that the *Chanson* was composed around 1100 and the Oxford manuscript was written some time later in a twelfth-century hand.

warrior, foremost in terms of social status under the king. The confession scene demonstrates that Roland dies as he lived, in the service of his lord and community to be rewarded with ascension into heaven for a lifetime of loyalty. The trial by battle that justifies Charlemagne's cause against Ganelon establishes that the individual's personal desires cannot take precedence over the good of the community. Rather, as Ganelon's execution confirms, his refusal to conform to social norms would not be tolerated. In both cases, a communal ethic is endorsed by the text and, implicitly, by its twelfth-century audience.

The song offers a grisly portrayal of the cruelties of war and provides insight into the nature of medieval warfare, yet it is not a factual account of the battle at Roncevaux. The author has taken great liberty with his portrayal of the event to the extent of inventing characters, manipulating the geography, inserting miraculous occurrences, and creating a fictional storyline.⁸ For the purposes of this dissertation, its historical relevance lies in its depiction of morality. Claude Galley's assertion of the verity of the epic encapsulates the relationship between the *Chanson de Roland* and medieval society. He states that

La société du XIIe siècle se reconnaissait dans les épopées, elle y projetait ses valeurs, ses institutions, ses croyances. Outre l'élément proprement littéraire, art dont le but est de plaire, encore que cela suppose une conformité avec les goûts, les tendances et les centres d'intérêt de l'auditoire, on doit pouvoir y découvrir . . . une image de la société

⁷ James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 120.

⁸ Paulette Gabaudan, "Etude historique et littéraire," *La Chanson de Roland* ([Paris]: Librairie Nizet, 1994) 21-152.

contemporaine et de ses problèmes et aussi et surtout en enseignement civique, religieux, moral.⁹

In order to appeal to its audience, the text had to reflect and reaffirm contemporary notions of right and wrong. Unlike artists today, medieval authors did not try to shock their audiences with startling creativity and originality; they tried to gratify the expectations of their listeners with traditional themes, and characters were judged as heroes or villains according to conventional morality. The immediate and widespread popularity of the *Chanson de Roland* is indicative of its successful embodiment of contemporary values and, in the words of George Fenwick Jones, “proves that it expressed the sentiments of the dominant social element of twelfth century France.”¹⁰

Having established that the song reflects social truths, scholars have differed in their interpretations of the values it espouses. They have typically been divided into two camps—one side arguing in favour of Christian values and the other side, for secular values.¹¹ Early analyses of Roland’s character in terms of a Christian framework have deduced that the hero is guilty of the sin of pride¹² for which he must make atonement.¹³

⁹ “Twelfth-century society is recognizable in epics—society therein projects its values, its institutions, its beliefs. In addition to the literary element, art that aims to please implies a conformity with the tastes, tendencies and the centers of interest of the audience, in such art we must be able to find . . . an image of contemporary society and its problems, as well and above all in civic, religious, and moral instruction.” (trans. mine) Claude Galley, “Dieu, le Droit et la Guerre dans Diverses Chansons de Geste,” *Justice au Moyen Age* (Provence: Publications du Cier Ma, 1986) 149.

¹⁰ George Fenwick Jones, *The Ethos of the Song of Roland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1963) 4.

¹¹ Julian E. White, “*La Chanson de Roland*: Secular or Religious Inspiration?” *Romania* 84 (1962): 398-408.

¹² Alain Renoir, “Roland’s Lament: its Meaning and Function in the *Chanson de Roland*,” *Speculum* 35 (1960): 572-83; William W. Kibler, “Roland’s Pride,” *Symposium* 26 (1972) :147-60; Larry S. Crist, “A propos de la *desmesure* dans la *Chanson de Roland*: quelques propos (démésurés?),” *Olifant* 1:4 (1974): 10-20; and Wolfgang G. Van Emden, “‘E cil de France le cleiment a guarant’: Roland, Vivien et le thème du guarant,” *Olifant* 1:4 (1974): 21-47.

¹³ T. Akinson Jenkins, ed., *La Chanson de Roland: Oxford Version*, rev. ed. Heath’s Modern Language Series (Boston: Heath, 1929) xlii; and P. Le Gentil, *La Chanson de Roland* (Paris, 1955) 109.

Other scholars have seen biblical echoes throughout the text and have applied a typological reading to the characters.¹⁴ Secular readings of the text largely discount the Christian elements as “superficial,” and concentrate on discussions of feudal honor,¹⁵ the historic ethos,¹⁶ and social and political values.¹⁷ However, recent scholarship has been more willing to negotiate a compromise between the religious and secular impetuses of the text without prioritizing one over the other.¹⁸ In her insightful article, Laura Ashe notes that “ideologies of the laity often differed greatly from the official theology of the Church”¹⁹ and discusses the text as a dialogue between the two through its depiction of a “secularized Christianity.”²⁰ Her work echoes my own viewpoint that the song

creates, challenges, and ultimately reaffirms a coherent system of feudal relationships between men, and between God and man, which forms the supporting social structure of a secular and divine empire.²¹

The secular and divine are inseparable because they operate on a single plane within the social hierarchy. Consequently, the boundaries between the three orders—those who

¹⁴ Gerard J. Brault, *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary (London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1978); and Emanuel J. Jr. Mickel, “Judicium Dei and the Structure of *La Chanson de Roland*,” *Studies in Honor of Hans-Erich Keller: Medieval French and Occitan Literature and Romance Linguistics*, ed. Rupert T. Pickens (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993) 29-48.

¹⁵ Owen, D.D.R., “The Secular Inspiration of the *Chanson de Roland*,” *Speculum* 37 (1962): 390-400.

¹⁶ Jones, *Ethos of the Song of Roland*.

¹⁷ John F. Benton, “‘Nostre Franceis n’unt talent de fuïr’: the *Song of Roland* and the Enculturation of a Warrior Class,” *Olifant* 6 (1979): 237-58. Rpt. in *Culture, Power, and Personality in Medieval France*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (London: Hambledon P, 1991) 147-165.

¹⁸ Brigitte Cazelles, “Outrepasser les Normes: L’Invention de Soi en France Médiévale,” *Stanford French Review* 14:1-2 (1990): 69-92; and William T. Cotton, “*Par amur et par feid*: Keeping Faith and the Varieties of Feudalism in *La Chanson de Roland*,” *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideas of Order and Their Decline*, eds. Liam O Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1994) 163-200.

¹⁹ Laura Ashe, “‘A Prayer and a Wacry’ The Creation of a Secular Religion in the *Song of Roland*,” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 28:4 (1999): 351.

²⁰ Ashe, 357.

²¹ Ashe, 357.

pray, those who fight, and those who work²²—are seen to be more fluid than originally thought and inadequate descriptors of a complex society.²³ Twelfth-century Christianity must be reexamined according to its actual practice in lay society as opposed to its theological ideals. This trend to discover aspects of lay religion in the *Chanson de Roland* parallels current historical research into the religious beliefs of the laity in medieval Europe.²⁴ There is a growing reluctance to accept the rigid compartmentalization of belief systems that characterized early scholarship and an increasing acceptance of the ambiguities that coloured medieval society.

Careful analysis of Roland's confession in its narrative context reveals an underlying communal ethic. Even in the moments before death, Roland seeks to fulfill his obligations to his community. I follow Susan Reynolds in identifying a community as a group that

defines itself by engaging in collective activities—activities which are characteristically determined and controlled less by formal regulations than by shared values and norms, while the relationships between members of the community are characteristically reciprocal, many-sided, and direct, rather than being mediated through officials or rulers.²⁵

²² Bishop Adalbero of Laon was the first to fully articulate this idea of social division in the early eleventh century. See Adalbero, "Carmen ad Rotbertum regum," ed. Claude Carozzi, *Poème au roi Robert*, *Classiques de l'histoire de France au moyen âge* 32, (Paris, 1979).

²³ Bouchard, *Strong of Body*, 28-29.

²⁴ André Vauchez, "Lay People's Sanctity in Western Europe: Evolution of a Pattern (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries)," *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, eds. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tímea Szell (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991); André Vauchez, *La spiritualité du Moyen Age occidental l'île-XIIe siècles*, (Vendôme, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975); Marcus Bull, *Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade: The Limousin and Gascony, c. 970-c. 1130* (Oxford: Clarendon P. 1993); John W. Baldwin, "From the Ordeal to Confession: In Search of Lay Religion in Early Thirteenth-Century France," *York Studies in Medieval Theology II. Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, eds. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (York: York Medieval P, 1998) 191-209; and Bouchard, *Strong of Body*.

²⁵ Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford: Clarendon P. 1984) 2.

Roland's community is comprised of King Charlemagne, the Twelve Peers (including Oliver), the warriors in Charlemagne's army, his family (including Ganelon until the betrayal is known), and God. Together, they are fighting to expand the borders of Christendom and increase the honour of the group. Though their relationships with each other are governed to some extent by pressure to conform to established norms and social hierarchies, action is generally characterized by mutual cooperation in the pursuit of a common goal. These same principles define interaction in the twelfth-century narratives discussed below. Charlemagne, like the kings in the romances, makes decisions in council, and both he and Roland, like other twelfth-century heroes, lead by example rather than through the use of force. Furthermore, characters define their individual strength according to the strength of the group. Roland's role as "guarant" (1160), protector of the French, is particularly important because he is the best of Charlemagne's knights. On this basis, Ganelon convinces the Gascon king that Charlemagne cannot be defeated while Roland yet lives. This strong sense of community pervades the action of the song so that even confession is depicted in the context of communal obligations.

Roland twice confesses—in the group confession before the battle (1124-41) and again when he feels death coming upon him (2259-396). Archbishop Turpin orchestrates the first confession to ensure the salvation of those men who might die in the upcoming confrontation. He reminds the French of their obligation to die for their king (1128) and to sustain Christianity (1129) before he urges them to confess:

Clamez vos culpes, si preiez Deu mercit;
 Asoldrai vos pur voz anmes guarir.
 Se vos murez, esterez seinz martirs

Sieges avrez el greignor pareïs. (1132-35)²⁶

By virtue of his office, Turpin grants absolution and, in language reminiscent of sermons preaching the crusade, he promises them martyrdom if they die fighting for Christianity. This scene reflects an early stage in the history of the confessional when it was largely a deathbed ceremony performed only once in a lifetime²⁷ (though some leeway was given to soldiers who might die suddenly in battle).²⁸ Confession was not yet a private interview between a priest and the penitent: it involved a general admission of sin followed by the imposition of a severe penance that often required a lengthy term of public humiliation. To avoid the associated penance, sinners usually confessed in the moments before death. The assembled knights at Roncevaux are judged as a group, and consistent with the rest of the narrative, the welfare of the community is given priority over that of the individual. Turpin does not hear the separate confessions of each knight, nor does he assign individual penance; instead, he counsels them as a whole to declare their sins and pray for God's mercy. His sermon to the knights is not concerned with their personal misdeeds, but their public and professional responsibility to sacrifice their

²⁶ My translations of the song largely follow Brault (Gerard J. Brault, ed. and trans., *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition. II. Oxford Text and English Translation* (London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1978)), but where I feel a more literal translation would be appropriate, I have made my own emendations. For example, Brault translates "clamez vos culpes" as "say your confessions." I prefer the more literal translation of "declare your faults" so that the text remains as close to the original wording as possible and allows readers to draw their own conclusions. "Declare your faults, and pray for God's mercy;/ I will absolve you to save your souls./ If you die, you will be holy martyrs./ You will have seats in highest paradise." (1132-35)

²⁷ Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Greenwood P, 1968) 34.

²⁸ In 459, Pope Leo I relaxed the restrictions governing confession to provide more flexibility for soldiers. B. Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*. The Herder History of Dogma, ed. and trans. T. Courtney (Freiburg-London, 1964) 107-8.

own lives in defense of the Christian nation. Thus, as penance, he commands them to strike the enemy (1138).

The group confession fixes the hero firmly in the context of his community. Roland is bound by the same responsibilities and faces the same risks as the men who fight alongside him. As Brigitte Cazelles notes, Roland is not distinguished as a hero because he differs from his peers. Rather, he represents a superlative embodiment of cultural norms: “c’est en effet une différence de degré, et non de nature, qui le démarque dans l’espace du ‘dreit.’”²⁹ Both the group confession and Roland’s own confession emphasize communal solidarity in a number of ways. First, the knights are unified by a common goal and, as they confess, they stand as equals before God. All have fought for Christianity and hope to be received in heaven should they die. Not even the archbishop is granted privileged status from his ecclesiastical role, but like every other knight at the moment of death, “si priet Deu que paraïs li duinst” (2241).³⁰ While the group confession prepared the warriors for a death that might come suddenly, those who feel death coming upon them more slowly have time to offer a more personal confession. Roland’s confession echoes those of Oliver and Turpin who died before him. Each man “cleimet sa culpe” (2014, 2239, 2383)³¹ while lying prostrate on the ground (2013, 2237, 2358). They then join their hands and raise them towards heaven (2015, 2239, 2392). Each prays to God to take their soul to paradise (2016, 2241, 2262). The parallel

²⁹ “it is in fact a difference of degree and not of nature that distinguishes him in the space of ‘dreit’ [the right]” (trans. mine) Cazelles, 76.

³⁰ “asks God to grant him paradise” (2241)

³¹ “declares his sins” (2014, 2239, 2383)

structure of the respective passages draws attention to the similarities between the men and unites them as members of the Christian community.

In his confession, Roland is not defending himself against a particular charge of wrongdoing. He offers a general admission of sins in a conventional manner:³²

Deus, meie culpe vers les tues vertuz
De mes pecchez, des granz e des menuz,
Que jo ai fait dés l'ure que nez fui
Tresqu'a cest jur que ci sui consoût! (2369-72)³³

Roland's statement is formulaic and offers no insight into the nature of his sins. There is no sense of personal introspection; instead, the hero is demonstrating an appropriate display of submission before his superior. Throughout this scene, he is concerned about appearances and how he will be perceived by others. For the benefit of his king, Roland walks some distance away from his men and lies facing the enemy:

Pur ço l'ad fait que il voelt veirement
Que Carles diet e trestute sa gent,
Li gentilz quens, qu'il fut mort cunquerant (2361-63)³⁴

The position of his body will convey the impression that he fought bravely until the end. For the benefit of God, Roland "cleimet sa culpe e menut e suvent" (2364).³⁵ The phrase, "cleimet sa culpe," that here indicates "beat his breast" may alternately be translated as "confesses," "declares his faults," or "repents openly," and its multiple connotations draw attention to the importance of external behaviour as an expression of socially appropriate emotion. By beating his breast, Roland displays humility before God, so he again "si ad

³² Owen, 397.

³³ "God, I accuse myself in the name of your virtues/ for my sins, great and small/ that I have committed from the time I was born/ until this day when I am overtaken here!" (2369-72)

³⁴ "He does this because he earnestly desires/ that Charles and all his men say/ the noble count died as a conqueror." (2361-63)

sun piz batud" (2368)³⁶ immediately before he offers his confession, his physical action corroborating his intent.

In his gestures and in his words during the confession scene, Roland exemplifies the loyalty to his community that is his prime motivation all through the narrative.

Arguing against a Christian interpretation of the poem, D.D.R. Owen states that

throughout the battle Roland never wavers from the pursuit of his feudal ideals; and . . . there is no mention here among his last thoughts of the holy cause in which he has been fighting, but instead we find them directed once more towards his king and country, his family, and himself.³⁷

Owen's definition of "feudal ideals" excludes religious motivation, so he suggests that the Christian elements in the poem are the later additions "of some skilful redactor."³⁸ I would argue that religious and secular modes of thought are inextricable from one another in the song because the divine presence was seen as an inalienable facet of everyday life. Colin Morris notes that prior to the twelfth century, there was no clear line drawn between religion, politics, and society:

they had no idea of a natural or human sphere which was exclusively under the care of men. The involvement of God and of other spiritual powers in the political and social order was taken for granted.³⁹

Roland sees God and the angels as part of his social network in the same sense as Charlemagne. He serves all of them with complete and selfless devotion, and, in times of need, he relies on their support. Moreover, in keeping his obligations to his king and

³⁵ "beats his breast with feeble and frequent blows" (2364)

³⁶ "beat his breast" (2368)

³⁷ Owen, 396-7.

³⁸ Owen, 400.

³⁹ Colin Morris, "Judicium Dei: The Social and Political Significance of the Ordeal in the Eleventh Century," *Studies in Church History* 12 (1975): 95.

peers, he is also serving God who reigns above them all. From the moment Roland feels death coming upon him (2259), he addresses himself to God and his subsequent actions should be read as part of a dialogue with the divine.

His first thoughts turn to the protection of Durendal so it does not fall into pagan hands. The sword symbolizes the bonds of fealty that bind Roland with his superiors, and, as such, it represents the honour of his community. In his address to the sword, the hero explains its importance:

Carles esteit es vals de Moriane,
 Quant Deus del cel li mandat par sun angle
 Qu'il te dunast a un cunte cataignie
 Dunc le me ceinst li gentilz reis, li magnes.

 Cunquis l'en ai païs e teres tantes,
 Que Carles tient, ki ad la barbe blanche. (2318-34)⁴⁰

God sits at the top of the social hierarchy, and his directive to give Durendal to Roland travels down through the chain of command via his angel and Charlemagne. With the sword, Roland conquers many lands for his king to govern and, implicitly, for the Christian God to rule. The weapon defends the integrity of the French nation in both a moral and a physical sense. Thus, the Gascon knight Chernuble boasts that he will desecrate France by first breaching Roland's sword: "Si cunquerrai Durendal od la meie./ Franceis murrunt e France en ert deserte" (988-9).⁴¹ The sword is equally representative of Christianity by virtue of the relics it contains in its hilt and for this reason Roland tries to ensure that it never serve the ends of Muslims: "Il nen est dreiz que paiens te

⁴⁰ "Charles was in the valleys of Maurienne,/ when God of heaven instructed him by his angel/ to give you to a good captain/ so the great, noble king girded me with it.// With it I conquered so many countries and lands/ over which white-bearded Charles rules." (2318-21)

baillisent;/ De chrestiens devez estre servie” (2349-50).⁴² His attempts to destroy Durendal represent his final effort to protect the community by ensuring that the sword never be used against them. After his first unsuccessful effort to shatter the sword with his own strength, Roland asks “seinte Marie” (2303)⁴³ for help. When he is again unsuccessful, he seeks help higher in the chain of command and asks God for assistance (2337). Durendal proves indestructible, and, in a final effort to protect the sword and the values it represents, Roland places it under his body (2359).

Though his actions dominate the first half of the narrative, Roland is consistently depicted in the service of others—conquering more lands for the glory of his king and God (2322-34), refusing to call for help for the honour of his family and country (1063-64), and sounding the horn so his countrymen will be avenged (1742-44). Through such service, he gains honour and prestige for himself. However, the underlying current of the narrative emphasizes the continuity of king, country, and God, while heroes such as Roland pass away. The sword that refuses to break is a metaphor for the nation that will endure past Roland’s ability to protect it. Ultimately, the sword serves God’s purposes and he will ensure that it is passed on to the knight who will take Roland’s place (3014-17). Ashe notes that

Roland’s death, and acceptance of death, is all about the continuity and stability of the system from which he came: in dying, he savagely insists upon the lack of importance of any one man. That is a feat which other medieval literary milieux, such as the Arthurian romances, never quite managed: they are always tied to the lives of specific characters.⁴⁴

⁴¹ “With my sword I will conquer Durendal./ The French shall die and France will be deserted.” (988-9)

⁴² “It is not right that pagans own you./ You must be served by Christians.” (2349-50)

⁴³ “holy Mary” (2303)

⁴⁴ Ashe, 365.

The first editor of the Oxford manuscript, Francisque Michel, chose to title the narrative the *Chanson de Roland*, but it could have just as easily been named for Charlemagne, France, or the battle of Roncevaux, for, as many scholars have noted, “no single character fulfills the heroic role.”⁴⁵ Roland accepts the inevitability of his death and prepares accordingly—trying as long as possible to fulfill his duty to Charlemagne, yet turning away without a qualm from the things he valued in life, “de tantes terres cum li bers cunquist/ de dulce France, des humes de sun lign./ de Carlemagne, sun seignor” (2378-80),⁴⁶ to prepare his soul for heaven.

The hero acts with full confidence that his soul will survive his body because he has faith that God intercedes directly in human affairs. A second time, Roland prays for God’s mercy with all due humility:

Veire Patene, ki unkes ne mentis,
Seing Lazaron de mort resurrexis
E Daniel des leons guaresis,
Guaris de mei l’anme de tuz perilz
Pur les pecchez que en ma vie fis! (2384-88)⁴⁷

This passage draws attention to miracles God performed out of compassion for humans in mortal peril. Roland requests the same intercession on behalf of his soul that is stained with the sins he committed during his lifetime. The direct and unmediated relationship between the hero and God is indicative of the role of the divine in the community.

⁴⁵ Patricia Harris Stablein, “The Structure of the Hero in the *Chanson de Roland*: Heroic Being and Becoming,” *Olifant* 5:2 (1977): 105.

⁴⁶ “the many lands that the brave knight conquered,/ fair France, the men from whom he is descended,/ Charlemagne, his lord” (2378-80)

⁴⁷ “Our true Father, who never lied/ who resurrected Saint Lazarus from the dead/ and protected Daniel from the lions/ also save my soul from all perils/ for the sins that I committed during my life.” (2384-88)

Historian André Vauchez notes that this understanding of the divine is typical of the eleventh and twelfth centuries: “Tous sont intimement persuadés que Dieu intervient de façon directe dans les destinées individuelles et collectives.”⁴⁸ Characters act with the full expectation that God is involved with their struggles and will intercede on their behalf. With the exception of Archbishop Turpin, whose ecclesiastical function is extremely limited and overshadowed by his role as warrior, the church and its clerics are largely absent from the text. Turpin directs the group confession, yet his role as intermediary is not seen as essential, which allows Roland to offer his own confession directly to God.

Once Roland has as far as possible fulfilled his obligations on earth, he offers himself in homage to God by thrice proffering his gauntlet (2365, 2373, 2389). Passed via an intermediary, the glove is a distinctive sign “qui donnent créance à la qualité de messenger ou d’ambassadeur”⁴⁹ and, through its exchange, it becomes the physical representation of the agreement between lord and vassal. This exchange is enacted between Marsile and his lord, Baligant (2677-2838); in response to Marsile’s request for aide, Baligant sends his glove with a messenger and invites his vassal to come render him homage. When the two meet in person, they formalize their relationship:

Al puign senestre ad pris un de ses guanz.
 Ço dist Marsilie: “Sire reis, amiralz,
 Teres tutes ici. . . [lacuna]

⁴⁸ “All are intimately persuaded that God intervenes in a direct manner in individual and collective destinies.” (trans. mine) André Vachez, *La spiritualité du Moyen Age occidental VIIe-XIIe siècles* (Vendôme, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975) 63.

⁴⁹ Gabaudan, 31.

E Sarraguce e l'onur qu'i apent." (2830-3)⁵⁰

Though the textual lacuna hides part of the phrase, it is clear from the context that Marsile is offering himself and all his lands to his lord in return for protection. The gauntlet is a visual representation of his submission and, when Baligant states, "de vos receif le guant" (2838),⁵¹ his acceptance of the glove indicates his acceptance of Marsile's homage. As in the exchange between Marsile and Baligant, Roland offers his gauntlet to God as a sign of his deference and humble request for protection.

His gesture is accompanied by other signs of his subservience—the beating of his breast and open admission of his faults. In strict terms, early confession was comprised of the admission of sins, penance, and absolution. However, it is not untoward to see Roland's offer of homage as a modification of the ritual to accommodate a pre-Christian value system. As James C. Russell has noted, early missionaries sought to build a compromise between the new and the old religious systems by redefining the

virtues of strength, courage, and loyalty in such a manner that would reduce their incompatibility with Christian values, while at the same time 'inculturating' Christian values as far a possible to accommodate the Germanic ethos and world-view.⁵²

Roland's confession reflects a unique form of Christian ritual wherein God is analogous to a human king, and, as his vassal, Roland offers his devotion in return for protection. With his last breath, Roland asks God to guard his soul, offers a general admission of sin, proffers his gauntlet, and joins his hands together (2383-92). Eventually adopted as an

⁵⁰ "He took one of his gauntlets with his left hand./ Marsile said: 'Great emir, lord king,/ all these lands [. . .]/ and Saragossa, and the fief connected with it.'" (2830-3)

⁵¹ "I accept the gauntlet from you" (2838)

appropriate position for prayer, the knight kneeling before his lord with hands folded and raised was humbly offering his fealty.⁵³ God accepts the hero's homage by sending Gabriel to take the gauntlet from Roland's hand and by bearing his soul to paradise (2390-96). Rather than an occasion for personal introspection and examination of the soul, confession in the *Chanson de Roland* is a ritual of allegiance as the knight finalizes his obligations to his king and prepares to join the ranks of the martyrs in heaven.

Upon Roland's death, the narrative shifts its focus to the exploits of Charlemagne who must now take a more active role in defending his community. Like his nephew, Charlemagne's actions are based on a communal ethic that places high value on service and loyalty. John F. Benton asserts that a code of honorable loyalty is central to the song. He mentions loyalty to kin, but stresses that more important are "a warrior's loyalties to his companions in arms, to his battlefield commanders, to his *pays* and his ruler, and to the Christian religion, all of which are skillfully combined in the *Oxford Roland*."⁵⁴ These ideals are challenged during the trial by battle between Charlemagne and Ganelon, and, ultimately, they are reaffirmed as the traitor is punished for his infidelity to king and country. The term "plait" (3741, 3780, 3841) refers generally to any judicial proceeding and, more specifically, to a judicial assembly gathered around a king or lord.⁵⁵ Stephen D. White emphasizes that in Western French litigation between 1050 and 1110, "the ordeal process always formed part of an even lengthier and more flexible disputing

⁵² Russell, 121. NB. In Russell's inquiry, "Germanic" refers not only to the Gothic, Frankish, Saxon, Burgundian, Alamannic, Suevic, and Vandal peoples, but also to the Viking peoples of Scandinavia and the Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain. (107)

⁵³ Bouchard, *Strong of Body*, 43.

⁵⁴ Benton, 162. (page citations are to the reprint edition)

process.”⁵⁶ Ganelon’s *plait* is comprised of a preliminary hearing, trial by battle, and sentencing whose various procedures correspond with historical evidence of trials in France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The historical accuracy of the legal procedures portrayed in this literary text is not essential to my argument as long as the trial can be recognized as a *Judicium Dei*. However, the author’s depiction of the judicial formalities of his contemporaries rather than those that would have been current in the time period surrounding the Battle of Roncevaux supports my contention that he presents the ethic of his contemporary culture instead of reaching back to recreate the value system of an earlier time. Furthermore, a more comprehensive understanding of the medieval judicial system elucidates the moral conflict that lies between Charlemagne and his vassal. By allowing a personal vendetta against Roland to motivate his actions, Ganelon unlawfully breaks faith with his king and, by extension, with God. Through its various steps, the trial emphasizes the importance of loyalty and community solidarity.

Ganelon is arrested because of strong suspicion of guilt in accordance with standard legal procedure in medieval France.⁵⁷ Though there is no direct evidence of his collaboration with the Gascons, his refusal to admit that the sound of the Olifant is a cry for help signals to his king and countrymen that his loyalty to his community has been compromised. Charlemagne, Duke Naimés, and the French all hear the horn and react

⁵⁵ “*plait*.” *Dictionnaire de l’ancien français: le Moyen Age*. Ed. Algirdas Julien Greimas. Paris: Larousse, 1997.

⁵⁶ Stephen D. White, “Proposing the Ordeal and Avoiding It: Strategy and Power in Western French Litigation, 1050-1110,” *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*. ed. Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995) 93.

⁵⁷ See Roger Grand, “Justice Criminelle Procédure et Peines Dans les Villes aux XIIIe et XIVe Siècles.” *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes* 102 (1941): 51-108.

appropriately by correctly deducing that “unc nel sunast, se ne fust cumbatant” (1769)⁵⁸ and “Rollant se dementet” (1795).⁵⁹ In response, they immediately rush to his aid while, conversely, Ganelon sets himself apart from the community by reacting inappropriately—insisting that Roland could not be in any danger and attempting to prevent Charlemagne from helping him. From this point onward, the traitor stands outside of the community and his arrest identifies him as a threat that needs to be contained. He is presumed guilty and the burden of proof rests with him to prove his innocence. Once a respected knight, Ganelon is tortured and shamed at the hands of serfs upon his arrest. Under the direction of the head cook, the kitchen help

. . . li peilent la barbe e les gemuns,
 Cascun le fiert .IIII. colps de son puign,
 Ben le batirent a fuz e a bastuns
 E si li metent el col un caignun,
 Si l'encainent altresi cum un urs;
 Sur un sumer l'unt mis a deshonor. (1823-28)⁶⁰

At the bottom of the social hierarchy, the serfs who beat Ganelon are still included in the “maisnee” (1820)⁶¹ while the accused has lost his status in the community. By chaining him “cum un urs” and by placing him on a packhorse like common goods, his very humanity is denied. For the trial, he is tied to “un estache” (3737)⁶² before the assembled

⁵⁸ “he’d never sound it if he weren’t fighting.” (1769)

⁵⁹ “Roland is desperate” (1795)

⁶⁰ “pluck out his beard and his moustache./ each strikes him four blows with his fist:/ they thrash him soundly with rods and sticks./ they put an iron collar around his neck./ and they chain him like a bear./ They placed him on a sumpter for his shame.” (1823-28)

⁶¹ Typically, a *maisnee* is composed of the individuals who live together under one lord or patriarch, including both family members and domestic help. The term can also be used in reference to the entourage and company of a king or great lord. “maisniee, -nie” *Dictionnaire de l’ancien français: le Moyen Age*. Ed. Algirdas Julien Greimas. Paris: Larousse, 1997.

⁶² “a stake” (3737)

crowd in “caenes de fer” (3735),⁶³ and the visible evidence of his criminal status marks him as an outcast. For Charlemagne and his entourage, there is no doubt that Ganelon is guilty of treason and they treat him as if he has already been condemned. The narrator supports this reading by calling the knight “Guenes li fels” (3735)⁶⁴ and by stating outright that he “traïson ad faite” (3748).⁶⁵ Ganelon not only betrays his king when he breaks his oath of fealty, he betrays his community and, in return, they reject him.

His kin form the only group who adamantly refuse to acknowledge his guilt and stand by him at the trial. In her comprehensive studies of the law codes of medieval peoples, Katherine Fischer Drew notes that the collective solidarity of the kin group is a common feature of all the codes:

The underlying concept was the assurance that each individual knew at all times whom he could call upon to support him . . . in providing proof or in supporting his oath in the courts, and in some cases (certainly among the Franks and Anglo-Saxons) helping him pay compositions assessed against him.⁶⁶

When Charlemagne calls for guarantors to stand as surety for Ganelon, his relatives do not hesitate to support their kinsman: “.XXX. parenz li plevissent leial” (3847).⁶⁷

Through their sponsorship, they align themselves with Ganelon’s cause and, to some extent, participate in his criminal status. The accused is released into their custody, but they are all now kept under guard for the duration of the trial (3849). As a small

⁶³ “iron chains” (3735)

⁶⁴ “Ganelon the Wicked” (3735)

⁶⁵ “committed treason” (3748)

⁶⁶ Katherine Fischer Drew, “Another Look at the Origins of the Middle Ages: A Reassessment of the Role of the Germanic Kingdoms,” *Speculum* 62:4 (1987): 807.

⁶⁷ “Thirty kinsmen pledge his loyalty.” (3847)

community in and of themselves, they stand against the majority though they clearly hope that their solidarity will result in Ganelon's reintegration into society.

The judicial proceedings are directed before a council comprised of "humes de plusurs teres" (3743)⁶⁸ who gather to witness the trial and offer their advice. Already, the communal emphasis of the trial is apparent as representatives from various peoples under Charlemagne's rule (3793-96) convene to participate in the judgment. Grand notes the same kind of procedure in thirteenth-century French towns and states that

ils ne seront là que comme prud'hommes venant apporter aide et conseil, et pour enlever tout soupçon d'arbitraire ou d'iniquité, car ils ne participent en rien à la juridiction.⁶⁹

Though the presiding lord was not obliged to take their advice, Charlemagne clearly counts on their support. Grand observes that trials typically followed a standard pattern:

La famille de la victime ou l'agent de l'abbé [the local lord] charge l'accusé. Celui-ci se défend. Des témoins sont produits pour appuyer les dires des parties. . . . Les prud'hommes écoutent, puis donnent leur avis.⁷⁰

This pattern is followed in the song as Charlemagne states his accusations (3750-60), Ganelon responds (3757-78), and the assembled men deliberate and offer their counsel (3793-814). No witnesses are called forth because Ganelon confesses to the death of the rearguard, but he defends his actions by asserting, "Venget m'en sui, mais n'i ad traïsun" (3778).⁷¹ In support of his defense, his kinsman proposes the ordeal:

⁶⁸ "men from many lands" (3743)

⁶⁹ "they are there to act as wise men who bring their help and counsel, and to eliminate any worry of arbitrariness or inequity, for they do not participate in anything in the jurisdiction." (trans. mine) Grand, 62.

⁷⁰ "The family of the victim or the agent of the abbot [the local lord] charges the accused. He defends himself. Witnesses are produced to support the statements of the parties. . . . The wise men listen, then give their advice." (trans. mine) Grand, 85.

⁷¹ "I avenged myself, but I did not commit treason." (3778)

Dist Pinabel: “Vos erez guarit sempres.
 N’i ad Francés ki vos Juliet a pendre,
 U l’emperere les noz dous cors en asemble,
 Al brant d’acer que jo ne l’en desmente.” (3788-91)⁷²

He challenges the opposition to prove their suit against his sword and his threat is enough to give them pause. When the council convenes, “Pur Pinabel se cuntient plus quei” (3797).⁷³ According to Stephen White,

in later eleventh-century western France, both proposals to hold ordeals and measures taken to avoid them appear primarily as instruments of power, as tricky, dangerous bargaining ploys that litigants, their supporters, and judges might use to achieve what they considered favorable outcomes in disputes.⁷⁴

Pinabel’s challenge presents a threat that is powerful enough to sway the council’s recommendation in Ganelon’s favour. Though the text does not reveal the reasoning behind the council’s desire to avoid an ordeal, they are reluctant to face Pinabel’s sword—“mult sereit fols ki ja se cumbatreit” (3804)⁷⁵—and propose that Charlemagne drop his suit (3799, 3809). Notably, they do not argue that Ganelon is innocent of the charges. Instead, they urge reconciliation and encourage the king to readmit the knight into his service: “Sire, nus vos prium/ Que clamez quite le cunte Guenelun,/ Puis si vos servet par feid e par amor”(3808-10).⁷⁶ The expression, “par feid e par amor,” was a stock phrase in feudal oaths and need not be understood literally. Nonetheless, the council is willing to overlook Ganelon’s transgression in the interests of peace, and their

⁷² “Pinabel says: ‘You will be saved forthwith./ No Frenchman condemns you to hang/ if the emperor puts us into the prizes together./ with my steel blade I will give him the lie.’ (3788-91)

⁷³ “Because of Pinabel, they remain silent.” (3797)

⁷⁴ White, “Proposing the Ordeal,” 121-22.

⁷⁵ “Anyone who would fight would be quite mad” (3804)

⁷⁶ “Sire, we implore you/ that you let Count Ganelon off./ he will serve you in faith and in love.” (3808-10)

recommendations suggest that a relationship based on faith and loyalty may be rebuilt. However, when Thierry offers his own challenge, the responsibility is taken out of their hands and the remainder of the trial proceeds under God's jurisdiction.

The trial by battle was largely reserved for disputes between members of the "warrior aristocracy"⁷⁷ and, because of its associated prestige, indicated some measure of respect for both participants. Unlike most *Judicia Dei*, the trial by battle was bilateral—it involved the participation of both the defendant and the plaintiff. The ordeal commences with the delegation of champions, initial exchange of oaths (3827-44), security of guarantors (3846-49), formal challenge (3855), confession (3859), mass and communion (3860), church offerings (3861), and then proceeds to the duel. The oath was key to any ordeal and often its wording could afford some advantage to one or the other party.

Thierry swears to Charlemagne that Ganelon is guilty of breaking faith with his king:

Que que Rollant a Guanelun forsfesist,
Vostre servise l'en dotüst bien guarir.
Guenes est fels d'ïço qu'il le traît;
Vers vos s'en est parjurez e malmis. (3827-30)⁷⁸

He does not deny that Ganelon may have had due cause to be angry with Roland.

However, he asserts that the personal dispute between stepson and stepfather cannot take precedence over Ganelon's responsibility to uphold his oath of fealty to Charlemagne. In a pivotal essay on medieval law, S.F.C. Milsom notes that legal development "was

⁷⁷ Morris, 99.

⁷⁸ "Even if Roland had wronged Ganelon,/ the fact that he was serving you was sufficient to safeguard him./ Ganelon is a felon because he betrayed him/ Towards you, he has perjured himself, he violated his oath." (3827-30)

dominated by the rule that the general issue must be taken whenever possible.”⁷⁹ By avoiding specific details and keeping the charge as simple as possible, the plaintiff had a better chance of winning his suit. In the case of the ordeal, “the simpler the statement of the problem, the less likelihood of misreading God’s will.”⁸⁰ Based on medieval definitions of treason, Emanuel J. Mickel shows that Ganelon can be identified as a traitor in at least three ways: because he arranged the ambush of Roland rather than a fair fight, because he and Roland were related through marriage, and because “he conspired to do harm to the king’s army and to a man protected by the king’s peace and service.”⁸¹ Thierry’s oath focuses on the last reason and does not complicate his charge with a long list of Ganelon’s offenses. He asserts simply that Ganelon broke his oath to Charlemagne when he attacked Roland and for this reason he deserves to be hanged as a felon. Pinabel does not respond with an alternate interpretation of his kinsman’s actions; he denies the accusations and declares that he will prove them false by his sword: “Jo si li fals, od lui m`en cumbatrai” (3844).⁸² The issue remains focused on the individual’s responsibility to keep faith with his lord, and, in accordance with the bond of fealty, respect his property and *maisnee*.

As lord reigning above Charlemagne, God is actively involved with the community and, by definition, the ordeal relies on his participation, for he was expected

⁷⁹ S.F.C. Milsom, “Law and Fact in Legal Development,” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 17 (1967): 13.

⁸⁰ Terence Scully, “The Ordeal at Roncesvalles: *Francs e paiens, as les vus ajustez*,” *Olifant* 7:3 (1980): 218.

⁸¹ Emanuel J. Jr. Mickel, *Ganelon, Treason, and the “Chanson de Roland”* (London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989) 86-87.

⁸² “I refute him and I’ll fight him on account of it.” (3844)

to miraculously ensure that the just man won the duel. Before they fight, both champions pray:

Ben sunt cunfés e asols e seigneur;
Oent lur messes e sunt acuminiez;
Mult granz offrendes metent par cez musters. (3859-61)⁸³

Like the confessions shown earlier in the narrative, those of Pinabel and Thierry were very likely general and should not be taken as indications that they are guilty of specific crimes. In completing these rituals, the two affirm their loyalty to God and their membership in the Christian community. Particularly, the “mult granz offrendes” reinforce their alliance with God by creating an “obligation to reciprocate.”⁸⁴ As Marcel Mauss has documented, Germanic societies had a well-defined system of gift-giving that created social ties through bonds of obligation between the giver and receiver. The champions’ generous gifts to God show appropriate respect for the divine at the same time as they seek to reiterate their mutual obligations with a show of good faith. Later, both men articulate a belief that God will control the outcome of the trial (3898, 3806). However, Ganelon’s devotion to God is questionable from the moment he seeks to create an alliance with the Muslims. Though he swears on his own relics, his acceptance of their oath sworn on the scriptures of “Mahum e Tervagan” (611)⁸⁵ indicates at least a partial acceptance of their beliefs, and this tolerance runs counter to the prevailing attitude in the text that non-Christians need to be converted or killed. For the ordeal, the traitor appears to put his faith in a strong champion rather than the cause of justice.

⁸³ “They made a good confession, they were absolved and blessed;/ They hear mass and they received communion./ They place very large offerings in the churches.” (3859-61)

⁸⁴ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990) 60.

Pinabel is described as “granz”, “forz,” and with a “cors ben mollez” (3900);⁸⁶ and “vassals est bons por ses armes defendre” (3785).⁸⁷ Rather than turning to God in prayer, Ganelon begs his kinsman to help him, “Getez mei hoi de mort e de calunje!” (3787).⁸⁸ In comparison to Pinabel’s size and strength, Thierry appears a poor champion because he is “heingre out le cors e graisle e eschewid” (3820).⁸⁹ The difference in size between the two men makes God’s miracle all the more apparent since one would expect the larger, stronger champion to win. Instead, God intervenes to protect Thierry “que mort ne l’acraventet” (3823)⁹⁰ and ensures that he wins the duel. Upon its completion, the French recognize the role of God and shout, “Deus i ad fait vertut!” (3931).⁹¹ They unanimously order the death of the traitor and the relatives who had pledged to support him: “Asez est dreit que Guenes seit pendut/ E si parent ki plaidet unt pur lui” (3932-33).⁹² Unlike the Christian deaths witnessed earlier in the text, those of Ganelon and his kin are not marked by their ascension into heaven. God has made a final statement of disapproval.

The emphasis throughout the trial remains on loyalty and the consequences of treachery. The narrator declares unequivocally that “ki hume traïst sei ocit e altroi” (3959)⁹³ before Ganelon and his supporters are killed. Through his betrayal, the traitor causes the deaths of the twenty thousand knights in the rearguard, those of the main

⁸⁵ “Mohammed and Tervagant” (611)

⁸⁶ “big,” “strong” and with a “well-built body” (3900)

⁸⁷ “He is a brave warrior well able to defend his arms” (3785)

⁸⁸ “Save me from death and this grave charge!” (3787)

⁸⁹ “spare of build, slight and slender” (3820)

⁹⁰ “from being struck dead” (3823)

⁹¹ “God performed a miracle” (3931)

⁹² “It is just that Ganelon be hanged/ together with his kinsmen who upheld his suit” (3932-33)

company who fought to avenge Roland, and his thirty relatives who stood up on his behalf. Thus the impact of his treachery reverberates through the community. His death not only removes his malevolent influence, but provides a graphic reminder to the community of the end that awaits traitors. Consistent with the values of service and loyalty demonstrated in both the *Judicium Dei* and Roland's confession, the text ends with Charlemagne's call to fight for Christianity in the land of Bire and his reluctant obedience. The king complains, "si penuse est ma vie!" (4000),⁹⁴ but he continues to faithfully serve God. As the narrator asserts when the French first ride into battle, a life of service is not easy:

Pur sun seignur deit hum susfrir granz mals
E endurer e forz freiz e granz chalz
Sin deit hom perdre del sanc e de la char. (1117-18)⁹⁵

However, loyalty is rewarded with a place in heaven, while treachery is punished. Out of all the values espoused in the text, the issue of loyalty is the focus of the two ecclesiastical judicial scenes in accordance with the song's consistent emphasis on service.

The good of the community is rated above that of the individual which ensures the survival of the group. Thus, the Christian nation of the Franks overcomes the deaths of Roland and the twelve peers, and prospers by filling its ranks with new heroes.

The *Chanson de Roland* demonstrates that its intended audience viewed God as an integrated member of their society. He interacts directly in their affairs and exhibits the

⁹³ "Anyone who betrays a man brings on his own death and that of others too" (3959)

⁹⁴ "my life is so full of suffering!" (4000)

⁹⁵ "One must suffer great hardships for one's lord/ and endure severe cold and great heat,/ and one must also lose blood and flesh." (1117-19)

same loyalty to his people as would a feudal lord. The relationship between Roland and God is characterized by mutual obligation and willingness to assist. The incorporation of secular and divine translates into greater fluidity between earth and heaven so that Roland never doubts God will support him in the just cause. As he prepares for death, the hero transfers his full allegiance from Charlemagne, who ruled him in life, to God, who will rule over him directly in death. Rather than an occasion for introspection and examination of his personal flaws, his confession reiterates his bond with his divine lord and forms part of an outward display of appropriate piety. God passes judgment and Roland is received into heaven. The hero becomes a positive example of the rewards of dutiful service in terms of both his prestige in the community and his recompense after death. In stark contrast, Ganelon epitomizes the destructive consequences of betrayal and infidelity. By allowing his personal vendetta with his stepson^{to} take priority over his obligations to Charlemagne and the French, Ganelon brings destruction down on all of them. The repercussions of his act of treason demonstrate in one sense, the fragility of a society based on personal loyalties, and, in another, they show the importance of every individual keeping faith with his community. Ganelon's trial displays the firm alliance of God, the king, and the French as they unite against a common threat. The traitor's death and mutilation give a clear sign of the community's desire to protect itself while emphasizing the importance of loyalty.

CHAPTER TWO – Honour and Loyalty in *Partonopeu de Blois*

The communal ethic that underlies the choices and actions of the heroes in *La Chanson de Roland* is also prominent in *Partonopeu de Blois*.¹ As in the epic, the needs of the community take precedence over the desires of the individual so that characters are rewarded for loyalty and a strong sense of honour. Individuals increase their reputations by enhancing the strength of the group rather than for excellence in solitary pursuits. Against this backdrop, Partonopeu is first evaluated by external signs of his nobility of character—name, appearance, wealth, and manner. Then, he is appraised by his ability to negotiate successfully various interpersonal relationships that test his devotion to the community. In two instances, he participates in a formal judicial scene where his moral worth is explicitly judged—when he fights in a trial by battle on behalf of the French and when he confesses to the Bishop. The *Judicium Dei* marks Partonopeu's transition to manhood as he takes his place in the community as their champion. The trial demonstrates his merit as a hero who can successfully defend his society against the attacks of the Danes. He proves loyal to the social ties that bind him, and thus honours himself and his community; however, he proves fallible at his confession when he fails to recognize the Bishop as a false counselor and wrongly betrays his lover. Loyalty is

¹ *Partonopeu de Blois: A French Romance of the Twelfth Century*, ed. Joseph Gildea (Villanova, PA: Villanova UP, 1967). All subsequent references will be to Gildea's text and translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

prized throughout the text as a major component of a noble character. It requires that the hero prioritize his duty to others over his personal well-being and recognize which obligations command his highest allegiance. While in the trial by battle, Partonopeu exhibits true selflessness in his refusal to surrender and his determination to fight to the death if required, during his confession, he becomes confused about the direction of his loyalties and proves unfaithful. He spends the rest of the text paying penance for his transgression until he is formally reconciled with his lover and with society.

Partonopeu's virtues are extolled on various occasions throughout the text (535-82, 1497-1510, 2295-2328, 2389-95, 4875-4921, 9966-92, & 10215-246) and these descriptions provide an important resource whereby the characteristics of a hero may be defined. The descriptions highlight the same values that are prominent in all the twelfth-century heroes discussed in this thesis: Tristan and Iseut, Lancelot, and Robert (after his reform). First and foremost, Partonopeu is identified in each passage as an individual whose inherent greatness distinguishes him from other men. Even before he is described in detail, there are two external signifiers—his lineage and his beauty—that point to his stature as a man destined to achieve renown.² His lineage identifies him in terms of his position within his extended family and in the social hierarchy; both entail the firm belief that with the name and status, he has also inherited the nobility of character that befits his station. As in the *chanson de geste*, John W. Baldwin recently noted that the knightly virtues mentioned most frequently in romance are those related to birth: “the ideal knight

² See Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner's brief discussion of genealogy and beauty in *Partonopeu de Blois* in her book, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993) 117-20.

should be *franc* (free), *gentiz* (noble), and *noble*.”³ At the age of thirteen, Partonopeu is introduced in the text as the beloved nephew of the king of France and an count in his own right:

Un sien neveu avoit li rois,
 Quens fu d’Angiers et quens de Blois;
 Fix ert Lucrece sa seror.
 Li rois l’amoit de tele amor
 Que nes le fil de sa moillier
 N’avoit il pas de molt si chier. (535-40)⁴

By taking the place of a son in the king’s affections, Partonopeu is unambiguously placed directly below the king within the class structure and, by inference, above other men. The list of virtues that follows his identification both justifies and supports his social position; the external designation of his status is in harmony with the internal demonstration of his virtue. In his study of late twelfth-century changes in French legal vocabulary, historian Georges Duby concludes that the social prominence of the knight stemmed largely from his birth rather than from his military prowess:

First, society officially recognized a superiority connected not with specialization in the military art but rather with birth; in other words, a hereditary caste took shape, juridically defining a nobility. Second, within this caste, a more limited group was singled out, whose membership included not all adult males but only knights, who were cloaked in a dignity assimilated to seigniorial authority . . .⁵

Within his cultural context, Partonopeu is destined from birth to fill a position in the upper ranks of society.

³ John W. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romances of Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil, 1190-1230* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000) 91.

⁴ “The king had a nephew/ he was count of Angiers and count of Blois/ he was son of his sister, Lucrece/ The king loved him with such love/ that born the son of his wife/ he would not have loved him more.” (535-40)

Apart from identifying the hero in terms of his social status, Partonopeu's lineage serves the equally significant function of identifying him as a youth who will grow to become a distinguished knight according to "the conviction that chivalric qualities are rooted in genetic inheritance."⁶ Just as the narrator earlier stated that "maus fruis ist de male raïs" (307),⁷ the opposite is also true based on the notion that "birth determines values, good or bad."⁸ A large part of Melior's initial appraisal of her lover stems from her assessment of his family tree. Because of his direct descent from the Trojan hero, Hector,⁹ she deduces that Partonopeu will become a noble warrior in his own right:

Car vos estes cosins Ector,
 Qui ainc n'ama argent ne or
 Ne rien fors sol chevalerie;
 Por ço wel estre vostre amie.
 Car ja li sans ne mentira,
 Mais nature tos tans fera;
 Ne soffera la gentillece
 Que ja faciés rien fors noblece. (1507-14)¹⁰

⁵ Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 295.

⁶ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 190.

⁷ "Bad fruit issues from a bad root." (307)

⁸ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "From Genealogy to Romance and Continuation in the Fabulous History of *Partonopeu de Blois*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 33:4 (1993): 33.

⁹ For a discussion of possible political readings of the Trojan genealogy in *Partonopeu de Blois*, see Penny Simons and Penny Eley, "The Prologue to *Partonopeus de Blois*: Text, Context, and Subtext," *French Studies* 69:1 (1995): 1-16. They point out various divergences between the version of the story of Troy found in *Partonopeu* and the version popularized by Dares' *Eneas* and Benoît's *Roman de Troie*. Based on these differences, they suggest that the prologue hides a political subtext that identifies and undercuts "the dynastic ambitions of the Plantagenets" (8). See also Anthime Fourier, *Le Courant réaliste dans le roman courtois en France au Moyen Age: I. Les Débuts (XII^e Siècle)* (Paris: Nizet, 1960). Fourier suggests that the *Partonopeu* poet links the house of Blois with the Merovingian line to glorify his patron. Regardless of the possible presence of political posturing in the text, the characterization of Hector in *Partonopeu* is consistent with his traditional presentation as a war hero.

¹⁰ "Because you are Hector's cousin/ who never liked neither money nor gold/ nor anything except his knighthood/ for this I will be your friend./ For blood never lies / but acts always according to its nature/ nor lacked gentility/ that made nothing except nobility." (1507-14)

She admires Hector because he dedicated himself to his “chevalerie” (a concept that may be loosely rendered as “kighthood” in English to distinguish it from the more specific term, “chivalry”).¹¹ His “sans” or blood that lies at the root of his kighthood is an internal, inherited quality that engenders his noble character and serves as a prerequisite for kighthood. This quality stems from natural rather than external, environmental factors and endorses the medieval theory that individuals were genetically predisposed to hold the social position of their parents. Melior realizes that she has put herself in a difficult position by choosing a lover at her own discretion rather than awaiting the advice of her council, but she is confident that Partonopeu has inherited Hector’s “sans” and consequently, places all her trust in him (1515-20).

The hero’s physical beauty is another important sign of his noble character. Each description of the central protagonist is headed by a reference to his appearance. He is “biax a desmesure,/ nus hom n’ot onques tel figure” (551-52),¹² “plus biax que n’est riens al monde” (1503),¹³ “si biax” (2297),¹⁴ “li plus biax c’onques fessit Dex” (2390)¹⁵ and “bels . . . des le chef duc as piés” (9969).¹⁶ In support of the general assertion that Partonopeu cuts a handsome figure, the author catalogues the various parts of the hero’s body (553-77 & 4879-96) and firmly concludes that the young man “de tote biauté est parfis” (578).¹⁷ The frequent use of *enumeratio* draws attention to the perfection of his

¹¹ See the definitions of “chivalry” and “kighthood” in Bradford B. Broughton’s *Dictionary of Medieval Knighthood and Chivalry: Concepts and Terms* (New York: Greenwood P, 1986).

¹² “beautiful beyond measure/ no man ever had such a figure” (551-52)

¹³ “more beautiful than anything in this world” (1503)

¹⁴ “so beautiful” (2297)

¹⁵ “the most beautiful who God ever made” (2390)

¹⁶ “beautiful from the head to the feet” (9969)

¹⁷ “of all beauty is perfect.” (578)

physical characteristics and makes it clear that each feature is part of a harmonious whole. The insistence throughout the text on Partonopeu's unparalleled beauty points to its significance beyond its aesthetic appeal. In the tradition already well established in Europe by the tenth century, outer beauty is understood as a direct reflection and embodiment of inner virtue.¹⁸ Thus, the narrator of *Partonopeu de Blois* justifies his praise of the young hero's beauty:

Avant el livre iert bien mostré
 Por coi je lo tant sa biauté;
 Car o ce qu'il ot bones mors,
 Li fist sa biautés grant secors." (579-82)¹⁹

Beauty and ethics are inextricably linked since the latter is reflected in the former and, in the case of Partonopeu, references to his appearance should be read as testimonials of his virtue. As avowed by Melior's maidens while they admire his sleeping form, "bele est et bel se contient" (4899).²⁰

Partonopeu's lineage and beauty identify him to others as a virtuous character whose moral integrity is evident from the outset. Should the hero's identity be hidden, Richard W. Kaeuper affirms that in romance a "well-proportioned body and a comely face identify the truly chivalrous, even if the young man is unknown, in disguise, or in rags."²¹ Each description identifies Partonopeu as a superlative knight in both general and specific terms. Though spoken by different characters, the descriptions agree with each other regarding the strengths of the protagonist. Taken together, they provide a

¹⁸ See Stephen C. Jaeger, "Cultus Virtutum," *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 76-111.

¹⁹ "Previously in the book it is well shown/ why I praise his beauty so much/ because with this he had good morals/ his beauty was very helpful to him." (579-82)

²⁰ "beautiful he is and beautifully he behaves" (4899)

comprehensive picture of the qualities that were prized in a hero of twelfth-century France. The most valuable description of Partonopeu occurs near the end of the text when the major complications of the plot are behind him and he is competing at the tournament for the right to wed Melior (9966-92). In this setting, Partonopeu is judged against the backdrop of other worthy characters and his person is subject to intense scrutiny by a council of noblemen who are intent on finding the best husband for their queen and, implicitly, the best king for their land. King Anfors, known for being “saiges et cortois” (9870),²² describes Partonopeu for the benefit of the other councilmen and he provides the romance’s most detailed assessment of the hero. The character described by King Anfors is at the height of his maturation as a knight, and thus best epitomizes the values held dear in a hero.

The values highlighted by King Anfors concern Partonopeu’s ability to demonstrate behaviour appropriate to his rank and station in life—refined manners and demeanor, effective leadership, and proper subordination:

Pius est et frans et mesurable,
 Saiges et cortois et maisnable,
 Larges doneres, bels parliers,
 Bons sires, loials justiciers,
 Amiables et envoisiés;
 Sens grant occoison n'est iriés,
 A sa gent est molt honorables,
 Humles et loiaz et estables;
 N'est hom vivant de ses aez (9979-87)²³

²¹ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 191.

²² “wise and courteous” (9870)

²³ “He is dutiful and giving and moderate/ wise and courteous and lordly/ generous giver, pretty speaker/ good lord, lawful governor/ amiable and happy/ he does not act without great cause/ he is very honourable to his people/ humble and loyal and dependable/ There is no man living with his qualities.” (9979-87)

As in *La Chanson de Roland*, the values prized focus on qualities that would facilitate the hero's relationships with others and, more particularly, those character traits that would make him a good ruler. The modern reader must approach the text with an awareness that even terms that are still in use today likely resonated with different connotations to a medieval audience. With this in mind, each of these terms will be analyzed and defined in terms of its use within the text and with reference to various dictionaries of Old French²⁴ to obtain an accurate understanding of the nuances of this description. Many of the above terms have complementary meanings that are best elucidated in light of one another. Therefore, the terms will be discussed in groups centered on the three main ideas of demeanor, leadership, and subordination (rather than in the order in which they appear). Then, the discussion will consider young Partonopeu's choices at the ordeal and the confession with regards to these ideals.

Self-presentation through mannerisms, mien, and speech was an integral component of a noble character. Thus, Roland carefully orchestrates his appearance before he dies so the position of his body will reflect his bravery and piety to others even after his death. Partonopeu's demeanor is denoted by the terms "cortois" (9980), "envoisiés" (9983), "amiables" (9983), and a "bels parliers" (9981), all of which relate to his depiction as "saige" (9980). The recurrent coupling of the terms "sages et cortois"

²⁴ Because of the vast dialectical differences between regions where Old French was spoken and the lack of a fixed system of spelling, no dictionary of Old French claims to be all inclusive. Wherever possible, I made reference to the *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français: le Moyen Age*. ed. Algirdas Julien Greimas (Paris: Larousse, 1997) hereafter cited as Greimas. This dictionary is based on a dialect of the twelfth century and provides detailed information about each word it defines; including part of speech, a literary source in which the word appears, and the date of the source. For many words, it also provides the etymology, linguistic variations, and examples of its use in a sentence.

(446, 2762, 5848, & 9870)²⁵ emphasizes the importance of outward deportment and behaviour as a manifestation of inner strength—in this case, wisdom. King Anfors describes Partonopeu as “cortois” (9980), a term that is broadly defined as “qui agit conformément à l’idéal de la vie noble.”²⁶ A crucial aspect of courtly manners is a proper and dignified bearing. C. Stephen Jaeger points out that “our vocabulary of politeness is still strongly marked by reminders of its origins at worldly courts:

‘courtesy,’ ‘curtsey,’ to ‘pay court.’”²⁷ Courtesy comprised a comprehensive system of behaviour that was appropriate for appearances at court and came further to distinguish the upper and lower classes. Theoretically,

In the disciplined person the body is the perfect mirror of the soul. That means that learning to walk and gesture elegantly, to speak persuasively, to hold the head and the body in dignified, grave, modest postures, and to compose facial expressions appropriate to any given emotion, are the first steps in the cultivation of virtue.²⁸

Consequently, courteous behaviour was an essential component of knighthood because it was a manifestation of noble virtues. Henri Dupin writes that “on comprend donc que le mot *courtois*, tout en gardant son sens moral, se soit appliqué, pour la désigner, à toute une catégorie sociale.”²⁹ In a discourse on the importance of love, the narrator of *Partonopeu de Blois* draws attention to the idea of courtesy as an expression of class:

Ensi set amors engignier
Cascun home de son mestier:

²⁵ “wise and courteous” (446, 2762, 5848, 9870)

²⁶ “who behaves in conformity with the ideal of the noble life” Greimas, “cortois.”

²⁷ Stephen C. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 28.

²⁸ Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 12.

²⁹ “We understand then that the word *courtois*, while keeping its moral meaning, may be applied, to indicate it, to a whole social category.” Henri Dupin, *La Courtoisie au Moyen Age: D’Après les Textes du XII^e et du XIII^e Siècle* (Paris: Editions A. Picard, 1931) 15.

Chevalier de chevalerie,
 Et clerc d'amender sa clergie;
 Vilonie tolt et pereche,
 Cortesie done et noblece. (3425-30)³⁰

Love is identified as the seed of “cortesie” and “noblece” among knights and clerics—an inner impetus that manifests itself in outward bearing and behaviour. Furthermore, courtesy is a civilizing force necessary to widen the gulf between humans and animals. Partonopeu earns the respect of his peers and elders from his dignified comportment, and distinguishes himself as a knight of noble birth.

The nobility also distinguishes itself by the joyful abandon they express through colourful clothing, dancing, singing, and extravagant feasting. By creating a festive atmosphere and drawing attention to their life of leisure, they demonstrate their affluence and emphasize their superiority over the lower classes.³¹ The term “envoisiés” appears multiple times in the romance and bears a number of related meanings, “joyeux,” “animé, enjoué,” and “joli, de couleur gaie.”³² The inner emotion and the outward display of happiness are closely connected, as if one cannot exist without the other so that joy is a sign of success and prosperity. When effort is rewarded with a period of time that is “bon et bel” (7121),³³ one reaps “d’esjoïr et je joër/ et de rire” (7124).³⁴ Partonopeu is “envoisiés” (9983) as befits a successful nobleman at two points in the text—at the

³⁰ “Thus he knows love teaches/ every man of his station/ knight of knighthood/ and cleric who amends his clergy/ villainy and idleness are removed / courtesy and nobility given.” (3425-30)

³¹ Later legists were concerned to preserve these signs of difference between the nobility and the peasantry, and passed various sumptuary laws designed to forbid the lower classes from wearing the lavish styles and colours of reserved for the privileged upper classes. See R. Barthes, “Histoire et sociologie du vêtement. Quelques observations méthodique,” AESC 12 (1957): 430-41.

³² “joyous,” “animated, playful,” and “pretty, of a cheerful colour” Greimas, “envoisié.”

³³ “good and beautiful” (7121)

³⁴ “delight and play/ and laughing” (7124)

beginning, as he enjoys his privileged childhood in the king's court and, at the end, when he participates in the tournament (9983). His joyful demeanor at the tournament denotes his confidence in his own ability to succeed and signals his victory over the obstacles that had previously caused him great distress.

Partonopeu's cheeriness is paired with his affability and both are important elements in a community wherein strength is dependent on mutual cooperation. "Amiables" (9983) had much the same connotations then as it has today of being friendly and easy to get along with, amicable. However, it was more selective in that a knight would only form friendships with others of noble character. Friendship is the central principle promoted in Cicero's *De amicitia*—a text that enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages. Jaeger suggests that the underlying rationale behind the ideal was that "only good, strong and noble men are capable of friendship, because true friendship is the love of virtue in another person."³⁵ Jaeger goes on to state, "the social institutions of aristocracy were saturated with this ideal. It governed social intercourse among clergy and at royal courts."³⁶ Contractual bonds of allegiance between individuals were cemented with the language of love and friendship. Thus, being "amiables" is more than a general feeling of goodwill towards others; it denotes the hero's strength of character that allows him to form meaningful relationships.

Partonopeu's courteous and amicable demeanor is buttressed by his communication skills as a "bels parliers" (9981) or "pretty speaker." The art of rhetoric is not depicted in isolation, but valued as a medium of sound advice. The description of

³⁵ Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 104.

Nestor in the prologue closely links wisdom with the ability to communicate. Nestor, who traditionally epitomizes good judgment in depictions of the Trojan War, is described as “plaines de grant sens et bons parliers;/ Il ert consaus de tote Grice” (216-17).³⁷ As counselor, both qualities were integrally related. Hernols de Marbrecon, a vassal and counselor of Melior, also exemplifies these virtues; he is “saiges de raison” (6508)³⁸ and “sages . . ./et dist sa raison oiant touz” (6511-12).³⁹ These examples suggest that a man’s ability to communicate his ideas was an essential component of his wisdom. Cicero’s *De inventione*, a text that was widely read and discussed in the twelfth century,⁴⁰ forcefully insists that the unification of wisdom and eloquence will benefit the community. According to Cicero, the separation of these two qualities leads to the harm of the state and the stagnation of intellect, but joined together they are a powerful force in human affairs.⁴¹

As a mature knight, Partonopeu’s ability to speak well is supported by his wisdom, a quality that was traditionally associated with age and experience. The adjective “saige” (9980) is used frequently and may be translated as “judicious” or

³⁶ Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 104.

³⁷ “Full of good sense and a good speaker/ He was counsellor of all Greece.” (216-17)

³⁸ “wise of speech” (6508) In this context, “raison” refers to a vocal mode of expression such as speech, discourse, or language and should not be confused with its modern French counterpart of the same spelling. See Greimas, “raison.”

³⁹ “wise . . ./and states his deliberation aloud to all” (6511-12)

⁴⁰ See Karin Margareta Fredborg, “Ciceronian Rhetoric and the Schools,” *Learning Institutionalized: Teaching in the Medieval University*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 2000) 21-42. and Karin Margareta Fredborg, “Twelfth Century Ciceronian Rhetoric: Its Doctrinal Development and Influences,” *Rhetoric Revalued: Papers from the International Society for the History of Rhetoric*, ed. Brian Vickers (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982) 87-97.

⁴¹ Cicero. *De inventione*. 1.1-5.

“wise.”⁴² In the author’s justification of his tale, he contends that the wise individual will pull good sense from a foolish story just as a bee draws honey from bitter herbs (118-27). Wisdom is seen here and throughout the text in antithesis to foolishness and as a function of good sense. Antonyms are often coupled to emphasize the contrast between two dissimilar concepts. In this manner, wisdom is contrasted with folly in the following phrases: “beles, laides, foles et saiges” (9242)⁴³ and “li sage i musent comme fol” (7494).⁴⁴ The term “fol” means “fou, qui a perdu la raison”⁴⁵ and thus signifies the complete lack of reason and/or sanity. As its opposite, “saige” denotes the pinnacle of human reason that is expressed through courteous behaviour and speech.

The description of the hero highlights qualities denoting good leadership through the following phrases: “bons sires, loials justiciers” (9982), “molt honorables” (9985), “frans” (9979), “larges doneres” (9981), and “maisnable” (9980). Partonopeu has already proven his ability to lead men in support of his king. Based on his knowledge of the young knight’s reputation, King Anfors notes that he is a “bons sires” (9982) and “loials justiciers” (9982). While the former phrase simply indicates a general recommendation of Partonopeu as a “good lord,” the latter marks him as a “lawful judge or governor.” The adjective “loial” stems from the Latin, “legalem,” which means “conforme à la loi.”⁴⁶ While the term grew to include the meaning of loyalty in the modern sense of faithful adherence to person or cause, in twelfth-century French, it still retained the

⁴² See Charles Brucker, *Sage et Sagesse au Moyen Age (XII^e et XIII^e siècles): Étude Historique, Sémantique et Stylistique* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1987).

⁴³ “beautiful, ugly, foolish and wise” (9242)

⁴⁴ “The wise man there amuses himself like a fool.” (7494)

⁴⁵ “crazy, who has lost reason” Greimas, “fol (II).”

⁴⁶ “conforms to the law” Greimas, “loial.”

meaning of “legal” or “lawful.” The Partonopeu narrator describes the strong king and governor (“justicier”) as “verais et dous et droituriers/ por sa proëce et por ses mors” (437-38).⁴⁷ The term “justicier” may be used as either a noun or an adjective,⁴⁸ and draws attention to the role of a leader in settling disputes and meting out justice. The king who is “nul justicier” (423)⁴⁹ is “felons et crûex et frarains” (426).⁵⁰ Regardless of social reality at the time, just governance was idealized in romance and considered proper behaviour for a respected authority figure. Thus, King Clovis is said to have “sans cruauté tenoit justise” (479)⁵¹ and his successor to the throne of France is described as “justiciers” (9916).

Partonopeu’s authority is reinforced by his sense of honour. King Anfors asserts that the young man is very honorable to his people, “a sa gent est molt honorables” (9985). The importance of honour is demonstrated by Partonopeu’s desire to submit to death in Ardenne rather than live in shame after he betrays Melior’s trust. To explain his wish to die, he laments, “Adans ki perdi paradis/ ne fist tel perte com je fiz,/ cant je perdi primes m’onor” (5229-31).⁵² He has no chance to restore his good name until Melior forgives him. By acting honorably, Partonopeu’s men will respect him and learn from his example. Honour binds a community together because it depends on the moral integrity of the group as well as the individual. When Mares fights dishonestly in the trial by

⁴⁷ “True and protective and just/ in his prowess and in his morals” (437-38)

⁴⁸ In Old French, the infinitive of the verb is often used as a noun. See Alan Hindley and Brian J. Levy, *The Old French Epic: An Introduction* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1983) 148.

⁴⁹ “not a just governor” (423)

⁵⁰ “wicked and cruel and vile” (426)

⁵¹ “observed justice without cruelty” (479)

⁵² “Adam who lost paradise/ did not make such a loss as I made/ when I first lost my honour.” (5229-31)

battle, his treachery brings dishonour to his people because it was his duty to guard the honour of Sornegur, his king (A3615),⁵³ but instead, he proves a “traitor” (A3616). Though Sornegur claims that “n’est par mon fait, . . . /que mors i est li cuens de Blois” (A3619-20),⁵⁴ he nonetheless accepts responsibility for the actions of his vassal and invites Lohier to take revenge (A3624) so that the honour of his countrymen may be restored. Sornegur bluntly states, “Rien nule dire fors honor” (A3610),⁵⁵ and this statement explains both his deep sense of betrayal and his willingness to sacrifice himself to restore the honour of his people. Likewise, honour compels Partonopeu to see his countrymen as an extension of himself and to defend their integrity just as much as his own.

Throughout the text, synonyms are paired for added emphasis and the companion word can provide an important key to translation. Based on the context of the masculine form of the adjective, I have translated the adjective “frans” as “giving” or “generous.” The term first occurs in reference to the Trojan hero, Hector, who was “dous et frans a totes gens” (156).⁵⁶ Sister Marianna Gildea suggests in her study of the vocabulary of the *chanson de geste*, that a man who is “dous” is characterized by his “strong, protective power, a readiness to assist.”⁵⁷ This description of Hector is in keeping with his mythological role as chief protector of his people—one who gives his life in their

⁵³ At this point in the text, Bern MS. 113 has a description of the Sornegur episode that is entirely different from the other manuscripts, so Gildea has provided the text from Paris MS. 2986 (cited in Gildea’s edition as MS. A) to give a more accurate understanding of the version that is more widely represented in the available manuscripts. I have signaled the use of the Paris version by the letter “A” placed before the line numbers.

⁵⁴ “It is not by my doing, . . . / that the count of Blois is dead.” (A3619-20)

⁵⁵ “There is nothing to say except honour” (A3610)

⁵⁶ “ready to help and generous to all people” (156)

defense. “Frans” is also paired with “larges,” an adjective meaning “generous”⁵⁸ that usually appears in the context of a nobleman rewarding his subordinates. The king of Syria is described as

Frans et larges a chevaliers
Quant il est besoing et mestiers,
Et quant il a faite sa pes,
Dont lor est eschius et engrés” (10173-76)⁵⁹

This description identifies the practical role of generosity in the relationship between a lord and his knights. The king does not altruistically or randomly spread wealth among his people, but rewards knights for their service when “il est besoing et mestiers.” The term “frans” captures one of the key elements of good leadership, the generous recognition of good service that strengthens the bond between lord and vassal.

Partonopeu is also recognized as a “larges doneres” (9981) or “liberal giver” and his reputation for generosity (“grans dons lor done et molt sovent” (2302)⁶⁰) attracts knights from far a field to fight with him for Lohier:

De totes pars li vienent gent,
Il les reçoit molt bonement;
En France n’a bon chevalier
Ne vegne a lui por acointier,
Et por armes et por avoir,
Et il est de si grant savoir
Qu’il les retient trestos o soi
For son besoing et por le roi. (2311-20)⁶¹

⁵⁷ Sister Marianna Gildea, *Expressions of Religious Thought and Feeling in the Chansons de Geste* (Washington: Catholic University of America P, 1943) 145.

⁵⁸ Hindley and Levy, 203.

⁵⁹ “Giving and liberal to knights/ when there is need and occasion,/ and when he has made his peace,/ with whomever then is hostile and impetuous” (10173-76)

⁶⁰ “Large gifts he gives them and very often” (2302)

His generosity is represented as a shrewd tactic to gain more followers, not only for himself, but also for his king. By giving arms and goods to knights who come to him, Partonopeu establishes himself as a leader and, simultaneously, affirms his loyalty to his own lord.

The adjective “maisnable” (9980) is an *hapax legomenon* used in three out of seven of the surviving manuscripts. It has been replaced with alternate terms of similar spelling in the others:⁶² “amiables,” “mesurables,” and “raisnables.” Their use suggests that “maisnable” was a rare term, unfamiliar to the scribes who sought to make sense of the word by replacing it with a more common adjective. Its form suggests that it is etymologically rooted in the noun that broadly refers to a medieval household. Duby states that the “maisnie” was

legally defined as follows in an article of the *Olim* dated 1282: “His own *maisnie* residing in his house (*ostel*), that is, composed of those who perform his private tasks at his expense.” The defining characteristics of the *maisnie* are common lodging, common meals, and collaboration under the lord’s orders on some common task.⁶³

In many ways, a lord’s household became an extension of himself, as he was responsible for its direction and maintenance. Because Partonopeu has not yet been responsible for his own household, I would suggest that “maisnable” simply means “lordly” (based on the intimate connection between a lord and his “maisnie”) or that the term more

⁶¹ “From all areas people come to him/ He receives them most graciously/ In France, there is no good knight/ not coming to him to get acquainted/ and for arms and for goods/ and he is of such great knowledge/ that he retains them all for himself/ for his needs and for the king.” (2311-20)

⁶² Gildea, *Partonopeu de Blois*, 404. Bern MS. 113, Paris MS. 2986, and Rome MS. 1971 use “maisnable.” Tours MS. 939 uses “amiables.” Paris MS. 19152 uses “mesurables.” Paris MS. 7516 and Paris MS. 368 use “raisnables.”

specifically draws attention to Partonopeu's readiness to establish his own household (and thus, ready to marry). Either sense would be in keeping with the overall depiction of the hero as a virtuous and just lord.

Partonopeu's leadership is complemented by his equally valuable ability to serve humbly his superiors and the needs of the community as a whole. His ability to subordinate his own ego and place himself at the service of others is suggested by the use of the adjectives "pius" (9979), "humles" (9986), "mesurable" (9979), "estables" (9986) and "loiaz" (9986). King Anfors' description of the young hero begins by stating that Partonopeu is "pius" (9979) or "dutiful." This term is another *hapax legomenon* and appears to have caused some difficulty with early redactors. The seven manuscripts that survive with this passage intact, disagree on the spelling of the adjective and in place of "pius," variously use the terms "plus," "puis," "preus," and "pruz."⁶⁴ As a direct derivative from Latin, "pius" refers to someone who "acts according to duty, dutiful; especially that performs what is due to the gods and religion in general, to parents, kindred, teachers, country."⁶⁵ Moreover, the concept of Christian duty appears elsewhere in the text as an important quality in a worthy knight. As he sets out to fight for France, Melior advises Partonopeu:

Honorés Deu et sainte glise

⁶³ Georges Duby, "The Aristocratic Households of Feudal France," *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, eds. Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1988) 63.

⁶⁴ Gildea, *Partonopeu de Blois*, 404. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, Bern MS. 113 is the base manuscript of Gildea's edition. The Bern manuscript and Paris MS. 2986 use the term "pius;" Paris MS. 19152 uses "plus;" Paris MS. 7516 and Paris MS. 368 use "puis;" Tours MS. 939 uses "preus;" and Rome MS. 1971 uses "pruz" (a variant of "preus").

⁶⁵ "pius." Charlton T. Lewis, ed, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary Revised, Enlarged, and in Great Part Rewritten* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980)

Et maintenés si se francise.
 De Deu aiés crieme et pour,
 Cil vos croistra pris et valor;
 Seürs querés chevalerie
 Se Deu avés en vostre aïe. (1931-36)⁶⁶

This passage agrees with the other twelfth-century texts discussed in this thesis in defining the relationship between God and man in terms of feudal lordship. If Partonopeu honours God as his lord and defends the majesty of the Christian church, God will protect and reward his vassal. Ironically, humble service allows the knight to increase his “pris et valor.” Partonopeu’s piety also expresses itself in his relationship with Lohier. With the death of his father early in the plot, the father/son relationship that was traditionally important in a patriarchal society disappears in favour of an emphasis on Partonopeu’s filial relationship with the King. As the loyal follower of Lohier, Partonopeu proves his worth in battle and earns a good reputation. Just as he is rewarded for his devotion to God and the Church, he reaps the benefits of dutiful service to king and country.

In the other versions of the manuscript, “plus” and “puis” seem to be misspellings of “pius.” However, “preus” and its alternate form, “pruz,” are commonly used to describe medieval knights and may be translated as “gallant” to capture the idea of being both noble-minded and courageous. Nicot’s *Treasure of the French Language*, published in 1606, defines “preus” in this manner:

⁶⁶ “Honour God and holy church/ and maintain thus its nobility./ Have fear and fear (awe) of God/ if you will grow in worth and esteem/ Seek knighthood with assurance/ if you have God as your aid.” (1931-36)

c'est un mot vulgaire François qui signifie, chevaleureux et de grand effort aux armes: aussi les anciens François ont tousjours donné ces epithetes d'honneur aux chevaliers, sage, preux et loyal, ou preux et hardy.⁶⁷

Even in modern French usage, this term is specifically linked to knighthood and suggests the now archaic gallantry that defined this profession and way of life. In the form of a noun, “preu” also has the less idealistic meaning of profit and advantage.⁶⁸ Melior asks Partonopeu to return to her once peace is restored to France, “por vostre preu et por m’amor” (1946),⁶⁹ reminding him that he will be rewarded with material and social gain in her service. As with piety, “preu” is a courtly form of service whose practice results in the increase of wealth and status.

The term “humles” (9986) expresses Partonopeu’s subordination as well. This adjective refers to the proper attitude of a supplicant before his superior, yet it is also used more ambiguously to mean “modest” or “reserved.” The first meaning is apparent in the humble bearing adopted by the French as they pray before the trial by battle:

François vienent molt humlement,
Deu reclamant escortement.
Il ont trestote nuit vellié
Et Deu molt humlement proié
Qu’il gart lor roi et lor honor
Et doinst Parthonopeu vigor. (2909-14)⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “it is a word in vulgar French that signifies, knightly and of great effort at arms: also the ancient French always gave these epithets of honour to knights, wise, ‘preux’ and loyal, or ‘preux’ and hardy” Jean Nicot, *Threysor de la langue françoise, tant ancienne que moderne* (Paris: David Douceur, 1606) *ARTFL Project: Dictionnaires d’autrefois*, ed. Mark Olsen, University of Chicago, 1 April 2000, <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/dicos/>

⁶⁸ Greimas, “prod, preu.”

⁶⁹ “for your advantage and for my love” (1946)

⁷⁰ “The French came most humbly/ praying to God heartily./ They stayed awake all night/ and prayed must humbly to God/ that he guard their king and their honour/ and grant Partonopeu vigour.” (2909-14)

They come before God “humlement” as suppliants and the repetition of the adverb emphasizes their self-effacing demeanor. Their attitude acknowledges God’s superior strength and authority as they beg him for help. The second use of the term “humles” contrasts it with “proud” as in the description of one of the knights at the tournament, “humles en paiz, en guerre fiers” (10040).⁷¹ This phrase suggests that “humles” has connotations of being unpretentious, yet not without strength, for when war arises, this knight is ready to assert himself more forcibly. These connotations arise in reference to Partonopeu when Melior is advising him not to overlook poor knights: “Humles soiés as povres gens;/ Donés lors dras et garnemens” (1927-28).⁷² With the injunction to “be humble,” Melior warns Partonopeu against excessive pride and encourages him to recognize the positive qualities of all his men.

Subordination is vital to good leadership since the leader must serve the needs of the community. Partonopeu is praised for being “mesurable” (9979) and “estables” (9986), lacking the impulsiveness that characterizes a person more driven by ego than by consideration of the group. The term “mesurable” occurs only twice in the text: in King Anfors’ description of Partonopeu (9979) and in a list of elements that Melior’s counselors seek to find in her husband (6571). Except for affirming that it is a positive attribute, the context provides no clues as to its meaning. The *Dictionnaire de l’ancien français: le Moyen Age* cites the use of this word in *Partonopeu de Blois* as an example of its meaning, “modéré, sensé”⁷³ and these connotations are in accord with King Anfors’

⁷¹ “Humble in peace, proud in war” (10040)

⁷² “Be humble to poor people/ Give them clothing and supplies” (1927-28)

⁷³ “moderate, sensible” Greimas, “mesure.”

later statement that Partonopeu “sens grant occoison n’est iriés” (9984).⁷⁴ These descriptors combine to suggest that the young hero does not act rashly, but carefully assesses every situation. The hero’s prudent character is complemented by his steadfastness. There are a number of meanings for the term “estable” (9986), but only one is consistent with its use in the text—the primary definition of “stable, ferme.”⁷⁵ Uraque reminds her sister that she has no choice but to marry: “saignor prendre est chose estable” (10313).⁷⁶ Melior’s kings seek a husband for her who “de parole soit estables” (6572).⁷⁷ The prayer that ends the text asks God to grant the lovers “grant joie estable” (10653).⁷⁸ Uraque berates Melior for alternately loving, then hating Partonopeu and mockingly asks, “Molt avés or estable cuer./ Des quant l’avés vos chastié/ Et mis en tel estableté?” (6666-68).⁷⁹ In all these examples, the adjective points to the same underlying denotation—if someone is “estable,” he or she stands firm and is consequently consistent and reliable.

The adjective “loiaz” (9986) is the last of Partonopeu’s virtues to be discussed and defined. Though the term “loials” is defined above as “lawful,” the use of the adjective “loiaz” in this section points to its alternate meaning of “loyal.” Loyalty is a critical factor in all relationships because it suggests that the individual’s ego is subordinate to his obligation to another. Kaeuper suggests that loyalty is a “military

⁷⁴ “does not get angry without great cause” (9984)

⁷⁵ “stable, firm” Greimas, “estable.”

⁷⁶ “to take a lord is a certain thing” (10313)

⁷⁷ “is firm of word” (6572)

⁷⁸ “great lasting joy” (10653)

⁷⁹ “To a large extent you now have a stable heart./ When did you begin to chastise it/ and put it in such stability?” (6666-68)

virtue” that binds “the individual to the collective ethos.”⁸⁰ As employed in *Partonopeu de Blois* and the other French texts under discussion in this thesis, loyalty is one individual’s responsibility to keep faith with another as outlined in a formal pledge of allegiance. The most obvious example of loyalty is inherent in the act of homage. The celebrated thirteenth-century legist, Philippe de Beaumanoir, explains this relationship:

Nous disons, et voire est selonc nostre coustume, que pour autant comme li hons doit a son seigneur de foi et de loiauté par la reson de son homage, tout autant li sires en doit a son homme.⁸¹

This aspect of mutual obligation underlies Gaudins’ pledge of loyalty to Partonopeu:

G’irai od vos molt volentiers
Et serai vostres chevaliers,
Por coi vos entendés a moi
Et m’aidissiés en loial foi;
O vos irai la ou vorrois
Et si con vos commanderois. (7875-80)⁸²

The two knights meet on the way to the tournament and solidify their relationship with a formal statement to assist one another in loyal faith (7878), so both men gain by knowing they can rely on their partner. In many ways, the terms that I have discussed as indications of subordination, “pius,” “preus,” “humles,” “mesurable,” “estables,” and “loiaz,” are also integral to effective leadership. They show the leader’s dedication to the community and when the leader acts in the best interests of the group he is more likely to earn the support of his followers.

⁸⁰ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 185.

⁸¹ “We say, and see it is according to our custom, that for as much as a man owes to his lord of faith and of loyalty by reason of his homage, just as much the lord owes to his man.” Philippe de Remi, sire de Beaumanoir, *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, 2, ed. Amedee Salmon (Paris: A. Picard, 1900) 383.

⁸² “I will go with you most voluntarily/ and will be your knight,/ for that you attend to me/ and help me in loyal faith/ I will go with you there where you would/ and as you command.” (7875-80)

King Anfors' description captures Partonopeu at the height of his maturity. At this point, Partonopeu exhibits those qualities most valued in a medieval hero—noble rank, beauty, courtesy, wisdom, just governance, generosity, honour, dutifulness, modesty, dependability, and loyalty. All of these traits center on his dedication to serve his community as a good leader and defender of the public good. The description concludes with the resounding praise, “n'est hom vivant de ses aez” (9987),⁸³ and, by winning the tournament, Partonopeu is established as a paragon of virtue. In her study of the medieval tournament, Mary Arlene Santina notes that the knight's greatest reward for triumph at a tournament is not necessarily the prize but the “widespread recognition of superior talent and an exalted reputation in the chivalric realm.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, while at the end of the romance, Partonopeu's excellence is acknowledged and rewarded, the majority of the text follows the maturation of the young knight as he meets various challenges. On two occasions the young hero engages in a formal trial that subjects his moral integrity to scrutiny. On the first occasion, he represents the French in a trial by battle against the Danes and, on the second, he must answer to the Bishop during his confession. In both cases, there is some doubt as to his maturity and the text raises questions about his virtue. Through their focus on morality and their depiction of the community's response to the hero, these scenes clarify the underlying communal ethic that surfaces throughout the narrative.

⁸³ “There is no man living with his qualities” (9987)

⁸⁴ Mary Arlene Santina, *The Tournament and Literature: Literary Representations of the Medieval Tournament in Old French Works, 1150-1226* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) 141.

The *Judicium Dei* illustrates the intimate connection between a hero and his community as the French rally behind Partholopeu to face the threat of the Danes. The young knight is not on trial alone, but as a representative of his countrymen and the justice of their cause. Therefore, the French participate by offering their prayers so that God will influence the outcome in their favour. The trial by battle follows the traditional, legal form of the ritual including the challenge (2713-26), response (2853-58), prayers of participant (2905-14), discussion of the wording of the oath (2915-31), oath of the challenger on relics (2932-36), oath of the respondent on relics (2937-40), and the duel (3137-3200). The challenge is issued formally “par un sien cleric et par un brief” (2810)⁸⁵ and the response is issued in kind. At this preliminary stage, both kings have agreed on behalf of their people to submit to the trial and let God decide the outcome. Lohier clarifies the details of the agreement to his liegemen:

S'il vaint, il avra la ligance
 De tot le royaume de France;
 Et se il muert, trestos si roi
 Tenront lor royaume de moi;
 En France doit venir ses fis
 Qui encor est enfes petis
 Por jurer et por faire homage
 Et tenir de moi l'iretage;
 Ses rois fera trestos jurer
 Des covenances si garder.
 J'ai la bataille creantee
 Et a Partholopeu donee. (2816-28)⁸⁶

⁸⁵ “by a good cleric and by a written notice” (2810)

⁸⁶ “If he wins, he will have homage/ of all the kingdom of France/ and if he dies, all his kings/ will get their kingdoms from me/ his son must come to France / who is still a small child/ to swear and to give homage/ and to get feudal service from me/ his kings will all swear/ to keep the covenant./ I have agreed to the battle/ and given it to Partholopeu.” (2816-28)

While this passage heightens the dramatic impact of the scene by outlining the risks involved, it also ensures that the agreement is witnessed by the French and by Sornegur's cleric who is still present on behalf of the Danes. The sovereignty of France is at issue. In her study of law in medieval France, Esther Cohen suggests that by simply agreeing to conduct the *Judicium Dei*, the parties form an alliance through their mutual desire to request the aid of a divine power. Cohen notes that the

repetition of the exact same formula by the dissenting parties made clear the mutual and equal character of the duel. Where no other proof existed, plaintiff and defendant stood equally before God, bound to prove their words by deeds. . . . The oath reflected more than mutuality; it reflected a certain bonding and unanimity.⁸⁷

Immediately before the duel, the French and the Danes reiterate the agreement in an oath before God. Lohier commends Partonopeu to the divine one last time (2956) and then the young knight takes his place on the battlefield.

Literary representations of the *Judicium Dei* typically focus on the oath,⁸⁸ but while the trial in *Partonopeu de Blois* contains the requisite elements of the ordeal, the formal oath is overshadowed by other concerns. Though the trial will ostensibly decide who may claim the just sovereignty of France, the issue is never clearly stated; the text does not provide the wording of the oath, nor does one party appear more confident than the other. Both the French and the Danes express their fear that the other side has produced a champion stronger than their own. When Mares' treachery interrupts the trial, the oath becomes irrelevant because the trial itself is invalidated from a legal point

⁸⁷ Esther Cohen, *The Crossroads of Justice: Law and Culture in Late Medieval France* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993) 58.

⁸⁸ See the examples in Ralph J. Hexter, *Equivocal Oaths and Ordeals in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975)

of view. However, the trial still serves to examine the moral integrity of all participants—the French, the Danes, Lohier, Sornegur, Mares, and Partonopeu. In place of a focus on the oath, the text emphasizes the bond created between the two parties when the preliminary challenge was accepted. Both parties agreed to settle their differences at the ordeal, and, while the French kept their word, the Danes did not. The issue then becomes, not one of rightful sovereignty, but one of honour. When put to the test, the French community and their champion stand together as one. They demonstrate loyalty to one another, solidarity against the enemy, and fidelity to their God and king. The trial proves Partonopeu's strength as a warrior and as champion for his country.

King Anfors states that Partonopeu “a sa gent est molt honorables” (9985).⁸⁹ The phrasing of this statement captures the essence of honour in a medieval knight, for it is intricately related to one's relationships with others and at its very heart is the individual's responsibility to defend the moral integrity of the group. The group, in turn, has a reciprocal obligation to their hero. Dominique Barthélemy describes honour as a “social capital” that members of feudal communities “jointly maintain and exploit.”⁹⁰ Partonopeu first earns the respect of his peers in the battles against the Danes, but he proves his worth at the ordeal. Though he has not yet been knighted, he has reached the age of discretion⁹¹ and wishes to be treated like an adult. Prior to the trial, Lohier praises Partonopeu for his noble bearing and bravery, describing him as “sages et cortois/ et

⁸⁹ “to his people is very honourable” (9985)

⁹⁰ Dominique Barthélemy, “The Aristocratic Households of Feudal France: Kinship,” *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Georges Duby (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988) 115.

chevaliers prous et segurs” (2762-63)⁹² and acknowledging that, in comparison to Sornegur, the young knight is “plus pros./ plus enprenans et plus estols” (2769-70).⁹³ Lohier’s description underlines those qualities that made Partonopeu a valuable warrior in the battles with the Danes. However, the French king fears that youthful enthusiasm will not stand up well against a more experienced knight. It is the king’s responsibility to choose a champion who will bring honour to his people. By questioning Partonopeu’s abilities, Lohier implicitly questions his honour.

In response, the young knight demonstrates a mature understanding of honour by seeing himself as a team player—serving the interests of the group and expecting their support in return. Partonopeu’s request to champion the French at the ordeal is couched in terms of reciprocal allegiance. His duty to serve his king and God is balanced by their obligation to support their vassal. Upon first hearing of Sornegur’s desire for single combat, Partonopeu walks over and falls at the feet of his king (2756): “Sire, dist il, faites m’onor/ Que por vos face cest estor” (2757-58).⁹⁴ His body language and his request to act for the king indicate his subordination to Lohier. Simultaneously, he asserts his own prerogative by insisting that the king grant the request. Barthélemy points out that unlike unilateral ordeals, “le duel est un combat: il fait honneur à celui qui le livre.”⁹⁵ By insisting on his participation in the ordeal, Partonopeu stands to increase his own prestige

⁹¹ According to common law, the age of discretion is twelve for the female and fourteen for the male. After the onset of puberty, they are no longer considered children. At the start of the text, Partonopeu’s age is given as “treze ans” (543) and at a year later, he must be fourteen years old.

⁹² “wise and courteous/ and a gallant and brave knight” (2762-63)

⁹³ “more valiant/ more hardy and more audacious” (2769-70)

⁹⁴ “Sire, says he, do me the honour/ that I may do this battle for you” (2757-58)

⁹⁵ “The duel is combat: it bestows honour on he who engages it.” Dominique Barthélemy, “Diversité des ordalies médiévales,” *Revue historique* 280:1 (1988): 12.

in addition to defending the honour of his community. While his duty to Lohier involves unswerving service to his king, his duty to God implies a responsibility to serve in the interests of justice. Though he is engaging in battle against a Muslim adversary, the issue is the sovereignty of France and not the validity of Christianity. A historical account of a trial by duel fought in 1033 in Saxony illustrates the importance of having both faith in God and a just cause:

The Christian began to fight boldly, confiding in that faith alone which, however, is dead without works of righteousness, and not diligently heeding the fact that God, who is Truth, disposes everything in true judgment, He who makes His sun to rise over good and evil, who causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. The pagan, however, put up a staunch resistance, having before his eyes only the consciousness of the truth for which he fought. Finally, the Christian fell, wounded by the pagan.⁹⁶

The Christian lost the battle because he neglected to serve the just cause while, in contrast, Partonopeu is certain that he fights for truth. As lord reigning above King Lohier, God's participation in the ordeal is indubitable, so the hero reminds his king that he is not acting alone: "Si m'aït li hautimes Dex,/ A cest besoing u well entrer/ Nul mellor ne li sai doner" (2798-2800).⁹⁷ Partonopeu relies on God's assistance to compensate for any disparity between his own strength and that of his opponent. In return, the young knight promises to perform to the best of his ability.

Partonopeu's view of himself as both giving and taking from his community is reinforced throughout this scene by the emphasis on communal participation in the ordeal. Though Partonopeu is their emissary on the battlefield, Lohier and the French

⁹⁶ Wipo, *The Deeds of Conrad II*, trans. Theodor E. Mommsen and Karl F. Morrison, *Imperial Lives and Letters of the Eleventh Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson (New York: Columbia UP, 1962) 91.

earnestly pray to God that he will protect their honour. In his speech to the people,⁹⁸

Lohier sets out the terms of his agreement with Sornegur, describes Partonopeu's role in the coming trial, and then counsels his people on their role:

A nuit irois de vos ostex
 O cierges et o estavex,
 Par ces eglises en irés,
 Nus piés en lagnes vellerés,
 Et priérés nostre Segnor
 Qu'il tense et garant nostre honor;
 Amosnes li faisons et vos
 Qu'il ait merci de nos trestos. (2837-44)⁹⁹

Here and throughout the text, God is referred to as "Lord," denoting his place in the social hierarchy. Like a feudal lord, he is a part of the French community and expected to act on their behalf. At the same time, he is here called upon to serve as their judge. Partonopeu does not stand alone: the French as a people are on trial, with their honour and their sovereignty at risk. The king urges them to approach God with due humility, "nus piés en lagnes vellerés" (2840), and beg him as their lord to protect their honour and, as their judge, to grant them mercy. As commanded,

Il ont trestote nuit vellié
 Et Deu molt humlement proié
 Qu'il gart lor roi et lor honor
 Et doinst Parthonopeu vigor. (2911-14)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ "If almighty God helps me / for this affair that I want to embark upon / I do not try to give anything better." (2798-2800)

⁹⁸ The people include the king's counselors, archbishops, bishops, dukes, counts, clerks, kings, friends, seigniorial, vassals, and those who guard his honour (2741-46, 2806-8).

⁹⁹ "At night go from your homes/ with the help of candles and torches/ Go into these churches/ barefoot, in ashes veiled/ and pray our Lord/ that he hold and protect our honour;/ we will do charity for him and vows/ so that he have mercy on us all." (2837-44)

¹⁰⁰ "They stayed up all night/ and very humbly prayed to God/ that he protect their king and their honour/ and give Partonopeu strength." (2911-14)

Through their prayers, they give the young hero all the support they may without breaking their oath to Sornegur. This short passage captures the interlocking and hierarchical web of relationships that characterizes the French community. God is clearly positioned above all others, Lohier and the honour that binds the community are next in importance, and Partonopeu is in line below the King. The people are ranked in the lowest tier in support of their superiors but, regardless, all play a role in defending their community against the Danes.

Once the trial begins, Partonopeu fully dedicates himself to the service of his king, God, and community without regard for personal welfare. As their champion, he must make every effort to defeat his opponent in the duel and holds a moral obligation to see the trial through to the end. By volunteering his body as an instrument of justice, Partonopeu allows his individual agency to be superseded by his commitment to the community. Consequently, when he is faring badly in the battle and Sornegur offers him mercy in exchange for his surrender, Partonopeu is not at liberty to accept. The young knight replies,

Sire, fait il, ne dites rien
 Fors nostre honte et vostre bien.
 Se rois de France vostre hom est,
 Molt avers fait riche conquest,
 Et s'avrai mal s'onor gardé,
 Qu'il le m'a sos Deu commandé. (31 19-24)¹⁰¹

Again, a concern for honour is Partonopeu's central motivation in rejecting Sornegur's offer because capitulation would bring shame to his people. The passage reinforces the

sense of Partonopeu as representative and servant of the French. He speaks of “nostre honte” (3120) using the first person plural and equates his surrender with its immediate impact on the king—Lohier will become Sornegur’s man. The young knight refers to the chain of command that obligates him to give his life (if required) in obedience to God’s will. God has enjoined him to guard the honour of his king and though his life is ultimately under God’s control, the hero swears to his opponent that he would rather lose with courage than admit defeat while he is still able to fight. The battle is thus fought on two levels because both Partonopeu’s prowess and his moral integrity are put to the test. If he accepts Sornegur’s offer to surrender, he has lost just as surely as if he had failed to adequately defend himself by the sword. His “corage” (3130) is equally physical and moral in nature as he proves to himself and to his community that he deserves to be honored as their champion.

Although the ordeal ends prematurely with the treachery of Mares, Partonopeu succeeds in establishing his king as the rightful sovereign of France and, equally as important, gaining honour for himself and his community. To erase the shame felt by his people, Sornegur offers his homage to the French king and Mares is punished for his betrayal. Partonopeu is lauded as “le vaillant” (3580)¹⁰² and praised among the French as the best of knights: “si dist bien par verité/ que onques n’ot veü son per”(3582-83).¹⁰³ The ordeal demonstrates that the hero’s moral integrity is dependent on his unshakable loyalty to his community with the primary focus being on the allegiance he owes to his

¹⁰¹ “Sire, said he, you do not say anything/ other than our shame and your good/ if the king of France becomes your man/ greatly have you made a rich conquest/ and thus I have badly guarded his honour/ that he gave to me under God.” (3119-24)

¹⁰² “the valiant” (3580)

king and God. The confession scene promotes the same values but, at this point, Partonopeu is found wanting. Unlike the ordeal, the confession takes place in the domestic sphere and puts Partonopeu on trial for his personal misdeeds. The focus on honour has shifted slightly to a question of loyalty though the two remain integrally connected. After delivering a sermon on the importance of loyalty, the Bishop suggests that the young knight is guilty of breaking his allegiance to God by keeping faith with Melior. In defending himself against this charge, Partonopeu falls away from the knightly ideal by committing infidelity of another kind—he breaks faith with his lover. A reading of this scene in light of the values emphasized throughout the text suggests that Partonopeu should have recognized the Bishop as a false counselor and trusted his own sense of right and wrong.

The text specifies that the Bishop comes from Paris (4380), an area that was well-known in the late twelfth century as a centre for the study of pastoral theology.¹⁰⁴ Alexander Murray notes that there were strong signs of regular lay confession in Paris and in areas influenced by its school for at least fifty years before the Fourth Lateran Council.¹⁰⁵ The influence of the Parisian schools explains the form of confession depicted in *Partonopeu de Blois*. It is not the “canonical penance” typical of early confessions that could only happen once in a lifetime and soon evolved into a deathbed

¹⁰³ “he says well in truth/ that he had never seen his peer” (3582-83)

¹⁰⁴ Though the University of Paris did not yet exist, the monastic schools of Notre-Dame were already famous by the beginning of the twelfth century. Among other notable theologians, the future Pope Innocent III was educated in Paris and his rise to power helped to spread many of the reforms that were debated in the schools. See “Paris, Archdiocese of.” *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 11, ed. Georges Goyau, transcribed by Douglas J. Potter, 1999, Kevin Knight, 7 July 2000, <<http://newadvent.org/cathen/11480c.htm>>.

ceremony because of the rigorous penance it imposed. Rather, it is closer to the type of annual confession enjoined by Pope Innocent III in 1215 that encouraged a more introspective examination of the soul and allotted penance based on a fixed system of tariffs. The Bishop's sermon prompts Partonopeu to look into his heart and confess his sin in accordance with the formal elements of a proper auricular confession—contrition, a vocalized admission of sins, and the assignation of penance. Presumably, the Bishop intends to absolve the young knight once the penance is complete. The scene commences with a sermon in which the Bishop encourages the penitent to reflect upon his sins. From Partonopeu's initial resolution to "dire rien contre s'amie" (4385),¹⁰⁶ he begins to wonder if he has acted unwisely in trusting Melior and his "cuers est tos trestornés" (4442).¹⁰⁷ He approaches the Bishop with a contrite heart evinced by his deep sigh (4433) and regret for his "folie" (4444),¹⁰⁸ and asks to be absolved of "un sol pechié" (4448).¹⁰⁹ Upon hearing the admission that Partonopeu has a relationship with a woman he has never seen, the Bishop declares that the knight must "sans congié voie s'amie" (4470).¹¹⁰ Partonopeu at once sets out to perform his penance and reveal Melior by the light of a magical lamp. Thus stated, the ritual follows a fairly typical pattern that should lead to a predictable conclusion—absolution and reconciliation with the Church. However, Partonopeu's confession is fraught with moral ambiguity.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Murray, "Confession before 1215," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6:3 (1993): 64.

¹⁰⁶ "say nothing against his girlfriend" (4385)

¹⁰⁷ "heart is all upside down" (4442)

¹⁰⁸ "folly" (4444)

¹⁰⁹ "only one sin" (4448)

¹¹⁰ "without delay see his girlfriend" (4470)

The Bishop who is introduced as “sage de sermon/ et molt set bien dire raison” (4365-66)¹¹¹ proves to be a questionable authority figure when his advice to Partonopeu has disastrous results. In the prologue, the author counsels his readers to follow the advice of Saint Paul to learn from the text by discerning good from evil and following the example of the good. Bruckner notes that consequently, “Any moral problem which may arise then is not to be located in the role of the romancer or the language of the story, but rather in the character of the readers.”¹¹² The confession scene in particular challenges readers to draw the correct lesson because it introduces so many elements that conflict with a straightforward acceptance of ecclesiastical authority. Murray describes the confessor as an “institutional functionary who listens and reacts according to principles laid down by his office.”¹¹³ Though Partonopeu’s confessor is known only by his rank as bishop, he is more closely aligned with secular power (Lucrece) than with the authority of his office. First, the Bishop’s intervention is prompted by the manipulations of Partonopeu’s mother who asks him very specifically to orchestrate the confession to promote her goals (4375-76). The scene takes place in her household and under her tutelage. More importantly, the mechanism of revelation is a lantern that Lucrece constructs through her “art” (4472).¹¹⁴ While the use of magic is not given overtly negative connotations in the text, it is nonetheless non-Christian and its use by the Bishop of Paris is irregular. The use of the lantern reaffirms the complicity of the Bishop and Lucrece, and emphasizes God’s distance from the trial. In marked contrast to the pious

¹¹¹ “wise of words/ and most well knows how to say a sermon” (4365-66)

¹¹² Bruckner, “From Genealogy to Romance,” 28.

¹¹³ Murray, “Confession before 1215,” 51.

¹¹⁴ “art” (4472)

King Lohier who commends Partonopeu to God's care before the ordeal (2956), the Bishop trusts in human arts rather than in the justice of God. Instead of assigning a penance such as fasting or sexual abstinence in accordance with the dictates of his office, he manipulates the confessional to his own purposes. The *Memoriale presbiterorum*, a thirteenth-century pastoral manual that "takes its ultimate origin from that strand of practical morality identified by Grabmann among twelfth-century theologians, especially the members of the circle round Master Peter the Chanter at Paris,"¹¹⁵ specifically warns bishops and other ecclesiastical officials of the dangers of acting outside of the boundaries of civil and canon law: "quia ignorans iura periculose agit et contra conscienciam facit, si presumat sibi assumere officium iudicandi et sic agit ad Gehennam."¹¹⁶ Because the Bishop is acting outside the bounds of his office, he should not be trusted, but Partonopeu fails to identify the Bishop as a false counselor until it is too late. At the moment when Melior's beauty is revealed, Partonopeu regrets his action: "Sa lanterne a al mur jete/ Et al diable conmandee// Car or set bien qu'il est traïs" (4533-38).¹¹⁷ He has been both betrayed and the betrayer, and bitterly repents his folly. Lucrece and the Bishop are proven incorrect in thinking that Melior is "une fée" (4369).¹¹⁸ The lantern reveals that she is the Christian daughter of the Emperor of

¹¹⁵ Michael Haren, "The interrogatories for Officials, Lawyers and Secular Estates of the *Memoriale presbiterorum*," *York Studies in Medieval Theology II. Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, eds. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (York: York Medieval P, 1998) 124. See. M. Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode nach den gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen*, 1 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1909-11) 476-501.

¹¹⁶ "he who is ignorant of the laws deals perilously and acts against conscience, if he presumes to take upon himself the office of judging, and so makes straight for hell." Haren, "Interrogatories for Officials, Lawyers and Secular Estates," 126-27.

¹¹⁷ "he threw his lantern to the wall/ and commended it to the devil// for he then knew well that he was a traitor" (4533-38)

¹¹⁸ "a fairy" (4369)

Constantinople (4575) and a noble match for the young Partonopeu. He never returns to the Bishop for absolution, but instead seeks forgiveness at the hands of his lover. For her sake, he chastises himself and performs penance. The authority of the Bishop is broken, but Partonopeu never abandons his faith in God and continues to pray for guidance (5417-80).

Just as the character of the Bishop must be read correctly to distinguish the falseness hidden behind his mask of authority, the various aspects of his discourse must be read carefully in accordance with the author's advice to "trait sens, com ex trait d'erbe miel" (120).¹¹⁹ While the penance imposed by the Bishop is invalid, his sermon emphasizes the theme of loyalty in accordance with its treatment elsewhere in the text. It delineates the obligations associated with gift giving in a feudal society, and reminds Partonopeu that he owes God devoted service:

Molt vos a fait et bon et bel,
 Plus que nul autre damoiseil.
 Sien est quanqu'il vos a presté,
 De bones mors et de bonté.
 Del sien li faites tele honor
 Qu'il ait en vos save s'amor
 Et que d'iables nul preu n'ait
 Del large don qu'il vos a fait.
 Entendés bien a lui plaisir,
 A ses commandemens tenir;
 Ne serves pas del dien autrui (4389-99)¹²⁰

These accusations support communal values rather than strictly personal considerations of the hero's soul. They emphasize Partonopeu's role in the social hierarchy and

¹¹⁹ "Draw sense, like the bee draws honey from [bitter] herbs" (120)

¹²⁰ "He [God] has made you good and noble/ more than any other nobleman/ That which he has provided to you/ good morals and bounty comes from him/ Do honour to his gifts so well/ that he has in

reinforce the bonds of mutual obligation that bind the young knight to God. By accepting the gifts that God has given him, Partonopeu accepts an obligation to remain faithful to his lord. The obligation is not strictly contractual, but cemented by the language of love (4394). According to Jaeger, “friendship and love were a form of respect, and an atmosphere of loving friendship was the visible or palpable sign of the virtue and high merit of the men who lived in it.”¹²¹ By bestowing his love on the knight, God demonstrates his confidence in Partonopeu’s nobility of character and recommends him to others as an individual of high worth. The Bishop incorrectly believes that Melior is a demon and has set herself up as a rival lord to God, so he counsels Partonopeu to serve no other and exert himself to keep only God’s commandments. In return for service, he will be given “grant honor” (4424)¹²² and, if he neglects his obligations, he will be “tos en fin honis” (4426).¹²³ His dishonour would be worse because he had not openly indicated his defiance, but continued to profit from God’s love while serving another (Melior).

The Bishop fittingly emphasizes the importance of fidelity to one’s lord. This theme runs throughout the text, primarily through negative examples such as Anchisés, whose betrayal caused the fall of Troy, and Mares, whose disloyalty brought the Danes under the subjection of the French. An early scholar of the Partonopeu story, K. Sneyders De Vogel, notes that the author of the French text is particularly critical of

you a sure love/ and that the devil has no power/ over the large gift that he gave you./ Try hard to please him/ to hold his commandments/ Do not serve anyone else.” (4389-99)

¹²¹ Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 104. See also, C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, (Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 1999)

¹²² “great honour” (4424)

¹²³ “all at the end dishonoured” (4426)

traitors: “le poète haisse les vilains . . . qui ont su entrer dans les bonnes grâces des rois et qui profitent de leur pouvoir pour calomnier les nobles et trahir leurs maîtres.”¹²⁴

Premeditated and deliberate treachery towards a lord who has bestowed love and confidence on his vassal was considered a heinous crime. However, Partonopeu is not guilty of such a betrayal. In response to the accusations that Melior replaced God in his affections, Partonopeu argues that she too serves God: “Molt me somont de Deu amer,/ et molt set bien de lui parler” (4451-52).¹²⁵ She has not set herself up as a rival to God, but serves him faithfully and encourages Partonopeu to do the same (1931-46). In support of his protestation of Melior’s innocence (and his own), Partonopeu cites examples of her generosity that allowed him to support numerous noblemen who in turn supported the righteous cause of the French. Because he is innocent of the charge against him and adequately defends himself at his confession, it is difficult to see why he accepts the Bishop’s false verdict. Nonetheless, this episode opens a space to explore the tensions involved in maintaining different kinds of loyalty—to God, to secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies, and to one’s lover—and suggests that it can be very difficult to coordinate the various demands of these relationships. Partonopeu believes that his obedience to ecclesiastical authority conflicts with his loyalty to Melior, but the Bishop is not acting appropriately and, therefore, the young knight is not obliged to obey him. The underlying assumption is that one’s loyalties should not come into conflict with one another; rather, they should complement each other. When Partonopeu fails to recognize

¹²⁴ “the poet hates villains . . . who were able to enter into the good graces of kings and who profit from their power to slander nobles and betray their masters.” K. Sneyders De Vogel, “La Suite du *Parthénopéu de Blois* et la Version Hollandaise,” *Revue des Langues Romanes* 5th ser. 8:48 (1905): 18.

¹²⁵ “Often she commands me to love God/ and knows very well to speak of him.” (4451-52)

the hollow nature of the Bishop's authority, he commits an infidelity that parallels that of Anchisés and Mares—he betrays his lover. However, the text moves towards the restoration of order and loyalties are eventually brought into balance.

The emphasis on fidelity in the text extends beyond the public relationships of men to the private relationships between lovers through the narrative framework of the narrator's addresses to his lady. The narrator ostensibly writes the tale for the pleasure of his ladylove and he frames the scene of Partonopeu's betrayal with protests of his own loyalty to his beloved (4048-52 & 4543-48).¹²⁶ While Partonopeu betrays his lover under minimal duress, the narrator swears that should his lady cut out his heart, he would thank her rather than speak badly of her (4543-48). Were he in heaven and she called, he would come (7546-49). It is perhaps due to the author's stated self-interest in wooing his beloved that loyalty to a lady is treated with equal gravity as loyalty to one's lord in *Partonopeu de Blois*. Authors of romance struggle with this issue of multiple loyalties, and it is a central theme in Bérout's *Roman de Tristan* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrette*.

Partonopeu is swift to realize his own error and acknowledge his true moral failing:

Bien est traïs quant vers s'amie
 A commencie vilonie
 Quant onques en li ne vit rien
 Qu'il ne detüst tenir a bien. (4539-43)¹²⁷

¹²⁶ For notes on the narrator's views of love and women, see John L. Grigsby, "The Narrator in *Partonopeu de Blois*, *Le Bel Inconnu*, and *Joufroi de Poitiers*," *Romance Philology* 21:4 (1968): 536-43.

¹²⁷ "Well he proved a traitor when towards his girlfriend/ he started villainy/ when he never saw in her/ anything that he should not consider good." (4539-43)

With this realization, he begins the process of penance that eventually leads the way to forgiveness and redemption. He proves his worthiness to his lover at the tournament and their embrace in the presence of the entire community signals the final restoration of his honour (10523-29). As Roberta L. Krueger notes, “for an instant, private understanding and public approval, textual meaning and public performance, harmoniously coincide.”¹²⁸ His private love of Melior is given public expression as their relationship is consecrated before God, and the French and Byzantine communities: “Uns patriarches les assemble,/ De par Deu les espose ensemble” (10545-46).¹²⁹ With this acknowledgement of their allegiance to one another, their loyalties are clearly defined and ratified by social acceptance. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explore the dichotomy of public and private in the text, the public world is the dominant, masculine world wherein men wield authority. In contrast, women who desire power use secrecy to open up a private space wherein they might exercise control. Partonopeu’s relationship with Melior develops in such a private space during their seclusion at Chief d’Oire. However, their relationship needs to be reconciled with the public world in order to culminate in marriage and legitimize possible offspring. By revealing Melior with the magic lantern, Partonopeu causes the short-term dissolution of their relationship but, at the same time, he effectively eliminates the boundary that separates private and public spheres of action. His act paves the way for the lovers to validate their relationship at the

¹²⁸ Roberta L. Krueger, “Textuality and Performance in *Partonopeu de Blois*,” *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, 2 (Pittsburg: U of Pittsburg P, 1985) 64.

¹²⁹ “A patriarch joined them,/ to by God marry them together” (10545-46)

tournament under the watchful eye of the community. Patriarchal control is reaffirmed, and the domestic sphere is knit with the political.

As a hero, Partonopeu is valued for the qualities that mark him as a nobleman of good character and birth, and for those qualities that make him an effective leader and humble subordinate. The final tournament judges the young knight carefully and considers all aspects of his character. All of his virtues are integrally related to his role in the community, and his ability to contribute to the honour of the group through his own upstanding behaviour. Honour and loyalty are given particular emphasis and both of these qualities are intrinsically linked with devotion to others. At the *Judicium Dei*, Partonopeu demonstrates his commitment to uphold the honour of the French and, consequently, gains a place as a respected adult within his community. The confession scene tests him once again and he fails to uphold the ideal of absolute loyalty to his lady; however, he realizes his error and is able to redeem himself through his suffering. Through his dramatic, self-inflicted torment, he proves his renewed commitment to Melior and demonstrates the lengths to which he will go to restore his honour. At their marriage, the entire community gathers to celebrate the union of the young couple and reaffirm their place in society. Partonopeu and Melior are crowned as king and queen over the gathered assembly and under God. The wedding provides the final statement on the importance of loyalty as Melior and Partonopeu pledge their faith to each other, and the community pledges its faith to their new rulers.

CHAPTER THREE – The Greater Good in Béroul’s *Roman de Tristan*

The surviving fragment of Béroul’s *Roman de Tristan*¹ is missing both the beginning and the end of the tale, but we can infer from its resemblance to other sources and from references within the text that it follows the traditional storyline. Before the fragment begins, Tristan has already defended Cornwall against Morholt, earned his place in Mark’s court, and shared the fateful love potion with Iseut. It opens with the lovers’ carefully staged conversation under the tree, contrived for the listening ears of Mark whom the lovers have detected hiding in the boughs above them. The duplicity of Tristan and Iseut as they pursue their clandestine relationship cannot be condoned by orthodox Christian values that unequivocally condemn both deceit and adultery; however, in Béroul’s depiction of the tale, the lovers are unambiguously defended and those who oppose them are condemned. The narrative’s exploration of the tension between the individual and the community reveals a communal ethic whereby personal desires are secondary to social obligations. This ethic justifies the killing of the three barons who pit themselves against the lovers, but ultimately, it also forces Tristan and Iseut apart. Once the effects of the potion wane, they resent their social isolation and return to their public roles. The ordeal exemplifies the primacy of community through its

¹ Béroul, *Roman de Tristan*, trans. Norris J. Lacy, *Early French Tristan Poems*, 1, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998) 3-218. All subsequent references will be to this edition and all translations will follow those provided by Lacy unless otherwise noted.

emphasis on reconciliation and the re-establishment of the social hierarchy. In place of the strict judgment of the lovers' guilt, the *Judicium Dei* pleads peace.

The two previous works under discussion, the *Chanson de Roland* and *Partonopeu de Blois*, present a picture of a unified society wherein individuals are destined from birth to fill certain roles that contribute to the welfare of the group. Cary J. Nederman describes this approach to social order as "communal functionalism." According to his definition, such a community is composed of functional groupings (such as knights, noblemen, peasants) that contribute to the maintenance of the common good according to their abilities. He allows that "different persons occupying divergent life situations will conceive of the common good in a manner relevant to their social needs and surroundings," but asserts that each is nonetheless given the liberty to make autonomous decisions regarding the "standards by which the healthy community is to be governed."² In the mid-twelfth century, John of Salisbury presented his major treatise on political theory, the *Policraticus*, using an organic model of society that illustrates the operation of communal functionalism. He uses the metaphor of the human body to define the different roles within the commonwealth. The body politic is ruled by a king who "occupies the place of the head . . . to embrace the whole breadth of the people in the arms of good works and to protect them."³ The senate sits at the heart of the body and offers wise counsel to the ruler. Knights are compared to hands that act for the head. Each segment of society must be committed to a common purpose or the body will

² Cary J. Nederman, "Freedom, Community and Function: Communitarian Lessons of Medieval Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 86:4 (1992): 978.

suffer: “each believes what is to his own advantage to be determined by that which he recognizes to be most useful for others.”⁴ Thus, individuals realize that their personal interests are best served through service to the greater good. In the *Chanson de Roland*, this principle is illustrated through the actions of Roland and his peers who see it as their duty to serve Charlemagne and devote their energies to the advancement of his kingdom. As a result, they increase their own honour. In *Partonopeu de Blois*, the young hero feels the same sense of obligation to his king. When Lohier’s authority is questioned by other nobles, Partonopeu pleads on his behalf and increases the king’s prestige by recruiting new knights to his service. Both narratives demonstrate that the various members of the community work towards a common goal while retaining the liberty to choose how best to meet that goal. When necessary, the community acts to protect itself by either correcting or eliminating internal or external threats to its solidarity.

In *Le Roman de Tristan*, the model for a cohesive society is presented at Arthur’s court. Iseut seeks out their help because she knows that, unlike her own court where “li rois n’a pas coraige entier” (3432),⁵ Arthur’s court is “loial” (3441)⁶ and his company is “natural” (3442).⁷ The pivotal term in the comparison of the two courts is “natural” which means “sincere” in the sense of being true to one’s naturally ordered place in the

³ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 5.6, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 69.

⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 6.20, 126.

⁵ “the king constantly changes his mind” (3432) This phrase could also be translated as “the king does not have a sincere and loyal will.” The term “coraige” refers to the disposition of the soul or spirit; in other words, the will. Iseut remarks that she cannot rely upon her husband to defend her honour because even after a formal reconciliation has taken place without anyone challenging her fidelity, the king’s will has not remained steadfast. Instead, he has bowed under pressure from evil wishers. “I. cor.” *Dictionnaire de l’ancien français: le Moyen Age*. ed. Algirdas Julien Greimas, (Paris: Larousse, 1997).

⁶ “loyal” (3441)

universe.⁸ Thus, Iseut suggests that Arthur's "mesnie" (3442)—all the members of his household from the lowest servant to the highest noble—conforms to traditional expectations of order with all the accompanying connotations of predictability and reliability. Indeed, her messenger's experience at their court gives the same impression. The members of Arthur's court have gathered together in the same chamber where they are arranged according to rank. Young men who have not yet been knighted, "filz a contors/ et filz a riches vavasors,/ qui servoient por armes tuit" (3385-87),⁹ sit together closest to the entranceway. They are furthest from the king and in the outer ring of the king's defense since they are the first to meet anyone coming through the door. One of them meets the messenger and escorts him to the dais where the king is seated with "tuit li barnage" (3396).¹⁰ This group is elevated above the rest of the chamber on an "estage" (3395)¹¹ and the king sets himself above the entire assemblage by standing as the messenger approaches (3401). The arrangement of the men within the physical space suggests clearly defined roles since they are grouped according to their rank and function. Yet it also denotes their unity as they occupy the same chamber and there is friendly interaction between the various groups. Their leisure also suggests that their kingdom is prospering. Even the shepherd on the road outside seems to enjoy peace and security since he has time to play his pipes (3376). Arthur stands at the head of his community generously knighting young nobles (3408) and judiciously settling disputes (3499-3503).

⁷ "sincere" (3442)

⁸ Greimas, "nature."

⁹ "sons of counts/ and of rich vassals/ who served others in order to earn their armour" (3385-87)

¹⁰ "all his knights" (3396)

¹¹ "dais" (3395)

All the nobles defer to his authority, offering their support for Iseut “se li rois veut” (3455)¹² and waiting for his approval before translating their words into action. Arthur and his nobles support one another, and their cohesiveness stands in stark contrast to the disorder that characterizes Mark’s court.

Norris J. Lacy asserts that the “court serves as the ideological center of the romance universe and a structural center for many specific works, even though only a small part of the story may actually unfold there.”¹³ I would further suggest that the king typically provides the focal point of the court. However, in the fragment that remains of Bérout’s narrative, Mark is only once depicted in court with his retainers (1855) and the scene only briefly describes the setting in order to emphasize that the king unorthodoxly leaves it behind to complete a personal errand (1921-25). His assembled advisors are dumbfounded that their king wishes to leave by himself: “Rois, est ce gas,/ a aler vos sous nule part?” (1926-27).¹⁴ In Cornwall, Mark’s absence from court is symptomatic of his inability to provide a cohesive center for his kingdom. He is portrayed as an ineffectual ruler; neither a righteous king nor a tyrant, he vacillates between wrath, tenderness, and indecision. Consequently, he is unable to maintain peace among his people. When in a mood both “fel et engrés” (862)¹⁵ the king condemns the lovers without a trial, the people cry out in protest: “Rois, trop ferfez lai pechié,/ S’il n’estoient

¹² “if the king wishes it” (3455)

¹³ Norris J. Lacy, “The Typology of Arthurian Romance,” *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, 1, eds. Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly, and Keith Busby, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1987) 39.

¹⁴ “King, is this a joke/ that you are going somewhere alone?” (1926-27)

¹⁵ “cruel and violent” (862)

primes jugié” (885-6).¹⁶ When out of “pitié” (481) he is reconciled with the two, the three barons swear that if Tristan is not banished they will “au roi Marc gerre feroient” (588).¹⁷ Because of his weak will,¹⁸ “les pardons de Marc s’effacent-ils toujours devant les nouvelles insinuations et ‘preuves’ des barons”¹⁹ and his authority weakens.

His failure to demonstrate good leadership, shown to be an important aspect of the heroic character in the discussion of Partonopeu, costs him the respect of his people, “cortois . . . et vilain” (2378),²⁰ so that they no longer look to him as a leader. However, he is more dramatically decentered by his refusal to subordinate himself to his lord God. Like Charlemagne in the *Chanson de Roland*, the king should answer directly to God and obey his commandments. Instead, Mark acts on his own initiative with complete disregard for God’s will. When he wishes to punish Tristan and Iseut without granting them a fair trial, he angrily declares:

Par cel seignor qui fist le mont,
Totes les choses qui i sont,
Por estre moi desherité
Ne lairoie nes arde en ré.
Se j’en sui araisnié jamais,

¹⁶ “King, you would be committing a terrible injustice/ if they were not tried first.” (885-6) For the meaning of the term “pechié,” see J.H. Caulkins, “The Meaning of *pechié* in the Romance of Tristan by Béroul” *Romance Notes* 13 (1971-72): 547-549. and Marie-Louise Ollier, “Le péché selon Yseut dans le *Tristan de Béroul*” *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, eds. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1990) 465-82.

¹⁷ “wage war against King Mark” (588)

¹⁸ See Reginald Hyatte, “Arthur as Marc’s and Tristan’s Double in the French *Tristan* Fragments by Béroul and Thomas,” *King Arthur Through the Ages*, 1, eds. Valerie M. Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day (New York: Garland, 1990) 110-26.

¹⁹ “Mark’s pardons always fade away before the new insinuations and ‘proofs’ of the barons.” Etienne Dussol, “À Propos du *Tristan de Béroul*: du Mensonge des Hommes au Silence de Dieu,” *Et C’est la Fin Pour Quoy Sommes Ensemble*, 2 (Paris: Editions Champion, 1993) 529.

²⁰ “nobles and commoners” (2378)

Laissez m'en tot ester en pais. (889-94)²¹

By suggesting that he might later be held accountable for his rash action, the king acknowledges that he is subject to divine authority at the same time as he defies his overlord. Rather than acting as a link between God and the community, his actions descry accountability to either party. Mark steps out of the chain of command and stands alone and, consequently, God acts directly in response to the pleas of the people. He saves the lovers from the punishment that Mark had envisioned because “receū out le cri, le plor/ que faisoient la povre gent/ por ceus qui eirent a torment” (912-14).²² As Kathleen White Smith states, “both of Tristan and Iseut’s ‘extraordinary’ escapes from punishment suggest that human judgment, Mark’s, is not valid here.”²³ The people have learned to bypass the king and address themselves to God—and their prayers are heard.

Like their king, the three barons fail to uphold their obligations to the community and, though Mark does not stand up to them, God eventually sanctions their deaths (4463-70). As nobles, the barons should be acting in the service of their king and community. William D. Cole asserts that

as much as readers may grow to oppose and dislike them, one must recognize that, regardless of their motives, the barons’ goals coincide with those of the feudal society presented in Béroul’s text: both the king’s honor and the legitimacy of his issue must be beyond question.²⁴

²¹ “Even if I should be disowned/ by the Lord who created the world/ and everything that is in it/ I will not fail to have them burned on a pyre./ Maybe I will be held accountable for it later./ but leave me in peace now.” (889-94)

²² “he heard the poor citizens’/ cries and pleas/ for those who were in distress” (912-14)

²³ Kathleen White Smith, “The Ambiguous Oath in Twelfth-Century Romance: Béroul’s *Roman de Tristan* and *Le Chevalier au Lion* of Chrétien de Troyes,” *Ball State University Forum* 29:3 (1988): 42.

²⁴ William D. Cole, “Purgatory vs. Eden: Béroul’s Forest and Gottfried’s Cave,” *The Germanic Review* 70:1 (1995): 3.

Cole is right in suggesting that the legitimacy of children was an important question in a time when titles and property were passed through the bloodline, but he is incorrect in stating that this matter arises in Bérout's text. Iseut is not impregnated (nor is there any concern that she may become pregnant) and Mark never mentions the possibility of an heir other than his nephew Tristan. The barons do not complain that the fatherhood of any offspring will be indeterminate. Rather, they are motivated by "gratuitously intense hatred"²⁵ and personal jealousy: "Cuelli l'orent cil en haïne,/ por sa prooise" (773-74).²⁶ The rest of the community is grateful to Tristan for saving them from Morholt (847-59), but the barons fail to place the common good ahead of their own egos and despise their saviour for reminding them of their own cowardice. It irks them that Tristan is not only the strongest and bravest knight, but that he has captured the heart of their beautiful queen. From the number of times that they see Tristan and Iseut lying together "toz nus" (594)²⁷ and given that they pay a spy for information so they can take turns watching the lovers through a window (4273-344), the barons demonstrate an obsession with destructive voyeurism. They act solely for their own personal gratification.

John of Salisbury reviles those who are guided by "self-love" as opposed to a healthy interest in the greater good. This group includes

informers and defamers, the jealous, the ambitious, the shameful, and the violators of all the duties All law is opposed to such persons, all legal

²⁵ Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., "Ethical Criticism and Medieval Literature: *Le roman de Tristan*," *Medieval Secular Literature: Four Essays*, ed. William Matthews (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1965) 77.

²⁶ "They detested him/ for his great prowess" (773-74)

²⁷ "completely naked" (594)

rights stand jointly against them, and all creatures will someday take up arms against these enemies of the public welfare.²⁸

The barons epitomize all the categories listed above and while John of Salisbury would call them “enemies of the public welfare,” Bérout’s narrator simply calls them “felon” (3137). The barons’ self-interest harms the community on two fronts. First, they allow Morholt to rob Cornwall of its children:

Qant le Morhout prist ja ci port,
 Qui ça venoit por nos enfanz,
 Nos barons fist si tost taisanz
 Que onques n’ot un si hardi
 Qui s’en osast armer vers lui. (848-52)²⁹

Through their cowardice they fail in their duty to protect the kingdom and stand in silence when they should take action. They allow fears for their personal welfare to overcome the righteous outrage they should feel on behalf of their violated community. The barons’ failure is recalled by various characters throughout the text and, in the eyes of their king and community, it is a strong point against them. Second, they compromise Mark’s honour by repeatedly breaking the peace and threatening to declare war—demonstrating within Cornwall and as far as Arthur’s court that Mark has no authority over his own people. After the ordeal that should have been the final word on Tristan and Iseut’s alleged affair, the barons stir up discontent:

Li rois a Cornoualle en pes,
 Tuit le criement et luin et pres.
 En ses deduiz Iseut en meine,
 De lié amer forment se paine.

²⁸ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 3.3, 18.

²⁹ “When the Morholt, who was coming for our children/ landed here,/ he immediately reduced our barons to silence,/ for not one of them was courageous enough/ to take up arms against him.” (848-52)

Mais, qui q'ait pais, li troi felon
Sont en esgart de traïson. (4267-72)³⁰

For a short time, Mark has re-established his authority under God and the kingdom has enjoyed peace. The three barons, again described as “felon,” immediately look to further their own private vendetta against Tristan without regard for the negative impact of their actions on the community. At the trial, Arthur berates them for their slander and denounces them as traitors: “qui te conselle/ tel outrage si fait merveille:/ certes, fait il, sil se desloie” (4141-43).³¹ He and his court leave no doubt that the barons are wrong to accuse the queen repeatedly without accepting reconciliation. When Arthur’s court hears that Iseut must undergo the ordeal, they ask incredulously, “Dex! . . . que li demandent?/ Li rois fait ce que il conmandent,/ Tristran s’en vet fors du païs” (3451-53)³² and conclude that “mal le penserent li felon” (4256).³³ The barons are unambiguously painted as evil characters for their machinations against the lovers and against social order.

In contrast, Tristan and Iseut are represented in positive terms and receive the highest commendations. Even Mark muses to himself, “Je ne quit mais q’en nostre tens,/ en la terre de Cornoualle,/ ait chevalier qui Tristran valle” (1470-72).³⁴ As the best of knights, Tristan is valued for his service to the community—primarily for his role as their

³⁰ “The king now had peace in Cornwall/ and he was feared by all, from far and near./ He included Iseut in his activities/ and took care to show his love for her./ But in spite of this harmony, the three villains/ were eager for more treachery.” (4267-72)

³¹ “whoever recommends/ this outrage to you is committing a terrible offense;/ he is certainly disloyal!” (4141-43)

³² “God! . . . What do they want from her?/ Mark does whatever they require,/ and Tristran is leaving the country.” (3451-53)

³³ “the traitors’ thoughts were evil” (4256)

protector. The people are indebted to Tristan for saving them from Morholt, and the memory of this act reappears throughout the text as a reminder of the bond between the community and their hero. He risked his life in the defense of their children and of the king's honour (856-57, 26-27, 141). He also put himself in danger to defeat a dragon and win Iseut for Mark when the people clamored for the king to take a wife (2556-64). The good Andret remarks that the very presence of Tristan enhances the strength of the community because the king is more respected and feared as a result (2872). Iseut is also lauded in superlative terms as the people ask rhetorically, "Roïne franche, honoree,/ en quel terre sera mais nee/ fille de roi qui ton cors valle?" (837-39).³⁵ She is praised as "la plus bele/ qui soit de ci jusq'en Tudele" (3409-10)³⁶ and Hyatte suggests that "the lady is to be esteemed for her beauty, of which the perfection mirrors her character."³⁷ Her role in the community is never overtly stated though the narrative suggests that she is held in high regard as a mediator between the people and their lord. In their conversation under the tree, Tristan begs Iseut to arrange a reconciliation between him and Mark:

Dame, je vos en cri merci:
Tenez moi bien a mon ami.
Quant je vinc ça a lui par mer,
Com a signor i vol torner. (159-62)³⁸

³⁴ "I do not think that in our time/ in the land of Cornwall/ there is a knight to equal Tristran."
(1470-72)

³⁵ "Noble and honored queen,/ in what land will there ever be born/ a princess who is your equal?"
(837-39)

³⁶ "the most beautiful woman/ from here to Tudela" (3409-10)

³⁷ Hyatte, "Arthur as Marc's and Tristan's Double," 118.

³⁸ "Lady, I implore your mercy:/ reconcile me with my friend./ When I came to him here, from across the sea,/ I did so in order to serve him as my lord." (159-62)

While their conversation is contrived, their intent is to reconfigure their relationship in appropriate terms so that Mark sees them interacting according to socially acceptable standards. By requesting her aid, Tristan is calling upon the queen's proper role as intercessor. When her husband confides in her that three of his most valuable barons have left him in anger because of suspicions of her infidelity, Iseut offers her body as a tool of reconciliation. She declares, "Ja n'en voudront si roide guise—/ metent le terme!—que ne face" (3246-47),³⁹ and hopes that her careful arrangement of the ordeal will forestall future conflicts between the king and his men: "si reseras d'eus acquité" (3272).⁴⁰

In addition to serving the community, the lovers are careful to render dutiful service to God. Maureen Fries notes that "it is the power of the potion . . . which sets them against a social order which, in most versions, they respect."⁴¹ When the effects of the potion wane and Iseut is reconciled with her husband, she immediately leaves an appropriate gift on God's altar:

. . . un garnement
 Que bien valoit cent mars d'argent,
 Un riche paile fait d'orfrois
 (Onques n'out tel ne quens ne rois);
 Et la roïn Yseut l'a pris
 Et, par buen cuer, sor l'autel mis. (2985-90)⁴²

³⁹ "They cannot think of an ordeal so cruel/ that I will not accept it: let them choose the date!" (3246-47)

⁴⁰ "that way you will have no trouble with them" (3272)

⁴¹ Maureen Fries, "The Impotent Potion: On the Minimization of the Love Theme in the *Tristan en Prose* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Quondam et Futurus* 1:3 (1991): 75.

⁴² "a garment/ worth a hundred silver marks./ a rich cloth embroidered in gold./ such as no count or king ever owned./ The queen Iseut took it/ and placed it reverently on the altar." (2985-90)

The expense and luxuriousness of the gift denotes the lovers' feelings of obligation towards God for arranging the reconciliation and also suggests restitution for having abandoned their communal roles for so long. As soon as the potion wears off, Tristan regrets that he is living in exile: "Oublïé ai chevalerie,/ a seure cort et baronie// Or detïse estre a cort a roi" (2165-66, 2173).⁴³ Iseut also regrets the loss of her social position: "Je suis roïne, mais le non/ en ai perdu par ma poison" (2205-6).⁴⁴ They both repent, though as John Halverson points out, "the concern here is not for a violation of sexual morality, but for a violation of social order."⁴⁵ They pray to God for guidance (2186-94, 2286-88) and approach hermit Ogrin for advice (2290-93) in order to arrange their reunion with society. By returning Iseut to her husband, Tristan "fait a sa rente" (3011)⁴⁶ and Iseut completes her restitution by laying a gift at the altar. In return for their devotion, God intervenes on their behalf whenever the lovers are in danger. Again and again, the lovers and their friends credit God with performing "granz miracles" (377)⁴⁷ to save them from discovery, shame, or death. J. Subrenat notes that "il est impossible de ne pas considerer toute ces invocations, tous ces appels á Dieu comme sincères. Tristan et Yseut ont confiance en Lui, ainsi que leurs amis."⁴⁸ Because of their unwavering faith and their commitment to the public good, the lovers enjoy God's support.

⁴³ "I have forgotten chivalry,/ the court, and the knightly life// I should be at the royal court" (2165-66, 2173)

⁴⁴ "I am queen,/ but I have lost that title because of the potion" (2205-6)

⁴⁵ John Halverson, "Tristan and Iseult: The Two Traditions," *Zeitschrift für Französ. Spr. u. Liter.* XCIII (1983): 275.

⁴⁶ "had made restitution" (3011)

⁴⁷ "a great miracle" (377)

⁴⁸ "it is impossible not to consider all these invocations, all these calls to God as sincere. Tristan and Iseut have confidence in Him, as do their friends." (trans. mine) J. Subrenat, "Sur le Climat Social, Moral, Religieux du *Tristan de Béroul*," *Le Moyen Age* 82 (1976): 249.

Once the effects of the potion wane, the lovers renew their allegiance to society and strive to restore order within the community. Béroul questions whether the private demands of their love can be reconciled with their public roles.⁴⁹ Stephen G. Nichols suggests that the answer is “yes.” Provided that the lovers maintain the pretense that “their love is no love,” their affair can continue “without threatening the social harmony of the kingdom.”⁵⁰ The ordeal demonstrates the underlying communal ethic that informs the moral judgments throughout the text. Though Iseut is on trial, her innocence is presumed from the beginning (3448-503) and the scene redirects attention to the faults of her accusers. Even before she has given her oath, Arthur defends her before her husband:

“Rois Marc,” fait il, “qui te conselle
 Tel outrage si fait merveille:
 Certes,” fait il, “sil se desloie.
 Tu es legier a metre en voie,
 Ne dois croire parole fause.” (4141-45)⁵¹

While the barons are guilty for having directed the accusations against Iseut, Mark is equally guilty for having believed them. Thus, the trial is set to vindicate Iseut, definitively settle the issue, and establish order. Peter Brown suggests that the primary role of the ordeal was the negotiation of peace within the community:

The greatest explicit ideal of the early Middle Ages is a minimal one of peace and, above all, concord. . . . In such a society the ordeal takes on its

⁴⁹ Joan Tasker Grimbert sees this same conflict at the root of Thomas’s version of the Tristan romance that she describes as the “ageless conflict of two powerful yearnings: on the one hand, an impulse towards the collective, an inclination for the established social order that causes one to desire to integrate oneself into society and to find a ‘homeland’ and on the other hand, an impulse toward the individual, an often irrational affinity that can cause one to cherish most what is alien or forbidden, bringing the individual into inevitable conflict with the social.” Joan Tasker Grimbert, “Love, Honor, and Alienation in Thomas’s *Roman de Tristan*,” *The Arthurian Yearbook II.*, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland, 1992) 78.

⁵⁰ Nichols, “Ethical Criticism,” 88.

⁵¹ “‘King Mark,’ he said, ‘whoever recommends/ this outrage to you is committing a terrible offense;/ he is certainly disloyal!/ You are easily manipulated;/ You should not believe slander!’” (4141-45)

meaning as an instrument of consensus and as a theatrical device by which to contain disruptive conflict.⁵²

Paul R. Hyams, another well-known scholar of the ordeal, concurs that “men had to hope that the rare *spectaculum* of a ‘good ordeal’ would mercifully release tensions and reinforce the community’s standards of proper behavior.”⁵³ While I would not agree that every ordeal was initiated out of a desire for peace,⁵⁴ the arguments of Brown and Hyams ring true for Iseut’s *Judicium Dei*. Tristan and Iseut work together to end conflict within the community by establishing a proper social hierarchy (putting God on top, boosting the authority of the king, and discrediting the three barons who do not behave in a manner appropriate to their station).

The compurgation by oath is very similar in structure to other forms of the ordeal except that the oath is not supported by a physical trial. Instead, the accused imperil their souls if they swear false oaths before God, and guilt is usually manifested by an inability to articulate the required statement of innocence. The ordeal is used in cases where direct evidence is unavailable, but there is sufficient public fame to warrant an inquiry.

Medieval canonists specify that

the suspicion must be held by good and substantial persons before further proceedings could occur. The accused could not be put to compurgation if

⁵² Peter Brown, “Society and the Supernatural: a Medieval Change,” *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 137.

⁵³ Paul R. Hyams, “Trial by Ordeal: The Key to Proof in the Early Common Law,” *On the Laws and Customs of England: Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorne*. eds. Morris S. Arnold et al. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1981) 98.

⁵⁴ The barons in this instance demand some kind of proof of Iseut’s innocence because of their deep-set hatred for the lovers, though Iseut orchestrates the proceedings to serve her own desire to restore social order.

his fame was impugned only by his enemies, or by untrustworthy men and habitual perjurers.⁵⁵

Given that the lovers are only accused by their enemies and the rest of the community remains convinced of their innocence, Iseut could not be forced to take the ordeal according to canon law. However, Helmholz cites a more compelling reason to go to the ordeal—publicity of innocence, “a formal declaration of innocence in favor of a man publicly defamed of a crime.”⁵⁶ He suggests that once accusations reached the level of open rumor, it would be difficult to carry on a normal life in the small communities that characterized medieval Europe. It would be in the best interests of the accused to clear their name. Iseut volunteers to submit to either an oath or an ordeal (3244–45) as long as “li roi Artus et sa mesnie” (3249)⁵⁷ are in attendance. She calls upon them to witness her judgment and take up arms on her behalf should anyone voice further accusations once her innocence is established. The *Judicium Dei* is called according to standard practice and proceeds according to the same. All the people, “et povre et riche” (3269),⁵⁸ sit in attendance, Arthur and Mark preside (4184), she and her witnesses discuss the wording of the oath, and Iseut swears to their satisfaction upon all the relics in Cornwall (4130–35).

In his various efforts to establish the lovers’ guilt and/or punish them, Mark fails to call upon God for help and instead rejects the authority of the divine. Conversely, the lovers repeatedly swear by God, and Tristan offers to clear himself through trial by battle

⁵⁵ R.H. Helmholz, “Crime, Compurgation and the Courts of the Medieval Church,” *Law and History Review* 1 (1983): 14.

⁵⁶ Helmholz, “Crime, Compurgation and the Courts,” 20.

⁵⁷ “King Arthur and his entourage” (3249)

on numerous occasions (818, 2568-74, 2854-67) because he has such strong faith (813). By definition, the *Judicium Dei* requires divine participation and, in choosing the nature of her defense, Iseut reestablishes God's right to cast judgment over his people. Scholars have argued the opposite—that the ordeal demonstrates God's loss of authority because he allows himself to be manipulated by the trickery of Iseut.⁵⁹ One of the first to question God's silence at the ordeal was Gottfried von Strassburg whose own version of the Tristan story was written around 1210, but already reflects a more authoritarian ethic than that of Béroul. His famous response to the vindication of Iseut derides God for covering the lovers' deceit. Etienne Dussol notes that in romance,

il est habituel que Dieu intervienne en desséchant la main du faux jureur, en démasquant de quelque manière son double jeu, et ici rien de tel ne se passe: Dieu est totalement silencieux. Difficile, nous semble-t-il, de ne pas considérer ce silence comme une approbation.⁶⁰

In spite of his own arguments that God consistently helps the lovers and aids in the destruction of their enemies, Dussol denies that such actions constitute approbation of Tristan and Iseut. He prefers to superimpose his own understanding of morality onto the text and wrongly concludes that, through silence, God is demonstrating all-encompassing love and forgiveness. According to Dussol's syllogism, adultery cannot be condoned by a Christian God, the lovers are committing adultery, and, therefore, their affair cannot be

⁵⁸ "poor and rich alike" (3269)

⁵⁹ See Leena Löfstedt, "Le Procès de Tristan Chez Béroul" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89:3 (1988): 378-90. and Barbara Nelson Sargent-Baur, "Truth, Half-Truth, Untruth Beroul's Telling of the Tristan Story" *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, MI: Solaris P, 1984): 393-421.

⁶⁰ "it is customary that God intervenes in withering the hand the perjurer, in revealing in some way his duplicity, and here nothing like that happens: God is completely silent. Difficult, it seems to us, not to consider this silence as approbation." (trans. mine.) Etienne Dussol, "À Propos du Tristan de Béroul: Du

condoned. Notably, he offers no argument to explain why his God “de l’Amour et de la Charité”⁶¹ does not also support the three barons. Like other scholars who focus on the (non-)issue of sexual transgression, he fails to see what Subrénat saw a quarter century ago:

La faute de Tristan et d’Yseut est d’abord une faute contre la vie sociale. . . [Tristan] est coupable envers son oncle, non d’aimer la reine, mais de ne plus lui rendre le service qu’il devrait.⁶²

The two have already realized the importance of returning to their social roles and the ordeal thus becomes, not a scene of judgment, but a means of reconciliation overseen by God. As Subrénat notes, Iseut “ne traite pas Dieu á la légère; jamais aucune tendance au blasphème, nous l’avons vu, ne se fait jour chez les amants.”⁶³

At the ordeal, Arthur reminds Mark that Iseut will swear “sor les corsainz, au roi celestre” (4162).⁶⁴ He thus reaffirms the power of the saints to act as mediators between the heavenly and earthly realms, and the role of God as king reigning over all spheres. Like their predecessors, the Capetians “saw God as King of Heaven. To Him they transferred the essential features, duly magnified, of royal power.”⁶⁵ Though the wording must satisfy her king and community, Iseut’s oath is essentially a dialogue with the

Mensonge des Hommes au Silence de Dieu,” *Et C’est la Fin Pour Quoy Sommes Ensemble*, tome 2 (Paris: Editions Champion, 1993) 526-27.

⁶¹ Dussol, “Du Mensonge des Hommes au Silence de Dieu,” 533.

⁶² “The fault of Tristan and Iseut is first of all a fault against social life. . . [Tristan] is guilty towards his uncle, not of loving the queen, but for not still rendering the service that he owes.” (trans. mine) Subrénat, “Sur le climat social, moral, religieux du *Tristan*,” 243-244.

⁶³ “does not treat God lightly; we have seen that the lovers never show any tendency towards blasphemy.” (trans. mine) Subrénat, “Sur le climat social, moral, religieux du *Tristan*,” 255.

⁶⁴ “on the bodies of saints (relics), to the celestial king” (4162) (trans. mine)

⁶⁵ Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (London: Cornell UP, 1992) 77.

spiritual realm. She calls upon God, Saint Hilaire, and the power contained in all the relics of the world to help her state the oath that will reassure her husband:

Or escoutez que je ci jure,
De quoi le roi ci aseüre:
Si m'aït Dex et Saint Ylaire,
Ces reliques, cest saintuaire,
Totes celes qui ci ne sont
Et tuit icil de par le mont (4199-204)⁶⁶

Through the wording that has become a stock phrase in modern English, Iseut promises that she will swear to her innocence “si m'aït Dex” or “so help me God.” By stating her oath clearly and confidently, Iseut demonstrates the truth of her assertion. Stuttering or slurring her words would have been taken as evidence that God was protesting perjury and the oath would have been immediately invalidated. Instead, the community notes that she “si fiere en jure:/ tant en a fait après droiture!” (4219-20).⁶⁷ By helping Iseut successfully complete her ordeal in the same manner in which he performed other miracles on behalf of the lovers, silently, God makes known his judgment of the case.

Arthur and Mark preside over the trial as the chief witnesses to God's judgment and, when her innocence is manifested, they duly state for the benefit of the gathered assembly, “la deraisne avon veüe/ et bien oïe et entendue” (4235-36).⁶⁸ Like the presentation of Arthur's court, the placement of the various bodies in relation to one another at Blanche Lande denotes their social status. As Iseut requested, all members of

⁶⁶ “Now hear what I swear here/ of which the king may be here reassured/ so help me God and Saint Hilaire/ these relics, this reliquary/ all those that are not here/ and all those throughout the world” (4199-204) (trans. mine)

⁶⁷ “swore such a confident oath./ She has conducted herself correctly.” (4219-20)

⁶⁸ “we have witnessed her defense/ and listened to it and heard it well” (4235-36)

the community attend the *Judicium Dei*—Tristan (3616), “vaslet et escuier” (3663),⁶⁹ “chevalier” (3669),⁷⁰ their ladies (4086), Arthur (3702), “tuit cil de la Table Reonde” (3706),⁷¹ Mark (3742), “li troi felon” (3788),⁷² and Iseut (3824). The tents belonging to the two kings are set at the middle of the space surrounded by those of their knights (4121-24). In this “cort” (4124),⁷³ Mark is firmly placed in the centre and the people are subordinate. The three barons are given no voice, but must gather with the rest of their countrymen around the kings to witness the ordeal. To emphasize further their roles as intermediaries between God and the people, the two kings stand on either side of Iseut during her oath while the rest of the community sits: “tuit s’asistrent par mié les rens/ fors les deus rois” (4183-84).⁷⁴ They give voice to God’s judgment and thus it is appropriate that they stand above the people. As Arthur’s second-in-command, Gauvain is next to the relics (4186) physically supporting his king. Of course, Tristan is not visibly present at the ordeal. Though it would have been fitting for him to be present to defend his own innocence and that of his queen, the three barons deliberately challenged Iseut when they believed Mark’s champion to be in exile. In a sense, Arthur takes Tristan’s position at the ordeal by firmly supporting the queen, acting as her continued

⁶⁹ “servants and squires” (3663)

⁷⁰ “knights” (3669)

⁷¹ “all the knights of the Round Table” (3706)

⁷² “the three traitors” (3788)

⁷³ “court” (4124)

⁷⁴ “everyone sat down in rows/ except the two kings” (4183-84)

surety (4237-46) and, equally as important, using his presence to strengthen Mark's authority before his people.⁷⁵

Through the commanding nature of his presence and those of his knights, Arthur forces Mark to act as befits a king in twelfth-century France. "The quintessential feudal sovereign,"⁷⁶ he demands that the compurgation by oath be conducted according to proper format. Hyatte correctly observes that

With Arthur presiding, one sees justice as a king should administer it, while in the earlier scene with Marc and his *félons* in command, Marc was patently contemptuous of the law, as he denied the accused the right of *judicium Dei*—oath, ordeal, or judicial combat.⁷⁷

While Arthur explicitly states his belief that Iseut is innocent, he nonetheless follows the trial through to its conclusion. Henry A. Meyers describes the medieval French king as "high judge in his realm over civil and criminal cases alike from the moment he expanded his warrior-chief functions into those of domestic peace-keeping."⁷⁸ However, he is careful to note that the king's role is one of stabilizing and balancing because his power still rests on his ability to command the respect of his nobles. As Halverson states,

Mark is not a powerful monarch, but (like the Louis of the epics and unlike the Arthur of romance) a feudal king severely dependent on his great vassals, and the obligation of *consilium et auxilium* is taken very seriously.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Because neither Guinevere nor Lancelot are mentioned in Bérout's text and Arthur is consistently portrayed as an ideal ruler, I see no reason to follow Mary Brockington's suggestion that his presence is meant to increase the "comic effect" of the scene as the "great cuckold" giving lectures to Mark about proper behaviour. Mary Brockington, "Tristan and Amelius: False and True Repentance," *Modern Language Review* 93:2 (1998): 310.

⁷⁶ Kathleen White Smith, "The Ambiguous Oath in Twelfth-Century Romance: Bérout's *Roman de Tristan* and *Le Chevalier au Lion* of Chrétien de Troyes," *Ball State University Forum* 39:3 (1988): 37.

⁷⁷ Hyatte, "Arthur as Marc's and Tristan's Double," 117.

⁷⁸ Henry A. Meyers in cooperation with Herwig Wolfram, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982) 94.

⁷⁹ Halverson, "Tristan and Iseult," 280.

In standing up against the barons, Mark has put himself in a difficult position. They threaten him from their well-fortified castles (3144-47), but he cannot back down without losing authority (3190). Iseut averts the crisis by volunteering to submit to the ordeal and her clever words save Mark from having to “give up Tristan to have Iseult as his barons contend.”⁸⁰ By correctly following the legal procedure, Mark acts with the authority of God and with the weight of the law behind him. Both kings are concerned to render a “loial esgart” (4138)⁸¹ and both concur that

Se la deraisne est en cel pré,
Ja n’i avra mais si hardiz,
Se il après les escondiz
En disoit rien se anor non,
Qui n’en eüst mal gerredon. (4174-78)⁸²

Here, Mark shows leadership qualities that befit a just king in conducting a legal trial (as opposed to his earlier illegal attempt to punish his wife and nephew without a trial) and asserting that the ordeal will be the final word on the case. He promises that those who fail to respect the outcome (thus questioning the authority of God, king, and the law) will be punished and reasserts control over his kingdom.

The conclusion of the trial firmly vindicates Iseut who is once again identified as “la roïne” (4244)⁸³ and condemns the three barons: “molt sont de cort li troi haï” (4248).⁸⁴ E. Jane Burns figures the rivalry between the lovers and their enemies in terms

⁸⁰ E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk*, 230.

⁸¹ “legal judgment” (4138) (trans. mine)

⁸² “If she is exonerated in this meadow,/ anyone so foolish/ as to question her honor/ after the trial/ will be punished for it.” (4174-78)

⁸³ “the queen” (4244)

⁸⁴ “the three villains were now detested at court.” (4248)

of language, suggesting the “verbally astute lovers” are pitted against the “barons with their subversive talk.”⁸⁵ The ordeal is a crucial battle in the verbal warfare between the two as Iseut orchestrates the scene to empower her own voice and silence the barons. Upon their arrival, the voices of the barons are invalidated by Tristan as he grants them the opposite of their desires. He leads them to deepest part of the ford in response to their request to be led to the easiest crossing (3788-96) and continues to lead them deeper into the mud while they ask for help. At this juncture, their words lack the power to influence either Tristan or the watching crowd. While the barons are present at the trial, they have no role in the proceedings that instead centre upon Iseut’s oath. Sworn upon all the relics in Cornwall, her words take upon the authority of God and the watching community who witness and endorse her defense. In the Germanic court, R. Howard Bloch states that “legal power resided, at least theoretically, in the community as a whole. Law originated in the living conviction of the group as validated by use and common consent.”⁸⁶ Arthur represents both the law and the will of the gathered assembly when he acknowledges that Iseut has been heard (“bien oïe” (4236)⁸⁷) and orders the barons to be silent henceforth: “que il ne parolent sol jamés” (4240).⁸⁸ As Halverson remarks, Bérout does not find fault with the lovers, instead

he blames only their opponents for spying and informing, for scandal-mongering in short, and this only—or so it seems—because it disrupts the social order. We are left with the uncomfortable inference that everything

⁸⁵ Burns, *Bodytalk*, 220.

⁸⁶ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1977) 49.

⁸⁷ “well heard” (4236) (trans. mine)

⁸⁸ “take care never to speak of this again” (4240)

would be all right in Cornwall if the barons would just mind their own business.⁸⁹

By the end of the trial, the barons have been completely discredited and two out of three are killed soon thereafter before the fragment abruptly ends. The trial has served its purpose—not the judgment of Iseut, but the restoration of social order and peace (4267-68).

Bérout's fragment ends before we can see if he successfully reconciles the love of Tristan and Iseut with social values. By the end of the *Judicium Dei* order has been restored, but Tristan remains in exile from the community and the lovers must continue their affair in secret. Though the conclusion of the tale is lost, it is clear that the preservation of the communal good is the motivating force behind the ethic in *Le Roman de Tristan* just as it defines the heroic action in the other twelfth-century works. Tristan and Iseut are heroes because they come to prioritize the welfare of their community over their personal feelings of desire for one another. Under the influence of the potion, Tristan avows that he would rather “o li estre mendis/ et vivre d'erbes et de glan/ q'avoir le reigne au roi Otran” (1404-6).⁹⁰ Like Partonopeu who faces a conflict of loyalties when the Bishop orders him to betray his lover, Tristan and Iseut must also reconcile loyalties that stand in opposition to one another by making the appropriate choice. When the compulsion of the potion wears off, their deep love for one another remains; however, they find the strength to devote themselves to their community once again. The

⁸⁹ Halverson, “Tristan and Iseult,” 278.

⁹⁰ “be a beggar with her/ and live on herbs and acorns/ than to have the kingdom of King Otrant” (1404-6)

successful manipulation of the ordeal is one of their first challenges as they begin the monumental task of restoring social order. Through Tristan and Iseut's careful coordination of the scene, Mark takes his place as head of the community under the authority of God and with the support of his people. To preserve the peace and to prevent the barons from inciting a "mortel gerre" (4449)⁹¹ between Mark and his wife, Tristan kills two of them with God's help. Presumably, he also kills the third in the original text that is now lost. In so doing, he affirms his own role as the protector of the community and eliminates the internal threat to its harmony as he had earlier killed Morholt, an external threat. Thus, he and Iseut continue to negotiate a compromise between their social responsibilities and their love for one another while acknowledging that the needs of the community must take precedence over their personal desires.

⁹¹ "deadly war" (4449)

CHAPTER FOUR – Honour in Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot, ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*

Chrétien de Troyes' ambiguity is well known, and *Lancelot, ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*¹ raises many questions about the relationship between the author and his world. Why did he let a subordinate write the conclusion of the tale? How much of the storyline did Countess Marie of Champagne give to him and in what way did she influence the construction of the text? Does the narrative have a political subtext that indicates the author's moral disapproval of the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere? Though we are free to speculate,² the answers to these questions will likely remain hidden, and, until concrete evidence proves otherwise, the text can only be read at face value. Godefroy de Leigny is a less sophisticated writer, but he carried on the work according to Chrétien's intentions and, as court poets, both men sought to give expression to the ideas and sentiments that society demanded of them.³ Like the other twelfth-century French romances, *Lancelot* is an artefact that reflects and promotes a communal ethic while exploring the tension between the community and the individual. The heroes thus far under discussion have met the challenge of reconciling social commitment with personal desire to varying degrees. Out on the battlefield, Roland is able to devote all his energies to the service of his king and countrymen without a thought for his fiancée waiting for him at home.

¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*, ed. K.D. Uitti (Paris: Bordas, 1989). All subsequent references will be to this edition.

² See Wendelin Foerster, *Der Karrenritter* (Halle, 1899). Foerster contends that Chrétien was forced to write *Lancelot* according to the desires of his patroness, but resented the subject matter which accounts for its structural flaws and the fact that he did not finish it himself. His arguments have been widely influential even though they are based on conjecture. A more recent scholar writes, "Chrétien's silences are among the most provocative features of his romance. . . . We readers are thus enticed to fill in the gaps with our own analysis." Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why are there so Many Interpretations of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*?" *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996) 61.

Partonopeu must work harder to incorporate his love for Melior with his public role as knight. He succeeds by proving himself an exemplary leader and subordinate, thereby earning the right to marry his lover. For Bérout's Tristan and Iseut, such reconciliation of public and private is impossible because they must always hide their love from others. However, once the potion wears off, both realize that their passion for each other must take second place to their obligations to the community. In *Lancelot*, Chrétien explores the possibility that the lover's illicit passion for his queen need not be relegated to a secondary role, but can serve the interests of the community. Lancelot's love is the source of his exceptional prowess and he strengthens Arthur's kingdom through his loyal devotion to Guinevere. While contemplation of his lover leads to comic mishaps, these scenes do not detract from the overall momentum of the narrative that builds a highly respected hero from his shameful introduction as the Knight of the Cart.

Beate Schmole-Hasselmann suggests that Chrétien's early romances follow a standard pattern: the introduction of an ordered court, disruption, and the restoration of order. According to her claim, the heroes of these romances (including Lancelot) are

envisaged as integrated members of the Arthurian community before the action begins. Whenever the Arthurian court as a place of *joie* has its harmonious state disrupted, then one of the knights sets off on his own, an elect representative, to come to terms with a hostile environment through the medium of *aventure* and finally to restore the ideal social order.⁴

While I respectfully defer to Schmole-Hasselmann's groundbreaking arguments on the historical and political context of Chrétien's romances, I disagree with her sweeping assessment of their internal structure.⁵ *Lancelot* does not begin with a picture of social stability wherein all the

³ F. Douglas Kelly, *Sens and Conjointure in the Chevalier de la Charrette* (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1966) 70.

⁴ Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart*, trans. Margaret and Roger Middleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 101.

⁵ While *Erec and Enide* and *Cligès* loosely follow this structure, it is not representative since the *Perceval (Le Conte du graal)* fragment does not suggest this pattern and neither does *Yvain (Le Chevalier au lion)*.

knights are integrated into a harmonious whole; rather, its central hero seems to come from outside the court. He is not present when Meleagant issues his challenge and, far from being an appointed representative (though his goals coincide with those of his community), Lancelot acts on his own initiative to rescue the queen. Arthur's court is characterized by its humorous inversion of conventional norms of behaviour and, from this initial chaos, the text moves towards the establishment of order with Lancelot's growth as a hero paralleling the general movement from disorder to harmony. When he first arrives upon the scene on a horse ready to die from exhaustion and steps onto the shameful cart, there are few clues to guide our response—he is an unnamed and unknown knight seen against the backdrop of a world turned upside down. Is he a respectable knight or a comic buffoon? In other words, is he honourable? Chrétien was the first to give Lancelot such a prominent role in the Arthurian myth and the first to link him with Guinevere.⁶ Therefore, he would have been a truly unknown quantity to Chrétien's contemporaries. From his ambiguous introduction into a fragmented society, Lancelot proves his merit by admirably serving the needs of his society. He pulls together the community through his insistence on the interdependence of its members, and ensures the return of the queen and those who were imprisoned in Gorre. The ordeal tests his honour and proves unmistakably that Lancelot is a credit his people. He eliminates the threat of Meleagant and establishes Arthur's court as the sole locus of power so that social order is restored through his efforts.

At the outset, the court appears to fit a traditional paradigm of social order with the king at the top of the hierarchy and the servants at the bottom. King Arthur presides over the whole "cort molt riche" (34)⁷ and sits at a table with his barons (38). The presence of the queen is next

⁶ See Jean Markale, *Lancelot et la chevalerie arthurienne* (Paris: Editions Imago, 1985) 7-22, and Peter Korrel, *An Arthurian Triangle: A Study of the Origin, Development and Characterization of Arthur, Guinevere, and Mordred* (Leiden: Brill, 1984) 6-30.

⁷ "magnificent court" (34) Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

noted (39) and then the rest of the noble ladies (41). Thus far, the court seems to be organized in a hierarchy based on social rank and gender. Kay as head server and “les conestables” (44)⁸ are mentioned last and it is a measure of their low social standing that they are sitting down to eat after everyone else has finished their repast. The scene is typical of Arthurian romance—the king and his court enjoying a leisurely holiday feast and awaiting some adventure. Even the brusque arrival of an unknown knight is in keeping with traditional motifs and leads us to anticipate that the stranger will challenge Arthur’s court, one of the knights present will take up the task, and the audience will hear a tale of chivalrous adventures. Instead, Chrétien teases our expectations with comic reversals that send the social hierarchy toppling to the ground. When the stranger boldly asserts that he holds “chevaliers, dames et puceles” (55)⁹ from Arthur’s kingdom captive in his prisons, “li rois respont qu’il li estuet/ sofrir, s’amander ne le puet” (63-4).¹⁰ The king’s passive acceptance of the situation deflates the rising tension and, though some may criticize Chrétien’s style as “overly witty,[and] jejune,”¹¹ the sudden reversal in the tale is humorous because the king does not act with the authority that normally distinguishes a king. This sense of the ridiculous increases when the king reacts with disproportionate grief to the news that his kitchen steward wishes to resign. Unhappy, but resigned to the fact that an unknown knight is holding his people captive, the king is brought to the edge of despair when Kay threatens to leave. “Molt desperé” (116),¹² he swears, “Que je n’ai en cest monde rien/ que je por vostre remenance,/ ne vos doigne sanz demorance” (110-12).¹³ The unnatural reversal of

⁸ “the serving staff” (44) Literally, this term means “count of the stable” and eventually evolved into the modern “constable,” though in the romance, it refers to those responsible for serving the meal.

⁹ “knights, ladies, and maidens” (55)

¹⁰ “the king responds that he is forced/ to accept the situation if he cannot amend it” (63-4)

¹¹ Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens, Ontario: Ohio UP, 1968) 167.

¹² “full of despair” (116)

¹³ “I do not have anything in this world/ that in order to keep you here/ I would not give you without delay” (110-12)

social order reaches its peak when the king sends his wife to grovel at Kay's feet and beg him to stay. From his place at the servant's table, Kay has been elevated above the king, the queen, and all the court. When Arthur grants him anything that he desires, they all become subject to his will. At the moment when all reason seems to have fled the court, Gawain draws Arthur back into a conventional role—stating his amazement that the king is acting like a child (228-29) and suggesting that they take appropriate steps to rescue the queen (232-40). This rapid sequence of reversals leaves the audience guessing as to whether they will hear a story of adventure or comedy.

Against this uncertainty, it is almost impossible to decipher the role of the mysterious "Chevalier de la Charrete" (24)¹⁴ when he first appears. Normally, medieval heroes can be immediately identified by their lineage, which determines their nobility of character, and by their appearance, which mirrors their virtue. These are important markers for the other twelfth-century heroes, but neither of these indicators is provided for Chrétien's audience who must look to Lancelot's words and actions to judge his moral fibre. Although Gawain recognizes his colleague, Lancelot refuses to divulge his name to other characters he meets. Names in twelfth-century romance have significance beyond their use as an appellation since, as Howard Bloch explains, words and the objects they denote converge in definition: "For language, which, to a much greater extent than today, was considered an integral part of the physical universe, also shares in the properties of things."¹⁵ Names provide a tag that is unique to each character¹⁶ and indicate their reputation so that an unspoken résumé of their family background, place of birth,

¹⁴ "Knight of the Cart" (24)

¹⁵ R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 52.

¹⁶ Though a wide diversity of names appear in literature, the variety of birth names actually decreases in the centuries leading up to the twelfth century so that many people shared the same name. People were increasingly differentiated by appellations indicating recognizable characteristics. John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and

and major exploits accompanies their introduction. When Lancelot lifts the slab covering the sepulchre revealing that he is the knight destined to free Meleagant's prisoners, the attendant monk is astonished and seeks to discover his name:

Si dit: Sire, or ai grant envie
 Que je seüsse vostre non;
 Direiez le me vos? –Je non,
 Fet li chevaliers, par ma foi. (1932-35)¹⁷

Upon the monk's repeated insistence, Lancelot replies only that he is a knight from the realm of Logres. He thus identifies himself as a member of a specific community without disclosing his personal history. By denying access to his name, the hero prevents the monk from understanding his most recent exploit in the framework of his past deeds and makes it more difficult for the monk to keep track of his future adventures. Like us, the monk is forced to judge the knight by his present words and actions. The maiden traveling with him is also ignorant of his name, but Lancelot is already building a new reputation as a knight of great prowess. She asserts:

Qu'ele nel set, mes une chose
 Setüremant dire li ose,
 Qu'il n'a tel chevalier vivant
 Tant con vantent li quatre vant. (1963-66)¹⁸

In the brief span that she has known him, she has already recognized his virtue and trusts him accordingly. Lancelot does not reveal his reasons for concealing his name, but it is notable that he is traveling incognito when he rides on the cart and when he fights his worst for Guinevere. His identity is not revealed until he has fully redeemed himself and his reputation is clear of shame.

Perceptions of Individuality," *Culture, Power and Personality in Medieval France*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (London: Humbledon P, 1991) 342.

¹⁷ "He says: Sir, I have a great desire/ to know your name;/ will you tell it to me? –Not I,/ said the knight, by my faith." (1932-35)

¹⁸ "That she knows but one thing/ with certainty she dares to say/ that there is no knight living of his equal/ anywhere the four winds blow." (1963-66)

The ambiguity surrounding Lancelot's role and the sense of social chaos engendered by the description of Arthur's court are intensified when the knight voluntarily steps onto the cart. He is "li chevaliers a pié, sanz lance" (347),¹⁹ a contradiction in terms since the "chevaliers" by definition is "a professional horseback warrior with special equipment."²⁰ Though he is innocent of any apparent wrongdoing, he puts himself on public display as a criminal by agreeing to travel through the town on the cart. The speaker explains that the cart was used in the same way as a pillory to display criminals and subject them to public ridicule. It marks their expulsion from society: "S'avoit puis totes lois perdues,/ Ne puis n'estoit a cort oïz/ Ne enorez ne conjoïz" (338-40).²¹ Since legal systems were associated with a particular people rather than a geographical area (thus Jews, Franks, and Christian religious could be neighbours and still subject to different laws),²² by losing recourse to the law, the criminal is in essence banished from his people even if he is not physically banished from the land. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen describes the cart as "a space outside of chivalric identity. To enter its ignoble confines is to become a mere subject of the law rather than its agent."²³ Throughout the text, the association between the cart and shame is so automatic that disgrace seems to be an intrinsic nature of the cart rather than an arbitrary association. The people lament:

Ha, Dex! Con grant mesaventure!
Fet chascuns d'ax a lui meïsmes,
L'ore que charrete fu primes
Pansee et feite soit maudite,

¹⁹ "the knight on foot, without a lance" (347)

²⁰ Linda Paterson, "Knights and the Concept of Knighthood in the Twelfth-Century Occitan Epic," *Knighthood in Medieval Literature*, ed. W.H. Jackson (Woodbridge, England: D.S. Brewer, 1981) 34. See also M. Bennett, "The Status of the Squire: the Northern Evidence," *Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, eds. C. Harper-Bill and R. Hervey (London: 1986), 1-11, and T. Hunt, "The Emergence of the Knights in France and England, 1000-1200," *Knighthood in Medieval Literature*, ed. W.H. Jackson (London, 1981) 1-22.

²¹ "Thus he [the criminal] finds himself outside of all law,/ he is no longer heard at court/ nor honoured or received with dignity." (338-40)

²² See Walter Ullman, *Law and Jurisdiction in the Middle Ages*, ed. George Garnett (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988)

²³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Masoch / Lancelotism" *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 240.

Car molt est vix chose et despite. (2620-24)²⁴

By its nature, the cart degrades the people it carries and marks them as outcasts. As much as the community might regret this association, they see it as inescapable. The crux of the dilemma is clearly stated:

S'il [Lancelot] fust de cest reproche mondes,
 An tant con dure toz li mondes,
 Ne fust uns chevaliers trovez,
 Tant soit de pröesce esprovez,
 Que cestui valoir resanblast,
 Et que trestoz les assanblast
 Etsi bel ne si gent n'i veïst (2629-36)²⁵

Though the people admire him for his nobility of character, his association with the cart has nearly condemned him to a life of humiliation: "sa vie est desormés honteuse/ et despite et maletüreuse" (585-86).²⁶ Far from situating the hero in a stable social environment against which his actions can be easily judged, Chrétien has riddled his text with ambiguity. Yet, the knight who is marked as a social outcast because of his association with the cart will prove to be the hero who will restore the community's moral and physical integrity.

In most respects, Lancelot exemplifies the qualities valued in a knight whose role is to serve and protect the community; all of his words and actions insist on the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other. Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama suggest that in societies such as that of medieval France:

People are motivated to find a way to fit in with relevant others, to fulfill and create obligation, and in general to become part of various interpersonal relationships. Unlike the independent self, the significant features of the self

²⁴ "Ah, God! What great misadventure!/ Says each of them to himself,/ the hour in which the cart was first/ thought of and made be damned,/ because it is a very vile and contemptible thing." (2620-24)

²⁵ "If only he [Lancelot] was freed from this reproach,/ as far as the whole world extended/ there would not be found a knight/ so proven in prowess/ that he could match his worth/ and if someone assembled all [the knights]/ you would not see one more beautiful or more noble than he." (2629-35)

²⁶ "his life is dedicated henceforth to shame/ and contempt and misfortune" (585-86)

according to this construal are to be found in the interdependent and thus, in the more public components of the self.²⁷

One of the critical qualifiers in this statement is that the individual is only concerned to fit in with “relevant others.” Lancelot carefully weighs the demands of others before he accedes and, of course, he is most anxious to meet Guinevere’s expectations while placing far less emphasis on moulding his behaviour to please scoundrels. His association with the cart should have led to his exclusion from society, but Lancelot continues to hold himself responsible to his community—God, Gawain, and his peers. In each of these relationships, he adjusts his behaviour according to the needs and expectations of the other party, placing their desires ahead of his own while actively striving to uphold the communal good. He thus demonstrates the social ethic that also motivates Roland, Partonopeu, Tristan, and Iseut.

First and foremost, Lancelot defers to God and receives his support in return. In his otherwise unwavering quest to save the queen, he stops at a monastery to pray—his sole “deviation from his resolution to pursue the queen by the straightest, fastest way.”²⁸ He demonstrates appropriate deference by pausing, “Ne fist que vilains ne que fos/ Li chevaliers qui el mostier/ Entra a pié por Deu proier” (1852-54),²⁹ and, in this small act, Lancelot shows that he is not a “vilains,” but a noble character who acts wisely. He dismounts to enter the church with due humility and, outside, he shows the same respect to the elderly monk by speaking “molt dolcemant” (1862)³⁰ and blessing him with the phrase, “Dex vos aïst” (1866).³¹ Though not stated, he likely prays for success in his quest, and the monk provides the answer to his prayer by revealing Lancelot’s destiny:

²⁷ Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, “Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 98:2 (1991) 227.

²⁸ Ruth Harwood Cline, ed. and trans., *Lancelot or the Knight of the Cart*, by Chrétien de Troyes (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990) 218.

²⁹ “The knight who entered the church on foot to pray to God was not a villain or a fool.” (1852-54)

... Cil qui levera
 Cele lamme seus par son cors
 Gitera ces et cels fors
 Qui sont an la terre an prison,
 Don n'ist ne sers ne gentix hon
 Qui ne soit de la antor nez (1912-17)³²

When Lancelot lifts the slab covering the tomb, the monk identifies him as the one who will fulfill the prophecy. In other words, the monk announces “l’accomplissement anticipé de sa mission chevaleresque” as the one who will “délivrer les prisonniers du royaume de Gorre.”³³ However, it is a measure of the intimacy of his relationship with God and Lancelot’s willingness to discern God’s will that he asks the right questions. As Paul Bretel observes, “l’incapacité à interpréter correctement les signes envoyés par Dieu est signe d’imperfection.”³⁴ Conversely, Lancelot’s ability to question the monk and correctly interpret his relationship to the mysterious tomb is a sign of his perfection. As God’s knight, he fully relies on the support of the divine. When the vassal questions his ability to rescue the prisoners, Lancelot responds that he will succeed “se Deu vient a pleisir” (2120)³⁵ and, as he approaches the sword bridge, he explains to his worried escort that

Mes j’ai tel foi et tel creance
 An Deu qu’il me garra par tot:
 Cest pont ne cest eve ne dot
 Ne plus que ceste terre dure (3098-101)³⁶

³⁰ “most sweetly” (1862)

³¹ “God protect you” (1866)

³² “He who raises/ this slab by himself/ will deliver those and them/ who are imprisoned in the land/ where none leave, serf or gentle man/ who were not born there” (1912-17)

³³ “the anticipated accomplishment of his chivalric mission,” “deliver the prisoners from the realm of Gorre” Corinne Nolin-Benjamin, “La fonction charnière de l’ermite dans la quête de l’identité,” *Romance Quarterly* 39:4 (1992): 392.

³⁴ “the incapacity to correctly interpret signs sent by God is a sign of imperfection.” Paul Bretel, *Les ermites et les moines dans la littérature française du Moyen Age (1150-1250)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995) 529.

³⁵ “if it pleases God” (2120)

³⁶ “But I have such faith and such belief/ in God that he will protect me everywhere/ that I do not fear this bridge and this torrent/ any more than this hard earth [the riverbank]” (3098-101)

Lancelot's faith and devotion give him the strength to pursue his quest. He thus demonstrates the benefits of mutual cooperation and support as he simultaneously affirms God's role in the community.

The relationship between Lancelot and Gawain is also characterized by mutual reliance and trust as each knight relies on the other for aid in the pursuit of their common goal. Their first priority is the rescue of the queen but, once that task is complete, Lancelot immediately goes in search of his colleague who has yet to appear (4096-4100, 5064-69). His concern to ensure Gawain's well-being before attending to his own needs (healing his grievous wounds for example) is echoed by other characters who prioritize the welfare of the community as a whole over their personal desires. Though they are free to leave and each yearns to go back to their homeland (4228-20), they do not depart until they believe that all their compatriots are safe and they can return home together. This general feeling of communal solidarity is drawn into sharper focus between the two knights. Through a dynamic system of exchange wherein each gift creates an obligation to reciprocate, Lancelot and Gawain forge strong ties of camaraderie. One such gift exchange occurs at the start of the text when Lancelot arrives on a horse suffering from exhaustion. After they respectfully exchange greetings, Lancelot speaks:

Si dist: "Sire, don ne veez
 Con mes chevax est tressūez
 Et tex qu'il n'a mes nul mestier?
 Et je cuit que cist dui destrier
 Sont vostre, or si vos prieroie,
 Par covant que je vos randroie
 Le servise et le guerredon,
 Que vos, ou a prest oua don,
 Le quell que soit me baillissiez."
 Et cil li dit: "Or choississiez
 Des deus le quel que il vos plest." (281-91)³⁷

³⁷ "He said to him: 'Sir, do you not then see/ that my horse is drenched with sweat/ so that he is no longer worth anything?/ and I believe that these two destriers/ belong to you, can I then beg of you/ by an agreement that I

He calls upon his colleague to recognize his dilemma by drawing attention to the sweat covering his mount and, from a statement of his own lack, he points out that Gawain has two horses. Even before he explicitly asks for one of the horses, the implications are clear—Gawain has a responsibility to help his comrade because he is able and the two men belong to the same community. As Lancelot states later, Gawain should feel obliged to help “par amor et par conpaignie” (6541).³⁸ Though Lancelot concludes his request with a promise of future repayment, Gawain does not immediately stand to gain from the loss of his horse. However, in a society that values interdependence over independence, the two knights are strengthening the ties that bind them to one another and, in a community that esteems such behaviour, they are increasing their honour. Without further ado, Gawain offers the horse, thereby concluding this exchange and setting the stage for future interaction.

Lancelot’s relationships with God (his social superior) and with Gawain (his peer) operate within the same parameters of reciprocal support and ongoing commitment to one another. Throughout his quest, he acts out similar relationships with his compatriots. Of course, he is bound to his queen on multiple levels and, in return for devoted service, he craves only a kind word from her lips. To others, he identifies himself as a knight from Logres (1929-30, 2080) and, though he does not give his name, the revelation of his communal affiliation is enough to establish kinship with fellow citizens. The vavasor’s family offers him their hospitality before they know who he is, but Lancelot’s revelation that he is a Logrian commences a new series of exchanges between them. The host asks him for details of his task and offers good advice in return: “par un covant que je vos doigne/ consoil au mialz que je savrai” (2138-

will render you/ service and faire recompense/ that you, will give as a loan or as a gift/ one of the two, as you elect.’/ and he said to him: ‘Then choose/ of the two the one that pleases you.’” (281-91)

³⁸ “for love and for companionship” (6541)

39).³⁹ Once he has given his counsel, his sons step up to offer their own assistance to the knight. The younger son hopes to be “adobé et chevalier fait” (2264)⁴⁰ in reward for his service and both hope that Lancelot will earn their freedom. They announce to those who inquire that Lancelot is the one who “nos gitera toz d’essil/ et de la grant maleürté” (2426-27).⁴¹ The hero does not engage with natives to Gorre on the same level, but enacts simple one-to-one exchanges wherein the obligation to one another ends with the fulfillment of the verbal agreement. Contracted to sleep with his hostess in exchange for a bed for the night, Lancelot fulfills his obligation and the woman releases him from further debt:

Or vos reposez mes enuit,
Que vos m’avez randu si bien
Mon covant que nes une rien
Par droit ne vos puis demander. (1269-71)⁴²

Though she follows him for some time, he does not seek to continue the relationship and gladly releases her when she wishes to depart (2020-22). His exchanges with other strangers are similarly discrete. He rides in the dwarf’s cart for information leading to the discovery of the queen (358-61). When the wife of his captor lets him attend the tournament, he swears that he will return and grant her anything in his power to give: “Dame, tote celi que j’ai/ vos doing et jur le revenir” (5502-3).⁴³ He returns to prison and their obligation to one another ends. Lancelot’s relationship with Meleagant’s sister is the exception to rule since the completion of the initial contract triggers continued commitment, but all his other relationships fit the general pattern—Lancelot feels a greater obligation to negotiate ongoing relationships with fellow citizens of Logres than with strangers. In such a manner, he pulls together his community so they come to

³⁹ “for a promise that I will owe you/ the best counsel that I know” (2138-39)

⁴⁰ “dubbed and made knight” (2264)

⁴¹ “will liberate us from exile/ and from great misfortune” (2426-27)

⁴² “Rest well the rest of the night/ for you have kept your word to me so well / that I cannot any more/ by right ask anything of you” (1269-71)

reaffirm their connection to one another in spite of their dispersal over a large geographical area. His presence triggers a rash of patriotic feeling among the Logrians who then declare war on Gorre (2302-23).

Lancelot's active commitment to his community belies the social ostracism and dishonour implied by his association with the cart. His honour provides a foundation of trust and reliability in his interaction with others so that his captor's wife, for example, can rely on him to return to prison and the maiden he accompanies in Gorre can trust him to protect her. More generally, women can rest assured that Lancelot will not harm them⁴⁴ and knights who desire to engage in battle can be confident that he will fight fairly. Good King Bademagu advises his son on the inter-relational nature of honour:

Que prodome doit prodome atreire
 Et enorer et losangier,
 Nel doit pas de lui estrangier.
 Qui fet enor, l'anors est soe:
 Bien saches que l'enors iert toe
 Se tu fez enor et servise
 A cestui qui est a devise
 Li miaudres chevaliers del monde [Lancelot]. (3226-33)⁴⁵

Though Meleagant refuses to take this advice, Lancelot grows in honour every time he interacts with another character because he treats others with respect. He makes appropriate alliances, fights for worthy causes, and acts honourably to friend and foe alike for as he says, "mialz morir ne vuel/ a enor que a honte vivre" (1126-27).⁴⁶ Because honour is public currency, his actions must also be witnessed and validated by society—not normally difficult in friendly interaction,

⁴³ "Lady, all that I have/ I will give to you and swear to return" (5502-3)

⁴⁴ A knight at this stage was simply a mounted warrior without the moral obligation that was later developed to protect damsels in distress. See J. Flori, "La Notion de Chevalerie dans les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes" *Romania* 114:4 (1996): 289-315.

⁴⁵ "A wise man should make alliances with other wise men/ and honour and welcome them/ must not push them away./ He who honours others, honours himself./ know well that honour will rebound on you/ if you honour and serve/ he who is without contest/ the best knight in the world [Lancelot]." (3226-33)

⁴⁶ "it is better to die in the pursuit/ of honour than live shamefully" (1126-27)

but more problematic when duelling an opponent to the death. Faced with the prospect of fighting in an isolated area, Lancelot complains,

. . . Certes molt sui iriez,
 Quant antre ancontré ne nos somes
 An place lee et devant homes,
 Que bel me fust que l'en veïst
 Li quex de nos mialz le feïst. (1638-42)⁴⁷

They proceed to a more populated area to remedy the situation. An audience is doubly important for Lancelot since his reputation has been compromised and, in every battle, he fights with an awareness that he must win or suffer great shame. When he worries that his prowess is in doubt, “an son cuer en a molt grant honte” (876)⁴⁸ and the strength of his blows increase to redeem his honour. His awareness of those watching him spurs him on to greater feats of valour. On one occasion, the gaze of his host and the assembled household prompts him to reproach himself for taking so long to defeat his opponent. His body trembles with anger and his blows furiously rain down around the head of his foe until “merci venir l'estuet,/ come l'aloce qui ne puet/ devant l'esmerillon durer” (2757-59).⁴⁹ The audience's function is then twofold: they motivate the hero to achieve success and they publicize his accomplishments so that his honour increases. Lancelot's efforts are well rewarded when the cart is forgotten⁵⁰ and Gawain acclaims that his colleague “si granz enors i avint/ qu'ainz n'ot si grant nus chevaliers” (5348-49).⁵¹

Through the agency of the hero, the textual impulses towards order from chaos and unification from fragmentation reach their culmination in the *Judicium Dei*. By defeating Meleagant at the trial by ordeal begun in Gorre and completed in Logres, Lancelot fully restores

⁴⁷ “I greatly regret/ that we did not meet each other/ in a busier place and before men./ I would have liked them to see/ which one of us does the best.” (1638-42)

⁴⁸ “in his heart there is very great shame” (876)

⁴⁹ “he is forced to ask mercy/ as the lark who cannot last/ against the merlin” (2757-59)

⁵⁰ It is last mentioned on line 4367 and then, by Lancelot himself. Otherwise, it is forgotten in the last third of the narrative.

⁵¹ “attained greater honour/ than any other knight has ever achieved” (5348-49)

his honour and reaffirms social order within his community. He establishes Arthur's court as the central locus of power, thus unifying the kingdom and restoring the authority of the king.

Lancelot and Meleagant fight three battles: the first is fought for the release of Guinevere, the second is the ordeal, and the third concludes both of the previous battles. All the battles operate according to the underlying understanding that God will accord victory to the just champion.

Thus the maidens of Logres perform acts of penance before the first battle in the hopes that they will sway God's judgment:

Trois jorz avoient getiné
Et alé nuz piez et an lenges
Totes les puceles estrenges
Del rëaume le roi Artu,
Por ce que Dex force et vertu
Donast contre son aversaire
Au chevalier qui devoit faire
La bataille por les cheitis. (3540-47)⁵²

Though Lancelot has repeatedly announced that he has come to fight "por la reine" (2145)⁵³ and for no other reason, the Logrians still see his battle as a group effort. Chrétien has structured his narrative so that by saving one, Lancelot will save them all. Consequently, the hero does not have to choose between serving his lover and serving the common good. Each battle involves God and the community, but the ordeal is distinguishable by its formal procedure. Before they begin, Lancelot draws attention to the legal apparatus by announcing, "Je sai de quauses et de lois/ et de plez et de jugemanz" (4964-65).⁵⁴ Under his recommendation, each party kneels to swear an oath on relics (4981) that asserts the justice of their cause. God alone acts as judge and both participants draw him into the proceeding through their oaths. Meleagant swears, "ensi

⁵² "They fasted for three days/ and went barefoot and wore hair shirts/ all the foreign young women/ of King Arthur's realm/ so that God would give force and strength/ against his adversary/ to the knight who must undertake/ the battle to deliver the captives" (3540-47)

⁵³ "for the queen" (2145)

⁵⁴ "I know of causes and laws/ and of trials and of judgments" (4964-65)

m'aïst Dex et cist sainz" (4987),⁵⁵ and Lancelot more explicitly asks, "Et de celui qui a manti/ praigne Dex, se lui plest, vantage/ Et face voire demonstrance" (4994-96).⁵⁶ The conclusion of the ordeal is postponed in God's name (5034) and Lancelot's arrival in time to fight the last battle with Meleagant is attributed to God's will (6227, 6591, 6703). Though he has a strong personal desire to avenge himself on his opponent, the hero submits to the will of God and his community. Consequently, Meleagant is not killed until there have been various attempts to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

The decision to try Guinevere at a *Judicium Dei* moves the conflict from the private space of the bedroom to the public space outside the walls of the castle. In so doing, the imputation of dishonour ripples outward to affect not only Guinevere and Kay, but also the imprisoned Logrians and Lancelot. Additionally, Meleagant now risks losing his own honour if he fails to prove his case against the queen. Stephen D. White notes that proposing the ordeal in French litigation between 1050-1110 was a precarious venture for all parties involved:

Because several of the procedural paths that the dispute might now follow led to total defeat for one party or the other and because defeat in the ordeal entailed dishonor as well as material loss, the proposal to hold the ordeal also transformed the politics of the lawsuit, increasing for everyone the political risks involved in the complex bargaining process that the proposal would initiate.⁵⁷

In *Lancelot*, the negotiations that take place in the bedroom when the bloody sheets are discovered increasingly complicate the original assumption of clear guilt. First, neither Guinevere nor Kay confess, thus forcing Meleagant to either drop his accusations or defend them with his sword. Then, Lancelot is called in to champion the queen and risks his own honour in

⁵⁵ "So help me God and all his saints" (4987)

⁵⁶ "And on him who lied/ God take vengeance if it pleases him/ and let the truth be demonstrated" (4994-96)

⁵⁷ Stephen D. White, "Proposing the Ordeal and Avoiding It: Strategy and Power in Western French Litigation, 1050-1110," *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995) 104.

her defense. The case now involves at least four people who must jockey for position in a public and formal sphere of engagement. The theme of honour that is a strong motif throughout the narrative reaches its culmination at the *Judicium Dei*. Guinevere has compromised her standing by apparently having sex with the seneschal, Kay, whose rank is far below that of the queen. As in *Le Roman de Tristan*, the question of adultery is not raised. Kelly stated decades ago that “there is certainly no suggestion in any of Chrétien’s works that she [Guinevere] has done anything reprehensible, and there is no attempt to pity, mock, or belittle Arthur because of it.”⁵⁸ Edward I. Condren echoes this thought in more emphatic terms,

Nowhere does Chrétien invite his readers to focus on the question of marriage vows and whether they have been broken. Adultery is neither condemned or condoned; it is not an issue in *Lancelot*!⁵⁹

Instead, the thrust of the arguments against the queen point to the wide difference in social standing between the two—a difference exaggerated by Kay’s poor performance as a knight. Meleagant is not concerned that she has had extramarital sex, he is upset that she chose “Kex li seneschax” (4785)⁶⁰ to occupy her bed instead of a knight who earned the right to keep her through his prowess. He laments to his father:

Bien savez an quel aventure
 Por la reïne ai mon cors mis,

 Sire, por Deu, ne vos enuit
 S’il m’an poise et se je m’an plaing,
 Car molt me vient a grant desdaing
 Qant ele me het et despist
 Et Kex o li chasque nuit gist. (4826-38)⁶¹

⁵⁸ Douglas, *Sens and Conjointure*, 67.

⁵⁹ Edward I. Condren, “The Paradox of Chrétien’s *Lancelot*,” *MLN* 85 (1970), 436.

⁶⁰ “Kay the seneschal” (4785)

⁶¹ “You well know the perils/ I endured for the queen, // Sire, by God, don’t let it bother you/ if this conduct weighs on me and I complain/ for it makes me feel greatly indignant/ that she hates and despises me/ and Kay sleeps with her every night” (4826-38)

Kay's alleged crime is more heinous because his king entrusted him with the safety of the queen, whereas Meleagant was open from the start about his intentions. Through these suspicions, Kay and Guinevere have been impugned with dishonour, and both stand to lose their status in the community as well as their lives if they are proven guilty.

The body of the queen is the microcosm of the body politic and when her honour is slighted, the imprisoned Logrians that she represents are also implicated. Cohen notes that "Guenevere's body is not her own; she is a 'social marker' rather than 'personality,'"⁶² and, as such, she must prioritize her public role over her personal desires.⁶³ By abducting the queen and threatening her honour, Meleagant reveals the lack of physical and moral integrity that marks Arthur's kingdom. The community that should be centered around its own king and court is subject to the will of a rival lord. The alleged relationship of the queen with the seneschal and the corresponding lack of integrity in the community build on the theme of disorder and fragmentation introduced in the first scene. The citizens of Logres are scattered over a wide area outside the geographical borders of their territory and, until the arrival of Lancelot, lack even the patriotism that draws a people together and sets them apart from their neighbours. Their declaration of war on the people of Gorre is the first sign of their desire to restore the integrity of their kingdom. When he passes through, Lancelot encourages them to think as a community rather than as individuals and tells them, "Einz devroit li uns l'autre eidier" (2475).⁶⁴ He explains that by working together, the acts of each member reflect well on the community as a whole because the act of one reflects the intentions of the group:

La volantez autant me haite

⁶² Cohen, "Masoch / Lancelotism," 251.

⁶³ Ideally, there should be no difference between public and private roles. The two are reconciled in *La Chanson de Roland* and *Partonopeu de Blois*, but such reconciliation is not possible in the case of adulterous love. In this case, private desires can only be repressed in favour of appropriate public appearances.

⁶⁴ "We should help one another" (2475)

Con se chascuns m'avoit ja faite
 Molt grant enor et grant bonté
 Si soit an leu de fet conté. (2499-502)⁶⁵

At his urging, they begin to cooperate with one another and seek to promote communal goals rather than their personal advancement. However, the unification of the community is not complete until the hero can effect their physical reunion at Arthur's court and remove all threats to their honour. Indeed, "par sa pröesce/ soit la reïne revenue,/ et Kex et l'autre genz menué" (5328-30),⁶⁶ but his task is completed at the ordeal.

For the final battle, Lancelot himself returns to Arthur's court and for the first time, the entire court assembles together. Upon his arrival:

S'an font grant joie tuit ansanble,
 Et por lui festoier s'asanble
 La corz, qui lonc tans l'a bahé.
 N'i a nul tant de grant ahé
 Ou de petit, joie n'an face. (6833-37)⁶⁷

In contrast to the description of the court at the beginning of the text, this court is characterized by its unity of expression. All express joy at their champion's return and all gather together in celebration. The king welcomes Lancelot appropriately and honours him for his deeds (6876). When both knights are ready to fight, Arthur takes control as befits a ruler—he directs the combatants to the battleground (6994-95), leads the rest of his court to a comfortable viewing area (6999-7004), holds the spectators back (7023), and then the battle begins (7024). The ordeal also reveals a unity of purpose as the king and all his people agree that Meleagant must be resisted. The dissension that arose between Arthur and Gawain when the king passively allowed Kay to take the queen has no place in this final scene where the emphasis is on accord. Unlike

⁶⁵ "Your intentions make me rejoice/ as if each of you already gave to me/ very great honour and great bounty/ so we can celebrate your beautiful thought as much as your beautiful gesture." (2499-502)

⁶⁶ "through his prowess/ the queen was returned,/ and Kay and the other people of lower status" (5328-30)

the previous battle scenes, there are no voices begging for clemency on behalf of Meleagant. The knight himself “ne merci demander ne daingne” (7105)⁶⁸ and “n’i a celui/ qu’ilueques fust, qui ce veïst,/ cui nule pitiez an preïst” (7112-14).⁶⁹ Lancelot recognizes the “moment when *pitié* must give way to justice” and kills his foe outright.⁷⁰ Arthur leads the celebration that signals the strength of their community that now stands united against oppressors, the full restoration of their honour and integrity, and the elimination of their foe. By fighting for his king, Lancelot builds Arthur’s authority and restores his court to its rightful place as the sole locus of power that draws together the community. He also establishes his own honour so that there is no doubt of his preeminent status as king’s champion.

It is unfortunate that Godefroy is a less sophisticated writer than Chrétien for he fails to bring out the full implications of the final battle as the termination of the ordeal. Consistent with the depictions of previous battles, God’s influence is noted (6913, 6960, 6986) but he does not draw out the full impact of this battle as a legal trial. Fortunately, Chrétien’s “essential purpose was already accomplished” when he abandoned the work⁷¹ and the momentum he built up throughout the narrative carries through to the conclusion. Though Godefroy’s comment on the death of Meleagant is limited to, “Ja mes cist ne li fers ganche” (7110)⁷²—referring to the personal animosity between the two knights, the narrative as a whole points to the greater impact that his death has for the community. He stood as a threat to their physical and moral integrity, and that threat has been removed. The ambiguity that surrounded Lancelot’s role at the start of the romance is resolved in favour of his function as warrior-protector. From his anonymous

⁶⁷ “They made great joy all together/ and the court amassed for celebration in his honour/ for so long they had wished for his return./ There was no one, young or hold/ who did not give themselves over to joy” (6833-37)

⁶⁸ “does not deign to ask for mercy” (7105)

⁶⁹ “no spectator,/ witness to his death/ took any pity on him” (7112-14)

⁷⁰ Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., “The Conflict Between *Pitié* and *Largesse* in the *Chevalier de la Charrete*” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 95:1 (1994): 35.

⁷¹ Jean Frappier, *The Man and His Work*, 93.

appearance as the “Chevalier de la Charrete” (24)⁷³ arriving out of the wilderness in search of the queen, he is now named as “Lanceloz del Lac” (3676)⁷⁴ and clearly identified as a member of Arthur’s court. He devotes himself to the service of the community and, through his efforts, he ensures its prosperity. His role as Guinevere’s lover is relegated to second place, such that he does not even greet her when he returns from his imprisonment in the tower. She also hides her personal feelings until she can later greet him privately for fear of exposing “son fol cuer et son fol pansé” (6869).⁷⁵ So, the audience is left with a final image of Lancelot as the heroic knight fighting for justice on behalf of his people and the communal ethic that motivates his actions is indubitably endorsed.

⁷² “Never again would he trick him” (7110)

⁷³ “Knight of the Cart” (24)

⁷⁴ “Lancelot of the Lake” (3676)

⁷⁵ “her foolish heart and her foolish thought” (6869)

CHAPTER FIVE –Mutual Fidelity in *Robert le Diable*

One hundred and fifty years ago, Florent Richomme boldly claimed that no romance expressed “le caractère et l’esprit du moyen-âge” more strongly than *Robert le Diable*.¹ He cites its deeply religious character (by which he means its Christian message of salvation) as evidence for his claim. For Richomme, the medieval poet is preaching orthodox Christian doctrine and offering hope to his audience by demonstrating that “la grâce de la rédemption pouvait pénétrer un coeur de fer, purifier une âme noircie de crimes.”² Certainly, *Robert le Diable* is more explicitly marked by the trappings of Christianity than the other works discussed in this thesis—by confessing his sins and starting on the path towards redemption, Robert hopes to enter heaven. However, his primary concern is not the state of his soul, but his isolation from society, and his immediate goal is not salvation, but reconciliation and acceptance. Like the other romances, this narrative reflects a communal ethic that integrates Christian ritual without sacrificing its underlying emphasis on the common good. At first, Robert is a direct threat to others—violently and brutally harming any who come within his reach. He lashes out at the people who try to nurture him until he feels the pain of the ensuing

¹ “the character and the spirit of the middle ages” Florent Richomme, *Les Origines de Falaise Sous le Règne de Robert, Père de Guillaume-le-Conquérant, suivi d’une Étude sur la Légende de Robert-le-Diable* (Falaise: Imprimerie de Levavasseur, 1851) 57. *Robert le Diable: Roman d’Aventures*, ed. E. Løseth (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et C^e, 1903). All subsequent references will be to this edition and all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

loneliness. Then, he vows to take the necessary steps to earn a place in society. He discovers that at birth he was dedicated to the devil and, through his confession, he hopes to achieve reconciliation with God and enter his service. The good of the community as a whole is of paramount importance throughout the text and Robert's loyalty and dedication to society is tested during his confession. He must demonstrate repentance for his past misdeeds, a sincere desire to reform, and deference to God's will. Once he proves that he is completely loyal to God and the community, he is ready to take his place openly in the social order.

Robert's cultural milieu is characterized by order and unity of purpose. The social hierarchy is organized according to rank in a loose pyramid structure with God at the top and the fool at the bottom. Consistent with his portrayal in the other French romances, God is predominantly designated by his role as a king or lord over all creation³ who is actively involved with the community on earth. His role is analogous to that of a feudal lord: he transmits some of his authority to subordinates who act on his behalf

² "the grace of redemption could penetrate a heart of iron, purify a soul blackened by crimes" Richomme, 70.

Designations of God in Order of Frequency		
Appellative	English Translation	Line References
Nostre Signor	Our Lord	740, 908, 1722, 3160, 4195
Dameldieu	the Lord God	483, 600, 1766, 3455, 5001
le roi chelestre	the heavenly king	585, 2547, 4797, 5001
Nostre Sire	Our Lord	904, 1757, 4416
Creator	Creator	232, 1819, 3099
beaus sire	good lord	1714
le roi hautisme	the highest king	2150
li Sire	the Lord	2501
nostre pere	our father	3058
Sire Dieus	Lord God	4634
roi de gloire	king of glory	4819

while simultaneously taking a personal interest in the lives of all his subjects. Under God's governance, the Emperor and the Pope share equal status as rulers who rely upon one another to make decisions. When the Turks threaten Rome, "l'emperere est corant venus/ por l'apostoile" (3044-45)⁴ to decide upon a plan of action and, as they renew the search for the white knight, "le saint apostoile en apele/ l'emperere" (3600-01)⁵ so that everyone works in concert. The lay nobility is organized under the Emperor in two ranks. The upper rank is composed of men occupying posts associated with the Roman governmental system, "les senators et les legistres" (1534),⁶ and with the Germanic monarchy, "duc et conte/ et la baronie romaine" (2768-69),⁷ while the lower rank comprises the "chevaliers de la tere" (2771).⁸ The "clergié" (4087)⁹ is grouped under the Pope in a single rank, which suggests their social equality even as they are distinguished by professional expertise:

. . . abé et moigne,
 Prestre sacré, clerc et canoine,
 Archevesque, esvesque et hermite
 Et li sains reclus qui abite
 En la forest fors de la presse (4089-93)¹⁰

Even the hermits and the recluse (normally excluded from ecclesiastical hierarchies) participate in feasts and councils, which emphasizes their inclusion in this community.

⁴ "the Emperor came running/ for the Pope" (3044-45)

⁵ "the Emperor calls the holy Pope" (3600-01)

⁶ "senators and legists" (1534)

⁷ "dukes and counts/ and the Roman barony" (2768-69)

⁸ "knights of the land" (2771)

⁹ "clergy" (4087)

¹⁰ "abbots and monks/ sacred priests, clerks and canons,/ archbishops, bishops and hermits/ and the holy recluse who lives/ in the forest far from the crowds" (4089-93)

Though his position is far below that of other members of the court, Robert holds some status as the Emperor's "fool" (2805).¹¹ In her study, Enid Welsford demonstrates that

in France the royal fool, 'en titre d'office', had a definite official status which was not accorded to the jesters of other countries, and it is certainly true that he was granted livery and monthly wages and had a regular position in the household.¹²

When Robert acts the fool in the street, the crowds "li font grant mal et grant laidure" (943)¹³ but, as the court's "jongleur" (2756),¹⁴ he fills the role of entertainer and enjoys the protection of the Emperor. Note that with the exception of Robert, characters are denoted by their social position to emphasize their contribution to the community rather than by a personal name that would underscore their individuality.

When the community gathers together, their positions in the physical space indicate their rank—the Emperor and the Pope sit on a dais immediately overlooking the higher nobility and clergy, the knights sit further away, and the fool occupies his place with the dogs. However, the very fact that they assemble in one hall draws attention to their unity and more particularly, the cohesiveness of lay and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Bouchard remarks that an emergent theme in recent works is "the impossibility of speaking of 'the' medieval church, as though it were a single, unchanging, monolithic entity to contrast with 'the' laity."¹⁵ She notes that communities composed of both lay people and clerics might own property together or share jurisdiction in a certain area:

¹¹ "fool" (2805)

¹² Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966) 120.

¹³ "hurt and injure him" (943)

¹⁴ "jongleur" (2756)

¹⁵ Bouchard, "Community," 1036. See, Constance B. Bouchard, *Sword, Miter and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), Constance B. Bouchard, *Holy*

the medieval lay world and the ecclesiastical world—especially the world within the cloister, which ironically was intended to be the most separate from secular concerns—should be seen not as discrete entities but as parts of the same community.¹⁶

The *Chanson de Roland* suggests a similar unity in its portrayal of Archbishop Turpin who is both a warrior and a priest, but the theme is more fully developed in *Robert le Diable*. Rome has two separate heads of state in the persons of the Emperor and the Pope—each based on a different mode of government and each with its own chain of command. However, the two work together harmoniously and many of the differences cemented in later centuries between secular and religious communities are non-existent. As a military commander, the Emperor keeps court in “le palais” (962)¹⁷ where he is primarily concerned with managing his human resources to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom. Like other nobles depicted in romance, he is well-endowed “de cortoisie et de proeche/ et de valor et de largeche” (969-70)¹⁸—all qualities that make him an effective leader. In addition, the Emperor enjoys a personal relationship with God that is not mediated by a priestly caste. On numerous occasions, he reassures his subjects that “s’il ont en Deiu boine creanche,/ encor leur aidera le Sire” (2499-500).¹⁹ Though the Pope is present before they go out to battle, the Emperor commends his people to God and leaves them in the care of the divine (1705-6). David Nicholas notes the same mingling of

Entrepreneurs: Cistercians, Knights, and Economic Exchange in Twelfth Century Burgundy (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1988), Barbara H. Rosenwein, Thomas Head, and Sharon Farmer, “Monks and Their Enemies: A Comparative Approach,” *Speculum* 66 (1991): 764-96, and Barbara H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny’s Property, 909-1049* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989).

¹⁶ Bouchard, “Community,” 1046.

¹⁷ “the palace” (962)

¹⁸ “with courtesy and with prowess/ and with valour and with largesse” (969-70)

¹⁹ “if they have firm faith in God/ the Lord will once again help them” (2499-500)

priestly and martial duties in pictorial representations where German emperors are “sometimes portrayed in contemporary drawings as part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy” in keeping with the belief that they were priests through anointment.²⁰ Alongside the Emperor, the Pope rules from St. John Lateran (511) where he dispenses justice (495) and says mass every day in accordance with God’s command (512-20). He is largely occupied with upholding ecclesiastical law which covered a wide range of possible offenses and grievances. In the decretal *Novit Ille*, directed at the archbishops and bishops of France around the same time as *Robert le Diable* was written, Pope Innocent III clarified the extent of his jurisdiction by asserting that he had not “the right to judge in feudal (or state) matters but in ‘matters of sin.’”²¹ Since almost any act can be considered a matter of sin, the authority of the pope and regional governments often overlapped. In this romance, the two rulers differ in leadership roles rather than in jurisdiction. While the Emperor is noted for his bravery and generosity, the Pope is described as “li glorieus et li saintismes” (4086)²² as befits a spiritual leader. The former leads men into battle, while the latter limits his participation to decision-making during the planning stages.

The interdependence displayed by the Emperor and the Pope extends into the community so that relationships are typically marked by cooperation and mutual reliance; regardless of differences in rank, all members of the community rely on each other for support and count on one another to act in the best interests of the group. When they can

²⁰ David Nicholas, *The Evolution of the Medieval World: Society, Government and Thought in Europe, 312-1500* (London: Longman, 1992) 184.

²¹ Jane Sayers, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe 1198-1216* (London: Longman, 1994) 44.

²² “the glorious and the most holy” (4086)

no longer tolerate Robert's destructive behaviour, the local inhabitants approach the boy's parents to demand that he be stopped:

Tant fait Robers, que a son pere
Et a la duçoisse sa mere
En font de toutes pars clamor. (229-31)²³

There begins a series of negotiations to decide upon an appropriate course of action to defend their community against further attacks. The duke proposes that his son be killed (233) while the duchess pleads mercy (235), but they work towards a compromise and ultimately decide to make Robert a knight in the hopes that his aggression will be channeled into nobler pursuits. In addition, his new profession will temporarily take him out of the neighbourhood as he journeys to other areas to participate in tournaments (317-19), thus satisfying the immediate demands of the local population. Like local rulers, "kings and princes could rule successfully only if they had the support of their magnates,"²⁴ and so, before making any major decisions, the Emperor not only consults with the Pope, but "a tous quiert conseil et demande" (1536).²⁵ As a group, the community decides which tactics to adopt in their defense against the Turks and the best position to take with the renegade seneschal. God's presence at their councils is understood though he is not visibly present and the priests do not presume to speak on his behalf. However, the assembled barons agree that they may rely upon God's support because he has helped them on other occasions in return for their devotion:

S'il ont en Dieu boine creanche,

²³ "Robert did so much, that to his father/ and to the duchess his mother/ clamour came from everywhere" (229-31)

²⁴ Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992) 313.

²⁵ "seeks counsel and asks questions with everyone" (1536)

**Encor leur aidera li Sire
Les mescreans a desconfire. (2500-02)²⁶**

Not even Robert acts in isolation (though his first alliances are misplaced)—in his early years, he commits atrocities in collaboration with a band of thieves (210-11) and, during his penance, he waits until he has the permission of God’s messenger before he dons the white armor (1802, 2576, 3177).

Prior to his conversion, Robert defies the values of order, unity, and interdependence esteemed by his community by indiscriminately lashing out against any who cross his path. Even as an infant, he refuses to accept his role in society and cruelly prevents others from fulfilling their roles by either maiming or killing them. When his nurses give him suck, he bites their nipples until they fear to offer him their breasts:

**Les noriches cel aversier
Redoutent tant a alaitier
.....
Mout le redoutent, qu’il mordoit (109-13)²⁷**

They initially try to complete their task by improvising a drinking horn, but they soon run away from him altogether in fear of his temper. Robert refuses to accept the natural relationship that binds a wet-nurse with her charge and, in so doing, jeopardizes his very life when he drives his nurses away. As he grows, his behaviour pushes everyone away from the household. Along with his nurses, the “baiseles” (128),²⁸ “chevaliers” (132),²⁹

²⁶ “If they have good faith in God/ the Lord will help them again/ to vanquish the infidels” (2500-02)

²⁷ “The nurses this devil/ fear too much to give him suck// Greatly they fear him, that he will bite” (109-13)

²⁸ “servant girls” (128)

²⁹ “knights” (132)

“clers” (140),³⁰ every “prestre” (147),³¹ and any “preudome” (193)³² avoid the Duke’s court. Without any apparent reason other than a lust for destruction, Robert attacks the rich and the poor, the ugly and the beautiful: “n’en trovast nul qu’il ne tuast/ u nel ferist u nel navrast” (163-64).³³ He is given a second chance to participate in the social order when he is dubbed a knight. His mother is confident that once Robert is made a knight and embraces adulthood, he will leave behind his old habits:

Adont le verés [vous] retraire
 Assés tost de ces[t] grant malisse:
 Tout en laira son malvais visse,
 Sa cruauté et ses mesfais
 Puis qu’il sera chevaliers fais. (240-44)³⁴

The later French manuscript, Fr. ms. 24405, fols. 2-25, Bibl. Nationale, Paris, offers an expanded version of this scene that clarifies the Duchess’s intent. The dubbing ceremony in itself does not transform the young rascal into a nobler entity as Kaeuper suggests.³⁵ Rather, the Duchess hopes that by accepting the honour, Robert is signifying his readiness to leave behind his childhood follies and take his place as a responsible adult in the community. At first, her hopes appear to be well-founded since Robert leaves the band of thieves to accept his promotion and departs for a tournament in the company “de chevaliers et d’autre gent” (279).³⁶ However, his brief alliance with the knightly class soon dissipates as he quickly alienates his new companions with

³⁰ “clerks” (140)

³¹ “priest” (147)

³² “worthy man” (193)

³³ “he did not find anyone who he did not kill/ or strike or wound” (163-64)

³⁴ “Then you will see him give up/ very quickly this great malice/ all in leaving his bad vices,/ his cruelty and his misdeeds/ once he is made a knight” (240-44)

³⁵ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 267.

³⁶ “of knights and other men” (279)

antagonistic behaviour. Rather than fulfilling his role in society, developing appropriate relationships, and contributing to the common good, Robert isolates himself from the people around him until he finds that he is all alone. People run away when he approaches (363), he suspects that God hates him (392), and his own mother fears for her life in his presence (406). His independence is a direct threat to society and perhaps less obviously, a threat to himself. He imperils his life by angering the community and endangers his soul by rejecting God's authority.

Robert's defiance and deliberate isolation from society are attributed to the same diabolical influence that brought about his birth. He is called a "maléf" (105)³⁷ and an "aversier" (109)³⁸ from the very beginning, and the atrocities he commits are so heinous that they can only be ascribed to the devil's influence. Robert himself does not understand the reasons behind his actions and longs for human companionship even as he pushes it away. He is thrilled when his father calls him out of exile, "forment s'en esjoit" (254),³⁹ and looks forward to being a knight. His father stipulates that "il le fera chevalier,/ se son grant mal voloit laisser" (261-62)⁴⁰ and Robert "trés bien li otria" (263).⁴¹ However, he is unable to live up to his good intentions. When he arrives at a neighbouring court to visit his mother, he is surprised that everyone has fled and no one comes to take care of his horse: "Robers pense profondement,/ meruelle soi mout

³⁷ "devil" (105)

³⁸ "adversary" (109)

³⁹ "he greatly rejoices" (254)

⁴⁰ "he will make him a knight,/ if he wishes to leave behind his great evil" (261-62)

⁴¹ "readily agrees with him" (263)

urement/ que chou est et de coi li vient” (369-71).⁴² His sudden realization that his actions have brought him to this point is all the more startling because he had apparently not intended to push everyone away. He begins to suspect that “cele mesestanche/ li soit venue de naissanche” (383-84)⁴³ and so asks his mother why he is “si plains de male aventure” (415).⁴⁴ The dichotomy between his natural inclinations and his diabolical compulsions suggests that goodness is inherent to human nature and evil comes from without. The Duchess granted the devil power over her son, but he is still human and his inborn desire for acceptance ultimately proves stronger. To be good is to be true to one’s ordained role in the community and, with his determination to offer a full confession, Robert takes the first step in fulfilling “sa destinée” (548).⁴⁵

Robert’s confession is a pivotal moment in the text—it is the catalyst that allows him to return to society as well as the test of his resolve. In confessing his crimes, the young knight must acknowledge his weaknesses and strive to embody the values he had hitherto scorned: deference and loyalty. The scene depicts all the traditional aspects of a formal confession including the presence of a spiritual advisor, admission of sin, repentance, and the assignation of penance. The Council of Limoges in 1031 condemned the practice of entering upon a pilgrimage to confess directly to the Pope and the twenty-first canon of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 reaffirmed that penitents may only be

⁴² “Robert thinks deeply/ marvels to himself most strongly/ of what happens and why it comes to him” (369-71)

⁴³ “this unfortunate state/ came to him at birth” (383-84)

⁴⁴ “so full of bad deeds” (415)

⁴⁵ “his destiny” (548)

absolved through their own priest.⁴⁶ Irregardless, it was common practice for penitents to seek absolution from anyone they considered holy. *Robert le Diable* insists on the inclusiveness of the religious community and the social equality of all religious by endowing a recluse with the *cura animarum*, the care of souls. Paul Bretel notes a number of examples in romance where contemplatives are portrayed with “des attributions que l’Eglise réserve à sa hiérarchie; ils légitiment enfin cette transgression en lui donnant la caution du pape, voire de Dieu lui-même.”⁴⁷ The evidence he has gathered suggests that among the general population, the pope and those religious who withdrew from worldly affairs were deemed to have a closer relationship with God than the average priest. Therefore, it is to Robert’s credit that he chooses to confess “a l’apostoille . . . / isnelepas sans plus attendre” (461)⁴⁸ as he is eager to accept penance for his sins and wishes to enter God’s service as soon as possible. There is no question regarding Robert’s guilt and he fully confesses his crimes to both the Pope and the Hermit, beginning with a general admission that he is “li plus pechieres” (583),⁴⁹ then providing a full statement of his identity including his name and the circumstances of his birth and, lastly, revealing his crimes in more detail: “lors li conte, dès la rachine/ dusqu’en la cime, ses mesfais” (604-5).⁵⁰ He demonstrates sincere repentance by cutting off his hair (467), removing the accoutrements of knighthood (465-66), donning a simple robe (475), and

⁴⁶ “Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215,” *English Historical Documents 1189-1327*, 3, ed. and trans. Harry Rothwell (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1975) 654-55.

⁴⁷ “the attributes that the Church reserves for its hierarchy; in short they legitimize this transgression in giving it the backing of the pope, indeed of God himself.” Paul Bretel, “Des Péchés Réservés: Droit Canonique et Pratique Littéraire,” *Et C’est la Fin Pour Quoy Sommes Ensemble*, 1 (Paris: Editions Champion, 1993) 279.

⁴⁸ “to the Pope . . . / rapidly without further delay” (461)

⁴⁹ “the worst sinner” (583)

shedding tears whenever he contemplates his life of sin (447, 609, 623, 753, 786, 1267), so his external appearance reflects his inward feelings of contrition. Accordingly, he accepts penance (888-89), receives absolution (911) and, by the end of the text, he has been fully redeemed (4835-39).

Just as Partonopeu's confession questioned his loyalty to God, so Robert's confession points to the same underlying error, "desloiautés" (618).⁵¹ Robert is guilty of acting in the service of the devil rather than in God's service. As a result, his penance examines his resolve to change his ways, and allows him to transfer his allegiance to his rightful lord and the community of the just. Penance should not be considered punishment, but a task voluntarily undertaken to atone for past wrongdoing and to effect reconciliation with those who were wronged. Around 1170, master theologian Peter of Poitiers set forth his understanding of penance in terms of a three-part structure:

quando aliquis peccat in proximum suum mortali peccato, tres personas offendit, Deum, Ecclesiam, proximum. . . . Si ergo Deo velit satisfacere, oportet ut graviter coneratur et poeniteat de peccato suo. . . . Deinde oportet ut satisfaciatur Ecclesiae confitendo peccatum et poenitentiam temporalem agendo. Demum oportet ut satisfaciatur proximo in quem peccavit.⁵²

Robert's penance is organized in a similar fashion as he must make peace with God, then the Church and, lastly, the lay community. In his own mind, Robert's first concern is to

⁵⁰ "then he recounted to him, from the root/ until the summit, his misdeeds"

⁵¹ "disloyalty" (618)

⁵² "when someone sins against his neighbour in mortal sin, he offends three persons: God, the church, and neighbour. . . . Therefore, if he wishes to make satisfaction to God, he should be deeply contrite and do penance for his sin Then he shall make satisfaction to the Church by confessing his sin and doing temporal penance. Finally, he shall make satisfaction to the neighbour he sinned against." (trans. Mary Mansfield) Peter of Poitiers, *Sententiarum libri quinque*, III. 16, PL 211: 1077, qtd. in Mary Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 41.

heal his relationship with Christ, for in spite of the evil he has done, he hopes that he “encor peut estre Dieu amis” (392)⁵³ and “mout couvoite/ venir a Dieu, s’il le peut faire/ por travail et por paine traire” (697-700).⁵⁴ The Pope too urges Robert first to reconcile himself with God and advises him to seek penance from a local recluse because “cel saint home glorious” (661)⁵⁵ has a closer relationship with the divine:

Il n’a el mont plus saint hermite,
Car n’est jors qu’en son abitacle
Ne fache Dieus por lui miracle,
Si que sovent i a grant presse. (656-59)⁵⁶

The holy man communicates with God directly via prayer and acts as an intermediary between God and Robert to achieve the reconciliation of the two. He assigns penance in direct accord with the divine will and, upon Robert’s earnest avowals that he will suffer his privations gratefully, the Hermit accepts him wholly into God’s service:

Il s’est couchiés tous estendus;
A Nostre Seignour s’estendus
Del tout, que diables nel griet.
Et l’ermite, eins qu’il se liet,
L’a si asaut de ses pechiés
C’onques puis n’en fu entiechiés,
Ne diables n’ot en lui part. (907-13)⁵⁷

⁵³ “once again might be God’s friend” (392)

⁵⁴ “greatly desires/ to come to God, if he can do it/ by working and by suffering” (697-700)

⁵⁵ “this saintly, glorious man” (661)

⁵⁶ “There is not in the world a more saintly hermit/ for he spends all his days in his cell/ and God makes miracles for him/ so well that often there is a great crowd” (656-59). By virtue of his solitary devotion, the Hermit has reached a level of intimacy with God that the Pope is unable to attain because his days are filled with more worldly concerns as the head of the Church. However, both men are equally valued for their roles and work together according to their different strengths to achieve what is best for their community.

⁵⁷ “He lay down stretched to his full length/ to Our Lord he gave himself/ completely, that the devil has no power./ And the Hermit, before he bound him [to God’s service],/ thus absolved him of his sins/ that never again would he be provoked,/ the devil does not have any part of him.” (907-13)

As in the other romances, this passage emphasizes that the relationship between humanity and God is akin to that of a man and his lord. Here, God accepts Robert into his service in a rite reminiscent of the feudal ritual of homage. The knight lies prostrate on the ground in an external show of his submission as Roland did just before death when he fully transferred his allegiance from Charlemagne to God. With this sign of his devotion, Robert gives himself to “Nostre Seignour” and formally revokes his allegiance to the devil. The Hermit binds him to God’s service with the term “lier” that means to bind by obligation or oath.⁵⁸ The ritual ends with absolution and the start of his penance. Robert has made his peace with God and with the Church who ratifies God’s decision, but must stand apart from the community on earth until the term of his penance is complete.

The conditions of his atonement diminish his humanity so that he stands on the fringes of society. Until released by the Hermit, Robert agrees to pretend insanity to the point where crowds chase him through the streets with clubs, “vous vauront il tout huer,/ ferir et enpaindre et bouter” (855-56).⁵⁹ He is not allowed to speak “por nul besoing sage ne fole” (866)⁶⁰ and may eat only those scraps that have first been thrown to the dogs. The first two conditions deny him the powers of reason and speech that separate humans from animals. The last condition places him firmly among the dogs where he fights for every meal and a place to sleep. After having considered himself above the dictates of society for so long, Robert must now completely suppress his individuality and earn a place in the community by starting at the bottom. At first, he is entirely excluded from

⁵⁸ “lier, loier” *Dictionnaire de l’ancien français: le Moyen Age*, ed. Algirdas Julien Greimas (Paris: Larousse, 1997)

⁵⁹ “they will want to all shout at you,/ beat and violently push and kick you” (855-56)

⁶⁰ “for any reason wise or foolish” (866)

human contact for, as the Hermit predicted, “de toutes pars est venue/ por lui arochier et tuer” (954-55).⁶¹ Beaten beyond recognition, emaciated by constant hunger, and threatened by the maddened crowd, Robert is close to death yet his resolve never falters and so, from this point, he is allowed to make a gradual return to society. He first seeks refuge in the Emperor’s court where his life becomes easier. The Emperor finds him amusing and grants him a place as court fool, throwing “pain blanc” (1130)⁶² to the dogs so that Robert can eat well and putting out “feure, estrain et paile” (1207)⁶³ so that he can sleep comfortably. During the day, he subjects himself to the wrath of the crowds, but now he is protected (to some extent) by the beneficence of the Emperor. Still, he feels socially isolated because

N'onques hom son non ne savoit
 Ne de lui savoir ne pooit
 Dont il soit de quel païs;
 Tout quident qu'il soit faus naïs. (1355-58)⁶⁴

Of all his privations, Robert seems to suffer most from being a stranger in Rome—unable to reveal his name or place of birth, he undergoes a virtual loss of identity. He endures this penance for ten years (1365) before he is granted another reprieve. When the Turks attack Rome, God gives him leave via messenger to don armour and protect the city (albeit incognito). On three occasions, Robert is allowed to step outside his role as fool and act more in accordance with his true nature. Susan Crane suggests that

⁶¹ “people came from everywhere/ to root him out and kill him” (954-55)

⁶² “white bread” (1130)

⁶³ “fodder, wheat stalks and straw”

⁶⁴ “no man knows his name/ nor of him could know/ from which country he comes/ all believe that he is a stupid fool” (1355-58)

chivalric incognito, as a motif of romance and as a historical practice, amounts to a peculiar kind of self-presentation, a self-dramatization that invites rather than resists public scrutiny.⁶⁵

Indeed, though Robert is careful to maintain the terms of his agreement and works hard to conceal his identity, he draws attention to himself disguised as a knight that he never attracted while in full view as a fool. When he plays the fool, he is amusing and inconsequential but, as a knight, he challenges others to unravel the secrets of his identity and may enjoy the attendant recognition of his worth. As he completes each step of his penance, Robert proves his fidelity and deference to his lord God and, simultaneously, effects his gradual reintegration into society. From a fool being chased in the streets, Robert becomes the acknowledged saviour of Rome and earns his rightful place in the community.

His penance teaches him to value others before himself. In his youth he was a predator interested in fulfilling his own appetite for destruction with little thought for the harm he was doing to others. His brutality empties his father's court and threatens the stability of the entire realm but, once he accepts God's penance, he can no longer take what he wants through force. Instead, he must rely upon the kindness of others for food, shelter, and quality of life. Because of the Emperor's benevolence, Robert comes to consider this court as home and identify with the people of Rome so that their problems become his own. When the Turks threaten the city, Robert joins the community in voicing his worry:

⁶⁵ Susan Crane, "Knights in Disguise: Identity and Incognito in Fourteenth-Century Chivalry," *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997). 63.

En la sale l'enpereor
 A tel esmai et tel freor
 Que nus n'i jue ne n'i chante.
 Robert, qui sos les degrés hante,
 A plus grant deul et plus grant ire
 Que je ne puis conter ne dire
 Por l'enpereor de boin aire,
 Que il voit si [trés] grant doel faire
 Entre sa maisnie privée. (1635-43)⁶⁶

He both echoes and amplifies the suffering felt by the Emperor and the entire court.

Finally, Robert has learned to act as a knight should—in support of his king and in defense of his kingdom. However, even in his great desire to help, he does not forget that he owes his first allegiance to God and must obey his commandments. So, he begs his lord God to allow him to act, “il prie que il secore/ l'enpereor en la bataille” (1754-55),⁶⁷ and does not sally forth until he receives the permission he seeks. Unlike before when his desire to be a good knight conflicted with his diabolical compulsion to wreak destruction, his natural feelings are now in line with the good deeds he is instructed to perform. In serving God, he is being true to his human nature. Ironically, the fact that he is a stranger would suggest that he is the least likely to care about the Turk's attack, yet his emotional suffering on behalf of the Emperor is greater than that of anyone else. Furthermore, his wretched appearance and low social position suggest that he is the least likely person to defend Rome, yet he proves their greatest asset. The opposite was true in his youth when his appearance as the son of nobility and “biaus a desmesure” (185)⁶⁸ hid

⁶⁶ “In the hall the Emperor/ had such discouragement and such fright/ that no one neither plays nor sings./ Robert, who resides under the stairs,/ has the greatest pain and the greatest anger/ that I cannot recount or say/ for the debonair Emperor,/ who he sees suffering so much/ within his private household.” (1635-43)

⁶⁷ “he prays that he may help/ the Emperor in the battle” (1754-55)

⁶⁸ “extremely beautiful” (185)

an evil nature. Like Lancelot, he erases the shame of his earlier conduct with noble and valiant deeds while in disguise so that when his identity is finally exposed, he is welcomed by the community. Upon the completion of his penance, his true nature is revealed so that appearances and reality are united. The entire court rejoices and forgives him unreservedly for his sins and, with his full reconciliation with the lay community, his penance is truly complete.

Jean Charles Payen states the obvious when he notes that the twelfth-century *Robert le Diable* “est l’histoire d’une rédemption.”⁶⁹ By the end, the hero is called “Saint Robert” (5078) and admired for his holiness where he was once despised for his devilry. However, we should be wary of reading this romance in terms of orthodox Christian doctrine that emphasizes the purity of the soul and the sinner’s personal spiritual growth. Robert’s growth is intrinsically connected to his relationship with the community (including both the laity and the clergy). In spite of the heinous nature of his acts, they are rooted in a simple error—he gave his loyalty to the devil rather than to his rightful lord God. Loyalty has been a central theme in all the texts thus far under discussion. Roland was praised for his devotion to his king, compatriots, and God, whereas Ganelon was found guilty of treason. Partonopeu was accused of transferring his allegiance from God to a demon, and was then found guilty of breaking faith with his lover. Tristan and Yseut were tried for infidelity, but exonerated by public opinion and through God’s influence at the ordeal. Lancelot struggles (and ultimately succeeds) to be loyal to both his king and his queen. These romances both reflect and reinforce the merit of loyalty

within the social milieu of twelfth-century France. The society depicted in *Robert le Diable* is like those portrayed in other romances, founded upon the values of order, unity, and interdependence that point to the underlying communal ethic. Again and again we see the same message, the welfare of the community is more important than any one individual. Loyalty puts this ethic into practice by binding people together through ties of obligation, duty, and love.⁷⁰ Through devotion to one another, individuals strengthen the community for the good of all.

This dissertation began by examining the ethic that motivates action in the *Chanson de Roland* and discovered that it is based on the primacy of the community. In an epic that has been traditionally read as one of the first expressions of French nationalism, this finding is in keeping with the values of patriotism normally associated with the text. It is more surprising to find the same ethic at work in the early romances and, yet, each of the four romances builds a consistent picture of a society governed by a desire to defend and advance the community. Their heroes are assessed according to their devotion to the common good and their ability to protect the integrity of the group. Relationships between God, the king, the hero, and other members of the community are characterized by mutual support and fidelity, so the hero always stands within a social network. These findings suggest that twelfth-century European society valued interdependence and individuals were motivated to find ways in which they might contribute to the greater good. The next section of this project will investigate the ways

⁶⁹ "is a story of a redemption" Jean Charles Payen, *Le Motif du Repentir dans la Littérature Française Médiévale* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1968) 170.

the translators of these romances adapted them to fit a more modern cultural climate based on the individual.

⁷⁰ According to Jaeger, love should be seen as “a social obligation intended to create harmony in the community.” *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999) 31.

CHAPTER SIX – Law and Conscience in *Partonope of Blois*

Though three centuries stand between its inception in France and subsequent rendering into Middle English, *Partonope de Blois* is noteworthy for its faithful adherence to the original design.¹ No formal search for the source manuscript of the English translation has yet been undertaken, but a comparison of the twelfth-century ms. 113, Burgerbibliothek, Bern, as edited by Gildea and the fifteenth-century Add. ms. 35 288, British Lib., London, as edited by Bodtker reveals startling similarity that invites comparison between the two texts. Much of the English romance is a close rendering of the “ffrenshe boke” (1299), which suggests that the later redactor worked directly from an early source. Their similarity also makes the differences between the two versions all the more striking. The diverse ways in which the English translator has transformed the text point to a shift in the underlying ethic. The community depicted in twelfth-century epic and romance functions as an organic whole wherein God, king, queen, priest, and knight all serve the greater good and each is valued for his contribution. Virtuous action is directly connected to its practical outcome and defined according to its positive impact on the community. The hero in particular is expected to demonstrate proactive commitment to serving the needs of the group. By the fifteenth century, the community has been de-centered, so that it no longer provides the focal point for action, and

redefined, to reflect the widening gap between social strata. God is now above and beyond the community on earth. The increased distance between humanity and the divine makes God simultaneously more inscrutable and more authoritative. This perception of God results in a sharp divide between physical and spiritual modes of being, with the denigration of the former and the idealization of the latter. The law plays a more prominent role in this world as a construct of the divine will that demands obedience because it reflects a higher purpose (one that may be incomprehensible to those outside the halls of power). No longer motivated by mutual loyalty and a shared sense of honour, characters are valued for their adherence to the law. These changes are primarily reflected in Partonope's characterization as a champion and in the revised interpretation of the challenges he faces at the trial by ordeal and the confession. From a question of the hero's devotion to his community, the English Partonope must demonstrate obedience to ideals enshrined in law.

A close comparison of the descriptive passages that so intimately examine the physical and moral characteristics of Partonopeu in the early manuscript² with the equivalent passages in the later manuscript demonstrates a general progression from unity towards fragmentation. The twelfth-century romance assumes a homogeneous audience that shares the values endorsed by the narrative and the poet does not hesitate to endow his hero with specific virtues that clearly point to a world-view based on the primacy of the community. Each description of the central protagonist highlights virtues that mark

¹ *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. A. Trampe Bødtker (London: EETS, 1912). All subsequent references will be to Bødtker's text.

² These passages are discussed above in Chapter Two and correspond to the following line numbers in Gildea's edition: 535-82, 1497-1510, 2295-2328, 2389-95, 4875-4921, 9966-92, & 10215-246.

his contribution to society as a nobleman, a leader, and a subordinate. The nobility of the hero's name and physical appearance reflect the nobility of his character so that there is harmony between his external and internal attributes. This natural unity of expression between the poet and his audience, the hero and his culture, and outer and inner perfection of the hero is unmatched in the English text. The fifteenth-century narrative questions the automatic assumption of unity that formed the basis of earlier thought and insists on approaching each factor as a separate unit that may or may not be co-related. This concept not only influences characterization, but destabilizes the relationship between the later redactor and his audience so that he can no longer be certain that they share the same values. It is, however, clear that in place of an ethic based on the unity of the community, we see the emergence of an ethic that supports the separateness of the individual.

Of the 202 lines devoted to describing the young hero in the earlier version, only 133 remain³ though the English text as a whole is about 11% longer.⁴ The passages have been shorn of the details that brought Partonopeu to life and lent verisimilitude to his personality. His introduction in each narrative illustrates their divergent approaches to characterization. Both state the young man's age, thus positioning him at the pivotal moment between youth and manhood, and both take note of his filial relationship with the king, which places him firmly within the social hierarchy. The twelfth-century narrative launches into a detailed description of Partonopeu's virtues and specifies that he

³ These may be found at lines 503-21, 1608-24, 1838-60, 2294-3028, 11624-37, & 11842-72.

⁴ Compare 10856 lines in ms. 113, Burgerbibliothek, Bern, to 12195 lines in the English.

is “pros et coragos/ et dols et humles et hontos,/ larges et frans et envoisiés” (545-7).⁵

This list is followed by a lengthy enumeration of his physical traits so that the audience now has a full picture of his maturity, social position, moral strengths, and appearance.

The fifteenth-century romance offers a much more vague depiction of the hero:

He was so gentyll of worde and dede
That thorowe all Fraunce, where þat he yede,
Off hys worshyppe men myghte here.
For off hys age he had no pere. (516-19)

This passage describes Partonope as a superlative individual who is famous for his nobility of “worde and dede” and, as such, it could be describing any medieval hero.

There are no detailed references to his appearance and more specific information about his merits is left to the imagination. The impulse towards generalization continues throughout the romance as sweeping expressions of his worthiness replace more detailed descriptions. Those few virtues that are explicitly noted are entangled with the demands of the plot so that they cannot be overlooked without compromising the integrity of the story. Partonope’s generosity, for example, draws men to follow him so he can come to the aid of the king (3003-7), and his prowess at the tournament is also cause for comment (11858-65). By speaking in generalities, the English redactor allows more room for his audience to draw their own conclusions regarding the hero’s attributes. He implicitly honours their individuality by granting them the freedom to decide for themselves why “thorowe all Fraunce . . . / off hys worshyppe men myghte here” (517-18).

⁵ “gallant and courageous,/ and sweet and humble and honourable,/ generous and giving and joyful” (545-7)

While most of the character traits noted in the French text are overlooked in the English, one is given especial emphasis—lineage. King Anfors' description of Partonope at the tournament concentrates almost exclusively on his social standing and familial connections. He is "fre" (11628) and "gentill" (11628), terms that distinguish him as noble born.⁶ The young knight's position as cousin to "þe kyng of Fraunce" (11631) that Melior also notes as a strong point in his favour (1612) indicates that he was "broughte forþe and borne of hey degre" (1613). He would thus make a suitable match for the daughter of an emperor. As in the earlier text, Partonope's lineage is traced back to Troy. He is "off Ectorys blode" (1841), which Melior claims as a very attractive quality in a suitor: "Þys was on cause, my dere herte, þat I/ Chesse yowe to be my lorde and eke my loue" (1846-47). Every description of the hero carefully notes his "naturall lynage" (11855) and almost as often, his descent from the "worthey Ector of Troye" (3010). However, the original assumption that Partonope had inherited Hector's heroism has been modified slightly to suggest that such inheritance is not inevitable. Instead, Partonope must try to live up to the example of his ancestor so that he may be "lekened" (3010) to the Trojan hero. David Burnley notes that the assumed connection between nobility of birth and nobility of character had always been problematic in the moral philosophical tradition. He suggests that by the later medieval period, the "emphasis fell upon the individual soul independent of circumstances of birth."⁷ This change of tone may be expressed by the notion that "nobility *ought to be* rather than necessarily *is* the property

⁶ "fre" and "gentil." *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1952).

⁷ David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (London: Longman, 1998) 94.

of the courtier and aristocrat.”⁸ However, if strength of character is no longer transmitted through the bloodline, an illustrious heritage still confers the authority of rank. Richard Britnell credits the automatic deference accorded to kings for such stability as England possessed between 1471 and 1529:

One powerful claim to obedience, deeply rooted in traditional values, was ancestry. Kings had this in common with their leading subjects, whose titles to status and property were characteristically founded on inheritance from their forebears. But the royal family surpassed all, and a strong genealogical sense was inseparable from royal status, since despite all the disputes over the royal succession that had disturbed fifteenth-century politics, the hallowed status of royal blood remained uncompromised.⁹

As the king’s cousin and an count in his own right, Partonope has inherited a position of unquestionable authority and this fact is underscored with each reminder of his ancestry and birthright. Though nobility of birth and character are no longer inevitably aligned, he is nevertheless still challenged to live up to the ideals that accompany his rank.

In the twelfth-century narrative, beauty is aligned with lineage as an outward sign of virtue so that the perfection of Partonopeu’s physical appearance identifies him to others as a righteous man. Every description of the hero is headed by a reference to his attractiveness, which is then backed by detailed examples of his moral rectitude. His character thus functions as a cohesive whole with external signifiers and internal signified in agreement. Conversely, in the fifteenth-century romance, physical appearances no longer reflect virtue as there is an increasing division between internal and external attributes. Beauty sparks a positive emotional response that may be expressed as love or

⁸ Burnley, 94.

⁹ Richard Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?: England, 1471-1529* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 50.

compassion in the viewer, but does not imply a corollary in the moral worth of the subject. Uraque for example is described as “one off the ffayreste/ that was on lyue, and þer-to þe goodelyste” (6184-85): her beauty and her goodness are differentiated by the term “þer-to” which means “additionally” or “besides.” Because of the differing merits attributed to physical appearance, it is a much less prominent factor in descriptions of the later Partonopeu. Most of the descriptions omit references to his appearance altogether. The conflicting attitudes towards beauty in the two texts may be illustrated by comparing their divergent interpretations of the discovery scene when Melior’s ladies-in-waiting find her in bed with Partonopeu. In the earlier narrative, the women reproach their mistress until they come closer and see the great beauty of her lover. Each aspect of his appearance is admired from his “front large, blanc et plain” (4883)¹⁰ to his “bras lons” (4893)¹¹ until they conclude, “bele est et bel se contient” (4899).¹² Because he is so handsome, they are convinced of his good character and withdraw their censure. The later manuscript sets up the same situation—when they first notice the man in Melior’s bed, “alle hur wymmen hur fowle gan blame” (6123). However, instead of admiring Partonope who is dismissed as a “lewed knaue” (6132), the women admire their mistress:

She had bewte and þat passyngely.
 Hur bewte made here malencoly to sece,
 So þat þer wes non of þat prece,
 That þey ne were in here herte sory
 That they hadde repreuyd so here lady. (6151-55)

¹⁰ “large forehead, white and smooth” (4883)

¹¹ “long arms” (4893)

¹² “beautiful he is and beauty he contains” (4899)

Her beauty awakens their love and compassion so that they regret their admonition. As beauty has lost its role as a signifier of goodness, it can no longer provide insight into Partonope's character that might modify their response to the situation. The English redactor has consequently ignored the hero's appearance and shifted the emphasis to Melior so that the women are moved to reaffirm their emotional connection with their mistress. Her error in judgment is no less severe, but her beauty moves their hearts to forgiveness and strengthens their bonds of loyalty to one another.

Partonope's appearance becomes a more prominent factor at the final tournament though it still takes second place to more pragmatic concerns of his lineage, morality, and financial status. After each candidate has been assessed by the council, two are chosen who appear to be relatively equal in terms of their desirability as a suitor: Partonope and the Sultan. The queen is given leave to choose between the two based on their appearance. She reasons:

He ought wele lyke me by reasone and skill
 That shuld haue my body and good at will.

 My choice lieth in þe semelyhede of [þe] two;
 The kynges in no wise may vary here-fro.
 To whome my herte can beste acorde,
 Hym will I chese to be my lorde. (12002-8)

While neither beauty nor love are considered *a priori* factors in choosing a husband—all the suitors are hidden behind armour throughout the tournament and, insofar as the council is aware, none of the suitors are known to the queen—both are brought into play as reasonable grounds for making a final decision. After having allowed the council of “kynges” to narrow down her choices, Melior reserves the right to make the final choice

based on her personal preference. She chooses Partonope because of their mutual attraction though she is keenly aware of the political risks involved should she offend the Sultan. Beauty is thus valued for its own sake in much the same way as it is appreciated in the twenty-first century—it has been divorced from morality, but still pleases the eye and may lead to love.

The descriptive passages reveal a trend towards fragmentation and compartmentalization that is articulated in various ways throughout the text, but its realization in the underlying ethic is nowhere more in evidence than in the judicial scenes. Though the ordeal had long since fallen out of use as a contemporary practice, the text scrupulously follows its source in detailing the stages of the trial including the challenge (3530-31), response (3667-91), prayers (3776-79), rehearsal of the covenant (3795-811), oath on relics (3816-23), and combat (3843-4452). The trial even retains its original purpose as a “theatrical bid for consensus”¹³—aiming to build accord between the two peoples without “grete blode schedynge” (3616). However, the tenor of the community has changed so that instead of presenting a unified whole, society has been divided into areas of specialization. While I hesitate to embrace unreservedly the simple (and simplistic) tripartite structure of medieval society of those who fight, those who pray, and those who work; the wars depicted in the English *Partonope of Blois* are clearly restricted to those who fight—primarily, knights and their kings. In contrast, when the

¹³ Peter Brown, “Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change,” *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 142.

challenge first arrives in the French text, the king immediately summons “ses conselliers” (2741)¹⁴ and a crowd of dignitaries arrive in response:

Parthonopeus i vient premiers,
Dont viennent li archevesque,
Et duc et conte et li evesque. (2742-44)¹⁵

Both ecclesiastical and secular nobility work together as advisors to the king and all are joined in the effort to protect the community. Once they decide upon a plan of action, the king gathers the rest of his community: “ses amis,/ ses demainnes, ses vavasors,/ et ciax qui gardent ses honors” (2805-7).¹⁶ All the “François” (2909)¹⁷ are instructed to pray for success and the trial is represented as a communal effort. Though the community is comprised of different social strata that contribute according to their various strengths, they are all focused on the same goal. In contrast to the inclusive nature of the French council, the king in the English text sends for “serten lordys that were most preve,/ off wyche onne was Partonope” (3537-38). Among this select group, the king finalizes his plans for the ordeal and then assembles “alle hy[s] hole Cheualrye” (3607) to advise them of the latest line of attack. Though he is speaking of an earlier time, Jean Flori’s definition of “chevalerie” still holds true in this context:

Qu’est-ce, pour eux, que la chevalerie? Avant tout un groupe d’hommes ayant en commun une profession, celle des armes, et des qualités, celles qui permettent de l’exercer valablement: vaillance, force physique, voire brutalité.¹⁸

¹⁴ “his counsellors” (2741)

¹⁵ “Partonopeu comes there first,/ then the archbishops come/ and dukes and counts and the bishops” (2742-44)

¹⁶ “his friends,/ his liegemen, his vassals,/ and those who keep his honour” (2805-7)

¹⁷ “French” (2909)

¹⁸ “What was chivalry to them? Foremost, a group of men with a common profession, that of bearing arms, and certain characteristics, those that permit them to exercise it effectively: valiance, physical

The king does not involve the entire community in the war effort—he calls together his warriors. These men are instructed to pray for their success and rather than a generic “cent Frans” (2922)¹⁹ as the early romance states, “.c. kny3htes” (3791) accompany Partonope in the later text to witness the ordeal. Because war has been delegated to a specific subsection of society, the ordeal is no longer represented as a communal effort. The ecclesiastical functionaries who joined the king in the earlier text are absent in the fifteenth-century narrative, suggesting that secular and religious nobility now preside over separate jurisdictions and the defense of the community no longer falls within the scope of members of the clergy. Once unified behind a single goal, the community has been divided into sectors that have separate areas of responsibility.

The twelfth-century romances discussed in this thesis all idealize cohesive communities united behind a king (or emperor) whose just governance lends stability to the realm and whose court provides an ideological centre for social interaction. Norris J. Lacy notes that this pattern is typical of Arthurian romance²⁰ and I would further suggest that it is typical of early French romance in general.²¹ Strong communities were forged through the interdependence of their members and a shared sense of pride in the common good. Honour is a key element within such an environment because it represents the bonds of mutual esteem that tie individuals to one another. Consequently, both honour and loyalty have been critical issues in the evaluation of the romance heroes within their

force, indeed brutality.” Jean Flori, “La notion de Chevalerie dans les Chansons de Geste du XII^e siècle: Etude historique de vocabulaire,” *Le moyen âge* 81 (1975): 435-36.

¹⁹ “one hundred Franks” (2922)

textual framework—Partonopeu, Tristan and Iseut, Lancelot, and Robert. All five of these characters undergo trials in which they prove their devotion to the community. In contrast, the increased specialization depicted in *Partonope of Blois* forces individuals to redefine their notions of community. The characters still identify themselves in terms of nationality as “the ffrensche” (3775), but they place themselves more immediately within their *métier* and owe allegiance to their professional colleagues. Because of their shared interests and goals, geographical proximity to one another, and sense of belonging, the French warriors might be considered a distinct community within the larger community of their nation. Honour is still a facet of the warrior code, so Sornegur can lament that Mares failed to preserve his “honowre” (4676). However, it has lost the primacy it once held as a sign of esteem, a cultural currency that Sornegur would risk everything to regain. In its place, the law binds the larger community as one people so that Susan Reynolds can describe late medieval society as “a community bound together by ties of due and lawful order.”²²

No longer focused on honour, the ordeal is punctuated by frequent reminders that Partonope fights to uphold the just cause under the law. King Lohier claims the trial as a battle of rights: “Forto trye owre bothe Ryȝthtes,/ Thys bataylle to stonnde be-twyn IJ knyȝthes” (3611-12). According to the MED, “ryȝhte” bears a number of meanings that would resonate in this context: “that which is morally right,” “that which is just,” “a rule

²⁰ Norris J. Lacy, “The Typology of Arthurian Romance,” *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, vol. 1, eds. Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly, and Keith Busby (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1987) 33-56.

²¹ See Douglas Kelly, *Medieval French Romance* (New York: Twayne P, 1993).

²² Susan Reynolds, “Medieval *origines gentium* and the community of the realm,” *History* 68 (1983): 381.

of conduct, a law,” “a right cause, just cause,” “a just claim, an entitlement; a legal or moral right,” or “that to which someone is justly entitled.” Legal and moral connotations overlap in this term and in late medieval English law, as Norman Doe explains:

According to natural law ideas, human law is not wholly autonomous, but relies for its authority on conformity with morality. In turn, this produces a wide conception of law. Law is not merely that set of commands and prohibitions consented to by the community, or the usages of judges, it is also that set of rules which corresponds to the extraneous formulations of divine morality represented in natural law.²³

The terms “natural law” and “divine law” are often used interchangeably and refer to the same premise—law is a projection of the divine will. As such, it is idealized as an ethical imperative that transcends mundane concerns and must be obeyed without question.

Before the battle, Partonope is confident in the justice of his cause and prays for help in defending God’s law:

Alle-myȝthty God, y praye thatt ye
Helpe me ynne yowr ownne Ryȝthte.
Onne [me] y take thus ylke afȝthte
Yowr lawe fully to defende. (3594-97)

The other knights echo Partonope’s request and ask in a similar vein that God defend “Crystes lawe” (3661). The fifteenth-century text clearly articulates the holy impetus that underlies the law and transforms the ordeal into a conflict of divine right (the French) versus human wrong (the Danes). In such circumstances, Partonope is destined to win because he represents God’s will.²⁴

²³ Norman Doe, *Fundamental Authority in Late Medieval English Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 60.

²⁴ Interestingly, the Rawl. ms. Poet. 14, Bodleian Lib., Oxford, though only slightly earlier than that of the Add. ms. 35 288, provides a reading of this passage that is closer to the intent of the twelfth-century original. Instead of God’s right, Partonope prays to defend the king’s right, and instead of

The increasing emphasis on rights marks a shifting attitude towards the community. The Germanic customs that lie at the root of the ordeal were based on compromise and their flexibility gave voice to what Rebecca Colman calls “the discretionary power of local communities.”²⁵ As Harold J. Berman states, folklaw or customary law

was not primarily a matter of making and applying rules in order to determine guilt and fix judgment, not an instrument to separate people from one another on the basis of a set of principles, but rather a matter of holding people together, a matter of reconciliation.²⁶

Because “holding people together” was so important in early communities wherein strength depended on mutual cooperation, Bérout’s *Tristan and Iseut*, for example, are allowed a great deal of latitude in pursuing their clandestine relationship. As long as they contribute to the common good and as long as reconciliation continues to be a viable option, the lovers are welcome at court. The barons who continue to accuse them represent the views of a later age that respects accountability to a fixed set of values. Partonope’s ordeal depicts this kind of authoritarian system where individuals must answer to the law. Once communities consent to subject themselves to formal jurisprudence, it begins to wield an authority of its own as an objective and impartial judge of morality. Central to this concept is the idea that “the makers of law are subject to the law that they make.”²⁷ With each prayer, the knights reiterate their hope that God

defending divine law, he promises to defend his king (3594–97). Bødtker provides a full edition of the Rawl. manuscript immediately underneath the parallel passages of the Additional manuscript.

²⁵ Rebecca V. Colman, “Reason and Unreason in Early Medieval Law,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (1974): 589.

²⁶ Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983) 78.

²⁷ Doe, 26.

will uphold his “ry3thte”—in other words, they hope that God himself will be bound by the laws that he created. The outcome of the ordeal is the same in both versions, Partonope wins the ordeal by default when Mares breaks his oath. However, the nature of Mares’ transgression differs in each text.

As Howard Bloch notes, “beginning in the twelfth century the individual assumed a distinct legal personality by which he became less and less responsible to the clan, which was, in turn, less liable to and for him.”²⁸ In the early romance where characters are accountable to each other, Mares is punished for betraying his lord:

La u si honi son segnor
 Deservi mort de traïtor,

 Dont forfist bien la mort Marés
 Quant il sor vos brisa le pais.
 La eüssons vengeance prise,
 S’en peüssons faire justise;
 Et li rois le nos commanda
 Quant traïtor le nos noma. (3811-26)²⁹

The account focuses on the web of interpersonal relationships that binds the Danes as a community. Mares’ treachery lies in his betrayal of the close relationship he had with his king that should have commanded his fidelity. The vassals who killed the traitor claim the right of vengeance in this case, which suggests that they too felt his actions as a personal affront. They are quick to reaffirm their own solidarity with the king by stating that they acted in accordance with Sornegur’s orders. Mares’ most grievous error stems

²⁸ Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1977) 228.

²⁹ “He who today so dishonoured his lord in this way/ deserves the death of a traitor.// Then the dead Mares acted very badly/ when he broke the peace with you [Partonopeu]./ In this way we took vengeance/ there we could do justice on him/ and the king ordered us to do it/ when he named the traitor to us.” (3811-26)

from his rift with his own community, but he is also guilty of breaking his word to the French and breaching the peace with them. In comparison, the same speech in the later narrative ignores the personal drama of betrayal and condemns Mares for contravening his oath:

He toke no hede of othe ne allegeanwnce,
 Butte enteryd þe lystes, and gret dysturbawnce
 Made, for he wolde rescowe hys lorde,
 A-gayne þe ordynavnce and þe accorde

 To suche one shulde do no grace,
 Butte done hym lawe and hye Iustyce. (4910-18)

His expression of loyalty to his king (his rescue attempt) is deemed to be misplaced because his higher allegiance should have been to his oath, the ordinance, and the accord reached between both peoples before the trial began. Mares does not just betray his lord, he breaks the law. Consequently, Furseus does not enact vengeance against his former colleague, he punishes him for his crimes in accordance with the impartial principles set down in “lawe and hye Iustyce.” From a very personal account in the earlier version that emphasizes the impact of Mares’ actions on the community, the English text centers on his failure to respect the authority of the law.

By insisting that he fight at the ordeal, Partonope overrides “alle reson and alle skele” (3591) and, yet, his request cannot be denied because he is backed by his authority as “cheffe Cowncell of thus londe” (3580). He ultimately proves true to his boast that he will defend the law (3597), and his success affirms and strengthens his right to wield influence in the community. His confession tests him on a different level since his authority is not at stake—rather, the Bishop questions his obedience to God. Ironically,

Partonope remains steadfast in his devotion to God, but proves inconstant to his lover and to his conscience. The form of the ritual follows the twelfth-century depiction and includes a brief suggestion of Partonope's contrition (4433), a formal admission of fault (5756-89), and the assignment of penance (5793-95). Though the form is the same, the two narratives focus on different issues—the earlier text centers on the question of loyalty whereas the key issue in the later romance is obedience. The bond of loyalty that ties the twelfth-century Partonopeu to God is modeled on the relationship between a vassal and his lord. Not a relationship of social equals, it is nonetheless founded on principles of mutual reliance and reciprocal obligation: each is expected to contribute to the relationship and each is expected to profit. Thus, Partonopeu serves God to the best of his ability and expects God's favour in return. Richard Firth Green notes that it is common for traditional societies to understand their relationships with the divine in contractual terms. Medieval peoples are no exception and their literature demonstrates "a strong sense of the reciprocity of the covenant between God and humanity."³⁰ As long as both partners are loyal to one another, the relationship will remain mutually binding. This type of arrangement presupposes that each has something to offer, but such is not the case in the fifteenth-century text because Partonope is entirely beholden to God for his strength, virtue, and success. As the Bishop reminds him,

Thankethe heyly þat ylke lorde
 Fro whome þys comethe; for wytte well ye
 Off yowre-selfe hyt may not be.

 Alle tho graces comethe fro hym;

³⁰ Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999) 352.

Fro yowe cometh no-þynge but fowle synne. (5699-707)

God is the source of all goodness and Partonope is nothing without him, a lowly sinner. The gulf between the divine and humanity has widened in the centuries since the romance was first transcribed. Melior acknowledges the vast superiority of God in her address to “Lorde Gode Omnipotente,/ that erþe, water, and ffyrmentente/ atte O worde madyste all of noghte” (6010-12). Partonope echoes this phrasing in his own monologue to the “fadir of hevyn omnipotent” (6675) and through the example of the immaculate conception, draws attention to the passive role of humanity as receptacles for God’s gifts (6685-96). Within this paradigm, loyalty is almost irrelevant since God has nothing to acquire from humanity, while humanity has everything to gain. Instead, people are judged and rewarded by their obedience.

The bishop of the early manuscript suspects that Partonopeu has transferred his loyalties to a “fee” (4369)³¹ or a “diables” (4395)³² and warns the young knight to serve no other: “ne servés pas del sien autrui” (4399).³³ In the later manuscript, Partonope’s subservience to God is indubitable and no others are set up to rival his authority. The Bishop questions whether a “ffendys of ffayre” (5656) has distracted him from properly obeying God’s injunctions. The fifteenth-century narrative introduces a great divide between the body and the soul where the former is aligned with “fowle synne” (5707), “þis wreched worlde” (6678), and pain (6689, 6696), while the latter is aligned with “graces” (5706), “hevyn” (6675), and “hele” and “gladnes” (5690). Partonope’s mother

³¹ “fairy” (4369)

³² “devil” (4395)

³³ “do not serve any other” (4399)

first expresses the fear that he is neglecting the needs of his spirit by indulging in physical pleasure. She declares,

Wyth hur he fynte all maner of plesaunce.
 Hyt ys a fende or some myschawnce,
 That wolle hys body and sowle brynge
 In-to some myscheffe. . . (5666-69)

The “plesaunce” that he enjoys with Melior is suspect because of its sexual connotations and, indeed, the concern would appear to be well-founded since the whole of their relationship plays out in the bed (until he is banished). The Bishop more clearly voices his concern:

Loke none erthely loue yow suppryse,
 Leste þer-wyth ye be so blente,
 That ye breke his comawndemente. (5723-25)

Partonope is in danger of letting earthly love overcome and confuse him, so that he loses sight of his primary goal—obedience to God’s commandments. Through his sermon, the Bishop hammers home his message: “sette all yowre entente/ to fulfyll hys commaundemente” (5708-9), “besy yowe to serue God a-boue” (5712), “yeff ye hym loue, he wolle yowe kepe/ fro alle your Enemys” (5714-15), “loue hym a-boue all þynge/ all wordely worshyppe I-nowe hue ye” (5717-18), “loue hym trewly in alle wyse” (5722), and in conclusion, “showe þat þou arte Goddys knyghte” (5742). By depicting service in the language of love, the Bishop invites comparison between the spiritual love of God and Partonope’s physical expressions of love for Melior. Under the force of the cleric’s words, the young man eventually capitulates and agrees to confess.

Partonope is caught between a number of outside figures who demand his obedience and claim to be supporting God’s authority. His mother and the Bishop work

in collusion to break up his relationship with Melior because they fear that she is distracting him from more noble pursuits. He answers their charges, protesting that his beloved does not prevent him from obeying God, she rather encourages him in his devotion:

. . . she
 Off Gode spekethe well and off hys lawe,
 And euer conselleth me to drawe
 Hym to serue and eke to plesse. (5761-64)

Nonetheless, they order him to use a magic lamp to see her “þowe hyt a-geyne hur wyll be” (5795) and back their command with God’s authority. Melior also buttresses her requests with appeals to God’s will and consistently advises Partonope to serve “God and holy chyrche” (2420) as she simultaneously forbids him to try to see her “by craffte of nygromansy” (2425). In both versions of the romance, the hero errs in evaluating their directives and deciding upon an appropriate course of action. The twelfth-century romances insist on the interconnectedness of human beings. In the language of social theory, such interdependence

entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one’s behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of *others* in the relationship.³⁴

Consequently, the early Partonopeu is strongly motivated to look at the reactions of others to govern his own actions. Still, attention to others is not indiscriminate:

“interdependent selves do not attend to the needs, desires, and goals of *all* others.”³⁵

³⁴ Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, “Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 98:2 (1991): 227.

³⁵ Markus and Kitayama, 229.

Herein lies Partonopeu's error—he fails to recognize the faulty advice of a false counselor. The fifteenth-century hero lives in a world that increasingly promotes an independent construal of the self. According to this worldview, the individual is an

autonomous entity who (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g., traits, abilities, motives, and values) and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes.³⁶

The uniqueness of Partonopeu's personality is affirmed by the text's refusal to label him based on his physical appearance or lineage. Instead, he must be judged by his own merits. The confession tests his ability to take action based on his "internal attributes" or his conscience, rather than according to the desires of others. Partonopeu fails because he allows himself to be coerced by the well-meaning Bishop rather than trusting his own sense of right and wrong.

When confronted by the Bishop, the Partonopeu of early romance admits that his "cuers est tos trestornés" (4442)³⁷ and, in his confusion, he cannot see the right course to take. In stark contrast, the later Partonopeu realizes from the outset that his confession can only lead to trouble:

. . . I wotte truly
I haue do nowe fulle grette ffolye
My loue þus fowle to be-traye.
Nowe ys to late to sey naye,
Sythe I am agreed þer-to. (5750-54)

At this point, he has agreed to follow the Bishop's advice, but he has yet to confess or receive penance. He already feels the guilt of disobeying his conscience and "ther-wyth he felle/ in-to a boghte full heuely" (5747-48). The later narrative introduces the

³⁶ Markus and Kitayama, 224.

conscience as an internalized moral code that ought to be trusted and respected because it comes from God. As Fortescue explained in 1452, “conscience comes from *con* and *scioscis*. And so together they make ‘to know with God’; to wit: to know the will of God as near as one reasonably can.”³⁸ The Bishop himself realizes that his own opinion must take second place to the authority that already resides in Partonope’s heart: “He bade hym boldely tell owte hys synne/ and ransake hys consyence well wyth-yn” (5734-35). The young knight should already know if he is guilty and has any sins to reveal at the confessional. Given his firm belief in Melior’s goodness and his own knowledge that he should be true to her, his decision to break faith with her appears irrational: “in þe nette/ off blynde ffoly he was I-take/ for alle resone had hym for-sake” (5843-45). There is no question that his actions are disparaged: he is “a traytowre fals and felle” (5832) and even he “wyste well he had done grette folye” (5870). His deep repentance for his inconstancy is expressed through sighs, tears, and loud lamentation: “After hys deth sore wysseythe he;/ he sykethe, he wepythe pytuosly” (6071-72). Ultimately, he is redeemed by his suffering and subsequent devotion to his lover. Urake recognizes his unwavering constancy when she rescues him: “she wist wele and knewe/ to þis lady Melyoure he was so trewe” (7736-37). He has learned to be faithful to the dictates of his conscience.

The comparison of these two versions of the romance reveals a multiplicity of differences in their approach to morality. In the three hundred years that lie between them, society has evolved from practicing a community-based ethic towards one that

³⁷ “heart is all upside down” (4442)

³⁸ Qtd. in Doe, 133. Doe suggests that this quote was wrongly attributed to Nicholas Statham (d. 1472) and may be found in his *Abridgement* printed in Rouen c. 1490.

acknowledges the right of individuals to express their uniqueness. Europe saw the change from a judicial system based on consensus and the peaceful resolution of disputes towards a system based on strict accountability to the law. These changes are reflected in the definition of Partonope whose character must adapt to meet the expectations of different cultural climates. The twelfth-century text depicts a hero bound to his community through ties of loyalty and honour. The community itself is characterized by solidarity and harmony, so that individuals are accountable to one another and work together to preserve the common good. The fifteenth-century text questions old assumptions of unity so that Partonope is less accountable to others than to himself and to the law. Though the shift between these two texts crosses not only time, but the English Channel as well, the changes that are here illustrated reflect general trends that were felt across pre-modern Europe. The French romances that various redactors have chosen to revive for English audiences expresses an underlying unanimity that political rivalries cannot entirely erase. These romances reflect a shared heritage at the same time as they demonstrate the evolution of a social ethic.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Individuality in Sir Thomas Malory's *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*

While Bérroul concentrated on the drama being acted out between Tristan, Iseut, and Mark in Cornwall and explored the tension inherent in that relationship, Sir Thomas Malory is more concerned about placing their story within the larger context of Arthurian mythology.¹ In the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* embedded within his larger work, *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory sets out to prove that Tristram is “the noblest man that bereth lyf/ but yf it were sir launcelot du lake” (8:27).² Consequently, much of the action takes place away from Mark’s court so Tristram has the opportunity to prove himself a valiant warrior as well as a true lover and a loyal retainer. By wandering in “the forest world of the questing knight,”³ Tristram exposes himself to “strange beasts, giants, hostile castles, desperate damsels, and enemy knights—each a potential test for the knight errant.”⁴ Successful completion of each challenge allows the hero to affirm his personal standing in a community that thrives on competition and measures each knight against his fellows. Loyalty, solidarity, and consensus were key motifs in the twelfth-century romances

¹ See William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994) 502-512.

² Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 1, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (London: David Nutt, 1889). All subsequent references will be to this edition. Parenthetical citations in the text refer to book and chapter according to the divisions introduced by William Caxton.

³ Sally Firmin, “Deep and Wide: Malory’s Marvelous Forest,” *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Reviews*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1992) 26.

⁴ Firmin, 28.

where individuals were valued according to their contribution to the group: Bérroul's Tristan and Iseut were no exception as they each strove to support and defend their community, ultimately realizing that their personal desires for one another must give way before their social obligations. Conversely, the strongest component of the ethic portrayed in the fifteenth-century narrative is the assertion of individuality. Malory depicts a world with a loosely organized social structure where behaviour is governed by an internalized sense of fair play rather than by external, authoritative forces. Against this backdrop, Tristram exhibits greater than average devotion to his lord. Yet, he also demonstrates the prowess and courtesy necessary to survive and excel in a world where competition has replaced solidarity as the principle mode of interaction. As a character with a well-established history of valorous deeds, Tristram easily fits into Malory's paradigm of the worshipful hero. However, Isoud's presence is considerably reduced as the romance concentrates on the exploits of male characters and relegates female characters to more passive roles.⁵ While the majority of my discussion will likewise focus on Tristram, who offers a wider point of comparison with his twelfth-century counterpart, I would suggest that the shift from an ethic based on the community to one centered around the individual is also apparent in the characterization of Isoud.

Compared to the strict social hierarchies maintained in the twelfth-century narratives and their overwhelming emphasis on group loyalty, the communities in the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* are more loosely structured and their borders less clearly

⁵ Percival's sister is perhaps the sole exception to this rule. See Ginger Thornton and Krista May, "Malory as Feminist? The Role of Percival's Sister in the Grail Quest," *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Reviews*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1992) 43-53.

defined. Bérout's depiction of Arthur's court follows tradition in placing the King immediately below God, followed by the barons, the knights, and then the servants. Iseut's messenger finds them assembled in one hall and their physical unity anticipates their unity of spirit. They all express the same sentiment when they hear Iseut's plea and they all rally behind their king when he decides to support her suit at the ordeal. Their impulse later proves to be in line with God's own wishes when the lovers are vindicated by the trial. As a righteous king, Arthur holds a position of great authority and his subjects turn to him for guidance and support. Though Malory's narrative retains echoes of King Arthur's traditional pre-eminence in the respect accorded to his name and the central role of his court, his person no longer commands the respect once bestowed upon kings. First, the symbol of his rule is the Round Table that denotes the equality of all who gather around its circumference, the knights and their king. Arthur does not stand out for his great prowess in a society that esteems physical strength and bravery—he wins a joust with Lamorak (9:9), but loses to Tristram (10:1) and Palomydes (10:73). In many cases, he is not even recognized by those who count themselves among his fellowship of knights. Tristram only knows Arthur because he keeps company with Launcelot. Once he recognizes his friend (by his “knyghtely wordes”), he infers that the other knight must be Arthur (10:73). Later, he sees them with their helms removed and again it seems as if the king is only known through the company he keeps:

sir Tristram thought that he shold knowe them
 Thenne said sir Dynadan pryuely vnto syr Tristram
 syr that is sire Launcelot du lake that spak vnto yow fyrst
 and the other is my lord Kynge Arthur (10:78)

On the two occasions when Arthur appears out of court without his liegeman, he remains unknown. Lamorak “knewe not kyng Arthur” (9:14) when he came upon him alone in the forest and Ector “knewe not kyng Arthur” (9:16) when he challenged him to a joust. None of these cases suggests that the king is deliberately concealing his identity to gain worship or increase the dramatic tension of the plot.⁶ Instead, these scenes devalue his kingship by presenting him as “a poure erraunt knyghte” (10:73) whose presence does not inevitably command the respect of his subjects.

Ginger Thornton blames “Arthur’s wavering knightly principles” for his “inability to control his court;”⁷ however, a number of factors contribute to the general fragmentation of society. Kingship itself does not wield the authority it had in the earlier romances. As in the Middle English *Partonope of Blois*, nobility of name is no longer an automatic indication of nobility of character; rather, it is incumbent upon the individual to live up to the honour implied by his rank. Regardless of his status, Mark is openly scorned as “the moost vylaynous knyght or kyng that is now knowen on lyue” (10:9) and taunted for his cowardice:

It is shame to you said sir Dynadan
that ye gouerne you soo shamefully
for I see by you ye ar ful of cowardyse and ye are a murtherer
and that is the grettest shame that a Knyght may haue (9:11)

He earns no special treatment for being a king, but is disparaged for being a shameful knight. The king’s impuissance is compounded by the casual approach to interpersonal alliances. In the *Chanson de Roland*, the ties of loyalty that bound Roland to his

⁶ See Jeanne Drewes, “The Sense of Hidden Identity in Malory’s *Mort Darthur*,” *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Re-views*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1992) 17-25.

colleagues and to his emperor were indissoluble because each party valued his obligation to the other more than he valued his own life. This strength of commitment carries over into the twelfth-century romances where alliances are serious matters and carry lifelong obligations. Even during his sojourn in the forest, Bérroul's Tristan cannot escape his feelings of duty towards his lord and uncle though he is in exile because Mark tried to have him executed. Similarly, Iseut remains Mark's wife even after he relinquishes her to a band of lecherous lepers and she continues to seek reconciliation with him throughout the romance. With few exceptions (the most notable being the love matches between Launcelot and Gueneuer, and Tristram and Isoud), alliances in the fifteenth-century narrative are treated more lightly. Instead of permanently identifying him as Mark's knight, Tristram's vassalage is not considered sacrosanct by the other knights he encounters. When he finally arrives at Arthur's court, "Arthur made sir Tristram knyght of the table round with grete nobley and grete feest as myghte be thought" (10:6) and exacts a promise from him that he will abide at his court. Neither Tristram's nor Isoud's reputations are affected by their connection to a villainous king because they are always considered separately. As Palomydes says to an absent Isoud: "the best knyghte of the world loueth the" and "the falsest kyng and Knyghte is youre husband/ and the moost coward and ful of treason is your lord kyng marke" (10:9). The bonds of marriage are treated as lightly as those of vassalage. The lovelorn Palomydes has no compunction about taking Isoud from her husband when she rashly promises him anything he desires and Mark has no problem letting her go with another man: "hastely the kyng ansuerd

⁷ Ginger Thornton, "The Weakening of the King: Arthur's Disintegration in *The Book of Sir*

take her" (8:30). Beverly Kennedy suggests that "Arthurian society as a whole tends to regard marriage as a contract which may be broken, rather than a sacramental union which may never be dissolved."⁸ Both Tristram and Isoud leave broken marriage contracts in their wake when they move into the Joyous Guard together. Tristram's wife is simply forgotten when he leaves her behind to rejoin his beloved and though his marriage was never consummated, neither was it formally annulled. Regardless, the relationship between the lovers is respected as a valid union. When Arthur sees them together, he comments to Isoud: "I dar say ye are the fayrest that euer I sawe/ & sir Tristram is as fayre and as good a knyghte as ony that I knowe/ therfor me besemeth ye are wel besett to gyders" (10:78). His casual appraisal of their adulterous relationship is symptomatic of the relatively nonchalant attitude towards commitment, even loyalty to one's lord or spouse.

Early French romances typically revolve around the committed relationships of a small group of people. While this is easy to see in Bérout's narrative where most of the action takes place around Mark's court, it is also true of works such as Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*. Though Lancelot ranges far a field, his actions are entirely motivated by the bonds of loyalty that unite him with Guinevere, Arthur, and Gawain. The overriding emphasis on fidelity and steadfastness carries over to colour temporary relationships. For example, Tristan twice ventures away from home to seek medical attention and ends by forming ties of marriage with his host family. Chrétien's Lancelot accepts the hospitality of a knight from Logres and the man continues to care for the

Tristram," *The Arthurian Yearbook*, 1, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland P, 1991) 142.

hero's well-being by sending his sons out to accompany their guest after he leaves them. His stay under their roof is an affirmation of their fundamental connectedness as knights of the same realm. The most noteworthy example of this characteristic expansion of the relationship between host and guest are the ties formed between Robert and the Emperor. As a fool, Robert seeks shelter with the Emperor who quickly accords him full protection. The emotional attachment between the two grows and eventually culminates in the Emperor's desire to make Robert his son-in-law. In contrast, fleeting encounters are an essential component of the knightly quest in *Le Morte Darthur* and characters routinely engage in temporary partnerships, or more accurately, pacts of non-aggression. Lamorak and Dynadan meet Mark in the forest without recognizing him and the three ride forth "alle to gyders" (10:9): "But whanne sir Lamorak and sir Dynadan wyst that he was kyng Marke/ they were sory of his felauship" (10:10). Though they despise the king, they treat him as a colleague while they are riding with him. However, once he leaves their company, they do not care to renew the alliance:

Now I pray you said kyng Mark that ye wille ryde in my felauship
that is me lothe to doo said syre Dynadan by cause ye forsoke my
felauship
Ryght soo sir Dynadan went from kyng Mark & wente to his own
felauship (10:12)

As promised, they hide his identity, but feel no further responsibility to him after they part ways. Just as traveling with another creates a temporary bond, so the relationship of host and guest creates its own obligations. When Isoud recognizes Tristram as her uncle's killer, her family allows him to leave unharmed because, as King Anguyshe

⁸ Beverly Kennedy, "Adultery in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*," *Arthuriana* 7:4 (1997): 69-70.

states, “in soo moch as thou arte within my courte/ hit were no worship for me to slee the” (8:11).⁹ When Tristram finds himself in a similar situation again later, the truce holds while he is a guest. Once he leaves the property, the angry host rides out to slay him, but the knight is still reluctant to fight:

I pray yow leue of and smyte me no more
for I wold be lothe to dele with yow
& I myȝt chese
for I haue your mete and your drynke within my body (10:60)

The food in his stomach reminds him of his responsibility as a guest to treat his host with respect. Nevertheless, Tristram responds without hesitation to the man’s continued aggression by killing him and continuing on his journey without a backwards glance.

The temporary nature of most alliances encourages characters to rely on themselves and recognize others as individuals before they view them as members of a larger group. Group affiliation is still a mark of status in some cases, but individuals are more likely to be judged on their own merits. Amid a sea of Christians, Palomydes should stand out as the knight who has not yet been baptized and, indeed, he is introduced as “the sarasyn” (8:9). However, in his social milieu it is far more important that he is “a noble knyght and a myghty man” (8:9). He is admired for his prowess and, though he betrays Tristram, his fault is attributed to “pruyuy enuy” (10:79) rather than his lack of Christianity. Family is a more significant aspect of character though a good family name is no longer a prerequisite for knighthood nor does a bad family name carry an automatic

⁹ The comparable scene is missing from the Béroul fragment. However, in Gottfried von Strassburg’s version written around 1210, their anger when they recognize Tristan as Morholt’s killer quickly gives way to reconciliation marked by the kiss of peace. Their relationship with Tristan/Tantris is built on something more permanent than the duty of a host towards his guest.

stigma. When La Cote Male Tayle first comes to court to be knighted, he is appraised without reference to his background:

Sir said sir Lamorak and sir Gaherys
hit were wel done to make hym knyght
for hym besemeth wel of persone
and of countenance
that he shall preue a good man and a good knyght
and a myghty for sire and ye be remembryd euen suche one was sire
launcelot du lake
whanne he came fyrste in to this Courte
and full fewe of vs knewe from whens he came
and now is he preued the man of moost worship in the world (9:1)

Lamorak and Gaherys remind the court that a man should be judged by his accomplishments rather than his family name (though it must be said that all the good knights are sons of good knights). Gareth relies on the same courtesy when he distinguishes himself from his brothers because of their shameful murder of Lamorak. He openly declares, “I shall neuer loue them nor drawe in their felauship for that dede” (10:68), and rather than deriding him for his lack of family loyalty, Tristram admires him for his choice. As noted earlier, Tristram is never slighted because of his kinship ties with his treacherous uncle. Werner Brönnimann notes that “the most significant core of personal identity in Malory is a character’s deeds. Deeds define the heroes and heroines, deeds individualize them.”¹⁰ The deeds of a knight form his reputation and though his group affiliation might strengthen the name he makes for himself, it does not detract from it. The Knights of the Round Table are the most prominent community, yet even they are judged for their individual merits. In the contest between Marhaus and Tristram, the

former is not automatically considered in the right because he belongs to the fellowship of the Round Table. Arthur states that Marhaus “was a worthy knyght,” but derides him in the same breath “for euylle dedes that he dyd vnto the countrey of Cornewaile” (10:6). Unlike Sornegur in *Partonopeu de Blois*, Arthur does not feel responsible for his vassal’s evil deeds. He considers Marhaus’ actions as reflections of the individual, not the group.

As independent agents, the knights vie with each other to win worship and increase their social standing. By continuously competing with one another, characters are arranged within a hierarchy of their peers so that all are rated as either better or worse than their fellow—a fact that belies the equality implied by the symbol of the Round Table. Though they are perhaps equals in the sense that they are members of a brotherhood that will not favour one man over another because of lineage or wealth, they have their own internal hierarchy based on prowess and gallantry. Women are also included in this arrangement to some extent, since they are rated for their beauty. In at least one instance, winning this contest means the difference between life and death. As Tristram and Isoud’s onetime host explains, it is an “old custome of this castel” that

... yf his [the guest’s] lady that he bryngeth
 be fouler than our lordes wyf
 she must lefe her heede
 and yf she be fayrer preued than is oure lady
 thenne shal the lady of this castel lefe her heede (8:25)

¹⁰ Werner Brönniman, “Individuality and Community in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*: Narrative Models for National Identity,” *Mittelalter-Rezeption V*, eds. Ulrich Müller and Kathleen Verduin (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1996) 66.

Isoud is proven more beautiful on this and other occasions, and her physical attractiveness earns her many admirers.¹¹ The contest between men is of course the predominant impetus of the narrative flow and, Andrew Lynch would suggest, formed the main attraction for the medieval audience.¹² Yet, this internal competitiveness is unparalleled in the twelfth-century romances with their emphasis on loyalty and unanimity. Each battle in the later romance is another step in the ongoing negotiation for supremacy, as Malory's knights strive against one another to determine who is the strongest and the most courteous. Throughout the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*, Launcelot enjoys the prestigious position of "best knyghte in this world" (9:7), while Tristram places a close second as the "moost of prowesse excepte sir launcelot du lake" (9:15). Before his death, Lamorak is considered "the thyrd" (10:63) and few characters are willing to challenge their position. Knights gain no worship by losing, so each will try to determine the strength of their opponent before they strike. As Dynadan explains after he has refused to confront a more valiant knight, "it is euer worship to a Kny3t to refuse that thyng that he may not atteyne" (10:8). Furthermore, two evenly-matched opponents will negotiate a draw whereby both might leave the duel with their honour intact. After testing each other's strength, they will typically exchange names and a brief record of past battles. One such encounter ends with the first knight declaring, "I will not with my good wille fyghte no more with you." The second responds in kind, "I wille be lothe to fyghte with you," and then he extends the hand of peace to bring a close to the

¹¹ There is no suggestion that outward appearance mirrors inner virtue as in the twelfth-century romances.

conflict, "I shal profer you kyndenys curtosy and gentilnes right here vpon this ground" (8:17). The physical contest is superseded by an equally important test of gentility.

At times, the knights fight for worthy causes that allow them the opportunity to affirm their righteousness against a villainous opponent and increase their worship through acts of bravery. These conflicts are usually fought to the death and reflect the kinds of battles depicted in earlier romance. However, knights just as frequently fight with each other out of "clene knyghthode" (10:79), which refers to a healthy desire to test oneself against an opponent, and this type of internal combativeness is unparalleled in the twelfth-century texts where the emphasis is on concord. These conflicts usually end fairly amicably though the goodwill of the loser might be somewhat strained, especially if he has sustained an injury. When Ywayne reminds his cousin Gaheryse of his obligation not to engage with other Knights of the Round Table, "sire the fyrst tyme ye were made Knyght of the round table ye sware that ye shold not haue a do with your felauship wetyngly" (9:38), he speaks of the first type of conflict. In tournaments and when passing each other in the forest, all knights are free to challenge one another in the sport of the joust or the duel. To this end, knights may conceal their identities so they are clearly fighting for themselves and not for the group. Jeanne Drewes points out that such concealment allows a more famous knight to "fight freely among the ranks, thus enabling him through his prowess to advance or, at the least, to maintain his position."¹³

Otherwise, it is difficult for a knight such as Launcelot or Tristram to convince lesser

¹² See Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997)

¹³ Jeanne Drewes, "The Sense of Hidden Identity in Malory's *Mort Darthur*," *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Re-views*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1992) 22.

knights to engage with them. When Tristram, Palomydes, Gareth, and Dynadan come to the tournament at Lona3er Castle, they plan their strategy to gain the most worship:

Syr said Palomydes ye shalle haue my aduyse to be ageynst Kynge Arthur
 as to morne for on his party wille be syre Launcelot and many good
 knyghtes of his blood with hym
 and the moo men of worship that they be
 the more worship we shalle we wyne
 That is full knyghtely spoken said sir Tristram
 and ryght soo as ye counceile me
 soo wille we doo (10:68)

By pitting themselves incognito against other Knights of the Round Table, they emphasize that they owe their first allegiance to themselves. However, it is important to note that they fight to increase their own worship, not to destroy or discredit the Round Table. Near the end of the tournament, the four knights again draw together to discuss their strategy and Tristram says,

I will torne vnto kynge Arthurs party
 for I sawe neuer soo fewe men doo soo wel
 and hit wille be shame vnto vs knyghtes that ben of the round table to see
 our lord kynge Arthur and that noble knyght sire Launcelot to be
 dishonoured (10:80)

The younger knights follow his lead, but Palomydes chooses to make his own way because he still hopes to prove himself a better knight than either Launcelot or Tristram. Each man is free to choose his own direction with no pressure to conform to the will of the group. Instead of trying to convince Palomydes to stay on their side, they respect his independence and wish him “god spede” (10:80).

Self-interest is a leading factor in decision-making as there are no external agencies to enforce right action. As noted above, kings wield dubious authority and compliance with their rule appears almost voluntary. King Arthur struggled at the

beginning of his reign to establish some kind of authority over the myriad groups that refused to acknowledge his right to kingship and his hold on the throne continues to be challenged by various characters throughout the text. This instability points to the underlying momentum of the text towards social chaos and disorder that is an unavoidable consequence of the increasing value placed in individuality. For the most part, King Arthur does not give orders or enforce his will on others to bring order to his society; rather, he voices mild reproaches to his men that allow them to continue to assert their autonomy. His reproof of Tristram for fighting against them at the tournament, “ye are a knyght of the table round/ of ryghte ye shold haue ben with vs” (10:78), is answered with a joke so that the king begins to laugh so hard he “myghte not sytte” (10:78) and the rebuke is immediately forgotten. Certainly, Tristram and his friends do not feel compelled to fight the next day with the Knights of the Round Table. The summons of King Anguysse demonstrates the limits of Arthur’s power and the complete absence of a legal apparatus to try offenders. The complainants themselves, Bleoberys and Blamore, issue the summons and threaten King Anguysse with the

forfetur of kyng Arthurs good grace
and yf the kyng of Irland came not in at the day assigned and sette
the kyng shold lese his landes (8:20)

However, here the formality of the case ends since neither Arthur nor his second-in-command, Launcelot, remain to see if Anguysse comes on the assigned day. The King of Ireland does arrive as requested, but “wist not wherfore he was sente after” (8:20) and consequently, he is unprepared for a trial of any kind. Arthur’s role is minimal—though the summons and the judgment are issued in his name, he is not present or otherwise

involved. Neither side presents a legal argument and the narrator point out the ambiguity of the case because “alle maner of Murtherers in tho dayes were callid treason” (8:20). No one doubts that Anguysse killed a man, the trial is intended to determine if the homicide was treasonous. Consequently, the lack of any legal wrangling at all is startling since there should be precedents to draw upon or, at the very least, the defendant should offer some defense. John Bellamy cites evidence to suggest that in the early sixteenth century, “at the preliminary examination of suspects before justices of the peace it was readily possible for persons to testify in their defence.”¹⁴ Anguysse’s case cannot even be considered a trial by battle since there is no oath nor divine participation. The parties finally settle the dispute themselves rather than relying on the authority of the king or the law.

In most cases, wronged individuals or communities make no pretense of enforcing the law, but take matters into their own hands. The inhabitants of the Castle of Pelownes find Palomydes “gyilty of their lordes dethe” (10:84) and claim that he must die “by ryght” (10:84). The knight does not submit gracefully to their judgment, but he is taken by force and the community decides that he “shold haue Justyce” (10:84). While their language suggests that they have the legal right to pass judgment, neither Tristram nor Launcelot recognizes the community’s authority. Tristram declares that he will not “suffer hym to dye so shameful a deth” (10:35) and Launcelot states, “it were shame to me/ to suffre this noble knyght soo to dye and I myzte helpe hym” (10:35). They rescue Palomydes, killing many men of Pelownes in the process, and thus demonstrate the risks

¹⁴ John G. Bellamy, *Criminal Law and Society in Late Medieval and Tudor England* (New York:

involved in seeking justice when there are no external authorities to enforce the right. Though his presence will be felt during the Grail quest, God himself is notably absent in the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* and his absence is indicative of the lack of any kind of absolute, external authority that might bring order to the generally chaotic society depicted by Malory. In Anguysshe's trial, both knights rely solely on their strength and stamina to win the fight. There is no priest present, nor do the combatants pray that the right cause will prevail. In another case, Amant is killed though he fought for a just cause. His friends complain that God allowed the villain to overcome the righteous knight: "O swete lord Ihesu that knowest alle hydde thynges/ why suffrest thou soo fals a traytour to vaynquysshie and slee a trewe knyght that fought in a ryghtuous quare!" (10:15). The other witnesses focus their blame on the knight responsible for the slaying, which suggests that the lament to God is an expression of grief rather than an indication that God normally participates in earthly trials. Individuals must rely upon themselves or seek their own course of retribution should harm befall them. As Derek Brewer notes,

The world is imaged as one of unforeseeable and dangerous encounters to be managed by courage, resourcefulness and luck. Self-reliance is all, for there is no-one else to ensure the fair play by others which is categorically demanded of oneself.¹⁵

The good knight's sense of "fair play" to which Brewer refers is an internal, largely intuitive understanding of right and wrong. In the twelfth-century romances, actions are assessed based on their positive or negative impact on the community and characters are encouraged to promote the greater good. The community of Bérroul's *Roman de Tristan*

St Martin's P, 1984) 49.

forms a chorus that gives voice to their needs. They remind Mark that their hero saved them from Morholt and urge the king to give the lovers a fair trial before sentencing them to death. Morholt who “venoit por nos [their] enfanz” (849),¹⁶ “li trei felon” (4237),¹⁷ and “li nains losengier” (1060)¹⁸ are clearly demarcated as enemies of Tristan, Iseut, and all of Cornwall because they further their own ends to the detriment of the community. The characters in Malory’s narrative practice a more individualized morality where each acts according to his personal (and somewhat subjective) sense of honour. While some knights are openly vilified such as Breuse saunce pyte who “was a grete foo vnto many good knyghtes” (8:21) and Nabon le Noyre who was “a tyraunt among crysten men” (8:40), many are simply defending their point of view and find themselves in conflict with another well-meaning knight. In a particularly frivolous encounter, Lamorak and Melyagaunce (both knights of the Round Table) “hurtled to gyders as wyld bores/ and thus they fought a grete whyle” (9:13)—each attempting to prove their lady more beautiful through force of arms. Eventually, Lamorak acknowledges the futility of their conflict since “euery knyght thynketh his owne lady fayrest” (9:14). A knight must be ever-ready to defend his sense of right so that others recognize the validity of his choices. When Launcelot, Isoud, and Gueneuer unite in their disapproval of Tristram’s marriage, he is quick to defend himself. He sends a letter explaining that “he was a true kny3t/ he hadde neuer adoo fleshly with Isoud la blaunche maynys” (9:5). Tristram’s response

¹⁵ Derek Brewer, “Malory’s ‘Proving’ of Sir Lancelot,” *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance*, eds. Alison Adams, Arnel H. Diverres, Karen Stern, and Kenneth Varty (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986) 135.

¹⁶ “was coming to take away our children” (849)

¹⁷ “three felons” (4237)

¹⁸ “wicked dwarf” (1060)

suggests that his friends do not have the right to pass judgment on his actions because only he is in a position to fully understand the situation. The fact that he has to send a letter to communicate with them emphasizes their distance from the case. They apparently accept his explanation since Launcelot thinks highly of Tristram ever afterwards and Isoud invites the wedded couple to visit her.

It is part of the increased focus on the individual's point of view that motives are scrutinized as well as actions. With a community-based ethic, motivation is less important than the final result. The twelfth-century Partonopeu never intends to destroy Melior's reputation with his magic lamp, but he must accept the consequences. Likewise, Chrétien's Lancelot intends to rescue Guinevere, but he accepts praise for the release of all the captives. Malory's knights spend their days fighting (unless in prison or recovering from serious wounds) and their motives determine the tenor of the fight. Challenged by a stranger to a joust, Dynadan enquires, "Whether aske ye Iustes by loue or by hate" (10:20), questioning whether the stranger has personal motives for wishing to fight. When the other requests the joust "for loue" (10:20), he sees that there is no malice and can respond accordingly. On a later occasion, Dynadan is subject to the same inquiry: "whether in loue or in wrathe" (10:57). He answers, "lete vs doo bataille in loue" (10:57), and thus affirms that they engage out of a sense of healthy competition and good sportsmanship. Palomydes is at fault in his battle with Tristram because he hides his malicious intent beneath the guise of pure sport and hides his identity under another's armour. Tristram fights out of love without realizing that his opponent holds a personal grudge against him. Consequently, Palomydes' prowess is marred by envy and jealousy

and he fails to earn worship at the tournament. Launcelot denounces Palomydes as “passyng enuyous” (10:81) and Gueneuer comments: “it happeth an enuyous man ones to wynne worshyp he shalle be dishonoured twyes therefore// and he that is curtois and kynde and gentil hath fauour in euery place” (10:81). Palomydes’ great deeds on the first day of the tournament are devalued because of his corrupt motives. More importantly, he himself realizes that he “dyd not knyghtely” (10:82) and “wel deserued” the rebuke of his friends (10:82). It is incumbent upon each knight to govern himself according to an internalized code of conduct. By living according to conscience, he will present a positive self-image and earn the acclaim of others.

Against this social backdrop of an ethic centered on the individual, Tristram sets himself apart from his peers by clinging to ideals of community service and loyalty until it is abundantly clear that his assistance is not appreciated. The traditional story of Tristram revolves around his struggles to maintain harmony in the domestic sphere, particular that of Mark’s household. At some risk to himself, he contends with jealousy and suspicion to stay in his lord’s good graces, continually striving to reconcile his love affair with his role as Mark’s champion and nephew. At the same time as he modifies the presentation of other characters to fit with a more modern ethic, Malory respects the conventional characterization of Tristram by emphasizing his loyalty to Mark and to the community of Cornwall. Thus, the legendary character is forced to adapt to a social milieu that prizes independence and autonomy, and, to some extent, this contrast draws attention to the flaws as well as the freedoms of the new world order since we know that Arthurian society is hurtling towards its doom. The fifteenth-century romance refigures

the battle with Marhaus so that it is more in line with the other duels figured in the text. Rather than a villain sent to rob Cornwall of its children, Marhaus is a “good knyght that was nobly preued/ and a knyghte of the table round” (8:4) who is sent to collect a “truage that Cornewaile had payed many wynters” (8:4). Like other knights who defend their point of view with the lance and the sword, he is willing to defend Ireland’s right to the tribute payment just as Tristram is set to defend Cornwall’s right to avoid payment. However, Marhaus’ motives for taking the fight upon himself are personal. He tells his king, “for to auance my dedes and to encrease my worship I wylle ryght gladly goo vnto this iourneye” (8:4). In contrast, Tristram avows, “I dyd the bataille for the loue of myn vnkel kynge Marke/ and for the loue of the countreye of Cornewaile/ and for to encrease myn honoure” (8:7). His principle motivation is altruistic and demonstrates his devotion to king and country. Tristram’s loyalty is tested when Mark requires him to joust with Lamorak who is already tired from battling thirty knights. He explains to his uncle, “hit were grete shame and vylony to tempte hym ony more at this tyme/ in soo moche as he and his horse are very bothe” (8:33). On Mark’s insistence, Tristram agrees to the fight:

Euer one good is lothe to take another at disauantage
 But by cause I wil not displease yow
 as ye requyre me
 soo wille I doo and obeye your commaundemet (8:33)

Though it compromises his own sense of justice, Tristram sacrifices his honour and good name to please his lord. He admits to Lamorak that he fought against his will and shamed himself.

Unlike the earlier romance, there is no ambiguity surrounding the relationship between the lovers—Tristram is taken “naked a bedde with la beale Isoud” (8:34).

Consequently, there is no ordeal that gives voice to the community and allows the lovers to be reconciled with Mark. However, the question of adultery is still figured as a conflict between two worldviews—one grounded in a communal ethic, and the other, in an ethic centered on the individual. In Bérout's romance, the majority espouses a communal ethic and values Tristan and Iseut for their contributions to the common good. The three Barons and the dwarf stand apart in judging the lovers for their private crimes rather than their public roles. In Malory, Tristram prioritizes the values of loyalty and reconciliation in his relationship with Mark over the pursuit of his own advancement. He feels that his services should be rewarded with a reciprocal sense of obligation. When he is sentenced to death “by the assent of kynge Marke and of syr Andred and of somme of the Barons” (8:34), he protests that he is being treated so shamefully. Since the lovers' guilt is clear, he cannot defend his innocence. Instead, he argues that his country owes him for the deeds he has done on their behalf:

fayr lordes remembre what I haue done for the Countreie of Cornewaile
and in what leopardy I haue ben in for the wele of you alle
for what I fouȝt for the truage of cornewaile with sir Marhaus the good
knyght
I was promysed for to be better rewarded
whanne ye alle reffused to take the bataille
therefore as ye be good gentyll knyghtes
see me not thus shamefully to dye (8:34)

Tristram's arguments reflect a communal ethic that fosters a strong bond between warriors of the same community. He points out that he risked his own life for them when no one else was willing to stand up to Marhaus—simultaneously calling upon their debt to him and suggesting that they still need him to fight their battles. In the twelfth-century romance, this speech is given to the community as they voice their protest on behalf of

their hero.¹⁹ The fifteenth-century Tristram has to defend himself and his speech has no effect. He especially regrets seeing his cousin acting against him and bewails, “O Andred Andred said sir Tristram thou sholdest be my kynnesman/ and now thou art to me ful vnfrendely” (8:34). In response, Andred pulls out his sword and Tristram finally realizes he is all alone against those he had previously considered allies. Mark does not share his nephew’s feelings of devotion to the communal good. Rather, the king’s motives revolve around the personal conflict between the two men that began as jealousy over Segwarydes’ wife:

as longe as kynge marke lyued
 he loued neuer sire Trystram after that
 though there was fayre speche
 loue was there none (8:9)

As in his battle with Palymedes, Tristram is acting in good faith while his opponent seeks his demise. He loyally obeys his uncle’s commands without seeing the ulterior motives of a lord who secretly hates him. Long before he fully understands the extent of Mark’s hatred towards him, Tristram’s friends see that his loyalty is misplaced. When the uncle and nephew have again been reconciled and ready themselves to leave Arthur’s court, “sir Launcelot and sire Lamorak and sir Dynadan were wrothe out of mesure/ For wel they wust kyng Marke wold slee or destroye sir Tristram” (10:22). Their fears are proven true when Tristram is thrown into prison immediately upon his return to Cornwall.

Outside of his relationship with Mark, Tristram meets or exceeds the criteria valued by his society. Not only is he famous for his prowess, but Arthur praises him as

¹⁹ Maureen Fries, “Indiscreet Objects of Desire: Malory’s Tristram and the Necessity of Deceit,” *Studies in Malory*, ed. James W. Spisak (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Inst. Pubs., 1985) 100.

one of the best knyghtes
 and the gentylist of the world
 and the man of mooste worship
 for of alle maner of huntyng thou berest the pryce
 and of all mesures of blowyng thou arte the begynnyng
 and of alle the termes of huntyng and haukyng ye are the begynner
 of all Instrumentes of musyke ye ar the best
 therfor gentyl knyght said Arthur ye are welcome to this courte (10:6)

His skills in hunting and music are part of the tradition, but all contribute to his presentation as the ideal knight. Though his relationship with Isoud is open knowledge by this time, his glowing reputation is untainted by any hint that their love affair is less than proper. Mark and his small band of followers are the only characters who accuse the lovers of wrongdoing and their motives are personal. Kennedy convincingly argues that “Tristram and Isode are both able to avoid dishonor by remaining loyal to their lord until such time as Mark proves by his treachery that he no longer deserves their loyalty.”²⁰ She notes that Tristram repeatedly proves the strength of his devotion and, while the potion strengthens their love for one another, “it is a bond of simple fidelity rather than sexual passion”²¹ that does not impel them to have intercourse: Isoud is still a virgin on her wedding night. In return for their fidelity, Mark tries to have Tristram killed for talking to Isoud at a window (8:32) and wants to burn all the court ladies for failing to drink cleanly from the horn of chastity (8:34). As Kennedy notes, “Mark’s treachery is widely known in Arthur’s kingdom and almost everyone there seems to approve of the lovers’ conduct and their flight from Cornwall.”²² At Launcelot’s invitation, Tristram

²⁰ Kennedy, “Adultery in Malory,” 68.

²¹ Dhira B. Mahoney, “‘Ar ye a knyght and ar no lovear?’: The Chivalry Topos in Malory’s *Book of Sir Tristram*,” *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, eds. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 316.

²² Kennedy, “Adultery in Malory,” 69.

settles in Joyous Guard with Isoud where the two begin their life as a loving, monogamous couple. The *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* ends with this idyllic resolution to their problems with Mark, but Launcelot's passing reference to his friend's death much later in the narrative shows that the lovers again sought reconciliation with Mark and were betrayed: "Tristram brought ageyne la Beale Isoud vnto kynge Mark from Ioyous gard" and while he sat harping before his love, "with a groundyn glayue he [Mark] threst hym in behynde to the herte" (20:6). With Malory, the tragedy of their story lies not in the eternal love of Tristram and Isoud, but in Tristram's repeated attempts as a noble knight and loyal vassal to earn the love of an uncle and lord who is ruled by jealousy and hate. No longer seen as an unambiguously positive characteristic, loyalty in this context appears almost irrational and leads directly to downfall of a much-admired knight.

Like *Partonope of Blois*, Malory's text reflects a fragmented society wherein individuals look first to their own interests and secondly, to the needs of the group. While the exploits of Partonope closely parallel those of his French predecessor, the story of Tristan evolves through a number of prose versions before Malory writes his own. He goes further than the *Partonope* author in emphasizing the individual agency of his characters and their self-reliance in a world that offers them little support. The social hierarchy is not clearly defined, alliances are loosely held, and, most importantly, competition has replaced loyalty as the primary mode of interaction between warriors. Tristram excels in this world where he must constantly prove his superior strength, stamina, and courtesy. His greatest weakness is his misplaced loyalty to Mark—a

mistake that results in his untimely death, but not one for which he may be faulted.

Otherwise, he displays confidence in his abilities and in his choices, and earns the respect of his peers. He epitomizes the independence valued in a Knight of the Round Table.

Situated within Malory's work as a whole, Tristram's story demonstrates the idealism that is the most redeeming quality of Arthurian society. Tristram strives to live up to his own ideal of loyalty in his relationships with Mark and Isoud, but he ultimately becomes a victim of a world that no longer supports such principles. Similarly, Arthur's bold vision of a brotherhood of knights wherein all are equals at the Round Table cannot be sustained in a world ruled by conflict and competition. The outlook is not entirely pessimistic, since Malory holds out the possibility of individual redemption. Galahad attains the Holy Grail, but Tristram achieves the respect and admiration of his peers along with everlasting fame as a hero in the Arthurian myth. While this chapter focuses on the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* as a discrete segment of the romance, the next chapter will draw on the larger context in its discussion of Launcelot. In this respect, the two chapters complement each other and their arguments should be read in light of one another. The prowess and gallantry valued in Tristram will also allow Launcelot to excel in a society ruled by competition.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Autonomy and Independence in Malory's "Knight of the Cart" Episode

The exploits of Tristram are concentrated in Caxton's Books Eight to Ten of *Le Morte Darthur*, after Arthur has established himself on the throne and prior to the start of the Grail Quest. Malory thus locates this character in a period of relative stability at the zenith of Arthurian culture and Tristram never needs to evolve according to the changing tide of his milieu. His own adventures and affairs are not troubled by war, and his sins are not scrutinized. In contrast, Launcelot lives through the fall of Arthur's court and, as he ages, he sees his son surpass him on the Grail Quest, one of his closest friends turn against him, the king he served declare war on him, and the queen he loved turn him away forever. As the best of earthly knights, Launcelot competes in the same sphere as Tristram, and, like his colleague, he earns his reputation with the sword and the lance by pitting himself against other knights. In the period before the arrival of the Holy Grail, all the trends noted above in the chapter on Malory's Tristram are equally valid in discussions of Launcelot as the text focuses almost exclusively on earthly exploits (primarily duels and jousts) without noting God's role in the community. The miracles that repeatedly save Bérout's Tristan and Iseut have disappeared in the fifteenth-century romance along with their trial by ordeal. Instead, Tristram is largely responsible for preserving their relationship and their lives, thus proving his autonomy and self-

of an “old knyghte . . . in Relygyous clothyng” (13:8) signals that the Grail Quest will follow new rules for “he that is not clene of his synnes/ he shalle not see the mysteryes of our lord Jhesu Cryste” (13:8). In order to succeed, the knight must abandon some of the habits that are condoned or even admired by secular society and conform to God’s will as taught by various Christian recluses. Though the rules differ between secular and religious quests, the underlying spirit of competition remains the same. Knights gain prestige by competing with their fellows and, in the doomed world of the Round Table, the message is clear: social disorder is inevitable and the most one can hope for is the salvation of the individual. Since his introduction into Arthurian mythology in Chrétien’s *Lancelot, ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Lancelot’s relationship with his society has changed dramatically. In the twelfth-century romance, the individual good is synonymous with the communal good. As Elizabeth Pochoda states,

The Arthurian social or political structure, when visible in Chrétien, cannot fail to be a model of social cohesion, since its underlying but unexamined assumption is that the ideal of personal perfection is coincidental with social fulfillment.¹

Consequently, Lancelot’s indomitable quest to save Guinevere simultaneously effects the rescue of his countrymen held captive in Gorre. The larger implications to Arthurian society are missing from Malory’s version of the “Knight of the Cart” that instead focuses on the personal drama taking place between Launcelot, Gueneuer, and Mellyagraunce. By setting this episode against the backdrop of a chaotic society, Malory

¹ E.T. Pochoda, *Arthurian Propaganda: “Le Morte Darthur” as an Historical Ideal of Life* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1971) x.

emphasizes the autonomy of the characters as they each endeavor to achieve personal fulfillment.

Society in the twelfth-century romances strives to maintain equilibrium, and the progression from chaos towards order is thus depicted as a natural movement. When the French Lancelot initiates the quest to rescue the queen, he sets in motion a process that will mobilize the captive citizens of Logres and inevitably lead to the restoration of order according to the prophecy of the stone:

Gitera ces et celes fors
 Qui sont an la terre an prison,
 Don n'ist ne sers ne gentix hon
 Qui ne soit de la antor nez
 N'ancor n'en est nus retornez (1914-18)²

Conversely, Malory's romance leads inexorably towards conflict, betrayal, and loss.

C.M. Adderley praises Arthur's kingdom as "a society symbolic of a golden age of chivalry,"³ deliberately ignoring evidence such as "Merlin's doom-laden prophecies"⁴ that foretell the eventual downfall of the Round Table from within. Even before his court is established, Arthur has a dream that forecasts its wrack and ruin:

hym thought ther was come in to this land Gryffons and Serpentes
 and hym thoughte they brente and slough alle the peple in the land
 and thenne hym thoughte
 he faughte with hem
 and they dyd hym passynge grete harme
 and wounded hym ful sore
 but at the last he slewe hem (1:19)

² "he will free from worldly confinement all those—peasants, and men of noble birth—who lie behind bars in a prison from which no one returns" (1914-18)

³ C.M. Adderley, "Malory's Portrayal of Sir Lancelot," *Language Quarterly* 29:1-2 (1991) 47.

⁴ Adderley, 47.

His enemies are identified as griffins and snakes who wreak a path of destruction through the land, first killing its people and then wounding the king. Arthur does not know that his real enemies will not be so obvious and that the mortal wound figured in his dream will be inflicted by his son, but his rule is already shadowed by omens that promise chaos. His response to the dream is characteristic of the prevalent disregard for larger social issues in favour of a more narrow focus on individual pursuits: “he was passynge heuy of his dreme/ and so to put it oute of thoughtes/ he made hym redy with many knyghtes to ryde on huntynge” (1:19). He shows similar disregard when Merlin warns him that “gweneuer was not holsome for hym to take to wyf/ for he warned hym that launcelot shold loue her and she hym ageyne” (3:1). Arthur persists in his wedding plans, thus deliberately choosing a wife who is destined to be unfaithful and prioritizing his personal pleasure over the good of the community. From the beginning, his kingdom is threatened by instability at its very heart in the persons of his wife, Gueneuer, and his son, Mordred. He is not alone in plunging onward regardless of known risks: other characters also take on adventures that come with stern warnings. Balen chooses to keep the demoiselle’s sword in spite of her assertion (later proved to be true) that “ye are not wyse to keepe the swerd from me/ for ye shalle slee with the swerd the best frende that ye haue and the man that ye moste loue in the world/ and the swerd shalle be your destruction” (2:2). Though Launcelot refuses the adventure, Gawayne and Percyual both try to draw the sword meant for Galahad knowing that “who that assayeth to take the swerd and fayleth of hit/ he shalle receyue a wound by that swerd that he shalle not be hole longe after” (8:2). These men approach their future with a certain sense of fatality

as if they know the world is beset with danger, yet they will still “take the adventure” (2:2)—pitting their own strength against the certainty of a hostile world and pursuing their own desires regardless of the social consequences.

The onward rush towards the dissolution of the Round Table appears unstoppable in spite of attempts to meet such a destiny with courage or avoid it altogether. When Arthur learns that he has conceived a child who will lead to his downfall and the destruction of his realm, he and Merlin contrive to kill all the babies who might fulfill the prophecy:

and all were sente vnto the kyng
and soo was Mordred sente by kyng Lotts wyf
and all were put in a ship to the see
and some were iiii wekes old and some lasse
and so by fortune the shyp drofe vnto a castel and was al to ryuen and
destroyed
the most part sauf that Mordred was cast vp and a good man fond hym
and nourysshed hym tyl he was xiiii yere olde
and thenne he brought hym to the Court (2:28)

Arthur’s attempts to thwart fate by eliminating his son are frustrated by events that conspire to return Mordred to court where he will be in position to betray his father. The forceful repetition of the word “and” that links the events of Mordred’s life emphasizes the relentless progression of destiny. When the king again tries to avoid his fateful encounter with Mordred, he unwittingly sets in motion the events that finally destroy his fellowship. Gawayne comes to warn him in a dream that if he fights with Mordred on the morrow, “ye must be slayne/ and the moost party of your peple on bothe parties” (221:3), and so Arthur calls for a truce of one month. As the parties meet to discuss the details of the truce, a knight draws his sword to strike an adder, thus inadvertently giving

the sign that the armies on both sides had been waiting for—the signal to engage in battle. “An hondred thousand” knights are killed (21:9) and the king is mortally wounded on “thys wycked day of desteynye” (21:9) that finally destroys Arthurian society. Just as Arthur is destined to be king, his world is destined to fail as society moves inescapably towards chaos.

It is tempting to draw a parallel between the Arthurian world and the fifteenth-century England that Malory knew, marked as it was by political turmoil and social unrest. The author himself is reputed to be “a rapist, church-robber, extortioner, and would-be murderer,”⁵ which scholars have found troubling because they cannot reconcile the vices of the author with the virtues of the heroes he portrays. While the fictional nature of *Le Morte Darthur* precludes it from being read as a historical chronicle of Arthur’s reign, neither should be understood as a reflection of political reality. The twelfth-century French writers discussed in the first half of this thesis also lived through times that were marked by upheaval and rapid social change, yet they depict worlds ruled by order and stability. Nonetheless, reality is reflected in the text in the characterization of heroes as they are necessarily a product of their culture and live according to a fundamental ethic that they share with their intended audience. When Caxton chose the romance for printing, he recognized that it would have wide appeal as an expression of British history with heroes that his nation would be proud to acknowledge.⁶ The

⁵ P.J.C. Field, “Thomas Malory: The Hutton Documents,” *Medium Aevum* 48 (1979): 214.

⁶ Even though Malory felt free to embellish his sources and added whole episodes such as “the Healing of Sir Urré,” scholars now generally agree that the author saw himself as a historian. See Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*, 2nd ed. *Arthurian Studies* 11 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992); Terence McCarthy, “*Le Morte Darthur* and Romance,” *Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New*

champions of the twelfth-century unanimously prioritize the welfare of their communities—valuing loyalty and honour above considerations of the self. Malory’s heroes reflect an ethic based on the autonomy of the individual and, given his colorful biography, it is quite probably an ethic he valued himself. Unlike other medieval writers who exploit the instability of the earthly world to accentuate the stability of the heavenly realm, Malory does not explore this theme. Instead, the chaotic backdrop of Arthurian society emphasizes the individual agency of the characters as they strive for success in a world that is gradually falling apart and doomed to collapse.

Studies in chivalry typically begin by citing Arthur’s exhortation to the Knights of the Round Table. Every year at the feast of Pentecost, they renew their vow:

neuer to doo outragyouste nor mordre
 and alweyes to flee treason
 also by no meane to be cruel
 but to gyue mercy vnto hym that asketh mercy vpon payn of forfeiture of
 their worship and lordship of kyng Arthur for euermore
 and alweyes to doo ladyes
 damoysels
 and gentylwymmen socour vpon payne of dethe
 also that no man take noo batails in a wrongful quarel for noo lawe ne for
 noo worldes goodes (3:15)

Seen in isolation, this oath suggest that the knights shy away from violence and cruelty, spend their days helping women, and police the realm with justice and mercy. When these ideals are compared with the actions and lifestyles of even the best of Arthur’s knights, there is a wide gap between theory and practice. W.R.J. Barron has called this

the “paradox of his [Malory’s] knightly heroes”⁷ and praises the sophistication of an author who can maintain such a fine balance between a reality of collective failure and an epitome of chivalric perfection. Rather than seeing the Knights of the Round Table as failures with high aspirations, it is more correct to evaluate them as they evaluate themselves—they are not trying to live up to an external standard of behaviour, but an internalized sense of right. When Launcelot and Tristram hear that their friend has been sentenced to death, they do not stop to consider whether he is being punished in a righteous quarrel. Instead, they rush to his rescue (risking the possibility that they themselves might be engaging in a “wrongful quare!”) because they feel that it is wrong to “suffre this noble knyght soo to dye” (10:85). Their impulsive rescue is typical of a knight’s response to another’s misfortune—they leap in to rescue the weaker party without further inquiry. The values stated in the oath may come into conflict with each other, as they do when Gueneuer is accused of poisoning one of her guests. The knights refuse to help the queen who is tearfully begging them for “socour” (18:5) because “they alle had suspecyon vnto her” (18:3) and they refuse to defend a guilty woman lest they be implicated in the judgment. Bors explains that he would lose worship among his peers if he defended her: “I maye not with my worshyp haue adoo in this mater by cause I was at the same dyner for drede that ony of tho knyghtes wold haue me in suspecyon” (18:5). In this instance, their stated obligation to assist ladies comes in conflict with the duty to abstain from unjust quarrels. However, the issue is not decided by reference to the vow taken at Pentecost, but according to the more important function of a Knight of the Round

⁷ W.R.J. Barron, “Knighthood on Trial: The Acid Test of Irony,” *Knighthood in Medieval*

Table—increasing worship. Though they do not take an oath to that effect, the knights primarily act to increase their worship through acts of prowess and courteous behaviour, and these are activities at which they excel. Helping others, for example, offers opportunities to prove oneself against a valiant opponent and granting mercy forces the defeated party to acknowledge one's supremacy. The values introduced for the Grail Quest are also consistent with an underlying spirit of competition as each of the knights vies against his fellows for the same prize. By pulling material from different and sometimes contradictory sources, Malory creates "a fascinating work of art full of inconsistencies"⁸ that is nonetheless unified in its insistence on values of autonomy, self-interest, and self-reliance.

The preceding chapter demonstrates the independence that characterizes heroes in the fifteenth-century romance. Characters first see themselves as autonomous individuals and, second, define themselves according to their group affiliation (family, colleagues, religion). The Grail Quest is no exception: the knights resolve individually to take on the quest and each man sets out on his own, taking "the way that hym lyked best" (13:8). Though Galahad is destined to achieve the grail, he does not help his comrades or his father in their quests. Percyval and Launcelot try to follow him, "but in a whyle he was out of their syghte" (13:17). Later, he comes to Gawayne and "smote hym soo hard that he claf his helme and the coyfe of yron vnto his hede" (17:1), then "stale away pryuely so that none wyst where he was bicom" (17:1). Gawayne admires his colleague's prowess,

Literature, ed. W.H. Jackson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1981) 90.

⁸ Derek Brewer, "The Presentation of the Character of Lancelot: Chrétien to Malory," *Arthurian Literature III*, ed. Richard Barber (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983) 51.

but must give up his own quest since he is so sorely injured. The “good man” (15:4) who reveals Galahad’s lineage to Launcelot also warns him that each man must stand on his own:

the sone shall not bere the wyckednes of the fader
nor the fader shalle not bere the wyckednes of the sone
but eueryche shalle bere his owne burthen (15:4)

As Adderley notes, “the Grail quest is highly personal, and each knight succeeds or fails according to his own abilities and merits.”⁹ As a result, Lancelot must compete as the best of earthly knights and gains no advantage from his position as the winner’s father. Self-reliance is valued over cooperation, which leads characters to accept dangerous tasks on their own. Lancelot has a series of adventures in Kay’s armour that proves that his reputation stems from his prowess and his success does not rely on his reputation. In this disguise, he smites down Gawayne, Vwayne, Sagramore, and Ector “al with one spere” (6:18); overcomes Turquyn, “the strongest knyghte that euer he [Kay] sawe excepte syre launcelot” (6:18) and releases Turquyn’s prisoners; forces three knights at a bridge to yield to him; saves Melyot from death; and defends Bagdemagus against his foes. By pitting himself singly against numerous adversaries, saving those knights who cannot save themselves, and fighting a knight who almost matches him in strength, Launcelot demonstrates his ability to stand his own ground. This list of adventures also shows him accepting the help of a young woman to escape the clutches of “four quenes sorceresses” (6:18). However, a knight’s worship is not compromised when he falls

⁹ Adderley, 56.

victim to magic that cannot be overcome with physical strength or an expression of Christian faith.

In valuing autonomy over interdependence, the fifteenth-century knights show a radical shift in perspective from their twelfth-century ancestors. While Malory's version of the "Knight of the Cart" focuses on the individual agency of the characters, the principle characters in Chrétien's *Lancelot* are fixed in an interlocking web of relationships that define them. It is an established part of the tradition that Lancelot is completely devoted to the queen and this detail does not change throughout the ages, but the early French hero is also seen as a faithful colleague of Gawain and a dutiful citizen of Logres. He and Gawain cooperate with each other on the quest, working together to find a means to rescue the queen and effectively deploying their resources to ensure the greatest chance of success as a team. They do not vie against each other for worship like Malory's knights, but hold themselves accountable to one another. Lancelot also accepts the support of fellow Logrians who offer hospitality to the hero and send two of their sons to help him on his way. When they come upon a battle, the three fight together:

Il seus si tres bien le feisoit
 Que trestoz les desconfisoit,
 Et cil molt bien le refeisoient
 Qui avoec lui venu estoient. (2417-20)¹⁰

Even the trial by battle, fought between two opponents, is a group affair since the women of Logres endure penance on behalf of their champion and beg God to grant him victory. The ties between Lancelot, Gawain, and the Logrians extend to Guinevere, so that she too

¹⁰ "He alone does very well who discomfits them all and those who came with him reinforce him very well" (2417-20)

feels a sense of solidarity with them and they for her. The strong feeling of community is entirely missing in the fifteenth-century narrative by which time the plot has been greatly simplified. Gawayne's participation is omitted so that Launcelot alone bears responsibility for the rescue of the queen. Once represented as a conflict between two countries, Gorre and Logres, Mellyagraunce is now a Knight of the Round Table who abducted the queen out of love without any greater, political intentions. He does not hold any captives other than Gueneuer and her bodyguards, so Launcelot's rescue does not have any larger implications to Arthur's court. Furthermore, Mellyagraunce's father is omitted from this episode so the knight is not seen in light of his family ties and, because he is no longer a king, he is not responsible for a population of subjects.

Each of Launcelot, Gueneuer, and Mellyagraunce act as autonomous individuals and, as such, they reserve the right to form relationships based on their personal inclination rather than their duty towards others. This privilege is accorded throughout the romance so, for example, Gareth can side against his brothers after they kill Lamorak and Arthur can choose a wife based on affection. The characters' relationships with God are also a matter of preference since each is called to a holy life individually and each chooses the manner in which he will live. Galahad enjoys the fruits of heaven for his "vyrgynyte and chastyte" (16:3), while Gawayne is rewarded for all the times he did battle in a "ryghteous quarel" (21:3). In the "Knight of the Cart" episode, the conflict revolves around the right to choose alliances freely and the power struggles of the three principle figures as they each try to assert their prerogative. Mellyagraunce begins the contest with an attempt to force Gueneuer to comply with his desire for an intimate

relationship. He calls upon his personal affection for the queen, “I haue loued yow many a yere” (19:2), to justify his act and refuses to admit the relevance of any other ties though Gueneuer reminds him that he is “a kynges sone/ and knyghte of the table round” (19:2). She refuses to submit, claiming that she would rather commit suicide (and thus preserve her autonomy). The negotiations then proceed to the next level as the retainers on either side fight to uphold the agency of their employers. When Gueneuer capitulates and promises to go with her captor, it looks for a moment like his wish will be granted, but she reasserts her dominance over the relationship by stipulating that her knights remain with her at all times. As Launcelot arrives, Mellyagraunce concedes defeat and asks her to take the situation into her “owne handes” (19:5). He has tried to overpower her through the use of persuasion and force, and failed on both counts. Next, he uses the force of convention to deny her independence by charging her as “a fals traytresse vnto my [his] lord Arthur” (19:6).

In general, adultery is not considered a troublesome issue in *Le Morte Darthur*—Mark’s wife, Isoud, and Lot’s wife, Morgause, commit adultery without paying any penalties. Isoud’s affair is not complicated by offspring and accompanying issues of possible illegitimacy, but Morgause engenders a son with her lover:

she was a passynge fayr lady
 wherfore the kyng cast grete loue vnto her
 and desyred to lye by her
 so they were agreed
 and he begate vpon her Mordred (1:19)

She had arrived at Arthur’s court with four sons who stand as visible reminders of her roles as wife and mother, yet both she and the king act as if they are free to do as they

please. Arthur finds himself attracted to her, she accedes to his advances, and the two consummate their love with no thought of any further ramifications. Nowhere are they censured for violating the marriage bed. Rather, Arthur discovers that Morgause is “his syster on the moder syde” (1:19) and regrets that he has unwittingly committed an act of incest. These two women reserve the right to choose lovers without moral censure from the community. However, Malory displays a notable reluctance to provide firm evidence of Gueneuer’s alleged adultery. Robert G. Sturges notes that “Malory does violence, in some sense, to his sources, refusing the knowledge that they appear to offer of the events they depict; he chooses ignorance rather than their supposed truth.”¹¹ The queen’s relationship with Launcelot is clouded by ambiguity, as when they arrange a private meeting in her bedroom:

And thenne as the Frensshe book sayth the quene and Launcelot were to gyders
And whether they were a bedde or at other maner of disportes
me lyst not herof make no mencyon
for loue that tyme was not as is now adayes (20:3)

The suggestion that love at that time did not involve playing in bed bears with it a hint of reproach for thinking that the two enjoyed a carnal relationship and discourages the reader from judging the two. A discourse on the beauty of “vertuous loue” (18:25) wherein “men and wymmen coude loue to gyders seuen yeres/ and no lycours lustes were bitwene them” (18:25) prefaces the episode of the “Knight of the Cart” so the reader is encouraged to believe that the relationship between Launcelot and Gueneuer is chaste. Beverly Kennedy broadly asserts that

¹¹ Robert S. Sturges, “Epistemology of the Bedchamber: Textuality, Knowledge, and the

No late medieval reader could have made light of Lancelot's adultery with the queen. Even the least pious would have had to condemn Lancelot for his treason against Arthur.¹²

As early as 1290, England held that it was treasonous to violate the king's wife: "Crim de majeste est un pece horrible fet a Rei . . . par ceux avoutres qi purguissent la femme le Roi."¹³ Yet, Tristram for one is never accused of treason for making love with the wife of a king. Instead, Mark is repeatedly said to be "full of treason" (8:39, 9:14, and 9:22) for slaying good knights and, elsewhere in the romance, the term "treason" is rather loosely applied to any act deemed to run counter to popular ideas of fair dealings. It does not function as a strict, legal category, but, to some extent, it is a measure of opinion.

Mellyagraunce's accusation of Gueneuer is a personal attack that, nonetheless, must be resolved according to convention

for the custome was suche in thos dayes
that and ony man were appealed of ony treason or murther
he shold fyghte body for body
or els to fynde another knyght for hym (8:20)

The call for a duel is another step in the treacherous knight's struggles for mastery over his queen since the charge forces her to defend herself or die even though the evidence against her is circumstantial. No one else believes that she is guilty—the wounded knights protest the charge and, when Arthur questions them, he finds no evidence of guilt. The court is more mistrustful of Mellyagraunce who they suspect of trapping Launcelot "with somme treason" (19:7), yet they seem powerless to stop the flow of the

Representation of Adultery in Malory and the Prose *Lancelot*," *Arthuriana* 7:4 (1997): 60.

¹² Beverly Kennedy, "Adultery in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*," *Arthuriana* 7:4 (1997): 78.

¹³ "The crime of *laesa majestas* is a horrible sin committed against the king . . . by those adulterers who defile the king's wife." [Andrew Horn,] *The Mirror of Justices*, ed. William Joseph Whittaker (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1895) 15.

trial. Unlike many of the other duels in Malory, this agreement is formalized with a ritualistic exchange of gloves that emphasizes the seriousness of the upcoming battle. Stephen D. White notes that calling an ordeal transforms the nature of a case by introducing an element that carries potential danger for both disputants: "In a region where no ruler monopolized the legitimate use of force, no one fully controlled the use of this recognized instrument of legitimation."¹⁴ Mellyagraunce forces the court to uphold his request for a trial by openly voicing his accusation as a public charge of treachery against the High King, but his true motives are personal: "wete you wel syr Mellyagraunce was passynge glad that he had the quene at such an auantage/ for he demed by that to hyde his treson" (19:6). He is attempting to bolster his position and draw attention away from his own transgression by questioning her integrity. If he can destroy her credibility and that of her knights (all of whom are compromised in his accusation), his own act of abduction will go unpunished because Gueneuer has already told him that her "lord Arthur wyste not of this . . . werke" (19:5) and Mellyagraunce has imprisoned Launcelot who might speak against him. Rather than a call for justice or reconciliation, this trial represents two individuals who are acting out their personal animosity. When Launcelot arrives to take on the battle, he too becomes a part of the struggle since his very life is at stake and that of the queen he loves.

Chrétien's hero exhibits selfless devotion to Guinevere and achieves his quest at great cost to himself. He shames himself by riding in the cart like a criminal and suffers

¹⁴ Stephen D. White, "Proposing the Ordeal and Avoiding It: Strategy and Power in Western French Litigation, 1050-1110," *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995) 94.

unimaginable pain crossing the sword bridge, yet he casually dismisses his suffering in the pursuit of his quest. This Lancelot is almost slavish in his absolute obedience to Guinevere and his refusal to question even her most capricious commands. Malory's character struggles to stay true to his own sense of right that may, at times, conflict with Gueneuer's demands. He no longer has to cross a sword bridge to reach his beloved, but rather "he took the water at westmynstre brydge/ & made his hors to swymme ouer Temse vnto lambehythe" (19:4). The cart no longer bears the automatic connotations of shame. Instead, it is a convenient mode of transportation when he "was fowle combed of his armour/ his sheld and his spere & alle that longed vnto hym/ wete ye wel he was ful sore annoyed" (19:4). The man who grabbed the nearest horse because "cil cui grant besoigne en est/ n'ala pas querant le meilleur/ ne le plus bel, ne le graignor" (292-94),¹⁵ now takes the time to find the courser "whiche lyked hym best/ & best sadel of werre there was" (19:8). In spite of the relative ease of Launcelot's journey to rescue the queen, he barely restrains his displeasure at her announcement that he need not fight because she has made peace with her captor. He exclaims, "& I had wyst ye wold haue ben soo soone accorded with hym/ I wold not haue made suche haste vnto yow" (19:5). Speaking privately with his friend later, he implies that he will take matters into his own hands once Gueneuer is out of the way: "lete ye this passe," he states, "we shalle ryghte hit another tyme when we beste may" (19:5). Malory's Lancelot is much more independent and refuses to compromise his own sense of integrity to rescue the queen. Held captive in Mellyagraunce's prison, Launcelot refuses to have sex with his jailor as a condition of

¹⁵ "he who is in great need/ will not take the best/ nor the prettiest, nor the biggest" (292-94)

his release though it means he will not be able to defend his queen at the trial. She chastises him,

ye ar not wyse
 for ye maye neuer oute of this pryson
 but yf ye haue my helpe and also your lady quene Gueneuer shalle be
 brente in
 your deffaulte onles that ye be there at the daye of bataille (19:8)

However, the knight is not moved by her goads and she is the one who capitulates, offering to release him in exchange for a kiss: “As for to kysse yow saide sir launcelot I maye doo that and lefe no worshyp” (19:8). Caught in a similar predicament, the twelfth-century Lancelot agrees to go to bed with his hostess and does so very carefully so as not to inadvertently touch her. She sees his obvious reluctance to have any ado with her and releases him from his obligation.

The independence valued and endorsed by Arthurian society both in this episode and the romance as a whole ultimately contributes to its downfall. As he does on many occasions, Launcelot rushes in to save Gueneuer, but, this time, he accidentally kills Gawayne’s brothers and ignites the spark of vengeance that leads to war (20:8). His various offers of reconciliation are rebuffed and the ensuing chaos in the realm gives Mordred the opportunity to claim the throne for himself. Robert L. Kelly notes that

Most Malory critics since Vinaver have agreed that Malory’s vision of society is pessimistic, but have allowed that the tale holds open the hope for individual salvation through devout spirituality.¹⁶

Characters pursue their own best interests to the end and, rather than trying to rebuild the community of the Round Table, they look to their own redemption. Gueneuer is the first

to join a nunnery and avows that she suffers penance to heal her soul so that she may “haue a syght of the blessyd face of cryst/ and at domes day to sytte on his ryght syde” (21:9). Now that all hopes for worldly success and pleasure have been taken from her, she turn her sights to earning a good position in the afterlife. As she pragmatically states, “for as synful as euer I was are sayntes in heuen” (21:9). Launcelot follows her example and lives a holy life, but his quest to excel is far from over—he is admired by those who see him for achieving “suche perfeccion” (21:10) and begins to move up the holy ranks, attaining priesthood before he dies. The night of his death, the bishop dreams that “the angellys heue vp syr Launcelot vnto heuer & the yates of heuen opened ayenst hym” (21:12). As in his life, the final image of the hero shows him moving up and achieving the success that had always marked him.

¹⁶ Robert L. Kelly, “Penitence as a Remedy for War in Malory’s ‘Tale of the Death of Arthur’” *Studies in Philology* 91:2 (1994): 114.

CHAPTER NINE – Obedience in *Robert the Devyll*

In place of the focus on order, loyalty, and honour that characterizes the twelfth-century narratives, Wynkyn de Worde's prose edition of *Robert the Devyll*¹ agrees with the English *Partonope of Blois* and Malory's *Morte Darthur* in emphasizing the instability of the world and the personal nature of the hero's quest for excellence. The sixteenth-century telling of Robert's redemption maintains the plot elements of the original, while reducing the psychological realism and increasing the dramatic effect of the story. It is a much shorter tale, with attention directed towards the rapid succession of events that lead to the revelation of the fool's true identity. His transformation from devilish youth to a saintly man is consequently more sensational, but the increased drama comes at the cost of a realistic portrayal of the hero's struggle to reconcile a demonic nature with a desire for social acceptance. The English hero has no moral qualms about the heinous acts he commits as a youth, hence his conversion is all the more miraculous. Moreover, he does not feel any innate respect for his parents or other authority figures, so his abrupt shift in attitude can only be attributed to divine grace. Malory's heroes defy the chaotic nature of their world by proving their self-reliance and by living up to their own standards of proper behaviour, whereas Robert exemplifies a more explicitly

¹ *Robert the Devyll, Early English Prose Romances*, ed. William J. Thoms ([1502?]; London: Wynkyn de Worde; Edinburgh: Otto Schulze & Co, 1904). All subsequent references will be to this edition and parenthetical documentation will refer to page number.

Christian approach to defining heroism: he owes his wicked nature to the influence of the Devil whilst his goodness stems from God's grace. This dependence on the divine undermines his personal agency so that, rather than embodying the virtues of autonomy, he comes to exemplify the positive attributes of obedience. Robert's confession tests his resolution to obey God without question and, through his absolute submission, he enjoys the modest rewards of a good life.

Unlike the comparatively stable society depicted in its French predecessor, the world in *Robert the Devyll* is constantly threatened with disorder and chaos. Accordingly, its characters display a chronic awareness of the fragility of life and spend much of their time trying (with intermittent success) to keep evil at bay. In spite of their vigilance, the disharmony introduced into the ducal household with a barren marriage ripples outward until it reaches cosmic proportions. When the Duke's advisors in the twelfth-century romance suggest that he wed, he "bonement lor otroie" (13)² and marries the woman they recommend without further ado. Though the couple is disappointed that they have not borne children, the marriage is otherwise happy and secure. Robert is the result of a momentary lapse, and his redemption flows naturally from a strong impulse towards order and harmony. In stark contrast, the sixteenth-century romance shows a fundamentally chaotic world where Robert's behaviour is merely one symptom of a natural inclination towards anarchy. Rather than viewing marriage as a logical expression of unity, the Duke and his advisors in the later text are more concerned to address the issue as a possible source of discord. The advisors are specific regarding

² "readily agreed with them" (13)

their desires for this marriage, carefully outlining the positive outcomes they hope from the union: “to the entente that his lygnage myght be multiplyed thereby, and that they myght have a ryght heyre to enherite his landes after his dysceyse’ (1). The Duke himself approaches the possibility of marriage with a certain amount of caution:

My lordes, what thyng that ye thynke best for me to do shall be done, upon a condycyon, in that ye wyll that I be maryed, that ye puruey me a wyfe accordynge to myn estate, for and yf I shol coueyte ony heyre or noblyer of blode than I am myselfe that myghte not stand with ryght, and yf I take one that is not of so noble an house as I am, that sholde be to me grete shame, and all my lygnage; wherefore me thynke it were better that I kepe me as I am, than to do that thyng that sholde not be myne honeste, and afterwarde repente me. (2)

He is wary of the potential instability of a marriage between partners of differing social status and would prefer an alliance that honours both parties so that neither have cause to regret their decision. In spite of their prudent approach to matchmaking, the marriage frustrates everyone’s expectations when the couple fails to produce any children and the Duke goes so far as to suggest that the alliance was a mistake from the beginning. He says to the Duchess,

they that made the maryage betwene us bothe they dyde grete synne, for I beleue and ye had been geuen to an other man, ye sholde haue had chyldren, and I also yf I had an other ladye. (3-4)

His complaint suggests that as individuals they are healthy and deserving of progeny, but their relationship as a couple is somehow flawed. For all the care taken in finding an appropriate match, God has declined to validate their choice by completing the family unit with offspring. Their unhappiness leaves them open to the manipulations of the Devil so that the discord that marks their domestic life soon extends into the community at large. Both the Duke and his wife were “vexed and moued” (4) as they conceived their

only son and, out of frustration, the Duchess promises her child to the Devil “body and soule” (4). Robert is thus the product of their discontent, personifying their lack of control over the situation and over their emotions. The sky grows dark at his birth and a great storm shakes the ground (5), and so the elements themselves conspire to remind humanity of the everlasting threat of chaos.

The widely divergent representations of order in the two versions suggest vast differences in the underlying worldview. The twelfth-century text’s propensity towards stability and harmony flows from a strong communal base wherein relationships with others are governed by feelings of mutual support and loyalty. Hence, secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies work together with a sense of common purpose, and the appreciation of difference between individuals of varying social degrees does not preclude cooperation. Everyone contributes to the common good according to their abilities so that even the lowly fool is valued for his entertainment. This sense of unity extends to the relationship between humanity and the divine in that God is portrayed as an active member of the community on earth. The Duke and Duchess, therefore, fully expect that God will grant them children in return for their “promesse” and their “proiire” (29).³ When their expectations are not realized, the Duchess rails against the injustice of her position:

“Dieu”, fail ele, “com me haés,
 Que fruit doner ne me volés!
 Une caitive non poissant,
 Donés vous, sire, leus enfant;
 Et moit qui tant ai, sire, avoir

³ “promises” and “prayers” (29)

Ne puis, che m'est vis, nul avoir." (37-42)⁴

She suggests that she deserves at least the same return for her devotion as someone in a lower social class and does not understand why she is thus scorned by a God who should be her ally. In a brief moment of doubt and disillusionment, she offers the Devil her prayers if he will grant her a child (45-48). Her error lies in misplaced loyalty for which she is deeply ashamed because she feels that she should have known that no good could have come of her action "car d'enfer vient, u li mal sont" (441).⁵ In hindsight, she recognizes that her bargain with the Devil could only have negative consequences, but it is too late for her to recant her statement since her conditions have already been met—she has conceived. Her attempts to bargain with God presuppose an intimate relationship with the supernatural where each side has the right to make demands of the other and each has the obligation to assist the other according to the ongoing nature of their mutual obligations. Richard Green suggests that this type of reciprocal and literal relationship with the supernatural was commonplace in medieval Europe until the fifteenth century, though making pacts with God himself had long since given way to bargaining with the saints or Mary in their roles as intercessors.⁶ The Duchess feels justified in her grievance against God who refuses to grant her children in spite of numerous requests. Nonetheless, she soon realizes that in turning away from the power of goodness towards one who knows only evil, she made a grievous error in judgment that has disastrous

⁴ "God, said she, thus you hate me/ that you do not want to give me a child!/ To a wretch without power, / you give, sire, children;/ and to me who has so much, sire,/ cannot, it seems, have even one." (37-42)

⁵ "for he comes from hell, where wickedness resides" (441)

⁶ Richard Firth Green, "Bargains with God," *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999) 336-75.

consequences for her family and for the local population. She is, however, fortunate that God responds to Robert's desire for acceptance with a willingness to arrange the penitent's reconciliation with the community.

As the characterization in *Partonope of Blois* and Malory's *Morte Darthur* indicates, this feeling of intimacy has been lost by the late medieval period in favour of a more detached and unequal relationship with God. In Wynkyn de Worde's version of *Robert the Devyll*, the Duchess is fully aware that she has no right to ask for anything, but "must thanke God of that whiche he sendeth us, and take it pacyently of what so euer it be" (4). God is depicted, in the words of Aron Gurevich, as a "distant and incomprehensible deity."⁷ While Jesus is called upon as lord (4, 25), God is addressed by the more awe-inspiring "creatoure of heaven and erth" (13, 52) or "Almyghty God" (18, 23). The romance is punctuated by reminders that his will cannot be known on earth except through divine revelation. The narrator admits that he cannot explain why the Duke and Duchess conceived no children in the first eighteen years of their marriage: "whether it were Godde's wyl it sholde be so, or it were thrughe theyr own defaulte, I can not juge" (3). The Duke himself is equally at a loss as to why he has been burdened with so many troubles and laments, "I wote in no wyse what to begyn, nor doo, nor saye thereto, but good Lorde onely I crye upon the for helpe" (13). He is described as a virtuous man:

passynge ryche of goodes, and also vertuous of lyuyng, and loued and dred God above all thyng, and dyde grete almesse dedes, and exceeded

⁷ Aron J. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. Janos M. Bak and P.A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 73.

all other in ryghtwysnesse and justyce, and moost cheualrouse in dedes of
armes and notable actes doynge (1)

His distress, therefore, cannot be related to any specific wrong and it is difficult for him to see how he might amend his life to relieve his pain. Unlike the early Partonopeu, whose happiness was a visible sign of his success, there is no intrinsic connection between the sorrow of the Duke and his righteousness as a Christian or his nobility as a ruler. The Duke suffers because God wills it so for reasons that may not be understood by the general population. He is not alone in his suffering, for God does not intervene to save anyone from the malice of Robert and even the most “vertuous and holy” (17) are murdered under the youth’s indiscriminate sword. The depiction of miracles emphasizes that God’s power serves his own pleasure and, thereupon, his intervention results from his own volition rather than by reason of prayers or almsgiving. At Robert’s birth, the world is confounded with darkness, noise, tremors, and great storms until it seems as if “all the worlde sholde haue perysshed” (5), but “in a short tyme it pleased God that all this trouble ceased, and the weder clered up” (5). Once Robert has repented, God intervenes a number of times to lead the way towards the young sinner’s salvation: he sends angels to the Hermit and to Robert to clarify the details of the penance, gives speech to the Emperor’s daughter by “a fayre myracle” (48), and orders Robert’s return to Rome. On each occasion, the miracle is considered an unexpected gift rather than an anticipated reward or rightful due.

The elevation of God, in comparison to his depiction in the twelfth-century romances, is matched by a corresponding denigration of humanity. As Roland kneels in the last moments before death to offer his homage to God, he fully believes that his

offering is worthy and God will receive his soul in heaven. His strong sense of his own worth has been repeatedly validated by praise, material reward, and the honours he has received from Charlemagne, so he has no reason to doubt that God will value him after death as he has been valued in life. The early Robert shares this healthy pride in his own abilities and confidently asserts in prayer that, if God wishes him to fight, he alone could turn the tide against the attacking Turks: “Par moi fuissent si acoilli,/ que tous les quidaisse tuer/ et de la plache remuer” (1732-34).⁸ Both heroes are justified in their self-assurance—Roland’s soul is welcomed by angels and, as promised, Robert saves Rome. The later Robert makes no such boasts, but styles himself “the moost and the greteste syner of all the worlde” (29) and approaches God only with great humility. He is a sinner among sinners in accordance with Catholic doctrine which states that, as a result of the willful transgression of Adam and Eve, all of humanity must carry the burden of inherent sin that destroys “the balance of the human faculties” and leaves people “inclined to evil.”⁹ With this doctrine in mind, the Duchess’s wrongdoing is more easily understood. Whereas in the earlier version of the romance the Duchess merely spoke impulsively, the later text shows a woman who is fully aware of the gravity of her crime and is still unable to stop herself, as if she is predisposed to err. The great pains she endures as she gives birth further suggest the inherent connection between sin and the evils that plague humanity by alluding to God’s curse as he sent Adam and Eve out of Eden. The story of the Fall known to medieval audiences is told in Jacobus de Voragine’s popular *Golden*

⁸ “By me they would be so attacked,/ that I would have a mind to kill them all / and chase them to the beach” (1732-34)

⁹ “sin,” *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 11, ed. Georges Goyau, transcribed by Douglas J. Potter, 1999, Kevin Knight, 10 June 2001 <<http://newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm>>

Legend, first printed in 1275 and published in English by Caxton in 1483. After they break God's commandment, Adam and all men after him are sentenced to labour for their sustenance, while Eve and every woman thereafter are cursed with the pains of childbirth. The first mother is told, "thou shalt bring forth children in sorrow; in the pain of sorrow standeth the curse."¹⁰ The Duchess carries her son for "ix monethes as comonly women goo with chylde" (5) and with this simple fact she is aligned with every other woman who has ever given birth. Then, as promised by Eve's curse, she goes into painful labour:

this lady coude not be deliyuered without grete payn, for she trauyelled more than a moneth, and yf good prayers had not been, and almesse dedes, good werkes, and grete penance done for her, she had deyed of chylde. (5)

The Duchess in the twelfth-century text had likewise known "grant paine" (83),¹¹ labouring for a week before she finally gave birth, but the later version stands apart in its exaggeration of the suffering involved and by explicitly connecting the pain with sinfulness—to ease her physical agony, the attendant ladies perform deeds that alleviate her spiritual burden of sin.¹² Though her labour pains are exacerbated by the demonic nature of her baby and the sinful nature of his conception, her attendants could not have known the personal circumstances of the Duchess and, yet, they know how to help her based on the doctrine of original sin.

The remote and impenetrable nature of God combines with the inherent sinfulness of humanity to create a world where disorder and failure are inevitable parts of the human

¹⁰ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1, ed. F.S. Ellis, 1900, 14 June 2001
<www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume1.htm#Adam>

¹¹ "great pain" (83)

experience. The impulse towards chaos is illustrated at Robert's conception where his soul is balanced between the forces of good and evil. The Duke offers a prayer to God, "Lord Jhesu, I beseche the that I may get a chyld, at this houre, by the whiche thou mayst be honoured and served" (4), while his wife prays to the Devil, "In the deuyle's name be it, . . . yf I be conceyued with chyld in this houre, I gyve it to the devyll" (4). Her words tip the balance so that Robert embodies an unrestrained inclination towards evil. His diabolic nature expresses itself in rebellion against authority and joy in destruction. At the tender age of "seuer yere old or there aboute" (7), Robert kills his schoolmaster to the intent that no-one will dare thereafter to restrict his movements: "now haue I taughte the that never preste, nor clerke shal correct me, nor be my master" (8). From this point onward, he cannot be stopped, but

began to do every day more harm than the other one, for he forsed and rauysshed maydens and wyues without nombre, he kylled murdred so moche people, that it was pyte, also he robbed chyrches, abbayes, hermytages, and fermes. (13)

Unlike the twelfth-century Robert who yearns for love and acceptance, the sixteenth-century youth revels in anarchy and firmly asserts, "there is no degre shall cause me leve my condycyons nor chaunge my lyfe, for I am not in that mynde to do no better than I have done hetherto, nor to amende for no man lyuyng" (11). He represents raw humanity without the benefits of God's grace or the civilizing power of obedience to divine law. Ultimately, Robert alone has the power to halt his destructive behaviour and accept God's authority.

¹² The Duke also bears the burden of sin and so must work to earn his daily bread. He, too, performs works of charity so God will look kindly on him.

Robert's confession is heralded by an inward change of heart that causes him to regret his life of crime. While his predecessor had cut his hair and donned a simple robe to indicate his repentance, the later Robert shows no external signs of his feelings. When he approaches his mother, he holds a "bloody swerde in his hande" (18) and she wants to run away in fear. However, the appearance of violence is belied by his piteous words and his heart "full of thought and repentaunce" (18). His appearance at the abbey where he seeks shelter spawns a similar reaction—the monks run away until his sweet words reveal his "sore syghynge and sorowfull herte" (25). Even the Pope and the crowd in Rome are "aferde to loke upon Robert" (30). Words, rather than weeping or penitential garments, indicate his contrition and demonstrate his personal transformation. As in the later *Partonope of Blois*, internal attributes are no longer expressed by external appearances. Robert quickly turns his good intentions into concrete actions by trying to convert his former colleagues and, failing that, killing them all so they may no longer "doo grete myschefe and murdre" (24). Before he leaves Normandy for Rome, he arranges for his father to make restitution on his behalf by giving him the key to his forest hideout and saying, "in the hous lyeth all the goodes and tresoure that I haue stolen . . . I pray you that this good may be rendred agene unto such people as they haue belongynge to before (25-26). Robert names himself a sinner before the Pope and, emphasizing the private nature of the confessional by the late-medieval period, the pontiff "toke Robert aparte, and herde his confessyon" (30) before he refers him to the Hermit. No longer a public affair, confession became an increasingly secretive ritual until the invention of the confessional-

box in the sixteenth century.¹³ As in the French romance, the Pope is “gretly abashed” (30) when he hears Robert’s confession and refers him to a Hermit for absolution. So, the young man offers a full confession a second time:

fyrst he shewed the heremyte how his moder had gyuen hym to the deuyll in his concepcyon; and how he smote the chyldren in his youth or he coude goo alone; and how he kyllid his scole master; and how many knyghtes he kyllid at the iustynghe whan his fader made hym knyght; and he rode thorowe his fader’s lande, robberyng and stelynghe, forsynghe of women, rauysynghe of maydens; and how he thurst out the eyen of his fader’s men in despyte of hym; and how he had kyllid vii heremytes; and shortly shewed hym all the offences that euer he dyde, sethen the houre of hys byrth tyll that tyme (31)

The details of his personal history (not offered in the earlier version) emphasize that the individual is the focus of this confession, the “helth of my [his] soule” (30) and not his role in the community. As Mary Flowers Braswell notes, the entire process “entailed a psychological minuteness that focused on the individual, not the group.”¹⁴ The sins that have added up throughout his life must be recounted for full absolution in the hopes that, being shriven of his “abhomyable synnes” (30), he might one day see “al the joyes of heuen” (30). Upon seeing that he is truly repentant and hearing the full story of his life of sin, the Hermit absolves him and assigns penance. Robert thus fulfills all the formal requirements of confession.

The same process in the earlier text, though still an auricular confession, contains more elements suggestive of community involvement. The Pope openly admits that he cannot see how he might absolve Robert on his own and calls for the aid of the Hermit.

¹³ J.A. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 134-5.

¹⁴ Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (London: Associated University Presses, 1983) 59.

He writes a letter outlining the details of the penitent's plight and so the two holy men communicate with one another about the best course of action. The Hermit, in turn, calls upon God for help and receives an answer: "A tant vit une main estendre/ devant lui, qui li prent a tendre/ un petit brief, et il l'a pris" (809-11).¹⁵ His interaction with the divine is immediate and concrete as he engages with God in a dialogue via conversation and letters. When the Hermit outlines the details of the penance, he makes it clear that Robert cannot hide and perform his tasks in isolation: "Ne laissiés un seul jor passer/ que vous ne fachiés amasser/ après vous la gent de la vile" (851-53).¹⁶ He also warns the young man that he must follow the orders of any strange messengers who call upon him in the name of his penance, which suggests that others will be informed of the character of his trial. Even the nature of his penance suggests that the ultimate goal is reconciliation with the community. Similar to penitents among the Hospitallers, a religious and military order that formed around the time of the first Crusade (1096-99), Robert must eat on the ground like a dog until forgiven. Mary Mansfield notes that everyone could witness the shame of such penitents and the gesture of humiliation allowed the community to maintain order without recourse to authoritarian control.¹⁷ Conversely, the penitential process depicted in the later text focuses almost exclusively on healing the relationship between Robert and God. The former is desperately seeking forgiveness, while the latter guides him and tests his resolve. The dialogue between the Pope, the Hermit, and God is missing: the

¹⁵ "Thereupon he saw a hand extended/ before him, that held out for him to take/ a small letter, and he took it" (809-11)

¹⁶ "Do not let a single day go by/ that you do not amass/ around you the people of the city" (851-53)

¹⁷ Mary Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 263.

Pope sends Robert on his way without a letter of introduction, the Hermit does not presume to call upon God for help, and God speaks to the Hermit in a dream without the tangible proof of a letter. The description of the penance does not specify that Robert must subject himself to the wrath of crowds or that he must respond to the commands of strange messengers. Instead, it is headed with a reminder to Robert that he has “gretly offended ayenst God” (32) and if he wishes to be forgiven, he must “playe the fole,” eat only what he can take from the “dogges whan men gyue them ought,” keep “dombe without speche,” and “lye among dogges” (32-33). There was a certain balance in forcing the penitent to accept the beatings of an angry mob in payment for the suffering he had inflicted on others. This sense of *quid pro quo* has been replaced with a penance that punishes Robert with an almost arbitrary series of conditions and demands only his absolute obedience. The Hermit states, “this penaunce ye must doo for your synnes in a maner and forme as I haue tolde you, tyll suche tyme as it shall please your Lorde to sende you worde that your synnes be forgyuen” (33). It is incumbent upon God to release the young man when he has paid for his sins in full and, accordingly, Robert need only hold himself accountable to the divine, not to the community at large.

Rather than loyalty, which is reciprocal, the confession tests obedience to divine command, a unidirectional relationship. Robert had keenly felt the social isolation demanded by his penance in the earlier romance and learned to value the community that nurtured him. Hence, when the Turks threaten Rome, he begs to be allowed to fight because he already feels a sense of solidarity with the Romans and an obligation to defend the community if only God will allow him. In contrast, the later text makes no

mention of either his physical or emotional suffering and, instead of incorporating a learning experience, his penance merely tests his devotion. It shows the enemy threatening their shores and, in response, “euery man was wyllynge and redy to go with the emperour to fyght and defende theyr ryght” (38). Robert stands out as the sole exception to the general mobilization of the community. He is excluded from their feelings of fear and resolve, and, as his city is attacked, he is “at home, where he was accostomed to walke in the gardyne” (41). The young man does not react until he is given a direct order from “a uoyce oute of Heuen sente from our Lorde” (41).

Thereupon,

Robert herynge the commaundement of God was abashed in his mynde, and durst not do ayenst goddes commaundement, but in contynent he armed hym and lepte on the horse without tarynge and rode his waye. (41)

The dynamics of this scene demonstrate the unequal and unidirectional relationship between God and humanity. God’s might and remoteness are represented by a powerful, yet disembodied, voice that comes down from above. Upon hearing the voice, Robert is suitably abashed as befits his lowly station. He does not engage in a dialogue with the divine, but jumps to obey “in contynent” and “without tarynge.” Throughout his penance, he holds himself accountable only to God and rebuffs all others. When the Emperor’s daughter miraculously speaks and names Robert as their saviour, he mutely refuses all their entreaties to unmask. First, the “lordes and ladyes” do him reverence and he “answered them not” (51). The Emperor then asks him to come forward, followed by the Pope’s endorsement, and still Robert plays the fool. He waits until he is formally released at God’s command:

I praye you that ye serue and worshyp God as ye haue done hyderto, for oure Lorde sendeth me now to you commaundyng you to speke, and no more to counterfeyte the fole, for it is Goddes wyll and commaundement. (52)

His release emphasizes the virtue of obedience as he is urged to continue in his service though the time of his penance is past. The wording underlines his responsiveness to God's will and command, so it is fitting that his first words respond to God alone:

whan Robert herde this he fell lyghtely on his knees and lyfte up his handes towarde Heuen saynge thus, "I gyue laude and thanks to God creature of Heuen and erthe, that it hath pleased the to forgyue me myne abhomynable and grete synnes thrughe so lytell and lyght penaunce that I haue done." (52)

Ignoring all others present, he reiterates and confirms the nature of his relationship with the divine—God is the almighty creator, while Robert is the unworthy sinner. By dismissing his payment as "lytell and lyght," he suggests that he did not truly deserve his release. Instead, it is a gift that it pleased God to grant. His revelation is quickly concluded, so all briefly marvel before "euery man departed and wente home" (52). In comparison, the unmasking in the earlier version reaffirms Robert's connection with the community. His speech outlines his history in brief and he identifies himself as Robert of Normandy for the benefit of the Emperor's court. He is immediately entangled in a web of relationships as his countrymen lay claim to his services on behalf of Normandy and the Emperor seeks to claim him as a son and heir.

Robert's penance forces him to act out the subservience and foolishness destined to humanity after the Fall when reason became clouded by sin. Christa Grössinger studies the carvings on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century misericords, many of which draw their humour and their moral message from depictions of "topsy-turvy situations which

invert the natural state of affairs of the world and upset the divinely rational order.”¹⁸ She asserts that the “foolish behaviour of human beings such as jesters brings the world upside-down into focus.”¹⁹ Likewise, Robert’s behaviour in the later version of the romance provides an uncomfortable reminder of mankind’s inherently sinful nature and the resultant folly of living according to our own resources. Before his confession, he unwittingly embodies the destructive impulses that govern humankind without God’s grace and, afterwards, he acts out the chaotic nature of humanity ruled by sin. During his penance, the dogs become Robert’s constant companions: “with dogges he ete and dranke and slepte and rose whan they rose” (35). While he is associated with the dogs, they in turn are associated with the sinful (because they are not Christian) nature of the invading army. The Turks are denigrated with the epithets: “hethen dogges” (38), “dampned dogges” (42), “false dogges” (42), and “hethen houndes” (51). If we can accept that the dogs are symbols of sin, by living with them, Robert is forced to acknowledge his own sinful nature. The strange scene where “Robert made a Jewe to kysse his dogges arse” (36), already a statement of anti-Semitism, now becomes more clearly an association between the Jew and his inherent sinfulness as a member of the race who placed Jesus on the cross. In letting the dog loose on the table, the fool may be demonstrating the sin that runs rampant among them and causes all kinds of trouble. Such images suggest the chaos that ensues when sin dominates rather than obedience to God. The romance delights in scenes that invert natural order beginning with the image of Robert as a preaching fox.

¹⁸ Christa Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997) 85.

¹⁹ Grössinger, 85.

When he returns to the thieves' den to preach repentance after his conversion, one of his erstwhile companions taunts, "Nowe Syrs, take hede the foxe wyll be an auker for he begynneth to preche" (23). This motif is widely used on misericords²⁰ which suggests a strong oral tradition for this tale preserved in English by Chaucer in the "Nun's Priest's Tale." The fox hides his true nature to deceive and capture a rooster, and so the story urges caution among those who might be deceived by hypocrisy. It also suggests the foolishness of a world where animals take the roles of people. The fool enacts a similar scene of social inversion when he mockingly blesses the Pope: "Robert rose up lyke a fole and gaued the pope his blessyng" (51). He, moreover, exploits a sense of the ridiculous when he throws "a bryde on a foule dongehyll" (37) and puts "a lyuyng catte in an hole sethyng potte with podred befe" (37). The narrator concludes these scenes with the comment, Robert "made moche myrth without harme" (37). These humorous inversions and deceptions suggest the misleading nature of a fallen world. In this chaos, humanity cannot trust its own powers of reason, but, like Robert, must learn to rely on the certainty of divine command. The Duchess learns this lesson after she is duped by the devil, and the thieves suddenly confront the instability of the world when they are killed by their former captain. The Emperor receives a similar lesson when he comes to discover through divine revelation that the man he had harbored as a fool, is the saviour of Rome in truth.

Once he has been cleansed of his sin, Robert continues to follow God's commands and obediently travels whither God would send him. He is rewarded with a

²⁰ Grössinger, 115.

wife, a flourishing career, and a son to carry on his legacy, but his success is tempered by the idea that chaos lies just out of reach, an eternal menace. Robert's son carries on his fight against disorder by waging "alwayes grete warre upon the Sarasyns" (57), but the text ends with a small prayer that suggests that the rightful goal of humanity is the stability of life in heaven rather than on earth: "I praye God that we may so lyue in this lyfe we may optayne and come to euerlasting lyfe" (57). Unlike any of the other works discussed in this thesis, *Robert the Devyll* openly preaches a message very much in line with standard Catholic theology. It relies on general knowledge about the doctrine of original sin to depict a fallen world wherein humanity's only hope lies in obedience to God and individual salvation. While a similar line of thought is suggested by the ending of Malory's romance when the Round Table has disbanded and individuals seek God's forgiveness in various religious houses, the two texts disagree on the fundamental nature of humanity. Malory's heroes are self-sufficient and rely on their own agency to achieve greatness, while Robert's strengths are entirely dependent on his relationships with the supernatural. First, his unnatural size and strength are attributed to the Devil. Then, his prowess comes from God, so he cannot be said to have defeated the Turks on his own: "God and Robert" rescue Rome (41). *Partonope of Blois* follows *Robert the Devyll* in attributing its hero's virtues to God and in advocating adherence to natural law (though it is not as explicitly doctrinal). More strikingly, each of the English romances concur in their view that the world is inherently chaotic and wrestle with the hero's role in such a world. Robert's answer to this quandary in some ways belies his heroism, he chooses strict obedience in the hopes of finding his way to the eternal life promised in the Bible.

CONCLUSION

With dismay like that expressed by Partonopeu's mother when she discovers his affair with Melior, Margaret Paston writes to her son in September of 1469 complaining of the secret marriage of her daughter, Margery, to the family bailiff, Richard Calle. Seeking to somehow forestall the match, Mrs. Paston calls in the bishop of Norwich to interview the parties and determine whether the marriage contract is binding:

And the bysschop seyde to her [the errant bride] ryght pleynly, and put her in rememberawns how sche was born, what kyn and frenddys that sche had, and schuld have mo yf sche were rulyd and gydyd aftyre them; and yf sche ded not, what rebuke and schame and los yt schuld be to her, yf sche were not gydyd be them, and cause of foresakyng of her for any good or helpe or kownfort that sche schuld have of hem.¹

The bishop's arguments reflect the opinion of the upset mother and call for the young woman to remember her obligation to her family and friends (all of whom are firmly against the match). His advice presupposes an interdependent relationship between all concerned and, therefore, he urges Margery to be guided by others so that she will in turn receive their support. The crux of the dilemma lies in conflicting loyalties—does Margery have a greater obligation to her family or to her lover? If she equivocates about the wording of her agreement with Richard, the bishop could easily declare the marriage invalid and she could satisfy the demands of her family. Instead, she avers that she will

not conform to the wishes of her family and, implicitly, her society who would have expected her to make a more profitable alliance. Rather, she will assert her independence and steadfastly follow the dictates of her conscience:

And sche rehersyd what sche had seyde, and seyde yf thoo worddys mad yt not sure, sche seyde boldly that sche wold make it surer or than sche went thens. For sche sayde sche thowht in her conschens sche was bownd, whatsoevere the worddys wern.²

With this statement, her mother and the bishop realize that they have no legal recourse by which to enforce their will on Margery. They themselves are bound by the same laws that protect the woman's right to make autonomous decisions. In fact, Mrs. Paston respects Margery's accountability to conscience, but had hoped that it would lead her daughter to marry a richer man. Still protesting the marriage, the family turns its back on Margery and, thus, they assert their own right to act according to conscience.

This account reflects the same conflict between the demands of the community and the desires of the individual that occupies the hero of medieval romance. In the earlier narratives, the balance is weighted in favour of the former and their heroes accordingly dedicate themselves to the common good. Conversely, the later adaptations promote the freedom of the individual and their heroes strive for personal fulfillment. The situation described in the *Paston Letters* closely resembles that of Partonopeu and Melior, but there is a crucial difference in the French romance that allows all parties to be satisfied—the secret lover is not a mere bailiff, she is the Emperor's daughter and an alliance with her can only benefit the family. Therefore, the conflict between individual

¹ Margaret Paston, "To Sir John Paston II," 10/11 September 1469, *The Paston Letters. Chaucer to Spenser: An Anthology of Writings in English 1375-1575*, ed. Derrek Pearsall (Oxford: Blackwell

and community collapses as the desires of the two are proven to be indistinguishable. The other twelfth-century romances reach similar conclusions—as the effects of the potion wane, Tristan and Iseut realize that they miss their communal roles and seek to return to society. Lancelot accomplishes the liberation of his people through the rescue of his queen and lover. Robert's longing to be accepted by others is finally satisfied when he becomes their champion rather than their scourge. Additionally, the completion of his penance marks his full integration into society as well as the cleansing of his soul. In each case, the desires of the hero harmoniously coincide with the needs of others. The later romances do not place the same emphasis on the public good, but focus directly on the hero's process of self-realization. In *Partonope of Blois*, the end result is the same as in its French predecessor, the young hero learns to be true to the dictates of his conscience and makes his mother happy by marrying well. This romance is the earliest of the translations considered and closely follows the plot of the twelfth-century version, so it is not surprising that it remains truest to the ethic espoused in the original. However, it also gestures towards a more modern viewpoint by depicting a fragmented society marked by the increased specialization and independence of its parts. Malory goes further in this direction; against the backdrop of a society that is doomed to destruction, his heroes must look to their own salvation. Robert the Devyll is similarly concerned to save his own soul and shows even less concern for the community at large than do Tristram and Lancelot.

Publishers, 1999) 425-26.

² Paston, 426.

These heroes embody the values of their social milieu by differing in degree, not in kind, from their peers. In a society that esteems honour, they are the most honourable, and, among those who admire self-reliance, they are the most self-reliant. The early works are consistent in their portrayal of a society characterized by order and cohesiveness. These aspects manifest themselves in a strong class hierarchy wherein each seeks to fulfill their social role. Moreover, the romances display a natural impetus towards stability, so protagonists are drawn towards the creation of harmony by valuing peace over conflict. Like Charlemagne who is weary of fighting at the conclusion of the *Chanson de Roland*, the twelfth-century heroes prefer fostering reconciliation to inflaming discord. The ordeal is one method whereby opposing parties might build peace because it signals, at the very least, the intention of both sides to settle their dispute. Partonopeu's success at the trial by battle leads to the reconciliation of the French and the Danes due also in part to the kings' desires to create accord between their two peoples. The young hero is the agent of his community and represents their hopes. In contrast, the three barons in Béroul's narrative repeatedly ignore Tristan's requests to settle their dispute through the ordeal. Then, they compound their error when they refuse to let Iseut's *Judicium Dei* provide a definitive conclusion to their grievance. Their refusal to submit to God's judgment is indicative of their rejection of communal values and justifies their deaths. The ordeal is called when other methods of arbitration have failed. Thus, the conclusion of Lancelot's battle with Meleagant comes after repeated attempts to reconcile the two sides. Like the three barons, Meleagant is only killed once it becomes

obvious that he will not submit to peace. Before the end of these narratives, their heroes ensure that social order is affirmed and harmony regained.

From this cultural climate dominated by order, the later romances show an inherently chaotic world. The former cohesiveness between God and humanity is lost in favour of the exaltation of the divine and the denigration of mortal life. This perception results in a sense that people can no longer rely on God to provide daily miracles on their behalf and, consequently, they display more independence than their ancestors. Social ties in general are less meaningful and individuals struggle to ensure their own success that may now come at the cost of the greater good. The fifteenth-century redactors all present a landscape wherein individuals are no longer accountable to one another as a general rule, though they may form alliances based on personal affection. Given that relationships based on love are more enduring than others, especially in *Le Morte Darthur*, personal affection is more highly valued in the later texts. Thus, Melior is free to make the final choice of a husband based on her preference and attraction to her suitor. Alternately, the marriage of the Duke and Duchess in *Robert the Devyll* is arranged without considering the importance of love and is thereafter marred by domestic disputes. (In the earlier version, they are satisfied with their marriage and only lament the lack of offspring.) The discord of the Duke and Duchess is symptomatic of the lack of cohesiveness in later society. As a result of this fragmentation, heroes are not as beholden to their communities; rather, they are admired for their independence. Again, this shift is most clear in Malory's romance where his heroes compete with each other and pursue their own goals at the cost of social cohesion. However, this is also true to a

lesser extent in *Partonope of Blois* where the motives of the hero have changed—he fights in the ordeal more to promote his own advancement and less to defend his people, and his confession is centered around the health of his soul rather than his obligations to the community. Robert, like Partonope, is motivated to save himself and does not demonstrate any sense of connection with others. As an unrepentant villain, he lashes out against society and, as a penitent, he conforms to the will of God without showing any personal concern for the welfare of his society even when they are threatened by enemies. This said, the heroes are not anarchic, and each English redactor proposes limits to behaviour based on liability to a fixed moral code to replace the earlier accountability to the community that once held society together.

As Thomas H. Ohlgren summarizes,

According to medieval political theory, man's law ought to follow the law of nature, which in turn reflected the eternal law of God. By using reason man was able to deduce a body of principles or ethical norms from God's law that were universal, unchangeable and morally obligatory.³

Conscience, divine command, and statutory law all reflect natural law that should be ethically binding to everyone and, most especially, to heroes. Though humanity has sought to govern itself by reference to the regulatory codes since the beginning of time and a notion of law underlies the twelfth-century texts to some extent—the ritual of the ordeal, for example, represents a legal apparatus—it is not explicitly called upon as an appropriate basis for action. Early heroes cite honour and loyalty, while later heroes claim that they act in accordance with the law (in one of its manifestations). This new

³ Thomas H. Ohlgren, ed., *A Book of Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English* (Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1998) xxv.

emphasis is most apparent in *Partonope of Blois* where both parties at the ordeal are encouraged to obey the law and Mares subsequent treachery is not only a betrayal of his lord, it is considered an illegal act. Similarly, Partonope learns at his confession to hold himself accountable to the moral imperatives of his conscience. By not heeding their dictates, he jeopardizes his relationship with Melior and risks his future happiness. Robert also learns the importance of obedience through his confession, though he is specifically enjoined to heed divine command and the narrative as a whole focuses on the ecclesiastical aspects of natural law. The role of the law is most ambiguous in *Le Morte Darthur* where characters rely almost exclusively on their conscience to define appropriate behaviour. While Tristram and Launcelot each have a well-developed sense of conscience and act accordingly, they cannot rely on others to share their point of view. Mellyagraunce, for example, acts wickedly without any apparent pangs of conscience when he abducts and attempts to blackmail Gueneuer. Once good friends, Gawain and Launcelot find themselves fighting against one another at the end of the tale because they both feel impelled to act according to their own sense of right. Ultimately, Malory's romance proves that conscience without the support of a fixed standard of ecclesiastical or statutory law (and methods to enforce these standards) is an insufficient force by which to moderate behaviour in a society based on individualism.

Heroes are not only admired by their intra-textual communities, they speak to audiences beyond the text by relating to us through their humanity and inspiring us through their greatness. The heroes in the twelfth-century romances must align their personal desires with duty in a community that demands their devotion to the common

good. The popularity of these narratives and their consistent preoccupation with this issue suggests that it was socially relevant to their contemporaries. Moreover, through the success of their heroes, these texts hold out the promise that such reconciliation is possible. They also offer the clear message that those who stand against the community will not be tolerated. The later romances depict a more complicated landscape where social order is more fluid, social expectations are less clearly defined, and people are forced to look to their own interests. Tristram, for example, struggles to stay true to his feelings of devotion towards Mark in a world that acknowledges his right to follow his own inclinations at the same time as they see that the hero's efforts are in vain. His predicament epitomizes the dilemma of trying to be righteous in a hostile world. The stories of Partonope and Robert have fallen out of style with popular audiences, nor are they standard additions to course syllabi, but Malory's characters enjoy continued success as heroes for a modern world. Their strong independence relates to way we see ourselves more than the obedience advocated in *Partonope of Blois* or *Robert the Devyll*.

Seen on their own, these literary works provide a glimpse into their historical framework, but viewed in light of one another, they build a picture of their cultural milieu that can be used with other evidence to more fully understand our past. This dissertation demonstrates that the medieval text is a product of its culture as well as the creation of its redactor. Further research might investigate new ways to read romance to more fully explore the relationship between the text and the world. While I have focused on examining the heroes in terms of the values represented in their narrative context, this study could be broadened to situate these heroes within the cultural context provided by

other medieval arts, historical documents, or archeological remains. Additionally, more work could be done on the ways that romances relate to one another indirectly, by sharing themes and motifs, as well as directly, through references to each other that build a consistent picture of the romance world. Such research would enable more precise readings of these texts. This dissertation has taken a sampling of popular romances written in France, presumably within a thirty-year period, and discovered a remarkable agreement between these narratives in terms of their focus on the common good. Yet, English redactors three hundred years later saw something in these stories that spoke to their own time and place, and transformed them to reflect a more modern ethic based on the individual. Their adaptations, published within roughly twenty years of one another, are also striking in their consistent depiction of a more fragmented world. Against this backdrop, the hero excels through self-reliance and obedience to the law. In this progression, we see the beginnings of modern society and the preoccupations that still haunt us.

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