

"A la guise de Gales l'atorna":
Maternal Influence in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*

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Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal* has been read as a sort of *Bildungsroman* tracing the trajectory of a rustic youth toward exemplary knighthood.¹ The formal education of the hero is limited to his interaction with three teachers. The first of these is his mother, whose tutelage he quickly leaves behind (and whose advice he either misapplies or, in one instance, openly scorns); her death shortly after his departure effectively eliminates her from further direct intervention into her son's education. Perceval's second teacher is the vavassor Gornemant de Gohort, who shows him how to bear arms, strips him of the exterior signs of his mother's influence, and symbolically knights him. The third and final teacher is a hermit, Perceval's maternal uncle, with whom he passes Easter weekend five years after the events recounted in the first part of the romance.²

Given this series of teachers, Perceval's growth would appear to be a movement away from maternal (and feminine) influence. Only after leaving his mother's manor can he be initiated first into the secular (male) world of chivalry, and then (by a second male teacher, the hermit) into communion with God. From this perspective, the *Conte du Graal* might seem to be a story with misogynistic overtones. Perceval's mother is first rejected and then eliminated from the romance. His later interactions with women do little to dispel the impression that women are somehow peripheral to Perceval's growth as a knight. Unlike Chrétien's earlier romances, the *Conte du Graal* does not focus primarily on a love relationship and its effect on a knightly protagonist. Indeed, Perceval proves to be singularly inept in his initial interactions with women: he comically mistreats one potential love interest (the Tent Maiden), and while an embryonic relationship with Blancheflor is established (but left unresolved), his behavior at Biaurepaire still falls short of that expected of a courtly knight.

Nonetheless, closer examination suggests that Perceval's relationship with his mother is reaffirmed rather than diminished as he moves toward exemplary knighthood. Indeed, far from being a latently misogynistic text, the *Conte du Graal* affirms the necessity of a feminine influence by predicating Perceval's progress toward exemplary knighthood upon his interaction with Blancheflor, who in a less obvious way also serves as one of Perceval's teachers.

In the opening scenes of the *Conte du Graal*, the as yet unidentified Perceval has his first encounter with knights. He initially takes them for devils, and then for God in the company of a troupe of angels. After interrogating the leader of the group on the function of lance, shield and armor, he naively asks him if he was "born that way" (l. 282, "Fustes vos ensi nez?"). When the knight replies that he has recently received armor and arms from a certain King Arthur, the dazzled youth determines that he too will seek out Arthur, ask him for armor, and thereby, as he believes, accede to knightly status.³

He will do so against the explicit wishes of his mother, who has deliberately raised him in ignorance of chivalry. Having lost her husband and two older sons to the sword, she is determined to shield her youngest child from the dangers inherent in knighthood. She begs him not to leave her manor, but when her pleas fall upon deaf ears, she equips him in a curious Welsh costume, gives him some parting maternal advice, and faints away as he rides off with scarcely a backward glance.

Because Perceval's mother does not want him to be a knight, and since his initial attempt to follow her teaching, the encounter with the Tent Maiden, is such an unmitigated disaster, it might seem that the boy's trajectory toward exemplary knighthood is necessarily a movement away from maternal influence. Indeed, Gornemant de Gohort, who teaches him to bear arms and, by fastening a spur on his foot, symbolically knights him, not only strips him of the

unknightly Welsh clothing provided by his mother, but forbids him to acknowledge her influence openly. It would thus appear that for Perceval, maternal influence is an impediment to knighthood.

But in the *Conte du Graal*, appearances are frequently deceptive. Indeed, a common theme of both Chrétien's Prologue and the narrative proper is the importance of distinguishing between surface and essence, between apparent and actual worth. In the Prologue, Chrétien praises his patron, Phillip of Flanders, by comparing him to the less admirable Alexander the Great, whose reputation for goodness, Chrétien claims, obscured his actual sinfulness:

cil que l'en dist qui fu si buens
[. . .] cil ot en lui amassez
toz les visces et toz les maus.
(ll. 15, 18-19)

(Alexander, who they say was so great. . . had amassed within himself all vices and all evils.)

Chrétien then develops the theme of misleading appearances, adding that God, if not men, can see through them:

Diex, qui toz les secrez voit,
. . . set totes les repostailles
qui sont es cuers et es entrailles.
(ll. 34-36)

(God, who sees all secrets, knows all that is hidden in one's heart and in one's gut.)

It is not exterior appearance--reputation--that really counts; it is something that exists *inside*, which exterior appearance may (and perhaps properly *should*) obscure.⁴ Chrétien goes on to associate Alexander with ostentatious display, or vainglory (*vaine gloire*, l. 40), and Phillip with the less readily perceptible quality of Christian charity (*carité*, l. 43), which he identifies with God:

Diex est caritez, et qui vit
en carité, . . .
il maint en Dieu, et Diex en lui.
(ll. 47-50)⁵

(God is Charity, and he who abides in charity abides in God, and God in him.)

In these passages, the Prologue warns against valuing that which is readily apparent over that which is hidden from view, a lesson which Perceval himself must learn. In his first encounter with knights, he mistakes the surface for the essence, the armor for the man; similarly, his chivalric interlocutors see only his odd Welsh appearance but are blind to his true knightly nature.⁶ In the course of the romance, Perceval will revise his own understanding of knighthood, while proving mistaken those who dismiss him as an ignorant Welshman "stupider than beasts in the field" (l. 244: "plus fol que bestes en pasture"). His story will teach the reader that true knighthood, like true charity, is not perceptible to the eye. It is a matter not of what one wears, but of what is in the heart.

The issues of surface and essence are closely tied to the question of maternal influence. Although Perceval's rejection of his mother and his disastrous misapplication of her teachings might seem to imply that maternal influence is an impediment to his growth as a knight, it is only through a symbolic return to the realm of the mother that he will accede to true knighthood.⁷ Moreover, the maternal lesson, first stage in Perceval's formal education, demonstrates the inadequacy not of her teaching, but of her pupil. For the Perceval of the opening scenes of the *Conte du Graal* is a walking illustration of the Parable of the Sower paraphrased by Chrétien in the opening lines of the Prologue:

Ki petit semme petit quelt,
et que auques requeillir velt,
en tel liu sa semence espanse
que Diex a cent double li rande;
car en terre qui riens ne valt,
bone semence seche et faut.
(ll. 1-6)⁸

(He who sows little reaps little. He who wishes to reap well casts his seed where God will increase his fruit a hundred-fold; for good seed withers and dies in worthless soil.)

Perceval's initial status as "worthless soil" is clearly established through his comical misapprehension of his mother's lessons, which are lost on him not because they are inherently faulty, but because he lacks the ability to understand them. At this point, Perceval is ground unsuitable for culture, lacking one essential element: the Christian *carité* (l. 43) that distinguishes Chrétien's patron, Phillip of Flanders, from the *vaine gloire* (l. 40) of an Alexander the Great.⁹

A substantial portion of his mother's lesson (*sens*, l. 527) is devoted to the question of Perceval's interaction with women (ll. 533-556). She focusses first on the importance of serving and honoring women, in general:

Se vos trovez ne pres ne loing
dame qui d'a'e ait besoig,
ne pucele desconseillie,
la vostre a<de appareillie
lor soit, s'ele[s] vos en requierent,
car totes honors i affierent. . . (ll. 533-538)

(If you should meet, near or far, lady or damsel in distress, help her, if she requests your aid, for all honor will come of it. . .)

This theoretical principle is followed by some simple guidelines to follow should he wish to serve and honor one woman, in particular (ll. 543-556): if the lady is willing, he may accept a kiss and a ring or an alms purse as a love token, but nothing more. The pedagogical method here is sound: moving from the general to the particular, from theory to application.

But the mother's lesson is barely registered (and totally misunderstood) by her literal-minded son. Soon after his departure for court, Perceval comes upon a beautiful maiden asleep in a tent. He greets the maiden by saying,

. . . Pucele, je vos salu
si com ma mere le m'aprist.
Ma mere m'ensaigna et dist
que les puceles saluaise
en quel que liu que jes trouvasse. (ll. 682-686)

(Maiden, I greet you as my mother taught me to. My mother taught me and told me that I should greet maidens, wherever I might find them.)

He later refers to his mother's lessons to justify forcing the maiden to yield first her lips, and then her ring:

Ains vos baiseraï, par mon chief,
fait li vallés, cui qu'il soit grief,
que ma mere le m'ensaigna. (ll. 693-695)

(I will kiss you, by my head, said the boy, whomever it might displease, for so my mother taught me to do.)

Encor me dist, fait il, ma mere
qu'en vostre doit l'anel presisse,
ne que rien plus ne vos fesisse.
Or cha l'anel! jel weil avoir. (ll. 712-715)

(My mother also told me, he said, that I should take your ring from your finger, but that I should do nothing else. So give me the ring! I want it.)

Throughout this encounter, Perceval asserts that he is behaving in accordance with maternal precepts. Nonetheless, he ignores the most essential part of her lesson, the injunction against forcing a woman to accept unwanted attentions:

Dames et puceles servez,
si serez par tout honerez;

mais se vos alcune en proiez,
gardez que ne li anuiez
de nule rien qui li desplease. (ll. 541-545)

(Serve ladies and maidens, and you will be honored everywhere. But if you ask one for her love, take care not to annoy her by doing anything that displeases her.)

Whereas the Tent Maiden explicitly states that she would not kiss him willingly (ll. 696-697: "Je voir ne te baiseraï ja/ . . . que je puisse": "In truth, I will never kiss you, if I can help it"), Perceval kisses her no less than seven times, "volsist ele ou non" (l. 708, whether she liked it or not). Similarly, he wrests away her emerald ring over her explicit objections:

"Mon anel n'aras tu ja voir,
fait la pucele, bien le saches,
s'a force del doit nel m'esraches."
Li vallés par le poing le prent,
a force le doit li estent,
si a l'anel en son doit pris
et en son doit meisme mis. . . (ll. 716-722)

(The maiden says, "You can be sure that you will never have my ring unless you rip it from my finger."
The boy grabs her wrist, forces her to unbend her finger, and takes the ring from her finger, which he puts on his own.)

The Tent Maiden's unhappiness at Perceval's attentions is signalled not only by her explicit protests, but by repeated references to her tears (ll. 729, 756-760, 773-781).

Here, Perceval has not only disregarded his mother's counsel, he has reversed it, turning the formerly happy Tent Maiden into precisely the sort of damsel in distress (*pucele desconseillie*, l. 535) his mother had enjoined him to assist and aid. When the maiden's jealous lover returns to the tent, he interprets her tears and missing ring as proof of her infidelity, for which he proceeds to punish her unmercifully; this injustice is not corrected until a later episode in which Perceval obliges him to recognize her innocence. While Perceval ultimately does correct his misbehavior by defending the maiden against her lover's unjust accusations, it is ironic that when he finally "gets it right," succoring a *pucele desconseillie*, the damsel in question is one whose distress he himself has caused.

Perceval's boorish behavior in the encounter with the Tent Maiden demonstrates his complete incomprehension of the precepts espoused by his mother. His disastrous attempt to follow her advice does not however indicate that her lesson was unsound. The advice is good; it is the hearer who misapplies it, focussing single-mindedly on the exterior signs of love service rather than the principle behind it.¹⁰ Ignoring the explicit warning not to do anything that might displease or upset a lady, Perceval remembers only that his mother had mentioned acquiring a ring--and perhaps a kiss--from the object of his affections.

Indeed, it is even conceivable that the boy understands but deliberately ignores his mother's advice, for Perceval is capable of rebelling against his mother's direction, even when he believes her to be right. In his initial encounter with the group of knights in the Gaste Forest, Perceval perversely decides to flout his mother's teaching:

Voir se dist ma mere, ma dame,
qui me dist que deable sont
les plus laides choses del mont;
et si dist por moi enseingnier,
que por aus se doit on seingnier.
Mes cest ensaing desdaigneraï,
que ja voir ne m'en seigneraï,
ains ferrai si tot le plus fort
d'un des gavelos que je port. . . (ll. 114-122)

(My mother spoke true when she said that devils are the ugliest things in the world. She taught me that one

should cross oneself to protect against them. But I will scorn her teaching. I will never make the sign of the cross; instead I will strike the strongest of them with one of my javelins.)

The issue of maternal influence is thus more complicated than it initially appears. While the first step in Perceval's trajectory toward knighthood is a rejection of the mother who had attempted to shield him from it, the boy is cognizant of the fact that her teachings may well be true, even as he ignores them. His readiness to flout her wishes is part and parcel of his foolishness. Moreover, as Perceval's boorish treatment of the Tent Maiden indicates, he misses the point of his mother's lessons. His single-minded focus on the exterior attributes of love service blinds him to the context in which they should be won. At this stage in his development, Perceval is incapable of truly altruistic actions. He is egocentric as well as egotistical, wanting a ring and a kiss for the same reasons that he will desire the shining red armor of the Chevalier Vermeil: not as tangible reminders of an intangible, interior state (the love which a lady might inspire), but as pure exterior sign, because he aspires to knighthood, and because--as a result of his mother's ill-digested lesson--he has associated a lady's favors with that much desired state.

In the course of the *Conte du Graal*, Perceval will develop the faculty of Christian love, gradually becoming the fertile ground in which the seeds of exemplary knighthood can grow. But he will be a knight of another sort than those found at Arthur's court. It is in this sense that Perceval's mother will remain closely associated with her son's chivalric education. She represents a value system diametrically opposed to the vainglory which Chrétien associates with Alexander (in the Prologue) and with Arthur's kingdom (and particularly with Gauvain) within the narrative proper.¹¹ Perceval's exemplary chivalry will be grounded not in the male-oriented Arthurian court, but in the maternal sphere which Pickens calls the "Grail axis."¹² Given the thematic significance of the dichotomy between exterior appearance and interior worth in the *Conte du Graal*, Perceval's appearance at various stages of his growth is both significant and suspect. Because of Perceval's foolish (Welsh) appearance, Arthur and most of his courtiers are incapable of perceiving his underlying chivalric nature. The only exception is the Laughing Maiden who recognizes Perceval as "He who will be the best knight in the world" ["celui qui de chevalerie/ avra toute la seignorie" (ll. 1062-1063)]. The fact that her perceptiveness earns her a slap on the face, courtesy of Arthur's seneschal Keu, is a first indication of the superficial, appearance-oriented nature of the Arthurian court.

When Perceval next encounters Arthur's court, he looks the part of a knight, from his scarlet hose to his violet cloak, from the red armor stripped from the body of the Chevalier Vermeil, to the spur which Gornemant has fastened upon his right foot. But this appearance too is deceptive, for his triumphant return to Arthur's court is marred by the arrival of the Hideous Damsel, who castigates Perceval for his failure at the Grail Castle. Perceval's apparent knightliness is no more a part of him than the new clothes he has reluctantly accepted before leaving the castle of Gornemant de Gohort. Underneath, he is still the "Welsh youth, uncouth, base and na<f" (in the words of the Tent Maiden, "un vallet galois . . ./ an<eus et vilain et sot" [ll. 791-792]) which his initial costume had proclaimed him to be.¹³

Chrétien's description of Perceval's Welsh costume reinforces our understanding of the maternal and Arthurian worlds as conflicting spheres of influence:

La mere . . .
li apareille et atorne
de canevs grosse chemise
et braies faites a la guise
de Gales, ou on fait ensamble
braies et cauces, ce me samble;
et si ot cote et caperon,
de cuir de cerf close environ.

Einsi la mere l'atorna. (ll. 496-505) (His mother outfits and dresses him in a coarse canvas shirt and breeches made in the Welsh style, where breeches and hose are made in one piece, as it seems to me; and he had a buckskin cloak and hood wrapped around him. Thus his mother fit him out.)

In this passage, one is struck by Chrétien's insistence upon the deliberation with which the mother equips her son. Clearly, Perceval's Welsh appearance, for which he is repeatedly mocked, is no accident.¹⁴ Perceval's mother, the daughter, wife and mother of knights, does not share her son's ignorance of chivalry and courtly ways.¹⁵ Why then

does she so carefully dress him in a way sure to provoke derision at the Arthurian court?

Since Perceval's mother does not want him to become a knight, one might assume that she dresses him in this fashion in a clumsy attempt to sabotage his chances. Given the theme of appearance vs. essence established in the prologue, however, another interpretation is more likely: that within the value system represented by Perceval's mother, conspicuous Welshness is a badge of honor. [16](#) Perceval's Welsh costume serves to remind us of the futility of judgments based upon exterior appearance, while signalling the shortcomings of the sort of vainglorious knighthood associated with the Arthurian court.

The tension between the values associated with the Arthurian court and Perceval's Welsh appearance is exemplified in a brief scene that follows Perceval's defeat of the Red Knight, whose armor he believes Arthur has awarded him. A courtier named Yvonet helps Perceval to put on the dead man's armor. But despite Yvonet's best efforts, Perceval refuses to dress in the finery of his vanquished adversary:

. . . li vallés sa vesteüre
ne volt laissier, ne qu'il preïst,
por rien qu'Ivonés li deïst,
une cote molt aesie,
de drap de soie gambesie,
[. . .] ne oster ne li puet des piez
les revelins qu'il ot chauciez,
ains dist: "Deable! est che ore gas?
Chanjeroie je mes bons dras,
que ma mere me fist l'autr'ier,
por les dras a che chevalier?
Ma grosse chemise de canvene
por la soie qui'st mole et tanvene?
voldriiez vos que je laissasse
ma cotele ou aigue ne passe
por cesti qui n'en tenroit goute?
Maldite soit la gorge tote
qui cangera n'avant n'après
ses bons dras por autres malvés!" (ll. 1152-1156, 1159-1172)

(But the boy did not want to give up his clothing, nor would he accept a comfortable tunic of padded silk, no matter what Yvonet said to him, . . . nor could Yvonet persuade him to remove the rawhide buckskins from his feet. He just said, "What the devil, is this a joke? Do you think I'll exchange the good clothes which my mother recently made me for the clothing of this knight? My heavy canvas shirt for his useless thin one? You want me to give up my waterproof tunic for this one, that wouldn't keep off a drop? May he be hanged who'd ever exchange his own good clothes for inferior ones.")

Here, Perceval's reluctance to part with his Welsh clothing is amusing, proof of his rusticity and na<veté. But it serves a double purpose, attesting also to his lack of vanity and indifference to surface appearance--precisely that which will differentiate him from his Arthurian peers, most notably Gauvain.

Where Yvonet fails in his attempt to make Perceval look more like a knight, Perceval's second teacher will ultimately succeed. Nonetheless, when Gornemant first seeks to present him with a resplendent new set of clothing, Perceval is as disdainful as he was to Yvonet:

. . . "Biax sire,
vos porriiez assez mix dire.
Li drap que ma mere me fist,
dont ne valent il miex que cist?
Et vos volez que je les veste!"
"Vallet, foi que je doi ma teste,

[ne foi que je doi mes deus oex,
ainçois valent cist assez miex.]"[17](#)

Fait li vallés: "Ains valent pis." (ll. 1609-1615)

("Fair sir, you could advise me better. Are not the clothes my mother made me better than these? And you want me to wear these!" "Youth, by the faith I owe my head and my two eyes, these are better." The youth replies, "No, they're worse.")

Perceval's stubbornness seems foolish but is in fact well-founded, reflecting his indifference to surface appearance (the *vaine gloire* of Chrétien's Prologue).

But if Perceval is unmoved by Gornemant's low opinion of his style of dress, he is helpless before the latter's use of a rash boon.[18](#) Gornemant reminds Perceval of the conditions he had imposed in offering the youth a night's hospitality:

"Vos me de<stes, biax amis,
quant je vos amenai çaiens,
que vos toz mes comandemens
feriiez." "Et je si ferai,
fait li vallés, ja n'en falrai
encontre vos de nule chose."

As dras vestir plus ne repose,
si a les sa mere laissez. (ll. 1616-1623)

("You told me, fair friend, when I offered you hospitality, that you would obey all my commands." "And I will do so," said the boy; "I'll never oppose you in anything." With no further delay, he puts on the clothing, abandoning that which came from his mother.)

Chrétien records this exchange without comment. But the careful reader should note that Gornemant's persuasion is not without an element of bad faith. Here is the passage in which Gornemant's responds to Perceval's request for a night's lodging: he will provide it

"Molt volentiers, fait li preudom,
mais que vos m'otroiez un don
dont grant bien venir vos verrés."
"Et quel?" fait il.--"Que vos querrez
le conseil vostre mere et moi."
"Par foi, fait il, et je l'otroi."

(ll. 1413-1418) ("Very willingly," says Gornemant, "if you will grant me a boon that will be to your advantage." "What?" "That you will follow my advice and that of your mother." "By my faith, I agree.")

Somehow, in the interim, Gornemant has conveniently forgotten the stipulation that Perceval also obey his *mother's* teachings. At the point where his own counsel conflicts with that of Perceval's mother, he uses Perceval's promise to strip from him all exterior traces of maternal influence.[19](#)

He then goes even further, requiring Perceval to repudiate--or at least to cease acknowledging--his mother's lessons:

"Or ne dites jamais, biax frere,
fait li preudom, que vostre mere
vos ait appris rien, se je non.
Et sachiez que ne vos blasmon
se vos l'avez dit dusqu'a chi;
et des or mais, vostre merchi,
vos proi que vos en chastiiez,
car se vos plus le disiiez,
a folie le tenroit l'en.
Por che vos proi gardez vos en."
"Coment dirai dont, biax dols sire?"

"Li vavasors, ce porrez dire,
qui vostre esperon vos caucha,
le vos aprist et ensaigna." (ll. 1675-1688)

("No longer say, dear brother, that your mother (rather than I) taught you things. I don't blame you for having said so up until now, but for pity's sake don't say so any more, for if you do, people will find you foolish. For this reason, I ask you to stop doing so." "What should I say instead, fair sir?" "You can say this: that the vavasor who attached your spur taught it to you.")

Here we see clearly that Gornemant represents chivalric values which are in conflict with those represented by Perceval's mother. Gornemant is an integral part of the value system represented by the Arthurian court.

The opposition between Arthurian and maternal values is also felt in Perceval's refusal to stay with Gornemant for more than a single night. He rejects the *prodhom's* offer to continue teaching him those things which a knight might need to know ("tels choses. . . / qu'au besoing mestier li eüssent" [ll. 1577-1578]) because he is worried about his mother and wants to return to her manor as soon as possible:

Li noviax chevaliers se part
de son hoste, et molt li est tart
qu'il a sa mere venir puisse
et que vive et saine le truisse.

(ll. 1699-1702) (The new knight leaves his host. He is eager to return to his mother and to find her alive and well.)

In fact, Perceval will not return to his mother's manor, for soon after leaving Gornemant's castle, he learns that she is dead. Nonetheless, his new-found concern for her well-being--reiterated in three further passages--is of considerable significance.²⁰ Up to this point, all of Perceval's actions have been governed by a single-minded focus on his own needs and desires. His concern for his mother's health is noteworthy because it is the first time that we have seen him spontaneously think of someone other than himself.

Perceval's initial egotism is carefully established by Chrétien. We recall the youth's reaction to his mother's tearful account of the loss of her husband and elder sons:

Li vallés entent molt petit
a che que sa mere li dist.
"A mengier, fait il, me donez;
ne sai de coi m'araisonnez.
Molt m'en iroie volentiers
au roi qui fait les chevaliers,
et je irai, cui qu'il em poist."

(ll. 489-495) (The boy pays little heed to what his mother is saying. "Give me something to eat," he demands. "I don't know what you're lecturing me about. I would very gladly go seek out this knight-making king--and I will do so, come what may.")

Fully absorbed by his own appetite and desires, Perceval does not even seem to be aware of his mother's distress--an indifference that is confirmed as he rides away from the swooning widow with scarcely a backward glance (ll. 621-632).

Perceval's comic self-absorption is also evident in his encounter with the Tent Maiden. He helps himself to kisses and a ring simply because he wants them; at this stage of his development, to want is synonymous with to take.²¹ Impervious to the distress he is causing, his next impulse is to assuage his hunger and thirst:

Li vallés a son cuer ne met
rien nule de che que il ot,
mais de che que jené ot
moroit de fain a male fin. . . (ll. 734-737)

(The boy takes nothing that he hears to heart, because he had not yet eaten and was dying of hunger.)

Perceval's enjoyment of his meal--a meat pie and wine, to which he helps himself with no more compunction than he had displayed in appropriating the desired kisses and ring--is utterly unaffected by the maiden's tears:

La damoisele . . . pleure fort;
molt durement ses poins detort.
Et cil menga tant com lui plot
et but tant que assez en ot
et prist congié tot maintenant (ll. 759-763)

(The maiden . . . weeps bitterly, wringing her hands. But he ate as much as he wanted and drank until he had had enough, and then bid her farewell.)[22](#)

Utterly self-absorbed, Perceval has no faculty of empathy, no consciousness of the Other to counterbalance his natural appetites. The juxtaposition of the maiden's tears and the youth's hearty appetite characterizes perfectly this self-involved stage of his development.[23](#)

Similarly, upon his arrival at Carduel, Perceval is indifferent to the distress caused Arthur by the insolent challenge of the Chevalier Vermeil (who has laid claim to Arthur's kingdom and spilled wine in the Queen's lap). When Arthur does not immediately acknowledge the boy's presence, the impatient youth doubts that he is king.[24](#) One notes the same indifference to other people's feelings, the same single-minded focus on his own desires, that characterized Perceval's interaction with his mother and with the Tent Maiden:

Li vallés ne prise une chive
quanque li rois li dist et conte
ne de son dol ne de sa honte.
De sa fame ne li chaut il.
"Faites moi chevalier, fait il,
sire rois, car aler m'en weil." (ll. 968-973)

(The boy doesn't care an onion for what the king tells him of his sorrow and shame, and he is indifferent to the insult paid the queen. "Make me a knight, sir king, for I want to be on my way!")

In these initial encounters, Chrétien takes great care to establish Perceval's self-centeredness. While his boorish behavior is undeniably amusing, these scenes also serve a more serious purpose. By analogy with the Prologue, Perceval's indifference to the feelings of others is the infertile soil in which good things cannot take root and grow. His heart is still as hard as stony ground; it has not yet been touched by Christian *caritéü*, the selfless love evoked by Chrétien in the Prologue. Perceval's refusal to stay on with Gornemant out of concern for his mother is therefore a development of some significance. Admittedly, this belated movement of empathy and concern is but a small step. But as the Parable of the Sower reminds us, all growth begins with a seed. In these few lines, Chrétien carefully records the first small movement of charity within Perceval's heart. It is the seed from which a truly exemplary knightliness will grow.

Perceval proves to be more adept at mastering the outward forms of chivalric behavior than in developing a charitable spirit. At Biaurepaire, where he spends the night following his departure from Gornemant's castle, he does the right thing for the wrong reasons. Despite copious evidence that the besieged city is in a state of crisis (and numerous hints from his hostess), Perceval does not think to offer Blancheflor his assistance until she has literally cried in his face (ll. 1971-1981). While he does ultimately "get it right," offering his aid to a damsel in distress, one has the distinct impression that he is motivated less by compassion than by the vague notion that "that is what knights do."[25](#)

The superficial nature of his progress is made clear by his actions the following evening at the Grail Castle. Once again, Perceval acts maladroitly, attempting to apply a rule of behavior that he has only dimly understood: Gornemant's injunction against talking too much (the same rule which prompted his uncourtly silence with Blancheflor). But whereas at Biaurepaire he was able to do the right thing for the wrong reasons, here his maladroitness will have devastating consequences: his failure to inquire who is being served from the Grail and why

the Lance bleeds will cause untold suffering in the infertile wasteland ruled over by his maternal cousin, the wounded Fisher King. The disastrous consequences of his silence, attributed by a second maternal cousin (and later by his maternal uncle, the hermit) to the sin of hard-heartedness, shows that the letter of any law (including Gornemant's) is less important than the charitable spirit which should animate one's actions.[26](#)

Here one notes the presence of a steady stream of maternal relations--two enate uncles (the aged father of the Fisher King and the hermit), two cousins--who belie the mother's early disappearance from the romance. Indeed, as Perceval's encounter with the second of these cousins establishes, the maternal influence ostensibly stripped from him along with his Welsh clothes is paradoxically reasserted even as he learns of her death. Soon after leaving the Grail Castle, Perceval encounters a maiden--the second maternal cousin--who was raised with him at his mother's manor (ll. 3596-3601). After questioning him about his evening with the Fisher King, she asks him his name (which has not yet been mentioned). The newly dubbed knight spontaneously "guesses" his identity: "cil qui son non ne savoit/ devine et dist que il avoit/ *Perchevax li Galois* a non (ll. 3573-3575: The one who didn't know his name guesses and says that it is *Perceval the Welshman*). As Rupert Pickens has remarked, this epithet affirms Perceval's essential Welshness--despite the fact that Gornemant has recently stripped him of the exterior signs of that identity.[27](#)

But no sooner has Perceval's name been revealed than it is changed by his cousin to "Perchevax li chaitis" (l. 3582, Perceval the wretched). She informs him that his mother has died of grief caused by his hard-heartedness--the very "sin" which caused his fatal silence at the Grail Castle. It is a bleak moment for Perceval. But it is also a turning point: paradoxically, the news of his mother's death turns Perceval from the road of Arthurian vainglory down which he had begun to walk. Shocked by his cousin's revelation, Perceval consciously chooses to change direction:

Et des que ele est mise en terre,
que iroie jou avant querre?
Kar por rien nule n'i aloie
fors por li que veoir voloie;
autre voie m'estuet tenir. (ll. 3621-3625)

(Since she is dead and buried, what should I look for ahead? I was going to her manor only because I wanted to see her. Now I must seek another path.)

This "other path" will lead Perceval away from vainglorious Arthurian values and toward a new sort of exemplary knighthood grounded in Christian charity. Moreover, while Perceval's new path will not lead him back to his mother's manor, it will restore him to her sphere of influence: after five years of aimless wandering, he will find himself at his uncle's hermitage, where he will gain a new understanding of his maternal heritage.

In order for him to reach that point, however, he must first rectify a number of earlier mistakes.[28](#) I have already alluded to Perceval's correction of his misbehavior with the Tent Maiden: by forcing her jealous lover to recognize her innocence, he repairs the damage done by the stolen ring and kisses. Similarly, the episode of the Blood Drops on the Snow corrects Perceval's lack of spontaneous charity toward Blanche-flor at Biaurepaire. In this charming scene, an early morning snowfall has blanketed the ground with white. Perceval is riding toward Arthur's encampment when three blood drops from the neck of a wounded goose fall upon the snow. The pattern of red on white reminds him of "la fresche color del vis/ [s]'amie la bele" (ll. 4454-4455: the fresh color of his beloved's beautiful face).[29](#) Thoughts of Blanche-fleur overwhelm him. He loses track of time, hardly aware of the world around him. Thus he fails to react when two messengers from the Arthurian encampment attempt, one after the other, to summon him into the King's presence. Only when attacked does he momentarily rouse himself, unhorsing first Saigremor and then Keu.[30](#)

Perceval's prolonged revery demonstrates a new aspect of his personality: the ability to direct his former self-absorption toward an object other than himself.[31](#) The experience is still intensely personal, but the love that quite literally stops him in his tracks is selfless rather than self-centered: "si pense tant que il s'oblie" (l. 4202: "He becomes so lost in thought that he forgets himself"). Thus Perceval's revery is more than the illustration of a courtly conceit. It represents the definitive end of his egocentrism, his discovery and embrace of the Other. To continue the analogy with the Prologue, the seed of *carité* represented by Perceval's concern for his mother has finally found fertile ground and begun to grow; during his visit to his uncle's hermitage, it will ripen into fruit.[32](#)

The road that will lead Perceval to the hermitage is not that of Arthurian vainglory, but an extension of the "other path" he embarked upon after learning of his mother's death. Perceval's triumphant reunion with Arthur's court is interrupted by the arrival of the Hideous Damsel, who denounces his failure at the Grail Castle, recounts the terrible consequences of that failure, and challenges the assembled knights to take on a series of adventures, each of which is presented as a means of winning glory and renown (ll. 4648-4714). These adventures have one thing in common: their purpose is selfish--to enhance one's knightly reputation--rather than charitable.³³ It is precisely this superficial sort of knighthood that will be illustrated by the adventures of Gauvain, the primary focus of the subsequent narrative. These adventures stand in, synecdochically, for those of the fifty-odd Arthurian knights who eagerly join him in selecting one or another of the reputation-enhancing adventures.

Perceval alone chooses another path: "Perchevax redist tout el" (l. 4727: Perceval responds altogether differently). This divergence of the ways is the logical result of the boy's reaction to his mother's death (l. 3625: "Autre voie m'estuet tenir"). Unlike the other knights, he will not seek glory and renown, but try to right the wrongs caused by his silence at the Grail Castle. He sets out to discover who is served by the Grail and why the Lance bleeds (ll. 4727-4740)--the very information which, according to the Hideous Damsel, would have prevented the disasters she predicts from taking place.

Since Chrétien's narrative is unfinished, we can only guess that this "other path" would ultimately lead him back to the Grail Castle.³⁴ But we do know that it leads, figuratively speaking, to a realm of maternal influence where Perceval will complete his apprenticeship of selfless love (*carité*). On Good Friday, some five years after embarking upon his Grail quest, Perceval encounters a hermit, his maternal uncle. At the hermitage, he confesses his sins, does penance, and is given Communion--thereby heeding a portion of his mother's lesson that he had ignored during five years of errancy.

Indeed, the hermitage episode can be seen as elaborating upon and completing the rudimentary religious instruction offered by Perceval's mother (ll. 567-594). The penitents who direct Perceval to his uncle's cell explain to him that he should not bear arms on Good Friday because it is the day on which Christ died (ll. 6289-6291). This explanation connects Perceval's visit to the hermitage with the final part of his mother's lesson, her account of Christ's Passion (ll. 584-588). The emphasis in both cases is on salvation bought with divine love, the highest form of *carité*.³⁵

The hermitage episode demonstrates Perceval's growth in the Christian charity identified in the Prologue. According to the Hermit, a Christian's first duty is to love God: "Dieu aime, Dieu croi, Dieu aeure. . ." (l. 6459: love God, believe in God, worship God). Significantly, Perceval's spiritual destitution prior to his meeting with the hermit is expressed first in terms of a lack of love: "Ne Dieu amai ne Dieu ne crui. . ." (l. 6366: I neither loved God nor believed in Him).

The Hermitage episode is the logical conclusion of Perceval's growth in charity. Had he not already developed the capacity to feel compassion and to act charitably, he would be unable to understand the implications of Christ's Passion. His experience of selflessness in the episode of the Blood Drops on the Snow (l. 4202: "si pense tant que il s'oblie") is what enables Perceval to comprehend the far greater selflessness of Christ's sacrifice.

Here we understand more fully the implications of Perceval's relationship with Blancheflor. While his initial offer of chivalric service in exchange for her love reflected Perceval's focus on the superficial level of appearances (what knights and ladies are supposed to do), he eventually comes to understand that love is more than mechanical adherence to a code of behavior. Before his departure from Biaurepaire, Chrétien tells us, Blancheflor "put the key of love into [Perceval's] heart" [". . . li metoit la clef/ d'amors en la serre del cuer" (ll. 2636-2637)]. The love that he carries away in his heart prepares him to understand Christian *carité*, identified with God in Chrétien's Prologue. This love cannot be seen, nor does it dictate any specific course of visible action. Instead, it leads to a cessation of conspicuous action (the Prologue's *vaine gloire*): the motionless reverie of the Blood Drops episode, during which Perceval ignores two summons to appear before King Arthur. It is thus fitting that the lesson of *carité* must pass through the emotions rather than the intellect. Perceval's love for a woman has opened him to the love of God. In teaching Perceval to love, Blancheflor has prepared the ground for his spiritual growth.

Although Perceval's mother appears to play a minor role in the *Conte du Graal*, her influence on her son is far-reaching. Despite her early disappearance from the narrative, she represents non-Arthurian values that are intimately

linked to Perceval's growth as a knight. These values, symbolized by the Welsh clothing which she gives him, are associated with Christian *carité*, a virtue which Chrétien opposes to the superficial vainglory characteristic of the Arthurian court. After her death, maternal influence is reasserted in the person of Perceval's enate uncle, the hermit who initiates him into a fuller understanding of Christian *carité*. In this final stage of Perceval's education, the hermit stands in for his sister, whose rudimentary religious instruction he completes. The substitution of the hermit for the mother implies that the *vallet galois* has reached chivalric maturity without having to leave her realm of influence. Indeed, Perceval could not have reached this stage in his development without his mother. According to the hermit, he has been preserved from harm during his years of errantry only by the salutary effect (*vertu*) of her parting blessing:

Ne n'eüsses pas tant duré,
s'ele ne t'eüst comandé
a Damedieu, ce saches tu.
Mais sa parole ot tel vertu
que Diex por li t'a regardé
de mort et de prison gardé. (ll. 6403-6408)

(Know that you would not have lasted this long if she had not commended you to God. Her words had such power that God looked after you for her sake, preserving you from death or imprisonment.)[36](#)

Thus we see that Perceval's mother has not in fact disappeared from the text, any more than Chrétien displays a hostility to feminine influence and teaching. Indeed, Perceval's growth could not have occurred without his mother and Blancheflor, who in teaching him secular love prepares him to understand divine *carité*. Because of these two women, Perceval will become a truly exemplary knight, fulfilling the prophecy of a third significant female: the Laughing Maiden who alone had seen beyond his Welsh garb, recognizing his potential to become the "best knight in the world."

Notes

1. On the subject of Perceval's education, see Madeleine Pelner Cosman, *The Education of the Hero in Arthurian Romance* (Chapel Hill, 1965-1966), pp. 49-100; Alexandre Micha, "Le Perceval de Chrétien de Troyes, roman éducatif," in *Lumière du Graal*, ed. Ren, Nelli (Paris, 1951), pp. 122-138; Rita Lejeune, "La Date du Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes," *Moyen Age*, ser. 4, vol. 9 (1954), 51-79; Penny Simons, "Pattern and Process of Education in *Le Conte du Graal*, *Nottingham French Studies* 32 (1993), 1-11; as well as the comments of Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes et le mythe du Graal: étude sur Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* (Paris, 1972), pp. 81-83, 90-94, 148-161; Paule le Rider, *Le Chevalier dans le Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris, 1978), pp. 17-38, 89-90, 97-141, 174-181, 200-208; L. T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), pp. 215-280; Rupert T. Pickens, "Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)," in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Douglas Kelly, The Edward C. Armstrong Monographs on Medieval Literature 3 (Lexington, KY, 1985), pp. 252-279; and Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 12 (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), pp. 90-100. While these critics have tended to agree in considering the three phases of Perceval's formal instruction as steps in a cumulative pedagogical process, Leo Pollmann argues that the Hermit episode is an interpolation used by a continuator to connect two originally unrelated romances of Chrétien, a *Perceval* and a *Gauvain*. See *Chrétien de Troyes und der Conte del Graal*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie 110 (Tübingen, 1965), pp. 86-110. This argument has not found general acceptance. See e.g. Rupert T. Pickens, *The Welsh Knight: Paradoxicality in Chrétien's Conte del Graal*, French Forum Monographs 6 (Lexington, KY, 1977), esp. pp. 128-136 ("Every structural feature of the *Conte du Graal* stresses the importance of the Hermit episode. . ."); also David Hoggan, "Le Péché de Perceval. Pour l'authenticité de l'épisode de l'ermite dans le *Conte du Graal* de Chrétien de Troyes," *Romania* 93 (1972), 60-76, 244-275.
2. For his mother's counsel, see ll. 527-594; other references to her precepts (invariably misunderstood by Perceval) are found at ll. 113-118, 142-154, 640-663, 682-716, 1360-1366, 1402-1409, 1541-1546, and 1672-1674. On the tutelage of Gornemant de Gohort, see ll. 1356-1698; for Perceval's encounter with the hermit, see ll. 6217-6513. All references are taken from Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. William Roach, Textes Littéraires Français 71 (Geneva, 1959); throughout, emphases and translations are mine.
3. From Perceval's limited perspective, a knight is defined by his armor, and the sole function of a king is to create knights by providing it. He resolves to seek out King Arthur, the "roi qui les chevaliers fait" (l. 333, the king who makes knights), because he wishes to be "ausi luisanz et ausi faiz" (l. 181, as shining and well formed) as the armor-clad men who are his introduction to knighthood. Later, he requests directions to the place "where King Arthur makes knights" ("Li rois Artus . . . / i fait chevaliers" (ll. 840-841); once arrived at court, he is indignant at Arthur's preoccupied silence, which he views as inconsistent with his role as king: "cis rois ne fist chevalier onques./ Coment porroit chevalier faire,/ quant on n'en puet parole traire?" (ll. 928-930: this king never made anyone a knight. How could he make you a knight when you can't get a word out of him?)
4. This idea is developed at ll. 29-46 with the allusion to Matthew 6:3, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." Chrétien identifies left and right hands as follows: "Le senestre, selonc l'estoïre,/ senefie la vaine gloire/ qui vient de fausse ypocrisie./ Et la destre que senefie?/ Carité, qui de sa bone oeuvre/ pas ne se vante, ançois se coevre. . ." (ll. 39-44: According to scripture, the left hand signifies vainglory, which comes from false hypocrisy. And what does the right signify? Charity, which conceals the good works which it does rather than flaunting them).
5. In the elided passage (ll. 48-49: "selonc l'escrit,/ Sainz Pol le dist et je le lui"), Chrétien attributes to Paul a text actually found in I John 4:16. But given the thematic focus of the *Conte du Graal*, this misattribution may have been deliberate rather than accidental, since as Rupert T. Pickens has noted, St. Paul was a patron of knights. See note to ll. 43-44 in *The Story of the Grail (Li Contes del Graal), or Perceval, by Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Rupert T. Pickens, Garland Library of Medieval Literature Ser. A vol. 62 (New York, 1990), p. 452.
6. Perceval's chivalric nature is revealed by the ease with which he masters feats of arms under the tutelage of Gornemant de Gohort, ll. 1473-1480: "Lors le fist li pseudom monter./ et il comença a porter/ si a droit la lance et l'escu/ com s'il est toz jors veschu/ en tornoiemens et en guerres/ et alé par toutes les terres/ querant bataille et aventure./ car il li venoit de nature" (then the worthy man had him mount and he began to carry his lance and shield as adroitly as if he had spent his life in tournaments and wars, and had travelled throughout the world in search of battles and

adventure, for it was in his nature).

7. As Pickens rightly observes (*The Welsh Knight*, 48-53, 115-133), Perceval's final teacher, the hermit who is his enate uncle, represents the same value system as his mother. Thus, Perceval's sojourn at the hermitage is a symbolic return to maternal influence. This point will be developed below.
8. Here, Chrétien conflates the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23, Mark 4:3-20, Luke 8:5-15) with II Corinthians 9:6 (used in line 1).
9. See the comments of Pickens relating Perceval's trajectory from childhood to adulthood with yet another Pauline epistle, Ephesians 4: "Paul equates childhood with ignorance and suggests that adulthood, which comes after a conversion promoted by charity (as in his own case), is a time of greater knowledge and understanding. . ." "*Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*," p. 238. Karl D. Uitti similarly connects the theme of charity, "unequivocally stressed . . . within the matere de Rome-type Prologue," with "the story of Perceval's exemplary awakening to charity" (*Story, Myth and Celebration in Old French Narrative Poetry, 1050-1200* [Princeton, 1973], p. 210).
10. We recall Perceval's similarly shallow understanding of knighthood and kingship; see note 3, above.
11. The association of Gauvain with Alexander-like vainglory and Perceval with Phillip-like charity is found in Uitti, *Story, Myth and Celebration*, p. 214.
12. For Pickens, the first of three "anti-Arthurian" points on the "Grail axis" is Perceval's mother's manor in the Gaste Forest; the second and third are the Grail Castle and the hermitage, homes of Perceval's two maternal uncles (*The Welsh Knight*, 49). The kinship of Perceval's mother and her two brothers is revealed at ll. 6415-6416.
13. As has been noted by Pickens (" *Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*," p. 245), Chrétien continues to refer to Perceval as "boy" (*vallés*) rather than as "knight" (*chevalier*) even after Gornemant has fastened the spur onto his foot (for example, at l. 2615, in the passage recounting Perceval's defeat of Clamadeu). Through such references, the reader is made aware that Perceval's transformation is not yet complete, despite the fact that other characters within the romance seem now to accept his knightliness at face value (cf. ll. 2856-2857, where Clamadeu refers to his adversary as "li miex vaillans chevaliers/ a cui je onques m'aointasse": the most vaillant knight I've ever known).
14. Welshness is explicitly associated with foolishness by one of the Arthurian knights encountered by Perceval in the Gaste Forest (ll. 242-248), as well as by the Tent Maiden (ll. 791-792). The Arthurian court's antipathy to Perceval's Welsh appearance is discussed below.
15. See the mother's revelation of Perceval's knightly lineage, ll. 416-424: "N'ot chevalier de si haut pris./ tant redouté ne tant cremu./ biax fiz, com vostre peres fu/ en totes les illes de mer./ Biax fix, bien vos po%oz vanter/ que vos ne dechaez de rien/ de son lignage ne del mien,/ que je sui de chevaliers nee./ des meillors de ceste contree" (There was no knight of such high worth or as respected and feared, fair son, as was your father in all the islands of the sea. Fair son, you may well boast that neither his lineage nor mine abases you, for I was born of a knight, one of this country's best).
16. This point has been cogently argued by Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, pp. 108-133.
17. The couplet in square brackets appears only in MS T; the two lines are numbered a and b in Roach's edition, where they are interpolated between ll. 1614 and 1615.
18. The rash boon is a common device in Arthurian romance; see Jean Frappier, "Le Motif du 'don contraignant' dans la littérature du Moyen Âge," *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature publiés par le Centre de philologie et de littératures romanes de l'Université de Strasbourg* VII.2 (1969), 7-46; rpt. in *Amour courtois et table ronde*, Publications romanes et françaises 126 (Geneva, 1973), 225-264. Gornemant's recourse to the rash boon is thus a subtle reminder of his alignment with the Arthurian rather than the Grail axis.
19. An analogous episode wherein maternal influence is figuratively stripped away as a son loses clothing provided by his mother is found in the midpoint episode of Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois*, where the title character loses a belt without which he cannot return to his mother's magical realm. See Wirnt von Gravenberg, *Wigalois, der Ritter mit dem Rade*, ed. J. M. N. Kapteyn, *Rheinische Beitr'ge und Hilfsbcher zur germanischen Philologie und volkskunde* 9 (Bonn, 1926), ll. 5315-6174, esp. the author's commentary at ll. 5339-5359 and Wigalois's lament, ll. 5990-6016. For English translation, see *Wigalois, The Knight of Fortune's Wheel*, tr. J. W. Thomas (Lincoln, NE, 1977), pp. 163-173. My comparison of the two episodes is part of a work in progress.
20. Perceval first expresses concern for his mother to Gornemant at ll. 1580-1592. His intention of returning to her manor is repeated at ll. 2917-2967, as the reason for his departure from Biaurepaire; at ll. 2990-2993, just before his encounter with the Fisher King; and at ll. 3618-3625, in his reaction to the news of his mother's death.
21. See l. 715 (quoted above): "Or cha l'anel! jel weil avoir."
22. See also l. 747, "mengüe par grant talent" (he ate with great gusto), and l. 750, "boit sovent et a grans trais" (he drank often and deeply).
23. Perceval's continued self-absorption during his visits to Biaurepaire and to the Grail Castle will also be signalled by references to his appetite. See Debra B. Schwartz, "Seeking the Path of Romance: Chrétien de Troyes and the *Tristan* Tradition," diss. Princeton, 1994, pp. 312-316, 328-329.
24. A silent sovereign cannot fulfill the only kingly function recognized by Perceval, which is to make knights by bestowing arms. See ll. 926-930, partially quoted in note 3, above.
25. Perceval's superficial motivation in defending Biaurepaire is suggested by one of Blancheflor's adversaries (ll. 2416-2418): "Li chevaliers, qui se deporte/ a Blancheflor sa bele amie/ volra faire chevalerie" (the knight, who is enjoying himself with his lovely friend Blancheflor, will want to perform deeds of chivalry). Perceval's primary motivation is not a charitable impulse, but the desire to act like a knight ("faire chevalerie"). For fuller discussion of Perceval's self-absorption at Biaurepaire, see my "Seeking the Path of Romance," pp. 312-316.
26. The causes and consequences of Perceval's silence are explained by the second maternal cousin at ll. 3582-3595; by the Hideous Damsel at ll. 4646-4683; and by Perceval's hermit uncle at ll. 6392-6431.
27. See Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, pp. 116-122.
28. Interestingly, all of the corrective episodes in the extant text have to do with Perceval's interaction with women, a fact which underscores the importance of the feminine in his chivalric development. Although no such scene has been preserved, Perceval's return to the Grail Castle and

correction of the mistakes he made there would accord with the thematic and structural unity of the romance; it is therefore likely that such an episode was planned by Chrétien. See note 32, below.

29. On the implications of the red/white contrast in this scene and throughout the *Conte du Graal*, see GraceArmstrong, "The Scene of the Blood Drops on the Snow: A Crucial Narrative Moment in the *Conte du graal*," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 19 (1972), 127-147.

30. We recall that the seneschal suffers a broken arm and a dislocated shoulder in the encounter, thereby fulfilling the terms of Perceval's vow never to come back into the presence of the king until he has avenged the Laughing Maiden, whom Keu had slapped for recognizing Perceval's chivalric potential.

31. A similar point is made by Uitti, *Story, Myth and Celebration*, pp. 212-213.

32. Here my interpretation diverges from that of Pickens, who sees the Blood Drops episode as the sign of "Perceval's complete assimilation to [the Arthurian] kingdom" ("*Le Conte du Graal* (Perceval)," p. 256). I would agree that the Blood Drops episode marks Perceval's new mastery of Arthurian forms: when Gauvain leads Perceval by the hand into the presence of King Arthur, we understand that he has achieved parity with the king's nephew, paragon of Arthurian courtly values. Nonetheless, Perceval's prolonged revery suggests his disjunction from Arthurian vainglory and his growth in Christian charity. The parallels between the Blood Drops episode and the Grail Procession, minutely detailed by Pickens ("*Le Conte du Graal* (Perceval)," 256-259) but interpreted by him in a negative way, seem to me to be evidence not of Perceval's shortcomings, but of his movement from self-centeredness toward *carité*; they suggest that the Blood Drops episode was meant to foreshadow a second visit to the Grail Castle during which Perceval would correct the mistakes that he made on the first. See also note 28, above.

33. The formulas with which the Hideous Damsel introduces the adventures are telling: "Qui voldroit le pris avoir/ de tot le mont. . ." (ll. 4701-4702: he who wishes to be recognized as the best [knight] in the world. . .); "Molt grant honor aroit conquise. . ." (l. 4708: he will win great honor. . .); "Et s'avroit toutes les lo%onges. . ." (l. 4711: and he will have earned great praise . . .).

34. See above, notes 28 and 32.

35. The connection between the respective lessons of mother and uncle is further reinforced by symmetrical construction: the hermit's *penitance* revisits, in reverse order, the sens of Perceval's mother. Whereas she moves from interaction with women (ll. 533-556, partially quoted above) to religious instruction (ll. 567-594), he begins with religious instruction (ll. 6440-6460, partially quoted below) and ends by directing Perceval to assist women (ll. 6465-6471). The middle segment of the mother's sens (her advice that he seek out the company of *preudomes*, ll. 557-566) is recalled by the hermit's "Preudome and preundefeme honeure" (l. 6460).

36. The maternal blessing referred to by Gornemant is found at ll. 617-619: "Biax fix, . . . Dix vos maint!/ Joie plus qu'il ne m'en remaint/ vos doint il ou que vos ailliez" (Fair son, may God be with you and grant you more joy than is left to me, wherever you may go).

