

*Bounds of Imagination:
Grail Questing and Chivalric Colonizing in
Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival*

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The Arthurian and Grail narratives of the High Middle Ages, particularly by means of their adventures and quests, occupied a new territory in the imagination of Western Europe. In a manner that might be likened to the expansion of Europe and Europeans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries into the Holy Land in the Crusades,¹ and of Germans from their population concentrations close to the Rhine into the eastern territories,² the courtly-chivalric romances – via their basic dynamic of movement from courtly-chivalric centers outward – find their way in wild, often uncharted landscapes, full of dangers, and upon overcoming them, claim and occupy them on behalf of God and knighthood. The connection suggested here may be more than an analogy. If imagined worlds and actions expand, enrich and multiply perspectives of the real world and of possible actions in it, then the courtly-chivalric romances are not only a new kind of narrative art that reiterates the increasing expansion and control one notes in other cultural and political domains in the High Middle Ages, but also a new intellectual and emotional enabler of expansion and control. With their tendency to displace armed aggression away from relatively pacific courtly centers in their characteristic dynamic movement outward (in adventures, quests), for example, the courtly-chivalric romances render perspectives and possibilities concerning aggression management and the more effective functioning of growing and more concentrated social groups that define themselves mainly in military terms (like the noble populations responsible for the development of the romances).³ The romances, in this particular feature (i.e., in their rendering of the outward

¹ J.R.S. Richards, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1998), focuses on Europe's expansion between 1000 and 1400.

² See Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War. The Military Religious Orders* (London, 1995), p. 18: 'The heritage of the *Drang nach Osten*, today's Oder-Neisse line, was largely bequeathed by the Teutonic Knights whose lands, the *Ordensstaat*, reached almost to St Petersburg. It was they who created Prussia, by conquering the heathen Baltic race who were the original Prussians and by the most thorough colonization seen in the entire Middle Ages.'

³ This is the principal topic of my book *Art of Arms. Studies of Aggression and Dominance in Medieval German Court Poetry* (Heidelberg, 2002).

displacement of aggression), seem to reflect or continue preceding cultural developments (such as the Crusades), but at the same time they provide both a new method for archiving, remembering, and processing those developments, as well as a new medium in which different variations on the displacement-dynamic can be tried out imaginatively.⁴

The imaginary as a cultural tool for rendering different perspectives of the world might be said to take a significant step forward in the second half of the twelfth century with the verse romances of Chrétien de Troyes, which depict the world as a geographically vague, yet malleable space consisting of courtly centers and a space outside them for chivalric adventuring and questing.⁵ In contrast to the wanderings of the famous literary heroes of antiquity, the adventures and quests of knights in the verse romances of Chrétien and his successors are invested with religious and social purpose, to such an extent that they are the knights' proper mode of being. The knights are not returning home (like Odysseus) or establishing a new home (like Aeneas), but rather are almost perpetually in motion. The movement away from courtly centers that occurs in adventures and quests possesses a value of its own and, correspondingly, the courtly centers are frequently viewed mistrustfully from a quasi-monastic perspective as places of idle comfort and luxury that can lead to the destruction of one's reputation and the perdition of one's soul. Also different from the imaginary worlds of antique heroes is the geography of adventures and quests, which has only vaguely identifiable characteristics. While Arthurian romance geography is less factually descriptive, it is more protean, malleable and hence adaptable to different purposes.

In their perpetual movement of adventures and quests, and in their malleable and hence adaptable spaces in which the movement is rendered, the verse romances as introduced by Chrétien provide a new artistic tool, more adaptable to the relatively diverse and dynamic cultural situation of the twelfth century than other, traditional types of narratives. The romances thus move and expand with, and for, the times in which they were composed. Presumably, they also, to an extent, shape those times (assuming a basic congruence of, and mutual influences among, the literary, intellectual and political aspects of Western Europe's expansion). The term 'colonization' might be employed in this context in a twofold sense.⁶ One might speak, first, of courtly-chivalric perspectives, occupations and settlements of imaginary worlds occurring in the romances via adventuring and questing and, second, of the romances more generally – along the lines suggested above – as concomitant working elements (i.e., working the imagination, intellect, senses) in the contemporary cultural and political expansion of Western Europe (or at least of the Western Europe as imagined by its feudal-aristocratic and ecclesiastic elites, an expansion that typically takes the

⁴ To use the parlance for justifying a liberal arts education these days, medieval audiences of the romances would have been involved in a literary experience that would have inculcated 'transferable critical thinking skills'.

⁵ The critical edition is Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, ed. Keith Busby (Tübingen, 1993).

⁶ See also Joshua Prawer, *The Crusaders' Kingdom: European Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1972).

name 'colonization'). The social and religious status invested in the adventures and quests of the romances receives an added dimension when viewed as aspects of a colonizing project, in which the imaginary is being discovered and employed in new ways by courtly-chivalric societies in Western Europe.

As such an adaptable artistic medium and tool from the start, it is not surprising that the possibilities of the verse romances, the perspectives they were able to provide, increased very rapidly among the successors of Chrétien in France and Germany. Arguably the most expansive of the medieval Grail verse romances was composed by the German poet Wolfram Eschenbach, based on the *Perceval* of Chrétien but – and how could it be otherwise given the process already set in motion by the French poet? – going significantly beyond his source in its rendering of imaginary perspectives of the world. For Wolfram's envisioning of new domains of adventuring and questing, and for the specific manner in which he 'occupies' them, the appropriate term might be 'bounds', both as a motion into new spaces that implies expansion (i.e., bringing by 'leaps and bounds' one's values and interests into new spaces), and as the spatial limits of that movement (in the sense of boundaries). With regard to the former significance, Wolfram prepares his audience from the very beginning for a narrative that will move in bounds. Following his notoriously difficult introductory verses, which combine vaguely formulated religious and chivalric terms and ideas in the image of the plumage of the magpie, Wolfram proceeds to liken the basic idea with which he begins his work – the understanding of which arguably has something to do with its correct comprehension – with the movements of another animal:

diz vliegende bîspel
ist tumben liuten gar ze snel,
si enmugens niht erdenken:
wand ez kan vor in wenken
rehte alsam ein schellec hase. (1, 15–19)⁷

[This winged comparison is too swift for unripe wits. They will lack the power to grasp it. For it will wrench past them like a startled hare!⁸]

The image of the startled hare suggests a narrative logic that moves somewhat erratically, in leaps and bounds,⁹ and seems especially appropriate for a romance such as Wolfram's, which bounds away from previous chivalric and Grail narratives in myriad ways: in flushing out the story of Parzival's parents and taking the audience via their adventures on a tour of the vaguely Arabic or Persian lands of the Baruc and the vaguely African lands of Belakane (also, given that these imaginary spaces coincide in part with the historical spaces of the Crusades, Wolfram presents a strikingly different perspective or vision with his

⁷ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Karl Lachmann (Berlin, 1964).

⁸ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A.T. Hatto (London, 1980), p. 15.

⁹ This is reinforced by subsequent verses: 'The tale never loses heart, but flees and pursues, turns tail and wheels to the attack and doles out blame and praise. The man who follows all these vicissitudes and neither sits too long nor goes astray and otherwise knows where he stands has been well served by mother wit' (Hatto, trans., p. 15).

generally sympathetic, courtly-chivalric depiction of its inhabitants); in the way that Wolfram imaginatively 'authorizes' his creative embellishments by having recourse to a fictional source – a chronicle in Provence – found by a fictional intermediary whom Wolfram names 'Kyot', thus extending the imaginary (i.e., fiction) in an unprecedented way that makes it its own reason for being; and, perhaps most important, in the ways that Wolfram's narrative – to a greater degree than earlier romances – bounds contrastive and sometimes contradictory perspectives and positions, as we shall see in greater detail below.

With regard to the significance of 'bounds' in its application to Wolfram's romance, it is the different kinds of dynamic non-linear movements that may be most immediately striking (and must also have been to Wolfram's first audiences, who would have had to accustom themselves to his romance's multiple perspectives). However, these movements also involve bounds in its other sense of 'borders': new imaginary territories that are demarcated and through which the characters' adventures lead, populated by many diverse, imaginary peoples. The new spaces are encompassed and comprehended in ways that correspond to their novelty, but an overriding characteristic of Wolfram's narrative world and the peoples who inhabit it is that they are thoroughly courtly-chivalric and rendered as such even before the principal characters make their appearance in them. The adventures and quests in Wolfram's Grail romance take place in new spaces which have already been, for the most part, rendered in ways consistent with courtly-chivalric values and interests by the imagination of Wolfram. Independent of the questing of his heroes, this world has thus already been 'colonized', though the heroes arguably bring a new chivalric standard with them and make a specific and memorable mark on these spaces they occupy, leaving it better and stronger than it had been before. This is the case with the non-Christian domain of the Baruc and Belecane in which Gahmuret moves, and it is also the case with the more conventionally Arthurian geography in which the adventures of Parzival and Gawan occur.

It is the wilderness of Parzival's mother Herzeloyde, and the sorrowful existence at the Grail Castle, that stand at odds with the courtly-chivalric world as rendered elsewhere in Wolfram's romance. It is these narrative spaces, their inhabitants, and the non- or anti-chivalric interests and values they incorporate and advocate, that could possibly necessitate distinguishing between Arthurian romance and Grail romance, adventure and holy quest. However, the meaningfulness of such distinctions for Wolfram's romance is questionable. As in the Arthurian romances generally, the action proceeds from courtly-chivalric centers outward into unknown, dangerous, resistant domains, such as the wilds of Herzeloyde and those surrounding the Grail Castle. In the adventures/quests of the main characters, the relationship between courtly-chivalric (worldly) values and religious ones is negotiated in different ways. While fine-tuning of approach on the part of the questing knights is certainly necessary, the case can be made that Wolfram's romance – via the singular quest of its main hero Parzival – remakes the relationship in a basically courtly-chivalric sense. A domain that was previously religious in a somewhat monolithic and (however vaguely) monastic sense is expanded, occupied and (re)mapped by the actions of the questing Parzival as a space that bounds chivalric and religious priorities,

worldly and spiritual interests. For the understanding of how this occurs, and for orienting oneself in the kind of world that Wolfram renders in his romance, one is best served not so much by a deep religious purpose as by a mind that can move with the agility of a startled hare.

A comparison of Wolfram's romance with other significant religious-monastic conceptions of chivalry provides a manner of appreciating the distinguishing characteristics of the former. A template for the medieval Grail romances, particularly as they took form in France from Chrétien and Robert de Boron to the Vulgate Cycle, is arguably Bernard of Clairvaux's *Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae*, composed in the 1130s. Whether this specific text was known to the later romance authors is, of course, impossible to know, but it articulates monastic ideas about chivalry and its appropriate mission that would have formed part of the cultural horizons in which the later authors lived and worked. Bernard sets off his conception of knighthood and its proper purpose from a worldly knighthood that he characterizes in this way:

Quis igitur finis fructusve saecularis huius, non dico, militiae, sed malitiae, si et occisor letaliter peccat, et occisus aeternaliter perit? Enimvero, ut verbis utar Apostoli, et qui arat, in spe debet arare, et qui triturate, in spe fructus percipiendi. Quis ergo, o milites, hic tam stupendous error, quis furor hic tam non ferendus, tantis sumptibus ac laboribus militare, stipendiis vero nullis, nisi aut mortis, aut criminis? Operitis equos sericis, et pendulos nescio quos panniculos loricis superinduitis; depingitis hastas, clypeus et sellas; frena et calcaria auro et argento gemmisque circumornatis, et cum tanta pompa pudendo furore et impudenti stupore ad mortem properatis.¹⁰

[What therefore is the end or result of this secular *malitia*, I do not say *militia*, if the killer sins mortally and the killed dies eternally? Indeed, to cite the words of the apostle: 'he who ploughs ought to plough in hope and he who threshes does so in the hope of receiving the fruits.' O knights, what is this error so stupendous, what is this madness so unacceptable, to fight at such great cost and effort, with no rewards other than those of death or crime? You cover your horses in silks and put over your coats of mail I know not what sort of cloth hangings; you paint your spears, shields and saddles; you decorate your bridles and spurs with gold, silver and jewels, and you hurry to your deaths with such great pomp, with shameful madness and shameful rashness.]¹¹

It is not difficult to perceive in Bernard's disparaging words precisely those aspects of worldly knighthood – particularly the richness of its material trappings and sensations – that made it so attractive to its worldly practitioners and, one is already tempted to say in view of the sumptuousness of his Grail romance, to authors such as Wolfram. This beautiful pomp and effort is only so much sinful waste, for Bernard, because its ultimate purpose or mission is combat

¹⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Liber ad milites templi de laude novae militiae', *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. III, *Tractatus et Opuscula*, ed. J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais (Rome, 1963), pp. 205–39; here p. 216.

¹¹ The cited translation of Bernard's text is in *The Templars. Selected Sources Translated and Annotated*, by Malcom Barber and Keith Bate (Manchester, 2002), pp. 215–27; citing p. 218.

with another knight, which brings with it only the possibility of one Christian killing another, and mortal sin and death. The concern with glory and worldly reputation, one of the hallmarks of the chivalric romances, would have to be dismissed as frivolous according to Bernard's view of things. There are many things that make worldly knighthood suspicious in Bernard's eyes, such as the military insignia that he likens to women's baubles, thus manifesting a characteristically monastic contempt for sensual pleasure (and, though less directly in this context, for women, with whom such pleasure is frequently connected). But it is because of combat as its final aim and reason for being that worldly knighthood is condemned. Because it brings with it the possibility of such great transgression and such great waste of God-given life, worldly knighthood is necessarily self-destructive and leads to perdition in Bernard's conception of it.

Against this view of worldly knighthood, Bernard places his conception of a religious knighthood, thoroughly renewed by virtue of its association with a quite different ultimate purpose, a purpose that can be connected quite concretely with a contemporary colonizing mission. Based on the model of the Knights Templar, and tapping into contemporary Crusades propaganda, Bernard articulates the chivalric approach he sees as leading not to perdition, but rather salvation and heaven:

Miles, inquam, Christi securus interimit, interit securior ... Sane cum occidit malefactorem, non homicida, sed, ut ita dixerim, malicida, et plane Christi vindex in his qui male agunt, et defensor christianorum reputatur. Cum autem occiditur ipse, non periisse, sed pervenisse cognoscitur. Mors ergo quam irrogat, Christi est lucrum; quam excipit, suum. In morte pagani christianus gloriatur, quia Christus glorificatur; in morte christiani, Regis liberalitas aperitur, cum miles remunerandus educitur.¹²

[Thus, I say, the knight of Christ kills in safety and dies in greater safety ... Obviously, when he kills an evildoer, he does not commit a homicide, but rather, as one might say, a malicide, and clearly is considered the avenger of Christ against those who do evil and a defender of Christians. When, however, he is killed it is recognized that he has gone to Heaven, not to his death. The death that he inflicts is reward for Christ, the death he suffers is reward for himself. In the death of an infidel the Christian glories because Christ is glorified; in the death of a Christian, the generosity of the King is revealed when the knight is led off to his reward.]¹³

Knighthood becomes holy to the degree that it is made part of the mission of the Crusades, and of Western Europe's expansion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In his specific depiction of a displacement of aggression outward, away from Europe, to negate the possibility of killing one's 'own', Bernard renders a landscape of colonization that superimposes worldly and religious dimensions. The chivalric struggle with the adversary is both a real one of the Christian against the 'infidel' as well as a spiritual and allegorical one of Good against Evil. Corresponding to these dimensions, two different but complemen-

¹² 'Liber ad milites templi', p. 217.

¹³ Barber and Bate, *The Templars*, p. 219.

tary domains are colonized by the 'new knighthood': the lands and wealth of the Holy Land that are taken (in the form of the Christian Crusader kingdoms), and that in possible future military action against the infidel remain to be taken, as well as the spaces in the Heavenly Kingdom that will increasingly be occupied by knights who have shunned the worldly approach leading to perdition and embraced chivalry's proper holy mission. Paramount in Bernard's conception of chivalric action and the way it should shape the world is its necessary justification by a religious purpose that envisions and occupies the world and heaven according to the absolute perspectives of good and evil, and the complementary imperative that chivalry must transcend a sinful, inferior, material (sensual) form to become a higher spiritual mission.

Later in the twelfth century, the French Grail romances take up some of the aspects of Bernard's depiction of the new knighthood and its mission. Though the romances are clearly not the same kind of programmatic and propagandistic text as Bernard's, they nevertheless manifest some of the significant aspects of the monk's *Liber ad milites templi* and begin to articulate, according to their own more specific narrative conventions, the insufficiency of a purely worldly knighthood, the association of the practice of knighthood with death and sin, and the need for a renewal of chivalry that is increasingly rendered as an allegorical battle of Good against Evil. The first Grail romance, Chrétien's *Perceval*, begins in the 'gaste forest' [waste forest; vss. 1289 and passim] and tells of the eponymous hero's youth. This unusual space shows itself soon enough to be an anti-chivalric one,¹⁴ associated with the hero's mother's wish to keep her son away from knighthood because of the great grief it has caused her. Her two eldest sons, brothers Perceval never had a chance to know, died in chivalric action, causing their wounded father's death from grief. Perceval's insensitive and impetuous desire to become a knight at Arthur's court, the worst fear of his mother, reopens this old wound and causes her death.

The manner in which the problems associated with chivalry are eventually addressed in Chrétien's unfinished Grail romance become clear during Perceval's meeting with his hermit uncle. In the French author's rendering of this episode, the shortcomings of the chivalric approach Perceval has taken to this point are underscored in numerous ways that suggest the need for a more spiritual mode of questing for the Grail. The setting includes a 'chapele petite' [small chapel; vs. 6342], and the hermit uncle is accompanied by 'un provoire / et .i. clerçon, ce est la voire, / Qui començoient le servise / Le plus haut que en sainte eglise / Puisse estre fais et le plus dols' [a priest and a young cleric – this is the truth – who were just beginning the service, the highest and sweetest that can be said in Holy Church; vss. 6343–47]. The Good Friday Mass – for this is the day on which these events occur – performed by figures of the religious establishment, leads Perceval to kneel and, overcome by fear that he has sinned against God, to ask his uncle for absolution: "Sire, fait il, bien a .v. ans / Que je ne soi ou je

¹⁴ Earlier the waste forest is described as a refuge, to which Perceval's father fled upon the destruction befalling the whole chivalric world after the death of Utherpendragon, Arthur's father. As part of these hard times, Perceval's father was wounded through both thighs and his body maimed.

me fui, / Ne Dieu n'aimai ne Dieu ne crui, / N'onques puis ne fis se mal non'' (vss. 6364–67) ['Sir,' said Perceval, 'it has been over five years since I have known where I was going, and I have not loved God or believed in Him, and all I have done has been evil'].¹⁵

All the while, Perceval is awash with tears, the most visible and continuous outward sign of the profound inner transformation he is experiencing. A key moment in this transformation is Perceval's discovery of his sinful responsibility for the death of his mother. This sin is strongly reminiscent of the principal sin of worldly knighthood as discussed by Bernard: it is the mindless desire to be a knight in the Arthurian mold that causes his mother's death (just as the practice of worldly knighthood had previously led to the deaths of Perceval's brothers and father).

Though Chrétien's romance abruptly ends before we can see the degree to which Perceval's approach is different after he leaves his uncle, this episode strongly suggests that Perceval has left the old, evil knighthood behind and will henceforth practice a fundamentally different, 'new' kind of knighthood, consistent with his religious awakening or renewal. The Continuations of Chrétien's Grail romance, like so many other medieval continuations of the great unfinished works of hallowed predecessors, provide ambiguous information at best for imagining how the text might have ended if its original author had been able to finish it. The Continuations seem generally to revert to a more conventionally chivalric orientation, and only that of Manessier, which has Perceval retiring in the end as a hermit in the forest, seems to be in the spirit of the radical questioning of conventional knighthood towards which Chrétien's romance seemed to heading in the quest of Perceval.

In the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal* of the Vulgate Cycle, we have another famous version of the Grail quest that takes the approach begun by Chrétien (by way of Robert de Boron's connection of the Grail with Christ's cup at the Last Supper) much farther in the same apparent direction. In the adventures of Bors, Perceval and Galahad, the *Queste* expands the spiritual, allegorical landscape that was only intimated in the first Grail romance – but that has been a latent cultural possibility at least since Bernard of Clairvaux's *Liber ad milites templi* – integrating into the imaginary world a landscape that is vaguely biblical and reminiscent of the deserts of the saints' lives. The terrains of questing are rendered like those of the early eremitic saints, with demons taking the form of beautiful temptresses to distract the holy heroes from their missions (in the scene depicting the temptation of Perceval, the hero catches sight of a red crucifix on the hilt of his sword and recoils from the carnal sin he is about to commit and soon after, as if to punish the sinful desires of his fallible flesh or to establish mastery over it, stabs himself in the thigh).¹⁶ The hermitic commentators, wearing the white robes characteristic of the Cistercian order, eventually make quite clear that the battles in which all knights of the Grail quest are involved must not lead to homicide (as when Gawain is admonished for killing knights

¹⁵ Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William Kibler (London, 1991), p. 459.

¹⁶ *La Queste del saint Graal*, ed. Albert Pauphilet, 2nd edn (Paris, 1980), pp. 110–11.

with whom Galahad had contended and left alive).¹⁷ The Vulgate Cycle depicts a Grail quest with a single transitional wilderness space occupied by worldly warriors and adversaries, and religious, spiritual ones. The latter eventually move beyond it, and Galahad, in achieving the Grail, transcends the material world entirely by virtue of his monastic virtue of chastity and his sinless chivalry (he wins every contest without ever committing homicide).

The thirteenth-century prose romance charts the spaces of the Grail quest, much as Bernard charted the spaces of the Crusades, as a terrain of the righteous struggle against evil, but in the former there is no physical embodiment of evil in the same way as there is in the latter (i.e., the Muslim 'infidels'), and there are no worldly kingdoms to be won in achieving the Grail. From the standpoint of colonization, what the *Queste* seems to achieve is a reiteration or rehearsal of the typically monastic subjugation of self and world. Though this subjugated space represents an interesting and varied amalgam, as the quest proceeds it shows itself, predictably, to be increasingly fragile and insubstantial. As such, it is a world that is both completely mastered and uninhabitable for courtly-chivalric purposes. Although it manifests a significant narrowing of purpose in the direction of its religious (heavenly) value, the Grail quest of the Vulgate Cycle is driven by, and perhaps represents a literary culmination of, the approach based on absolutes that showed itself in Bernard's *Liber ad milites templi*, and in the religious 'renewal' of Chrétien's Perceval.

Wolfram's *Parzival* renders the mission of the Grail quest and its concomitant traversal and occupation of imaginary realms in quite different ways. The basically religious interest associated with the Grail in influential French versions of the narrative (as possible literary articulations of, or responses to, monastic ideas and ideas about the Crusades that also found their way into Bernard's text on the 'new knighthood') is preserved to a certain degree in the section of the German romance dealing with the eponymous hero. Yet a very different guiding principle is at work in the German romance. The narrative world and the author's approach to it are rendered not in terms of the absolute distinctions that begin to dictate the approach to imaginary realms in closer proximity to the Grail (Good versus Evil, holiness versus sin, chastity versus lust, etc.), but rather in a way that is consistent with the hops, skips and jumps of Wolfram's prologue. In so doing, Wolfram takes a principle that has been present in the Arthurian romances since their beginning with Chrétien and expands it radically (just as he expands the mere girth of the narrative beyond the French source with his bounds of imagination). Perhaps the best articulation of this principle occurs immediately following one of Wolfram's many self-references:

ob ich guotes wîbes minne ger,
 mac ich mit schilde und ouch mit sper
 verdienen niht ir minne solt,
 al dar nâch sî si mir holt.

¹⁷ *La Queste*, pp. 46–55.

vil hôhes topels er doch spilt,
der an ritterschaft nâch minnen zilt. (115, 15–20)

[If I desire a good woman's love and fail to win love's reward from her with shield and lance, let her favor me accordingly. A man who aims at love through chivalric exploits gambles for high stakes.]¹⁸

These verses can be understood on many levels, which is typical for Wolfram's Grail romance. On one, the author is occupying a (fictional) self in the context of his performance and seems to be claiming for this 'self' the same chivalric values and orientation as those of his heroes Parzival and Gawain.¹⁹ On another, this self-reference reinforces the basically chivalric impetus or mission of Wolfram's narrative. This is reiterated in the actions of his hero Parzival, for whom adventuring and Grail questing basically coincide. Wolfram's (self's) prioritization of a good woman's love is found again in the love of his hero Parzival for his wife Condwiramurs, a love that remains a motivating and sustaining force for the adventuring/questing Parzival alongside the Grail (in stark contrast to anti-feminine aspects of the Grail quest as rendered in the Vulgate Cycle). The final lines, though perhaps most immediately a statement of personal conviction on the part of that (fictional) self, suggest with their broader implications that the guiding principle of Wolfram's narrative – if 'principle' it can really be called – is chance. The metaphor of gambling aptly characterizes an approach that does not turn back from chivalric adventuring in the direction of pre-existing absolute meanings, upon the inception of Grail questing, but rather moves boldly forward, accepting, affirming and operating with the element of chance in adventure to an as yet unprecedented degree.²⁰

There is no doubt that Wolfram's Grail, particularly as described by Parzival's hermit uncle Trevrizent (the equivalent of Perceval's unnamed hermit uncle mentioned above), has strongly Christian characteristics: it is too heavy to be lifted by sinful mortals, infidels cannot see it, messages brought by a turtledove from Heaven on Good Friday communicate instructions to the Grail community, and the guardians of the Grail must be virgins and chaste. The most important political function of the Grail and the community guided by it is to provide new lords for lands in need of them:

wirt iender hêrenlôs ein lant,
erkennet si dâ die gotes hant,
sô daz diu diet eins hêren gert
vons grâles schar, die sint gewert.
des müezn och si mit zûhten pflegn:
sîn hûet aldâ der gotes segn. (494, 7–12)

¹⁸ Hatto, trans., p. 68.

¹⁹ The relationship between this constructed 'self' of the performance and Wolfram's 'real' self remains a matter of conjecture. That the relationship is one of consistent irony is questionable. Shortly afterward, the constructed self claims to be illiterate (patently untrue); immediately before, the self claims to be a knight (highly likely).

²⁰ On chance and contingency in the romances, see Walter Haug, 'Der Zufall: Theodizee und Fiktion', in his *Die Wahrheit der Fiktion. Studien zur weltlichen und geistlichen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 2003), pp. 64–87.

[If a land should lose its lord, and its people see the hand of god in it and ask for a new lord from the Grail company, their prayer is granted. Moreover, they must treat him reverentially, since from that moment on he is under the protection of God's blessing.]²¹

In its political mission, the Grail community could be said to be expanding into the world, occupying or colonizing lordless lands, and bringing them into line with its quasi-monastic characteristics. These characteristics are underscored in the sometimes contentious discussions that occur between Parzival and Trevrizent. While the former has shown some signs of remorse about his defiance to God (he has not forgotten God, as had Chrétien's hero, but rather quite pointedly renounced his service to God and replaced it with service to ladies), he continues throughout his stay with his uncle to be an advocate of chivalric values and interests. The uncle remains the most vocal and prominent advocate of the quasi-monastic values and interests that seem to hold sway around the Grail – and presumably in the Grail's ever-expanding worldly sphere of influence. Several exchanges between these two figures reveal their distinctive priorities, as this one concerning the manner in which the Grail is to be approached:

dô sprach aber Parzivâl:
 'Mac rîterschaft des lîbes prîs
 unt doch der sêle pardîs
 bejagen mit schilt und ouch mit sper,
 sô was ie rîterschaft mîn ger.
 ich streit ie swâ ich strîten vant,
 sô daz mîn werlîchiu hant
 sich naehert dem prîse.
 ist got an strîte wise,
 der sol mich dar benennen,
 daz si mich dâ bekennen:
 mîn hant dâ strîtes niht verbirt.'
 dô sprach aber sîn kiuscher wirt:
 ir müest aldâ vor hôchvart
 mit senften willen sîn bewart.
 iuch verleit lîhte iwer jugent
 daz ir der kiusche braechet tugent.
 hôchvart ie seic unde viel.' (471, 30–472, 17)

['If knightly deeds with shield and lance can win fame for one's earthly self, yet also Paradise for one's soul, then the chivalric life has been my one desire!' said Parzival. 'I fought wherever fighting was to be had, so that my warlike hand has glory within its grasp. If God is any judge of fighting He will appoint me to that place so that the Company there know me as a knight who will never shun battle.'

'There of all places you would have to guard against arrogance by cultivating meekness of spirit,' replied his austere host. 'You could be misled by youthfulness into breaches of self-control. – Pride goes before a fall!'²²

²¹ Hatto, trans., p. 251.

²² Hatto, trans., pp. 240–41.

The tensions visible here between the positions of Parzival and Trevrizent are never completely resolved in Wolfram's romance. Parzival remains proudly and defiantly chivalric, and never experiences, awash with tears, the same deep spiritual transformation of his French predecessor Perceval. The leveling in the direction of religious-monastic values as one approaches the Grail does not occur. Instead, multiple chivalric and monastic perspectives, with points of convergence, but also with tensions, if not frictions, remain in play to the end. The religious-monastic approach to the Grail and the world that surrounds it, suggested by Chrétien and perhaps taken to its most developed form in the *Queste del Sainte Graal*, becomes in Wolfram's romance one manner of proceeding among many, one part of a much more complex approach to narrating and questing. This greater complexity and open-endedness with regard to the author's narration and the hero's questing for the Grail (which is also adventuring for a lady) corresponds to the variety, color and vividness of the depicted world and experiences in it.

As a manner of efficiently comprehending and taking control of his world, Parzival's approach is necessarily worldly, which in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is to say courtly-chivalric (and aristocratic). Parzival fights till the end of his quest, when he is informed by the Grail spokesperson and sorceress Cundrie that he has been summoned to it. Clear indications of a change in Parzival's approach are difficult to find in Wolfram's text. Outwardly he continues to do what he had done prior to his meeting with Trevrizent. Of course, it is quite possible that an inner change – a religious enlightenment or transformation – has occurred in Parzival, but if this is the case it scarcely affects his actions and words. The more obvious changes are in the words and actions of characters such as Trevrizent, who have been the most outspoken critics of Parzival's approach. Near the end of the romance, after Parzival has won the Grail, he comes across his hermit uncle again, who expresses to him his amazement that, after all, he was able to get the Grail by means of his defiant anger (the same prideful attitude for which the uncle had criticized him in Book IX). Trevrizent continues to feel that God remains in control of events, but – understandably under the circumstances – leaves room for believing that God is still in control of events with his remarks about the inscrutability of His divine plan.

Though it may be presumptuous to say so, in view of the holiness for which it comes to be known on account of the French romances, even the Grail itself seems to be 'bounded'. When Parzival takes control of the Grail Castle, the chivalric love of ladies effectively displaces the quasi-monastic chastity imposed by the Grail on its keepers. Anfortas, a man punished (wounded in the scrotum) for engaging in chivalry for the love of a lady, is saved and restored to health by Parzival, whose chivalric fighting for a lady's love first became part of his approach when he declared his angry defiance towards God. When Parzival heals Anfortas and replaces him as lord, he does not transcend an older inferior (chivalric) self as he rises to the higher level represented by the Grail. Rather, he strengthens and expands the power of the chivalric interests he has advocated from the start. In his typical manner, Wolfram provides strong support for the idea of a victory of worldly love at the Grail Castle in an indirect way, with the behavior of Parzival's infidel brother Feirefiz, who falls in burning hot love for

Repense de Schoie, Parzival's aunt and the high priestess of the Grail. Told that he can only have her in wedlock if he converts to Christianity, Feirefiz asks: 'Ob ich durch iuch ze toufe kum, / ist mir der touf ze minnen vrum?' ['If I were baptized for your sake, would Baptism help me win love?'; 814, 1–2²³].

When this is affirmed, Feirefiz immediately consents to be baptized, thus effectively rendering this most holy ritual an instrument for the satisfaction of his clearly very carnal desire. This affirmation of love at the end of Wolfram's romance is striking not only as an aspect of the courtly-chivalric colonization of the Grail domain, but also as a final reaffirmation of something that has caused so many people so much grief and sorrow during the course of the romance. Despite the frequently fatal outcome of love (which is both erotic and spiritual in Wolfram's conception of it), which by way of loyalty leads to death in the event of the death of the beloved (most notably in the cases of Herzeloide and Sigune), Wolfram does not reject it. The happy end, rather, is a reiteration of love as 'daz nahe süeze / der alde und der niuwe site' [what is sweet when near, the old custom, ever new; 203, 9–10].

Wolfram presses forward with worldly desire and love, despite their transitoriness and resulting pain, and he proceeds in a similar way with regard to the possibility of death in knighthood. By making Parzival's killing of the Red Knight Ither one of his hero's main sins, Wolfram focuses more squarely on death in chivalric action than Chrétien did in his unfinished romance. But it remains a problem for which there are no simple, absolute answers. Parzival later engages his best chivalric friend Gawan, and shortly thereafter his half-brother Feirefiz, in combat. In both cases there is the danger of repeating the terrible sin. The first time such an outcome is prevented by a random occurrence: a man passes by, recognizes Gawan, and calls out his name, thus informing Parzival of the identity of his opponent and bringing the fight to an end. In the second combat, God causes Parzival's sword (the one he took from Ither) to break as it strikes the helmet of his brother, in what otherwise might have been a fatal, fratricidal blow. The happy ending which ensues is thus facilitated by a God who has decided, perhaps according to the same inscrutable plan to which we saw Trevrizent allude above, not to permit a chivalric homicide (and fratricide) to take place *this time*. On the surface it might look as if Wolfram hereby seeks by means of a kind of *Deus ex machina* to evade the problem to which Bernard of Clairvaux so forcefully drew attention, and to which Wolfram himself repeatedly draws attention in his own work. But it would probably be more accurate to say that in order to remain open to all of life's possibilities, it is necessary also to accept the possibility and perhaps inevitability of death in chivalric combat.

In some respects, Wolfram's Grail quest operates within the socio-cultural boundaries of its time: at the Grail Castle Parzival is next in line of succession, he is arguably the best and most determined fighter in his world, and God also eventually shows Himself to be on his side. The successful quest thereby corresponds to basic dynastic, military and religious expectations. Still, in important respects, Wolfram's Grail quest pushes boundaries outward. Between the

²³ Hatto, trans., pp. 240–41.

extremes of utter self-determination and the random occurrence of individual events (functioning according to their own logic), on the one hand, and an 'absolute' understanding of the course and status of events according to pre-existing religious or aristocratic conceptions, on the other, Wolfram's romance evinces a wide range of perspectives and outcomes. As part of the broader cultural and military expansion of Western Europe in the twelfth- and thirteenth centuries, Wolfram's Grail romance models an intrepid approach to, and occupation of, an imaginary world that is rendered with unprecedented differentiation and complexity.