Moving Cataclysm: Journeys of Quest, Landscapes of Loss in Late French Medieval Romance and 19th-Century Travel Narratives

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the relationship between human movement, social processes, and changing landscapes in 12th-13th-century French romance (*roman de quête*) and early to mid-19th-century French travel narratives and *romans d'ailleurs*. The intentional journey, which we can apply to secular as well as to spiritual goals of both medieval heroes and Romantic journeyers, connotes a place of juncture in an individual life that seeks resolution through movement, through return to origins, and through alignment with ongoing human processes and the processes of history. How narratives of traversal of natural and lived spaces assign meaning to both traveler and place and how humans construct themselves and attempt to re-order their universes by intentional journeying comprise the focal concerns of this study. The term *cataclysm* refers to any sudden, violent change, whether local, global, or in one's perception of the universe. Late medieval quest, initially a prescribed practice designed to re-educate the

wayward knight for service to society, emerges as a complex response to natural and social degradation, associated with incompatible, yet co-existing, moral discourses, forces of progress, and progressively mechanized human identity. As Ken Hiltner puts it, environmental consciousness occurs when one becomes "thematically aware" of one's environment "at the moment of its withdrawal" (*What Else is Pastoral* 38). 19th century travelers, for whom pilgrimage into unknown and "exotic" territories often accompanies social or political exile, attempt to mediate between the multiple dimensions of *being* and being French in relationship to post-Revolutionary France. Whether from the vantage point of Chrétien de Troyes, 13th-century prose adaptations of the Arthurian legend, or early-to-mid-19th century reflections of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, texts from each period grapple with codified and re-imagined scenarios of encounter between individuals, unknown wildernesses, and the lost local: their authors articulate perceived threats, document uncertainty, and seek resolution through projects of self-renewal. Whether as pilgrims, exiles, or *flâneurs*, the landscapes within which these travelers wander loom with an aura of impending eclipse that, nevertheless, never entirely loses hope of *régénérescence*. As they progress through space, these journeyers move around and about cataclysm that, presumably, through transformation, they can move, distance, reverse, or avert.

Monnie and Dominic

Guy

Contents

Acknowledgments i

Introduction ii

Part I: 'Moyen Age'

Preface 2

1. Vanishing Towards the Self: the Topography of Becoming in

Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal 26

2. Baring Landscape: Humanity and Nature at the Edges of Love and Death in the Arthurian

Cycle 114

3. Getting to the Arthurian Wasteland: Gender, Violence, and the Ecology of Feeling 173

Part II: 'Dix-Neuvième Siècle'

Preface 243

4. Ambivalent Harmonies: Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Wandering and Reclamation

En Orient 248

Nerval: All Roads, No Road, and Nowhere Left to Go:

5. La Route et la Vapeur: Destination and Discourse in *Lorely* and *Notes de Voyage* 312

6. 'La Nature Pourrie': Bipolarity and Environmental Conscience in *Voyage en Orient* and

Aurélia 349

Concluding Thoughts 412

Works Cited 419

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Introduction

The primary objective of this dissertation is to examine the relationship between human movement, social processes, and changing landscapes in the 12th-13th-century French romance (*roman de quête*) and the early to mid-19th-century French travel narrative and *roman d'ailleurs*. How narratives of traversal of natural and lived spaces assign meaning to both traveler and place and how humans construct themselves and attempt to re-order their universes by intentional movement through these spaces comprise the focal concerns of this study.[i] By 'human movement' I intend first and foremost intentional journeying (also known as *pilgrimage* or *quest*), undertaken 'solo' for formative or reparative purposes, whether by heroes of late medieval romance or by first-person narrators of the Romantic voyage. The idea of the intentional journey, which we can apply to secular as well as to spiritual goals of both medieval heroes and Romantic journeyers, connotes a place of juncture in an individual life that seeks resolution through movement, through return to both known and unknown origins, and through alignment with ongoing human processes and the processes of history. Du Bellay speaks of the "malheur" created by the movement of travel, whose residual narrative connotes exile, not merely by virtue of distancing oneself from one's community, but, more to the point, by the very fact of displacement, "dans le fait d'avoir 'laissé' et d'avoir 'été laissé" (24-36).[ii] As initiates, journeyers become marginal figures; they move at the interstices of their own society and the societies with which they interact; they create as much as they experience environments and, in turn, are created by them. Related phenomena, such as social migration and altered density and

demographics of population, provide an underlying sociological subtext to both the hopes and anxieties expressed by the authors of Arthurian romance and 19th-century first-person travel narratives. With respect to this last point, the term *cataclysm* refers to any sudden, violent change, whether local, global, or in one's perception of the universe. As Ken Hiltner puts it, environmental consciousness occurs when one becomes "thematically aware" of one's environment "at the moment of its withdrawal" (38).[iii] Whether from the 12th-century vantage point of Chrétien de Troyes or the early-to-mid-19th century reflections of Alphonse de Lamartine and Gérard de Nerval, the narratives I discuss herein evidence ongoing negotiation between the fixed and fluctuating dimensions of humans and their environment, between localized, expanded, and marginal territories, between the "interior space" of individual *selves* and the broader environmental spectrum where human activity occurs.[iv] The primary texts I have chosen, namely Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* and *Le Chevalier de La Charrette*, the prose *Lancelot*, or *Lancelot du Lac*, and *La Mort du Roi Arthur*, in the first part of this dissertation, and Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient*, and varied narratives by Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient, Lorely, Sylvie, Aurélia*, among others, in this dissertation's second part, pertain to more than narratives of evolution or devolution of individuals with respect to their communities; they act as retrospective and forward-looking environmental testaments and offer methodologies for locating order within states of disorder that remain relevant to human-environmental themes of the 21st-century.

Let me turn to some ways in which my two selected periods and their respective texts might be relevant to one another. I would first argue that the Middle Ages should not be looked at as a fixed model but, rather, "in terms of its own realities" (Freedman 22-3) which, as is the case with all periods, are subject to flux. When we speak of an individual 'self' in relationship to

a broader socio-environmental spectrum, it is important to make some distinctions between concepts of selfhood in the 12th and 19th centuries. Broadly speaking, we must understand the medieval person as unlike ourselves; most specifically, unlike 'modern' individuals, medieval man does not yet see himself as entirely differentiated from his surrounding environment. His concept of 'self' is porous and dependent upon the messages of his physical surroundings and the cosmos.[v] This said, the 12th-century marks a period of significant transition with respect to the evolution of the conceptual self. Whereas the emergence of the individual has long been associated with the Renaissance, scholarly evidence indicates that traces of the earliest formation of the concept of the individual can be located 12th-century.[vi] Nor should we think of the process of individuation as a continuous stream, beginning at one end of a spectrum and ending at another. For example, R.R. Bolgar (*The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries*) and Dom David Knowles observe a rapid rise in individualism and humanism between 1080 and 1150 followed by a progressive decline, and a return to renewed vigor that culminated in the Italian renaissance. To further clarify our terms, the emergence of the medieval self does not apply to the idea of the individual citizen within a political community but, more aptly, to the development of individual self-awareness, based upon a sense of the world as an "ordered system" in which one can self-express without excessive concern for convention or the repercussions of authority. Innovations such as law and administrative structures, on the other hand, tend to adopt a similar function as clan-based forms of pressure, implementing rules of conformity or even exclusion on otherwise heterogeneous communities (Freedman 15-7). Chivalric emphasis upon *feeling* between individuals—feeling, along with interiority, becomes the "binding mediatory thread" of medieval social integration (Bloch, "Wasteland" 268)—can be

understood not as *like* but, rather, as an *incipient resemblance* to the deeply mysterious, complex personality of the 19th-century self.

If we look for threads of continuity between quest narratives of the 12th- and 19th-centuries, the medieval example does retain some influence. The destruction of French nobility as a legal order in the aftermath of the Revolution resulted in the tendency of displaced aristocrats to look for alternate forms of nobility elsewhere—in the Middle Ages, in Native America, in tribalism and esoteric traditions (Liebersohn, Weil, "Romantic Exile" 4).[vii] Comparisons as well as distinctions (particularly between respective qualities of Self) have been made between the personal journeys of the hero of the 19th-century *bildungsroman* and the hero of medieval romances. If we can locate a common point—and there are several— between the *quêteur* of the late medieval romance and the early to mid-19th-century travelers represented in this dissertation, an experience of 'otherness' and social exile are two common traits; each traveler moves through space in order to transcend, and even to transform, the respective universes in which he/she resides. Both purposeful questing and aimlessness figure in medieval and 19th-century narratives; the manner in which each derives its respective significance depends upon influences specific to the individual *quêteur* within his/her space and time. *Errer* in the 12th-century connotes straying from God, with the understanding that, if the errant wanderer chooses correctly, reunion is possible. As Mme. De Staël observes, personal pilgrimages of the early 19th-century reflect a re-valuation of human feeling and of religious sentiment, "ce qui se passe dans le cœur" as a residual counter-effect of the intellectual movements and events of the 18th-century (43).[viii] Understandings of religion and spirituality broaden, however—the Terre Sainte interests few by mid-century. As for the practice of wandering, speaking in favor of a later Romantic trend, Saint-Beuve insisted that *flânerie,* commonly associated with urban leisure and

aimlessness, was in fact the opposite of doing nothing. The profession of the *flâneur* is to become one with the crowd, to be in the midst of the ephemeral and the infinite: to see the world, to be at its center, and yet to remain unseen.[ix] Pilgrimage and wandering do not appear as antithetical to one another in Romantic travel narratives; rather, they subsist simultaneously and serve different masters.

To return to another important theme, echoing the 12th- and 13th-century heroes discussed herein, the 19th-century traveler contends with an individual identity and a unique role in a society with which he finds himself at odds. Romantic travelers, like their literary predecessors, experience exile as a repercussion of error and personal failing; likewise, each uses movement to mend discord within the self and in relationship to his/her identified social groups (for Romantics, this includes the nation), achieving ambivalent results. The 19th-century traveler does not become medieval. He does however imagine himself as the inheritor of both a literary and a historical legacy, which begins with the Crusades, indulges the imaginings of the 12th-century romance, and negotiates with the defining events and movements of the 18th- and 19th-centuries; which leads us to another prevalent concern of both periods.

Preoccupation with social and environmental destruction, prevalent in both of Chrétien's romances as well as in the prose texts featured in my second chapter, has been associated both with the medieval 'worldview'—in developmental terms, we understand this as a pre-rational, symbolic mode of engagement with the inhabited environment—and with magical or mythological consciousness.[x] The premise that cultural preoccupation with the "end of nature" (Mckibben) is by no means applicable only to the latter half of the twentieth century is evidenced by pre-Christian equation of cosmological occurrences, such as meteors, eclipses and the like, with degenerative cycles in humanity and nature. Preoccupation with nature's potential for

damage, as well as life-sustaining abundance, is not uniquely medieval. Each era has its unique methods of expressing universal discomfort with the continually shifting relationship between civilization and the natural world, wherein old parameters, the boundaries we have already established between what is *us* and what is *out there,* undergo redefinition.

As to the question of where we might place our respective texts within the pastoral continuum—both the absenting of a natural backdrop and a crisis of locus prefacing exile are indicated here—expressions of anxiety relative to transitional processes underway apply across the temporal spectrum. To note some key transitional features of each period, whereas 'world-making' in the literary Middle Ages depends upon all that can be imagined, as the period approaches its culmination, the Arthurian narrative gives way to sober observations concerning the breakdown of social relations, the pros and cons of law and technological advancements, and deserted landscapes. Perceval's emergent sensitivity and subjectivity to cultural and environmental signs, for example, define him as an alternate model emerging from a decadent order. For Romantics, advances in science and technology, such as the introduction of the railroad, complete with exaltations of steam and the screech of locomotion, registered as encroachments upon the imagination and the sacred thought processes once available to the poet through peaceful communion with nature. In texts from both periods, movement through space elicits as well as exacerbates experiences of awakened perception to toxic elements in the human-environmental sphere; individual participants either incorporate—Nerval makes a literary style of the discomfort of accelerated motion—reject, or attempt to rewrite undesired conditions as self-defined cultural change agents (Lamartine).

In addition to applying a socio-environmental lens to my close reading of the texts mentioned above, this project seeks to build upon as well as to expand upon aspects of critical

precedents that pertain to eco-human perspectives of the respective periods. Until recently, much of environmental (ecocritical) reading (focused primarily upon American and English literature of the 19th- and 20th-centuries) has concerned itself with themes of endangerment to the 'natural' world; 21st-century environmental thinking, following the lead of science studies, has shifted away from the idea of an "endangered species" and from "first-world" restoration politics towards an acceptance of humanity's "post-human condition" (Buell, "Forward," *Environmental Criticism* xiv-xv). I would venture to suggest that both the loss of integrality in the eco-human relationship and traces of a conceptual post-human condition are present in the Arthurian narrative as well, even before we get to first, second and third world distinctions; annihilation scenarios stop, perhaps, when we do in fact acknowledge ourselves as post-human. The narratives I now undertake, which offer worthy insights with respect to formative phases of perceiving oneself as 'human', 'eco-human', and 'other', albeit through a combined lens of universal alterity and Frenchness, will, I believe, speak to aspects of evolutionary pre- and post-human-environmental concepts of 'being' relevant to the periods in which they were created as well as to contemporary dialogues and practices such as those just mentioned.

[i] De Certeau proposes a notion of 'espace' as 'place' that is traversed (put into practice through movement) and rendered meaningful by various forms of human activity: "*l'espace est un lieu pratiqué*;" "De même, la lecture est l'espace produit par la pratique du lieu que constitue un système de signes—un récit" *L'Invention du Quotidien*, vol. 1: 173.

[ii] "La souffrance de l'exile ne réside pas dans l'éloignement, mais dans le déplacement dans le fait d'avoir 'laissé' et d'avoir 'été laissé,'" Du Bellay, sonnets 24-36; "Analyse du contenu," *Les Regrets* 10.

[iii] Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?* 16. Hiltner offers this reflection in reference to the Early Modern English debate over care for the planet.

[iv] Howard Bloch defines the 12th-century individual as an "interior space within a broader political spectrum," "Wasteland and Round Table" 272.

[v] See A.J. Gurevich, "Introduction" 32.

[vi] See Walter Ullmann, *The Individual in Medieval Society* 6.

[vii] Harry Liebersohn, "Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso, and Romantic Travel Writing." *The American Historical Review* 99.3 (1994): 746-66, in K. Weil 111-126.

[viii] "L'esprit humain est maintenant bien moins avide des événements même les mieux combinés, que des observations sur. Cette disposition tient aux grands changements intellectuels qui ont eu lieu dans l'homme; il tend toujours plus en général à se replier sur lui-même, et cherche la religion, l'amour et la pensée dans le plus intime de son cœur" (43). See also Denyse Delcourt, *L'Ethique du Changement dans le Roman Français du XIIe Siècle*, note 2, 6.

[ix] This is a modest approximation of Baudelaire's definition in "Le peintre de la vie modern." *Le Figaro*, 1863.

[x] This sort of categorization has been challenged, particularly in recent years. See also Arnold Van Gennep, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas.

Part I

‘Moyen Age’

Preface

Roland Barthes has referred to the literary text not as an inductive access to a Model, but as an entrance into a network with a thousand entrances: "to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departure[s], a narrative or poetic Law, but at a perspective [...], whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened [...] (12)."[i] The variety of perspectives suggested by Barthes' analogy is useful when we consider the medieval texts I have chosen to examine in the first three chapters of this dissertation, *Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette,* the prose *Lancelot,* and *La Mort le Roi Arthur*. Each of these texts, which provide their own version of the Arthurian legend, departs in unprecedented ways from romances that can be thought of as adhering to circular, closural models of the *bildungs*-journey. In Chrétien's earlier works, such as *Yvain ou Le chevalier au lion* and *Erec et Enide,* for example, we find a systemic order existing between the disruption of an individual life and disturbances, such as tempests or unusual interfacings between wild animals, occurring within nature. Herein, the primary objective of the temporary crisis is to return the hero to *his* proper and just place in society, i.e., to prepare, instruct, and improve him for the role assigned to him by destiny. Heroes such as Perceval and Lancelot, on the other hand, are shaped by multiple, often competing influences during the course of their journeys. The relationship of these heroes to Arthurian society is marginal, obscure, or otherwise problematic, to the extent that readers must question the purpose as well as the implications of individual heroic trajectories.

Chrétien's seminal, incomplete work, *Perceval ou le conte du Graal*, can be viewed as a departure from the closural template as it broadens, intensifies, mystifies, and in many ways obscures, symbolic and didactic precedents concerning the purpose of the individual in relationship to society and the natural environment. Both the romance and its hero, in fact, call attention to a confounding loss concerning the fundamental relationships between humans and Nature, upon which all views of self and God are based (Gurevich 59).[ii] More explicitly, as human potential visibly evolves or degenerates in relationship to a failing society, *Perceval* begins to suggest that the evolution of human consciousness—involving spiritual though not purely Christian understanding, and having to do with the newly perceived Self—as opposed to social education, is the ultimate goal. In other words, as a latter-day hero, Perceval outgrows the initial model he is meant to serve and, at the same time, fails to represent a clear alternative.

In order to better grasp the social and environmental concerns expressed by the lack of closure in our primary texts, let me emphasize the distinction between the model and law, which *is* absolute. Although we often think of models as fixed entities, objects, or a given set of standards, from which we derive our spiritual and behavioral modes of being, the term, in fact, as its etymological derivations indicate—the Latin '*modulus*,' also related to 'modler', in Old French, and more recently '*moler*', or '*mouler*', whence to '*mo(u)ld*' (Partridge 411)—connotes a *process* through which a piece of clay, for example, in the physical world, or a maxim, a conceptual equivalent, acquires a 'tangible' shape, such as a legend, a folk tale, or a historical tradition. Myths, much as rites, Claude Lévi-Strauss tells us, are dual by nature and interminable in that something is always left *unfinished*. This last point is important. In his discussion of the complex processes of social transformation, Lévi-Strauss uses the analogy of the nebula, which, although it becomes ever more vaporous as it spreads gradually across communities of

understanding, maintains a nucleus which, once condensed, reorganized and reformulated, can be perceived as "something resembling order" emerging from the (perceived) chaos of that former order which has been lost. Thus, as we understand them, legends and myths function interchangeably as models of conduct, as well as shared perceptions of "truths" regarding social, environmental, and cosmological surroundings. As evolutionary entities, always in the process of recontextualization and rearticulation, these legends and myths employ difficult and incongruous methods of articulation to document perceptions of "shifting reality," visibly ravaged by the past, unimaginably altered by a future that awaits it. From the perspective of the 21st-century reader, while our entrances into a literary and cultural network such as the medieval text may be many, social, theological, or phenomenological, to name a few possibilities, the late 12th-century and 13th-century French texts I discuss henceforth are particularly noteworthy as testaments to the uncertain processes of cultural and epistemological evolution in which literary, social, and ethical precedents undergo, as uncomfortably as we might imagine, processes of erosion, reevaluation, dissolution, and eventually extinction, while the terms of their rearticulation appear continually to elude us.

As to what actually constitutes the presumed worldview of a 12th- and 13th-century courtly society, 20th- (and 21st) century scholars have stressed the lingering influence of medieval practices of communication, from ways of thinking to means of exchange, in early modern society. It is important to make the distinction that the medieval *individual* does not emerge as a unique "personality" with individual peculiarities and challenges specific to his inner psyche. Put another way, according to the *bildungsroman*, for example, the unique traits of a medieval hero, both his faults and his gifts, serve a specific pedagogical purpose designed to maintain structure and order within the community he represents. In other words, the 'standard' hero functions as a

unit within a larger whole. Initially, his existence depends upon his relationship to a lived, "local" environment, with which he interacts at a practical and communal level and which determines how he will view and think about himself. Deviation from the norm does not differentiate the hero from his society but, rather, sets out to reestablish order through his example. This all changes, of course, when authors situate their increasingly complex heroes within unstable societal and environmental contexts.

Medieval perspective (which has been compared somewhat simplistically to the early stages of infant development) differs from our own in that medieval persons and communities do not construct as we do distinct conceptual boundaries between their physical existence and the inhabited environment through which they move. Otherwise stated, the relationship between nature and hu/man is a "key determinant" in his/her developmental consciousness (Gurevich 45). In the medieval mind, nature, above and beyond its function as a source of food and shelter, acts as something of a mirror of the human soul. Further specified, individual identity, associated with the advent of 'modernité'—for our purposes, *modernity* begins with change and a culture's orientation to a potential future brought on by change—and with the beginning stages of the early Renaissance, can be seen as emerging out of as well as away from traditional forms of communal association. During this lengthy and difficult process, relationships between individuals and the communal structures of their societies become increasingly volatile, as my examination of the three Lancelot texts will demonstrate.

An important distinction needs to be made concerning the medieval individual, particularly in view of the focus of this chapter. As I've indicated above, although the heroes of the late 12th century French novel (*le roman de quête*) do not have distinct personalities, they possess 'interior selves' as evidenced by their capacity for deep feeling, for introspection and

self-reflection (a motif often associated with memory and the loss of memory), all of which causes them to change 'within' in accordance with or aside from predominant values around them. In texts such as *Perceval* and *Lancelot*, the individual begins to emerge as a subjective entity in relationship to a society whose values he is either unable or unwilling to follow. Disparities between expressions of individual identity and society, perceived as transgressive and punished by exile (Lancelot), death, or individual self-destruction (Tristan), were rearticulated by Renaissance writers as a conflict between the "layered self," a "public" persona, serving a social function, and the private, or "interior" self, constituting the "core" of personal identity (Parker, Bentley, "Introduction"). The late medieval hero, whose struggle with society represents the growing pains of an interior self in the process of becoming, does not struggle for self-perfection, as did his chivalric predecessors, in relationship to a fixed society. This latter-day hero quests, deviates, and evolves in relationship to influential movements in culture, technology, warfare, religion, commerce (involving new forms of transportation and external contacts), with alarming signs of environmental repercussion. The result is not merely an increasingly complex hero who surpasses or otherwise challenges previous models, but, more precisely, a hero who, by virtue of his ambivalent, ambiguous, even cryptic nature, represents (in the tradition of the wounded healer) the lengthy, rather arduous process of cultural self-definition and re-articulation. And, much as with the legend which has created him, the efforts of this latter-day medieval hero produce an unfinished result.

Medieval Landscape and Ecology

As I have alluded above, awareness of environmental flux is not merely a result of contemporary environmental thinking. Preoccupation with moral deviation informs the denatured world characteristic of *La Mort le Roi Artur*. As Pearsall and Salter emphatically remind us, "Nothing except his personal narrative of birth and death more urgently signalled to medieval man of mutability than the changing aspects of landscape and weather" (119). As with Perceval, the physical and moral iconography of Lancelot must be studied in relationship to his environment, both natural and social. We cannot, for example, ignore that, as cultural assessment of this hero progresses according to the worldviews of his authors, the nature and content of his surrounding environment undergo a corresponding transformation, leaving a mere suggestion of the enchanted sub-aqueous forest of his early life, and little of the natural vegetation or cultivated landscape associated with the literary medieval landscape. Many additional factors are at play and must be considered from a variety of contemporary vantage points, as well as from the literary and social contexts of the 12^{th-} and 13th-centuries.

To invoke a useful contemporary perspective, environmental activists, such as Lester Brown (*Saving the Planet*, 1991, *Plan B 4.0*, 2009), stress the relationship between environmental strain – both 'man made' and 'naturally' occurring – and failing states whose unifying characteristics include food and water shortages, deforestation, and poverty. Mounting environmental stress, Brown asserts, produces pressures on the underlying structures of society that invariably lead to violence—once again, the familiar paradigm: "a great peace that is breaking down" (Eco)—and, eventually, to the dissolution of societies as we have known them: through loss of habitat (of islands and coastlines, for example, due to rising sea levels), of species, and of worldviews. Anthropologists such as Mary Douglas speak of the intrinsic

relationship between inflexible societal structures and volatile processes in human evolution. To cite an example particularly relevant to my study of Lancelot, when human desires become behaviors that stray too far from the eco-semiotic categories within which they can be accounted for and regulated, we can expect a volatile reaction. To borrow Brown's terminology, a "tectonic process" begins to occur, spiraling outward as it were from the cohesive social unit to neighboring societies and, eventually, to the inhabited environment. From an evolutionary perspective, a bilateral strain in human-environmental relations appears unavoidable. And yet, from a human perspective, the general consensus that 'something is amiss' begs for a collectively designed 'solution' of some sort. The strained relationship between 'movable' (changing) and 'unmovable' (fixed or stubborn) entities within the eco-human relationship represented in the Arthurian narrative underscore these last assertions.

Nor is the general pessimism of the Arthurian perspective entirely one-sided. End-time scenarios, or apocalyptic doctrines, do not set out only to confirm our worst fears; they also give rise to hopes of a "shining future" out of the destruction of "our wretched world!" (Eco, *Conversations*). The danger of this perspective lies in its capacity to turn attentions away from present realities and concerns and to adopt delusional, apathetic postures regarding the future, or, conversely, to take refuge in artificial, and potentially devastating, 'solutions' (Jonestown, Heaven's Gate, etc. . .). For those to whom prospects for resurrection (not merely a Christian construct) appear dubious within the lifetime of the individual, 'signs' pointing to a quantifiable End-time (with date and time provided), become a means of negotiating a viable 'truth' (or fiction) to live by. Correspondingly, both Chrétien's and the 13th-century prose texts I discuss in the first two chapters of this dissertation exemplify, with degrees of authorial entitlement, rather diametrically opposed ideas concerning how humans (ought to) relate to, construct and inhabit

their world. These texts demonstrate ways in which changing values and perceptions influence, interact with, and potentially produce eschatological interpretations and experiences of a situation in transition. They act not only as testaments of literary tropes but also to medieval presence in the enveloping natural world, which includes interactions with 'Natural' and manmade territories and infractions made upon, or on behalf of, one by the other.

Concerning the Arthurian narrative's 'fin-de-siècle' mind set, Eco's definition of the Middle Ages as both a cultural state of mind and a condition of culture (the words "breaking down" remain central),[iii] presupposes an ongoing state of anxiety (by-and-large an aristocratic construct) that we recognize as 'millennial' (*Apocalypse Postponed*). Chrétien's portrait of aristocratic discomfort with merchants and moneychangers in *Perceval* would support Eco's assertion. At the same time, anxieties concerning all forms of 'foreignness' (invasion by barbarians)—a rubric under which we might also find 'uncertain' moralities—represent a broader, collective response to change. Like the 'vulgar' *masses*, suggested by mercantilism and the decadent aristocracy in *Perceval*, as-yet-undefined epistemological territories infiltrate and disrupt the sanctuary of the interior life, with the result that something once valued is perceived as "irretrievably" lost. Far from adopting a nostalgic response, the profoundly dismal view of our 13th-century authors provides what we might define (with Eco) as "an extreme, apocalyptic testimony" as to how this loss might have occurred. The central focus of these seminal works is the often-incompatible relationship between the interior world of the individual, associated with feeling, and human agency, a paradigm that Jean Frappier (in a reference to Lancelot's madness) describes as "une démence authentique, non pas stable, mais caractérisée par une oscillation entre l'égarement et la lucidité" (*Étude sur La Mort* 79-80). Moreover, as we progress from 12th- to13th-century texts of the Arthurian cycle, estrangement from lucidity increasingly reflects the

moral condition of society, as opposed to the individual hero. In addition to a spectrum of attitudes concerning human morality and its impact on society and the environment, 13th-century texts raise questions and offer warnings to future generations. Importantly, as the competing discourses within these texts demonstrate, lack of consensus concerning a collective truth—which points to cultural and historical memory—constitutes a pivotal disjuncture from which the multifariously nuanced episodes of the Arthurian legend evolve.

Another point I would like to make in support of an environmental reading of these selected 12th- and 13th century French texts, which does not (and cannot) ignore their Christian, Celtic (and Hebraic) content, is that multiple influences, secular, structural, and having to do with developments in technology and commerce, beg further consideration, both in view of 21st-century global concerns and post-human perspectives. René Girard's assertion that the inability to adapt to changing conditions is a trait characteristic of religion in general (*Violence and the Sacred* 39) sheds some light on the 'medieval' predicament. In other words, let us beware of the 'celestial' solution to the problems presented by 'unfinished' treatments of the Arthurian legend, offered by its many sequels (*La Queste du Saint Graal*, for example). Incompleteness, like failure, has a didactic message. To take this a step further, Gillian Rudd addresses the impasse between Christian and secular influences on medieval society with her assertion that "fixed things" cause difficulties, whereas the possibility of change offers solutions: "it becomes evident that in certain circumstances flux is the thing to be relied upon and stability springs not from rigidly staying in one place but from knowing how to sway with the tide" (140).[iv] Both Girard and Rudd address a key problematic of all transitional periods: how to reconcile tradition—at its extreme moral dogmatism—with advancements in human practice and intellectual orientation?

For our purposes, while the medieval imagination may be quite supple, moral and behavioral laws, as we know, resist flux, and tell only partial tales of the manner in which society evolves.

The extent to which both cultivated 'nature' and the 'natural' environment reflect conflicted views and concerns of the late medieval period is perhaps best indicated by the variety of epithets and uses of natural settings, symbolic and mundane, as well as by the progressive extremity of nature's representation in a text such as *La Mort*. Viewed as a real entity, as opposed to an allegorical construct, nature is never entirely an It; nor do applications such as He or She apply across the spectrum. To a large extent, symbolic and social contexts determine gender distinctions associated with the elements and with natural spaces. In late 12th-century and 13th-century prose versions of the Arthurian cycle, allegorical and symbolic systems of representing nature, such as in the *Roman de la Rose*, or in the examples of *Roland* or *Yvain*, appear increasingly overshadowed by an element of dark realism, not unfamiliar to the twentieth and twenty-first century imagination. Consistently, texts appear to interrogate the status and the direction of humanity through their representation of natural environments whose degraded condition underscores innate social truths, whereby, a "constant movement of position" is required to keep everything at play: "now one thing takes precedence, now another, or not, in the constant shift of life and death, survival and extinction" (Rudd 3-4). The environmental perspective, (Rudd uses the term 'ecocritical'), can "bring to the fore" insights that may otherwise be relegated to the periphery or overlooked entirely. Since Pearsall and Salter, for whom the literary landscape exists primarily in accordance with the symbolic role it has to fulfill, critical study of medieval texts has begun to consider the cultural content of quotidian views of landscape, often seen from the vantage points of above or below. These seemingly mundane views, mentioned as-in-passing, introduce, among other things, a perspectival consciousness less

rooted in symbolism than in evolving ways of seeing. As Glen Love puts it, the "enveloping natural world" becomes "part of the interpretive context" (qtd. in Rudd 16).

As a communicative entity, nature inhabits a relatively high position on the hierarchical spectrum. As a victim of exploitation and war turf, the natural environment fares rather badly, much as the average medieval peasant or serf. Rachel Carson's argument for a worldview in which 'wonders' and 'realities' are not perceived as opposites but, rather, as 'two ways of describing the same thing' (1954), gives us some clues as to the diversity of natural representation (symbolic, ominous, temporal, mundane) we encounter in late medieval texts. To acknowledge wonder is to acknowledge both humility and a sense of integration in our (human) relationship to the larger world (Rudd). This kind of thinking implies both an awakened sense of stewardship and an awareness of our impact on the interconnected web of species and ecosystems (small and large) in the environment(s) we inhabit. At a local level, being, human and other, describes the set of species and individuals within a given system (which presumes conceptual if not actual physical boundaries). This much said, species and groups residing outside a given system influence and help to define that system, according to such things as global and local impact, similarities and differences. The ecocritical perspective, initially rooted in ethical and political concerns of environmentalism and ecology,[v] also draws upon a range of other disciplines, such as human geography, literary criticism, natural and human sciences, phenomenology, anthropology and eco-psychology (Kay Milton's *Loving Nature*, 2002, for example), whose viewpoints contribute to my reading of the literary journey of quest in both Part One and Part Two of this dissertation.

Let us also not ignore that, as ecofeminist writing underscores, the 'human' portion of the human-environmental relationship predominantly references western male perspectives and

objectives. Rudd, among others, has pointed out that the Gaia concept (Lovelock, 1979), associated with the ancient Greek earth goddess, and with traditional concepts of femininity (fertility, mothering, and subservience), has "legitimated" human practices of environmental exploitation, particularly as *she* is viewed as a self-sustaining unit whose powers of self-regeneration work to correct imbalances, naturally occurring or 'man-made'. Contrary to the belief that nature's powers of self-regeneration work in human favor, regardless of what humans do to her, Gaia's concern with the restoration of natural environmental balance is fairly indifferent to human survival. Although Nature may provide humans with rude messages, she is not particularly interested in what we do with them.

Once again, like nature, human attitudes and perceptions are not static; unlike nature, humans tend to flounder uncomfortably in the absence of coherent classifiable articulations of the external world; *we* tend to adopt, "albeit crookedly," the most dominant concepts available to our consumption (10). Leaving aside for the moment recent critiques of environmentalist concern for the protection of biodiversity as "dominationist double-think," "intervolvement" between humans and the "biogeological universe" (Buell, in Hiltner, *Ecocriticism* xv) does not merely appear as a reactionary pose of medieval texts. Nor does the interdependency of medieval persons and nature posit an unproblematic relationship; a point well-articulated by Robert Bresson's cinematic adaptation, *Lancelot du Lac*: the products of men (e.g. tools of warfare) are less biodegradable than the products of nature. Even as mechanization creates a new order of indestructibility, detrimental to the natural world, human continuance presupposes a past, with all of its relics, as well as a forward-looking present. A chief concern of natural evolution is not merely survival but replacement, to borrow Darwin's terminology, by those who "win out" at the expense of their rivals (*Origin*).

Part of the task of environmental reading, which applies to both medieval and 19th-century texts in this dissertation, involves paying attention to both allegorical (iconographic) elements and those elements more closely related to the 'real' (albeit multiple and overlapping) contexts of the periods in question. As I discuss in my readings of Chrétien's *Perceval* and *Charrette*, and relative to the 13th-century prose texts, fields viewed from a castle window may actually communicate something more pertinent to medieval society than merely local color: a distinction, for example, between the ordered courtly world and bordering forest territories associated with the 'wild'. Elemental iconographies, such as the woods, water, rock, and metal, have evolving social and symbolic functions, particularly evident in the late medieval texts under examination in these two chapters. Not one but, rather, a range of attitudes are at play, questions of gender roles among them. A long list of medieval scholarship acknowledges a relationship between natural and environmental iconographies and fixed and mutable gender roles, a topic I treat as it arises in *Perceval* and the *Lancelot* cycle. As courtly love figures prominently in late medieval romances, gender relations, perceptions, and roles cannot be entirely divorced from the natural, or artificial sites (gardens, orchards, mazes) in which amorous interactions occur. Before I turn to the analysis of these texts, let me first point to some important developments of medieval thinking in relationship to the lived environment.

From the Garden to the Wasteland: Medieval Views of Nature, the Body, Love

Neither Christian nor secular views of the Middle Ages conform to a uniform consensus where nature and the environment are concerned. To offer an initial signpost, Bernard Huppé has identified the Crusades as a period during which nature acquires a rhetorical function and "serves

merely as a backdrop, or frame of reference, for human events" ("Nature in Beowulf and Roland," *Approaches to Nature* 29). Although medieval awareness does not dismiss the ominous messages of the cosmos, nature becomes sublimated to the deeds and designs of men. Both scientific and religious thought contribute to a cautionary relationship between humanity and Nature, as well as to a general distrust of the feminine. Drawing from Greek origins that distinguish Nature, "all that has existence," from God, original oneness, "what has being," or, "that from which all being is derived" (Scaglione), medieval scholastics tend to see nature not as a machine, but as a principle to be studied rationally through observation. Plato had established a dichotomy between matter and spirit, body and mind Soul interchangeably to refer to intelligence and to the soul (Weisheipl; Scaglione). In book V of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle attempted to reconcile the primacy of the Soul and the reality of Nature, applying a condensed, formal use of the term φύους to refer to the principle of movement and rest in corporeal reality. Initially, for Aristotle, the term connoted a "process of growing," later understood as an "active principle of growing things," and, more precisely, the active *source* of movement in all natural things. The meaning could be variously construed as fire, earth, air, or "the primary material out of which any natural object is made" (Weisheipl 3-5; *Metaphysics*, 1014b27-28). Aristotle equated nature with the essence of things and with the innate and distinct differences in all things that, within themselves, possess a source of movement: matter, capable of receiving movement, could be equated with nature. 'Art', as defined by Plato, was any product of human intelligence (or physical interference) having an influence upon reality: the upward movement of a ball tossed into the air, for example, is not a natural phenomenon but the result of 'art' (Weisheipl, "The Concept of Nature"). Chance was not a 'thing' but, rather, a 'concurrence' involving unlike *things* that operate according to their own determined laws. In other words, 'chance' became a

rational means of accounting for unpredictable or irrational elements in the world, such as meteoric explosions, environmental cataclysm, or the birth of a monster.

Adaptations of both Platonic and Aristotelian views of nature, evident in the philosophies of Avicenna (Abu Ali, or, Ibn Sînâ, 980-1037) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), inform both the ideas and representation of nature in medieval texts. The chief difference between the two medieval thinkers lies in their views of the natural universe; Avicenna's tendency was to underestimate the power of 'nature' in the universe, attributing it to celestial forces, whereas Aquinas acknowledged nature's dynamic role as the instrument of God. Avicenna tends towards a fatalistic view; Aquinas sees no role for Fate. An important implication of Avicenna's thought is a form of pre-Cartesian dualism that divides the human intellect from nature, thus rendering humans spectators, rather than active parts, of the world. For Aquinas, conversely, the realm of nature is autonomous and real, and man is a continuous part of it (Weisheipl 154-5).[vi] Just as Nature is a means of gleaning the Author of Nature; the environmental condition of nature reflects the spiritual condition of humans. The divergent views of these philosophers provide an important framework from which dichotomies concerning the representation of (wo)man and nature can be understood.

Developments in the philosophy of nature in the twelfth century include a growing interest in psychology, particularly in the psychology of love and, correspondingly, of morality: "In a universe ordered by an all-embracing *natura*, love is a link between man, the *minor mundus*, and his macrocosmic environment, for human physical and psychological life are actuated by the same *vitalis motus* which sustains the natural order" (W. Wetherbee, *Approaches to Nature* 47). 'Fallen' man is limited by his ability to see clearly, with the "eyes of reason." Subsequently, his task is to "feel his way" by experience, susceptible to the sensory attractions

and pleasure provided by *naturalia*, as well as to the understanding available to him through detached observation. Typically, feminized, seductive Nature is contrasted with masculine *ratio*, which endeavors to realize a logical order in relationship to Her distracting influence. We find traces of Aquinas in Alain de Lille's encouragement of twelfth century man to confront the temptations of the external world in order to develop an understanding of a higher reality and, particularly through creative endeavors, to refine the spirit and intellect in relationship to the cosmos. Avicenna's teaching accords with more pessimistic views of 'Fallen' man, who, incapable of reconciling the overtly sexual and often unpredictably potent forces of Nature, lives in a perpetual state of amnesia. Man's own imaginative capacities, rather than guiding him towards enlightenment, i.e. a remembrance of the original union, more frequently lead him to uncover his unfulfilled, corrupted nature. Chrétien most certainly drew from this last model when he created the conflicted psyche of Lancelot in relationship to the queen in *Charrette*.

In a related vein, irrational, or 'mad' behavior, associated with the medieval lover, corresponds with Plato's vision of the effects of beauty (the pure Forms) upon the senses, wherein the obsessed or 'mad' lover attempts to form a mystic union with the "higher values" ignored by most mortals (*Symposium*, *Phaedrus*). Medieval allegorical equations with animals and the noble and base natures of men can both be traced to Plato's stipulation that good men underwent purification as disembodied souls after death, whereas evil men underwent metempsychosis into animals corresponding with their vices in life. Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (IV, 1030-1207) provides an Epicurean view of love, naturalistic and purely sexual, which, although not an argument for unbridled passion (sex is an irrational, if at times necessary, mercenary act), opposes the ideals of classical metaphysics (Scaglione, Wetherbee).

Two strains of thought dominate medieval Christian views of nature. The first, ethical at its core, equates nature with original sin, and thus with the realm of Satan. From a second, primarily ontological perspective, Aquinas saw nature's forms and patterns as evidence of God's creative activity (Scaglione). As to the morals of men, Tacitus has presented an indelible pre-Christian image of barbaric virtue in his depiction of forest-dwelling, skin-clad Germans whose primary characteristics are loyalty and devotion to family (Schama). Christianity's association of the "brutal instincts of savage peoples" with sexuality and various forms of moral and social depravity informs the often contradictory attitudes concerning courtly passions, particularly where adultery and abduction appear. From a feudal perspective, a chaste woman has value both as property, representative of a family's wealth and social status, and as insurance of legitimate succession in royal lineages. Although church doctrine on the technicalities of sexual matters in marriage was not clearly formulated until the mid-sixteenth century Council of Trent (1545-63), evidence suggests (and the Arthurian diegesis supports this) that, where matters of 'property' and filial legitimacy are concerned, women were subject to much closer scrutiny and consequences concerning sexual conduct than men.

The duality of standards represented by the ideals of courtly love and Christian teachings coincides with a reaction, beginning in southern France and spreading to Western and Central Europe at the onset of the second millennium, to the "stifling conventions" of theological morality. Renewed literary interest in Nature and in "nature's rights," which bears traces of Latin and Arabic traditions is, by Christian interpretation, reminiscent of original desire for the forbidden (Scaglione). [vii] Stylistically, *amour courtois*' sympathy with spontaneous expression and authenticity of feeling is evocative of later naturalism. Andreas Capellanus' late twelfth century *De arte honeste amandi* effectively codifies the doctrine of courtly love as a union of

noble souls (wherein the woman commonly holds a higher social status than her lover), normally out of wedlock, justly earned through various exacting noble feats by the male suitor and freely granted by the lady as a reward for his loyalty and efforts. The lover's suffering and often painstaking, superhuman sacrifices add a recognizably Christian dimension to what might otherwise be misconstrued today as eighteenth century licentiousness or 1960s'-style 'free love' (Scaglione, "The Problem of Nature" 6-13).

It is important to note that the courtly standard that allows adultery becomes invariably problematic as a practice, as evidenced by the fates of heroes such as Tristan and Lancelot. As I will discuss in detail in my third chapter, the female body, central to fluctuating discourses surrounding the triangular relationship between Lancelot, Guenièvre, and Arthur, is either relegated to biological and social functions or subsumed under moral and aesthetic iconographies associated with nature in the medieval text. Celtic tradition associates the male body with both procreative and sovereign functions easily disrupted by feminine inconstancy. The historicized medieval male body is correspondingly relegated to social and symbolic systems of governance, thereby de-naturalized. Le Goff associates medieval Christianity's use of bodily metaphors with traditions inherited from Greco-Roman Antiquity. Both cultures viewed the head, or *caput*, "seat of the brain," as "the organ that contains the soul," which is to say the "vital force" of the individual, responsible for the functioning of the entire body. Whereas pagan use of bodily metaphors emphasized systemic functions: "head/intestines/limbs (*caput*/*venter*/*membra*), the Christian system of bodily metaphors emphasizes the pair of the head and the heart, with Christ as the symbolic Head of the church. This formula became politicized during the Carolingian period with the association of the empire with the body of the church, directed by Christ on earth through "two intermediaries, [. . .] the pope and the emperor (or the king)" ("Head or Heart?"

14). In the New Testament, the heart represents the "seat of vital forces" and designates the affective and interior life: "'the center of decisive things, of the moral conscience, of unwritten law, of encounters with God'" (16).

Twelfth century adaptations of the organicist metaphor into the political realm distribute superior functions between the head (the prince, or king) and the heart (the 'hypothetical' senate), with lesser social and professional functions represented by 'lesser' body parts: the hands (civil servants and warriors), which have a dual, somewhat ambiguous status as they represent both manual work and "le bras séculier," secular power; the feet, lowliest of body parts, associated with the peasant. Unsurprisingly, members of the lowest order of medieval society are most directly associated with members of the "third function," which is to say money handlers and merchants, etc. . . . Christian scorn for the accumulation of wealth, associated with the belly and the organs of digestion and elimination, and by association with putrefaction, illness, vice, and vile miserly habits, contributes to the ignoble view of both the peasant and those involved in trades and selling of goods. The head remains the primary symbol of the political body, hence, the symbolic value of decapitation. The king of the Christian West is "the conjunction of a private, human body and a political, divine body" (Dupont, "The Emperor-God's Other Body" 397); at his death, the mortal body is buried, while the second is proclaimed *immortal*.

As a reflection of the multiple influences that inform them, both wavering and simultaneously contradictory social and theological perspectives appear in late medieval texts. 12th-century romances resuscitate the value of the male body through its equation with physical strength, and the moral virtues of bravery (protection), loyalty (faith), and compassion (mercy), particularly as inspired by feminine beauty. The duality between chaste and debased

knighthood—which reflects a growing authorial interest in the psychological complexity of human nature, as well as a resurgence of clerical pessimism—is a prevalent feature of 13th-century texts, such as *La Mort* and *La Queste*. Dante's 14th-century vision of Christian moral cosmology, which elevated ephemeral earthly love to a universal rapport with "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (*Paradiso* XXXIII), demonstrates a dramatic distancing from the values and practices proposed by Capellanus.

To return to the social and environmental implications of conflicting moralities and human practice, Greek tragedy has long established the relationship between the "natural urge," or, impulsive action, and catastrophe. The heroes' actions, 'one false move', whether through ignorance or limitations of character, such as arrogance, precipitate *katastrophé*: literally, overturning, figuratively, upsetting, hence a ruinous conclusion, great misfortune. For Greeks, unlike Christians, the 'wrong' actions of men, even with their disastrous outcomes, are not necessarily 'morally' bad. Growing opposition to medieval courtly values is evidenced by the eventual condemnation of Capellanus' treatise by Parisian bishop, Etienne Tempier, in 1277. While courtly love presupposes the liberty of choice and the social virtue of moderation, both Béroul's *Tristan* and the *Lancelot* give us examples of deviations from this ideal, with correspondingly problematic consequences. In matters of love, Abélard underscores the difference between Renaissance nonconformism and the medieval individual; the wayward cleric accepted his mutilation as providential punishment and repented of his moral incontinence (although, in the intellectual and philosophical sphere, he continued to be controversial). Héloïse, on the other hand, did not forget that, in his *Theologia Christiana*, II, Abélard considered continence an addition to the Gospels, and therefore, not entirely essential (Scaglione 27). We recognize a similar divergence between feminine and masculine attitudes in Guenièvre's

relationship to Lancelot in our 13th-century texts. As Héloïse reminds us, individual theologies must also be considered in relationship to both the temporal life of the theologian and the physical capacities of his body. Augustine makes an analogy (later adapted by medieval authors of romances) between his own moral reticence and 'straying' from the 'just' path: "I had wandered along crooked ways, [...] not indeed because I was certain of it, but as though I preferred it to other teachings which I did not seek with piety but opposed with hatred" (*Confessions* 8.7.17). Temporality and the perspective of age correspondingly inform the dialectics of 12th- and 13th-century renditions of Lancelot.

Concerning the moral arguments of my second and third chapters, at first glance, Lancelot would appear to follow the Augustinian model: immoderate in his devotion, later a repentant. The explicit carnal fixations of Augustine and Abélard do not, however, provide an accurate model for Lancelot whose fixation with the queen has both carnal and transcendent connotations, particularly in Chrétien's example. Another way of saying this is that, at the story's inception (Chrétien's version), Lancelot's amorous situation accords positively with the courtly trope: the hero suffers in order to be worthy of his reward. In *La Mort*, the hero's failure at forbearance increasingly reflects Christian distrust of human nature, prefaced by the separation of Nature from God. Perhaps not coincidentally, Lancelot's moral struggle takes place at the end of his life when knightly exertion, in love as in warfare, has lost both its positive social function and its oppositional value. Although this last text reflects Christian values that associate immorality with social and environmental degradation, it does not posit (as *La Queste* does) Christian obedience as a solution to human problems. Moreover, *La Mort*'s depiction of dysfunctional morality, at all levels of society, coincides with the text's function as a testament to the end of a literary and historical cycle, leaving in its wake obscure prospects for the future.

From a sociological perspective, the conflicting value systems found in courtly and religious attitudes are representative of two ruling classes of the period: the nobility and the clergy. A third influence points to an affirmative attitude towards natural desires and a suspicious, often deprecatory, attitude towards a rising mercantile class, as exemplified in *Perceval*. Alain de Lille makes the distinction between Nature, a creative force from which like things procreate, and the 'ill will' of man; likewise, 'natural love' is distinguished from Platonic 'spiritual love' and sinful, 'adulterous love' (Scaglione 167).[viii] The Catharists, whom Alain opposed (*Contra haereticos*), considered all matter, '*natura naturata*' (observable changes and processes), a product of the devil and, therefore, evil. Alain could defend the 'natural', Nature's creation, as long as it was not subverted by 'unnatural' excessive desire, perversion, or other vices, which he viewed as detrimental to the innate moral harmony of the universe. Reason, in the end, was required to keep the senses in check.

In Jean De Meung's portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, Amant and Raison represent two entirely different realms of human functioning, the irrational, which we associate with emotions, and the rational. As neither can justify nor fully annihilate the existence of the other, they remain unreconciled. The compatibility of Venus and Nature has the practical value of propagating the species. De Meung's point that, once the 'higher' elements of courtly love, such as trust, loyalty, and fidelity, are debased by 'lowly' elements, such as jealousy, unreliability, and distrust, wherein 'refined' inner emotion is revealed as mere delusion, is evident in the degraded views of courtly love, represented by Chrétien and *La Mort*'s author. Jealousy in marriage (based in hierarchal authority and territorial rights), much more than in love (an equalizer), is a recipe for certain chaos: "eus [les femmes] sont franches nées;/ Lei les a condicionées,/ Qui les oste de leur franchises,/ Ou Nature les avait mises" (v. 13847ff., in Scaglione). Chrétien's vision, which both

elevates and ridicules the role of the lover, and such texts as the prose *Lancelot* and *La Mort*, show us that neither women nor men are free to follow their natures without consequences. Feminized Nature remains suspect, always capable of trickery and vengeance, even as she succumbs to human exploitation and the devastating effects of ceaseless warfare (Weisheipl; Wetherbee).[ix]

[i] R. Barthes, *S/Z*. I've used Richard Miller's translation; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. 1974. This quote appears in section VI. "Pas à pas": "[. . .] le texte unique n'est pas accès (inductif) à un Modèle, mais entrée d'un réseau à mille entrées; suivre cette entrée, c'est viser au loin, non une structure légale de norms et d'écarts, une Loi narrative ou poétique, mais une perspective (de bribes, de voix venues d'autres textes, d'autres codes), dont cependant le point de fuite est sans cesse reporté, mystérieusement ouvert [. . .]," 19. *S/Z*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970.

[ii] The anxieties alluded to above can be associated with a very lengthy process of social and cultural redefinition taking place in the late 12th century, characterized by the development of an urban population with more rationalistic (hence practical, mercantile) ways of thinking and dealing with land and nature. "As urban civilization takes shape around him, man is less and less susceptible to the rhythms of nature; he detaches himself more and more from her and begins to look upon her as an object to be utilised," Gurevich 90.

[iii] According to Eco, what is required to make a good Middle Ages is, first, "a great peace that is breaking down," next, the collapse of a great power, and, finally, the intrusion of outside influences which alter or otherwise threaten the status quo (*Travels in Hyper Reality*).

[iv] See Rudd's reading of Chaucer's "Franklin's Tale," *Greenery*.

[v] This orientation has been challenged more recently by a new generation of critics who argue against nostalgic preservationism and for a "Posthuman/ Postnatural" perspective. See Le Menager, Shewry, and Hiltner.

[vi] "There is no bifurcation between the celestial and terrestrial; there is no *dator formarum* to explain natural changes in the terrestrial world, and earthly changes are not explained by the stars" (Weisheipl 155).

[vii] A. Scaglione lists the following sources for this assertion: A. Roncaglia'a "Di una tradizione lirica petrovatoresca in lingua volgare," *Cultura neolatina*, XI (1951), and, with particular emphasis, D. de Rougemont's work on Arabic influences on Provençal culture, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, II; see Notes for Chapter II (156).

[viii] Scaglione, *De Planctu Naturae*, 34, and note 56, 167.

[ix] See "Aristotle's Concept of Nature: Avicenna and Aquinas," Weisheipl; also W. Wetherbee: "Some Implications of Nature's Femininity in Medieval Poetry," *Approaches to Nature*.

One

Vanishing Towards the Self: the Topography of Becoming in *Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*

Le conte du Graal ou le Roman de Perceval (*Perceval* henceforward), Chrétien de Troye's final, incomplete romance (1179-80, approximately), marks a departure from earlier works in the author's oeuvre (Chrétien wrote five romances between 1160 and 1180, *Yvain, Erec et Enide*, and *Cligé* among them), particularly for the ambiguity and intricacy of its content. The hero, a virtual 'tabula rasa', is representative of both the ambiguity and the complexity we might expect from an author attuned to the conflicted and otherwise uncertain paradigms of his day. We can trace Perceval's personal evolution along two axes, the first, his "lived" life, which we associate with history and historical time, and which takes place along a horizontal axis, with a presumed point of arrival, however elusive, and, the second, his spiritual life, normally associated with verticality, i.e., with spiritual ascent. Equally relevant, and in the interest of avoiding a predominantly spiritualized allegory of human development, the evolution of this hero can also be thought of as cyclical, occurring within the cycles of nature (evidenced in both Christian and Pagan calendars): he goes forth into the world (waxes) in springtime; he matures and retreats (wanes) in autumn and winter. Although narrative time within the text is at times incongruous, or unspecified[i] (its emphasis is diachronic), as the narrative unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that the domains (both social and spiritual) that determine Perceval's evolution are themselves unfixed, even enigmatic.

Two things remain certain. First, as the hero evolves and refines himself emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, he participates in the redefinition of the spatial and temporal contexts with which he interacts. Secondly, his progression is both linear, emphasizing his

mortality, and circuitous, subject to setbacks, to obfuscation, and to ambiguity. He is confronted with epistemological problems and situations he is expected to fix, a prerequisite to his personal growth. At the same time, the increasingly chaotic society around him calls attention to its own unfixability, whether by heroes or by saints. The very nature of this hero's journey, towards humane consciousness and consciousness of his interior Self, underscores the journey's emphasis upon locus *as* process (or progress), rather than locus *as* destination.

From the outset, the hero's departure from the sheltered nucleus of his mother's "*manoir*" initiates both a palpable (physical) and a symbolic (psychological and spiritual) entrance into a richly composed spatial topography of semiotic complexity. Perceval's primary teacher, Gornemant, instructs the hero according to the tenets of chivalry, whose rote observance proves inadequate, with disastrous consequences, once the hero enters the domain of the Fisher King, where his imperative task is to interpret signs. Most notably, Chrétien 'elevates' the 'stakes' from the sphere of chivalric exploits and social redemption to a primarily, although not an exclusively Christian spiritual sphere.[ii] Beyond this, the author introduces what we might refer to, particularly regarding 12th century precedents, as a heretofore scantly articulated dichotomy of human potential. He achieves this in part through juxtaposition.

In his prologue, Chrétien quotes the words of the Evangile: "Que ta main gauche ignore/ le bien que fera ta main droite!" (31-2), opposing "fause ypocresie," ostentation, or *courtoisie* in its degenerate phase, and "charité," a Christian value meant to guide our reading and understanding of the text. In a more compatible vein, Perceval's horizontal, chiefly unidirectional journey through "la Déserte Forêt perdue," underscored by the recurrent motif of nameless rivers, "rapide et profonde" (2926), "si large que fronde" (7142), derives its narrative significance in relationship to this hero's progressive emotional, psychological, and spiritual

development, his 'vertical' evolution. As a "nice bestiaux" (uncultivated novice), Perceval personifies mutability. Evolution is his only option.[iii] In contrast, his counterpart, Gauvain (important to our discussion particularly in terms of this next point), emerges as a negative model largely because of his *reliably fixed* character, which, in the tradition of Bakhtin's heroes of the "*roman grec*," known for "leur grandeur d'âme, leur courage, leur force, leur intrépidité et (plus rarement) leur intelligence" (Bakhtin 257),[iv] is designated as a man of action, unable to distinguish between worthy, as opposed to frivolous exploits.

Last, though by no means of least significance, and essential to the concerns of this chapter, Chrétien creates an elaborate dialectical poetics of the 'sacred and profane' through his heroes' interactions within a variety of natural and unnatural spaces. Once again, in this rendition of the legend, the hero's assimilation into courtly society, which, in the initial stages of the romance, appears to be the objective of his author, never entirely occurs.[v] Perceval's epistemological progression through a symbolic landscape, which corresponds with strategic phases of his learning, brings him closer to an experiential realization of an evolutionary burden, which it is his destiny to correct through the perfection of his person and, eventually, his soul. This hero who, in spite of his all-too-human defects, progresses, topographically, emotionally, and spiritually, as an incipient Self, begins not only to draw attention to his difference from the discourteous, chaotic society around him but, moreover, begins to suggest an emerging communal conscience that gleans its own impending demise as well as its potential for recreation. As this chapter examines the important stages of *Perceval*'s personal journey, it also seeks to shed light upon the cultural implications of the narrative's multi-dimensional traversed landscapes, whose symbolic and 'real' attributes express shifting social and moral values as well as an ecological perspective.

Moving Heroes and Transitional Space

In order better to understand the relationship between the 12th century hero of the *roman chevaleresque* and the social and environmental spaces with which he comes into contact, it is necessary to underscore the extent to which Perceval's journey departs from previous models of the journey of quest. Although we cannot treat earlier romances as equal in content or in scope, we can identify the individual's relationship to society as a central focus of these texts as well as the central determining factor in the outcome of the hero's destiny. To begin with a few fundamental concepts (and misconceptions) concerning our study, Mikhail Bakhtin has established the importance of human encounters, coincidental or otherwise, in a given place, as an essential component of the *épreuve*. The Russian critic identifies the major shift from vertical to horizontal time as the movement from which action and events "strive ahead."[vi] The *chronotope* establishes the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" in literature, with respect to the image of man within his surroundings.[vii] In the early model, the attributes and details of a given place have little to do with the unfolding adventure and its outcome. Space is abstract and must be plentiful. The story follows its own course. The hero of this last model tends to be immutable. Chance, as opposed to character development, is of primary concern; thus, the characteristics of space become interchangeable, even disposable. Conversely, locus is essential to the idyllic genre, defined by its cyclic and quotidian representations of bucolic nature and agricultural life, where disruptions to the pastoral equilibrium, caused by the encroaching city-state, on one side, or by 'wilderness' on the other, constitute an impending disaster whose primary characteristics include loss of internal peace and the fear of displacement. With its emphasis on cyclical stability, the idyllic genre (which

broaches the tragic) ends when the journey begins.[viii] We are closer to a model of *Perceval* with the antique geographical novel, which emphasizes the land of birth as a point of departure for the voyager whose values, outlook, and understanding undergo tests of fortitude as a result of his encounters with 'foreign' places and people. The very concept of the road or path introduces an organizing principle based in the real. Moreover, and crucial to our discussion, the biographical element, which assumes some form of human evolution, involving self-reflection as well as a given series of trials in social, physical, and perhaps spiritual spheres, is an essential component of this latter genre whose structure, content, and spatial decipherability are inseparable from the image of man contained within. Bakhtin has equated the narrative structure dedicated to chance encounters with the immutable hero whom he associates with "primitive" societies and "primitive" man. Things happen to this hero and he responds according to his innate characteristics: flight, pursuit, quest; "'Fate' runs the game" and the hero "*endures* the game fate plays."[ix] The critic's next point underscores a crucial distinction between the 'primitive' model and the 12th century medieval journeyer (whom we must also distinguish from the hero of the *Épopée*): "And he not only endures – he *keeps on being the same person* and emerges from this game, from all these turns of fate and chance, with his *identity* absolutely unchanged."[x] As Denyse Delcourt has demonstrated in her study of the topic, *L'Ethique du Changement dans le Roman Français du XIIe siècle* (1990), Bakhtin's association of antique versions of the *Prüfungs-roman*, "roman d'épreuves," with the Romanesque hero of the chivalric romance of the high and low Middle Ages overlooks an essential difference important to our discussion. Delcourt identifies a vital distinction between heroes of the *Épopée*, such as Roland and Raoul de Cambrai, whose characters and roles as warriors remain fixed, and the hero of the 12th century French novel, who undergoes trials for the purposes of self-perfection and, once perfected,

returns to the society he left with a renewed role.[xi] According to what we can identify as the 12th century chevaleresque genre, the hero is characterized not only by his need to improve, but also by his capacity for perfection. He leaves society with a defining defect and returns to that *same* society altered, or converted. In certain cases, the change is negative and manifests as a gradual degradation of character, (as is the case with Tristan). (I will discuss aspects of this narrative paradigm with Gauvain's character at later points in this chapter.) The medieval author, less concerned with an "objective" reality than with the imaginary potential of the "real"[xii] (as evidenced by half-beast, half-human incarnations and by "woundrous" happenings, the latter most often associated with the Celtic origins of these narratives), succeeds, nevertheless, if only by default, in representing "real" 12th- and 13th-century anxieties concerning his changing times. Both *Perceval* and the poetic and prose romances dedicated to Lancelot, which I'll dicuss in my second chapter, explore the consequences of conflicting social values, such as those of Christianity and the courtly world. As a progressive commentary on multiple aspects of individual and social identity, the texts go much further, adding to the courtly and Christian dichotomy evidence of the cumulative effects of such things as social mobility, mercantilism, and military conflict upon livelihoods, lived lives, and the inhabited environment through which society both derives and determines its existence. *Perceval* is a unique testament to the late 12th century genre in that Chrétien's hero, the courtly society he seeks to enter, and the natural environment are represented in perpetual, mutually dependent, and often troubling phases of transformation for which the "incompleteness" of the romance is an apt, if not also an intentional metaphor.[xiii]

Towards Becoming: World, Self, and Other

According to the motifs of formation I have discussed above, the task of the novice (*nova*) is to grow from his temporary "newness," to come into being, as a well-developed social participant, of and for society, yet not entirely subservient to it. The contrast between Perceval's point of origin and his eventual destination is essential. For the unschooled youth, isolated from regular humanity by his overprotective mother, society, to say nothing of its precepts, is scarcely a concept. Single-minded and socially illiterate, the hero is as unaware of his identity and of his actions as he is ignorant of his name; as he develops linguistic and moral cognizance, he divines his name. Theoretically speaking, human "consciousness" implies, first, cognizance of one's self, of one's being, followed by cognizance of others. More specifically, during the process of individuation, a personal "I" emerges (as opposed to the Freudian Id), slowly differentiating itself from the collective psyche, which includes both instinctive and spiritual experiences. Individual consciousness ranges from sentient consciousness, to practical and pragmatic, spatial and perspectival, moral and spiritual domains. When we first meet Perceval, no such social categories of learning or distinction have been made. His animalistic needs, "Donnez-moi donc à manger! fait-il," and desires, "Toutes ces choses lui plaisaient," drive him from one basic (thoughtless) action to another. At this stage, we cannot expect him to align, let alone to individuate himself from a collective psyche with which he has had no contact: "C'est Nature qui l'instruit (Car il venoit de nature)" (Frappier). The only apparent mediator between this hero's immediate needs, his likes and dislikes, and the society he is destined to encounter is sensory information. In other words, it's 'dark' in there. The youth ambles forth, blindly testing the boundaries of his limited knowledge of *things* and the way things work. Sights and sounds, new to his psyche, elicit associations, albeit mistaken, and impulses that, because of the responses or

consequences they provoke both from within and from without, prove transformative to the hero's social situation as well as to his inner being. Perceval's social imperative is to outgrow his status as *enfant sauvage* and to learn the behavior and the skills of the *nouveau chevalier* who will join Arthur's court. He inherits a spiritual imperative as well, i.e. to move towards the light, which is to say, towards the moral and spiritual potential of his yet-to-be awakened conscience. His journey, which is progressive as well as regressive, is less chronological than developmental. As the hero traverses space, he both acquires and unveils the embedded messages of his culture and environment.

Let us consider some developmental theory relevant to this unformed hero's journey. In his *Theoretical Biology*, Jakob von Uexküll uses the word "*Umwelt*" to describe the "world of one's own," or, the "own world" (Harding 17), which includes both the physical and psychological environment in which the individual lives and his/her response to it. The Umwelt is intrinsically linked to geographical and topographical place and proportionately influenced by external and internal movements affecting the experienced domain. Existentialists have added two additional categories to Uexküll's concept: the "*Gegenwelt*," the world or perspectival orientation of the society in which one lives, and the "*Eigenwelt*," the world as it is perceived and experienced by the individual (*passim*). According to these theorists, the Umwelt may act as "a transparent barrier" separating the individual from the "outside." At the same time, "like glass," the Umwelt functions as "a reflecting surface on which one sees one's own image, while of course one thinks that what one sees is the outer world" (25). The danger of course is never to learn the distinction. To apply these concepts more specifically to Perceval's inner and outer journey, phenomenology designates *Lebenswelt* as human space, which encompasses the intentional activities of wo/man, and *Umwelt*, as the space that surrounds wo/man, wherein these

activities take place (Westphal, "Introduction," *Geocriticism* 5-6). A third component, *Mitwelt*, which we may think of as integrative as well as integral, comprises the intersubjective world shared by individuals and the larger community to which they belong. If the *Umwelt* represents mere existence, the *Mitwelt* demands (inter)action *and* provides the context within which individual existence acquires meaning. With regard to the 12th-century individual, who identifies with a collective but who also has a sense of his separateness from that collective, and to the evolving psyche of a hero such as Perceval, we understand that relationships, social, cultural, environmental, and otherwise, are not only inevitable and intersubjective but porous as well. All movement and movements (human and in nature) inherently influence one another and the various means through which they find articulation. Much of how these relationships play out within the individual life of the hero and with respect to the many environments with which he interacts depends upon two interdependent factors: a) the quality of the teaching he receives and b) his capacity for interpretation and, thereafter, for right action. Perspective is key and, to further complicate matters, *Perceval* offers us both chronocentric and *a*chronocentric perspectives.

As is the case with all initiates, Perceval's journey involves a series of tests and transitory phases known as *rites de passages*, designated or sanctioned rites that accompany all change of place, social position, status (or state), and age (Van Gennep, Turner 94). Most typically, three designated phases occur, which can be described as follows: 1) separation from society or from one's social position, 2) margin (also known as *limen*, or "threshold" in Latin), and 3) reincorporation, or reintegration into society. The second phase, known as margin, or limen, as we might well imagine, intensifies experience and has a brief duration. During this intermediate, transitory state, individual characteristics become "ambiguous." The subject sheds, both

symbolically and in actuality, vestiges of his former self, such as clothing, personal status, or physical traits. In a similar vein, the cultural realm through which he passes possesses none of the attributes of its prior or future states. Wildness, darkness, beastliness, sexual ambiguity, and such topoi as the forest and the desert are associated with the transitional phase of the rite of passage; the initiate's identity becomes obscured, "marginal" to others and to himself, an experience so disorienting that it may provoke madness. Eventually, as is the case with Yvain, in *Le Chevalier au Lion*, the hero regains his senses and his identity. Having undergone a transformation that leads to his social and, ideally, to his ethical improvement, the hero rejoins society, advancing in his social position and ready to perform the duties his destiny requires of him.

With respect to Perceval, we must view liminality not as the temporary transitional phase between one social status and another but, rather, in terms of the 'extra-ordinary', or more appropriately, the 'deficient' situation of the hero. Although he posseses the body of a young adult male, mentally speaking, this hero has scarcely left his mother's womb. He resides in epistemological darkness while the true quality of his nature, gleaned by others, remains invisible to him. Moreover, his artificial status (imposed upon him) as a liminal persona, has kept him in an ongoing state, literally "at the threshold," of intellectual and social non-being. Two important distinctions can be made between Perceval and earlier initiates such as Yvain. This latter hero begins his quest as an adult member of a society to which, although still imperfect, he belongs. He enjoys the reputation and the activities knights enjoy. The entire purpose of Yvain's *éloignement* from society is his eventual return as one of its distinguished members. As he succumbs to and then overcomes disgrace, bestiality, and madness, he passes the ritual tests designed to improve his character and the content of his heart.

Perceval's journey differs in the following ways. As I have mentioned, this novice knows nothing of the world and the world outside his mother's insular domain knows nothing of him. He has, as yet, no rank or status to lose. Secondly, as the story reveals, with the exception of the "herseurs" who till his mother's land, Perceval interacts with virtually no one and has no defined social function other than his title as "le fils de la Veuve Dame." For this hero, unlike for his predecessors, instructions received by more 'worldly' teachers, whose influence I will discuss shortly, improve him by degrees but ultimately fail him. His abrupt initiation into Arthur's knighthood is followed by a long, solitary journey away from the king's court. Much as with Yvain, this hero's progressive, incremental development, involves significant encounters within manmade, natural, and supernatural spaces. Yet, contrary to what we have learned to expect with the earlier model, the journey arrives at no final point of consummation. As a rite of passage, its result remains ambiguous. Although he is formally accepted into Arthurian society, Perceval remains at its outskirts, seemingly by choice, before disappearing altogether. From this ambiguity, the reader can extract an important development in Chrétien's concept of the journey of the medieval hero. The highly symbolic and painfully complex phases of Perceval's formation confirm that his unique destiny has more to do with the evolution of a conscious Self than with his return to society. Furthermore, the relationship between the declining values of the knighthood and courtly society, always at the periphery of the hero's journey, and the 'real' and symbolic landscapes through which he travels, insist upon a cultural message never entirely resolved within the pages of Chrétien's final text.

Home and the Larger World

At the threshold of his mother's manoir, Perceval's fate becomes visible.[xiv] His consciousness has yet to be formed. His hasty departure, which we associate with the season of spring, marks the difference between his becoming and his non-being in relationship to a larger world. This does not imply that, regardless of his impulse to break free, the hero's ties to his home life are severed the moment he takes the initiative to begin a true adult life. The insular nature of his home life has already infused the hero, albeit subconsciously, with the untold history of his forefathers, as-yet-to-be revealed to him in words.

Perceval's leavetaking is, in fact, fraught with both past and present error. The home, a locus most often associated with origin, memory, intimacy, security and an absence of struggle, is also, in its remote spaces (the subconscious if we will), and in the 'privacy' of our dreams, a place of harbored secrets and shadows. Open spaces, such as the prairie or the forest (which is both an open and a closed space depending on one's perspective), conversely, demand action and imply consequences. This does not imply a diametric opposition between the home and the larger world, however. Interior, or 'intimate' space, and exterior space are characterized by their symbiotic relationship; the two encourage one another "dans leur croissance" (Bachelard, *Poétique* 183).[xv] Nor shall we oppose the concrete enclosure to 'vastness'. As Bachelard reminds us, size is a 'human' value; even the miniature can be '*vast*' in its own right" (195).[xvi] Perceval's movement then, away from, between and through, suggests something more than the hero's individual development. Just as his encounters with the world, its spaces, its human and non-human entities, inevitably move his consciousness from a state of non-being to a state of being, his individual imprint, which has much more to do with personal evolution than with action, stirs the consciousness of the world.

And yet, paradoxically, the hero's evolution is meant to undo the negative consequences of previous actions of others. Regardless of his "niceté," Perceval is held accountable for his errors, particularly as they have much to do with the errors of his forefathers. Neither society, nor his author, will pardon his ignorance, a fault of his education, which, as the story reveals, conceals the violent legacy of an entire patriarchy. The hero's as-yet unrecognized burden, coupled with his lack of practical knowledge and socio-linguistic understanding, inform the nature of the trials he must undergo, away from home and the shelter of the maternal nest. As much as Perceval's decisive foray in the forest underscores the dearth of his preparation for a worldy life, it suffices to instill within him an impulsive yet necessary choice: to enter the stream of his destiny, which contains the future and the past that *does*, and *does no longer*, belong to him.[xvii]

In his prologue, Chrétien compares his novel to the act of semination, in which the proliferation and cultivation of fruits born "au centuple" depend not only upon the quantity and timing, of "semer," but, most notably, upon the locus, "bon lieu," in which the seed is sown; "Car en terre qui ne vaut rien/ la bonne semence se dessèche et meurt" (5-6). The perspicacity (or lack thereof) of both reader and hero are implicated here. It is important to stress that, in Perceval's situation, the home (*manoir*), often thought of as an entity, a wholeness unto itself, is emblematic of a failure to domesticate as well as a failure to prepare, albeit to educate, the novice for the challenges of the larger world. The Old French association of '*manoir*' with stability and dwelling, 'demeurer', 'habiter', and 'rester', underscores the contrasting value of the forest as a place of unpredictable happenstance. The maternal nucleus, which comprises "ce bois que vous voyez là-haut,/ entourant la montagne./ [...] le col de Valdone./ [...] [où] se trouvent les herseurs de ma mère,/ ceux qui sèment et labourent ses terres" (290-4), indicates a

relationship to agriculture, and therefor to cultivation and to growth; the youth is excluded from this cyclical ecology. Herein, the nameless novice derives his identity only by affiliation with the maternal locus, "le fils de la Veuve Dame/ de la Déserte Forêt perdue" (72-3). To frame this further in ecological terms, Perceval's mother attempts to artificially separate her son from 'first nature', associated with the natural processes of entropy; in so doing, she equally neglects the potential of 'semer', which implies human intervention in natural processes, what Plato defines as 'second nature', necessary to the birth of ingenuity and to symbiotic longevity in the human-environmental relationship.[xviii]

Indeed, at this preliminary stage of Perceval's journey, very little "semence" has taken place between the boundaries of the cultivated fields surrounding his mother's manoir and the forest threshold into which he ultimately strays: into the world of men, into solitude as well, proving, both figuratively and literally, that, "en ce qui concerne l'intimité, on n'enferme rien" (Bachelard 198) and, conversely, that the nature and quality of our earliest intimacies inextricably shape our relations with the world.

The season of spring, "[...] au temps où les arbres fleurissent,/ les bois se feuillent, les prés verdissent,/ où les oiseaux dans leur latin/ avec douceur chantent au matin, et où toute chose s'enflamme de joie" (67-71), as mentioned earlier, underscores the unformed nature of the novice at the inception of his journey. Spatial as well as educational boundaries separate the nucleus of the family manoir, the cultivated fields, and the forest: "[Il/ Perceval] se leva et de bon cœur/ sella son cheval de chasse,/ se saisit de trois javelots/ et sortit ainsi du manoir de sa mère/ en se disant qu'il irait voir/ les herseurs qui pour sa mère/ hersaient les avoines,/ avec leurs douze bœufs et leurs six herses" (74-81). We can establish the time as morning. The "bon cœur" of the novice is synonymous with his youth and his general ignorance. The "herseurs" who plow

for his mother indicate La Veuve Dame's social status as a landowner, aristocratic, of noble origin (as she belatedly informs her son), though marginalized by her widowhood and her secluded life. Perceval's three javelins suggest his capability, albeit rustic, as a hunter, "très habile au lancer,/ il allait lançant tout alentour" (93-4), as well as his limited familiarity with the forest around him. His entry into "la Déserte Forêt perdue" (73), associated with sterility and grief, "au matin," "de bon cœur," sets in motion the impressionable youth's collision with his destiny and with the intractable forces of history. No longer is the locus merely 'un endroit' peripheral to his home, a place for gaming and passing time. It becomes a locus of rupture between future, past, and the idyllic serenity of ignorance. The gradual espistemological awakening of the hero, based upon correcting his initial misinterpretations, sets this in motion. At first mistaking for "diables" the sounds of knights approaching through the trees, he then experiences them visually, "tout en clair, [...] les hauberts étincelants,/ les heaumes clairs et brillants," reversing his earlier impression; Seeing them as "les plus belles choses qui soient," he understands them as "des anges" (123-37). In a later scene, the novice has evolved just enough to be capable of separating the 'knight', a man who can be killed, from the beautiful armor he covets.

To add further context to the above, the environmental condition of Perceval's "Déserte Forêt" is noteworthy in that it marks a departure from forest ecologies such as Broceliande's "forêt épaisse" (*Yvain*). We can associate *Perceval*'s arid forest not only with the arduous nature of this hero's journey, but also, along these same lines, with what Jacques Le Goff defines as the "psychology" of the twelfth century—to which we can add cognizance and discomfort with an observable paradigm shift—wherein the forest begins to lose its earlier attributes as a domain of fecundity and sustenance and begins to acquire some of the characteristics often associated with

the desert, such as exile and penitence.[xix] In a similar vein, the isolated widowhood of Perceval's mother underscores the bleak ecological and psychological direction of the narrative, particularly as her situation precludes fecundity. According to iconography, which can be traced back to Sophocles, the *gaste-forêt* represents a state of environmental decline widely associated with violence against family and members of high-ranking social classes, an important theme visited throughout the text, particularly with regard to the Roi Pêcheur and the fate of Bliocadran, Perceval's father.

Maternal "sterility," underscored by La Veuve Dame's morbid attachment to her son and her excessive fear for his future, suggests a toxic element in the mother-son relationship, particularly in light of the fact that, as she suppresses her son's natural development, she also suppresses his awareness of a pernicious moral blight which it is his destiny to reverse. La Veuve Dame's bleak outlook, "il arrive au meilleurs de tomber" (399), suggests a feminine dimension to the text's predominantly male affliction: *Melancolia*, or *acedia*, a condition associated with loss, as with the asceticism of Saint Antoine, characterized by a "dégout du cœur" and a "dégout de la vie." In spite of her high birth, this mother scarcely enjoys the privileges of her social status. Like, Ygraine, mother of Arthur, and Hélène, birth mother of Lancelot, la Veuve Dame is permanently sidelined and largely motivated by the violent deaths of her husband and first two sons. Unlike secondary parents and mentors such as Merlin, who takes the infant Arthur, and the Lady of the Lake, Lancelot's adoptive mother, Perceval's mother is devoid of magic. Instead, this grief-stricken widow is motivated by fear and hopelessness concerning the future. This last point prefaces a recurrent motif of the Arthurian legend; the unfitness of Perceval's melancholic (because disenfranchised) mother underscores the relationship between the "special" origins of this hero and the negative effects of maculine violence he is expected to reverse.

The emotional orientation of Perceval's mother should not be underestimated in terms of its influence on the development of the narrative. As a condition of the soul, medieval thought associates melancholy with the acquisition of wisdom, with hysteria, madness, genius, loss, capriciousness of memory, and even more relevant to our study, with the disastrous condition of man, "Appauvris, déshérités, chassés," and the earth, "Les terres furent dévastées." Incapacity to act in the world, a symptom of the melancholic state, and of the limitations of being a medieval female, is an insidious model La Veuve Dame instills in her son, for his "own good." Not incidentally, the symptoms of melancholy are closely related to phases of initiation, or passage from one state or condition in the world to another. Freud has made the important distinction between mourning for a lost world or status, a natural process of grief, with an unspecified, but eventual expiration date, and melancholy, the abnormal persistence of grief, accompanied by despair, which infiltrates and largely determines one's way of perceiving and relating to the new, the unknown, or the emerging world.[xx] The melancholic can no longer identify what she has lost, because all is lost, past present, and future: *Le 'moi' est vide*. Perceval inherits his mother's condition, which can only be corrected through error and *errer*. His evolution demands that he "unlearn" his mother's influence. This presents a moral quandary, however, particularly as it necessitates the abandonment of her person.[xxi]

Another irony asserts itself. The hero's decision to leave results in large part from his misreading of signs: i.e. his misunderstanding of the spiritual value and worldly meaning of knights. Much like the forest he enters, Perceval is closed, which is to say, unaware and untried; at the same time, he is "open on every side" (Bachelard 185),[xxii] subject to influence and insinuation that he is equipped to decipher only at the most literal and rudimentary levels. When La Veuve Dame understands that she cannot stop her youngest son from pursuing his obsession

with becoming a knight, she also understands, far better than he does, how little equipped he is to interpret and to respond to the challenges that lay before him: “qu’arrivera-t-il?” she asks. “Ce que vous n’avez jamais fait/ ni vu personne d’autre le faire,/ comment en viendrez-vous à bout?” (482-4). The widow implicates herself, of course, as she has intentionally sheltered her son from all knowledge of the world; he in turn makes dutiful mockery of her instructions to put himself at the service of ladies and young, unprotected girls he meets along his path; accept a kiss only if it is offered, likewise a ring; he must seek to know the names of strangers with whom he becomes acquainted: “C’est par le nom qu’on connaît l’homme” (526); he must go to churches and abbeys (but what is a church?). The quandary presented here is that, not only does Perceval lack visual familiarity with the places and objects mentioned, he lacks the most rudimentary processes of social initiation, i.e. the experience of activities performed within these spaces, which would render them meaningful.

At the heart of his mother’s misgivings lies her fairly accurate assessment that Perceval, now a novice and an initiate, will misread, and thus misinterpret the world’s signs: “Il n’y a rien d’étonnant, à mon avis,” she declares, “à ne pas savoir ce qu’on n’a pas appris./ L’étonnant c’est plutôt de ne pas apprendre/ ce qu’on entend et ce qu’on voit souvent” (487-90). The problem of course is her son’s dearth of attentiveness: he is less a dim wit than a blank slate, ill equiped for the challenges before him. The maternal message to this would-be-knight is both an expression of doubt and a lack of faith, rooted in fear, as opposed to maternal wisdom. With no experience or memory of his father, Perceval must filter his unformed notions of the world through the “unstable” image provided by his mother. Hermeneutically speaking, this gives him precious little to work with. Initially, the youth follows his mother’s instructions in a rude and faltering manner (his roughness early in the story with a young damsel in the forest is a prime example).

As the narrative explicates, Perceval's capacity, or lack thereof, for interpreting, first, social codes, and further on, spiritual signs, progresses from a series of unfortunate, yet permissible mistakes to a sequence of regrettable errors with grave social, moral and historical implications. Even as the hero eventually learns through trial and error, making false and then correct associations between words and the things they represent, the connection he must learn to make between the lesson and its rote administration proves less demanding than the moral imperative of subtle interpretation and "just action," neither of which can be taught.

As the story progresses, Perceval's ability or inability to decipher "ce qu'on voit souvent" has increasingly severe implications, reflecting the difficult stages of his evolving consciousness. When we first encounter the hero, his sense faculties are unformed and virtually inoperative. He arrives at interpretations based upon what pleases his eyes "tout en clair" and what displeases his ears "un grand vacarme." The novice mistakes external beauty for godliness, "Êtes-vous Dieu?" (168), and confuses the knight's identity "chevalier" for his name; likewise, he perceives the knights' armor as a bodily attribute *got from birth*: "Fûtes-vous ainsi né?" (276), thereby contributing to their assessment that this "Gallois" and others like him are, by nature, "plus sots que bêtes menées en pâture" (238).

Perceval's rearing by his mother merits further elaboration, not only with regard to our examination of cataclysmic worldviews of the late twelfth century, but also concerning prior melancholic readings of the hero and the text's patriarchal figures,[xxiii] Bliocadran, Perceval's father, and the Fisher King, both of whom I will discuss in a later episode of the text. In her "artificial"[xxiv] isolation of her son from all normal processes of social development, as well as from the knowledge of his paternal legacy, Perceval's mother creates an intimacy of neglect, as opposed to the dialogical intimacy one would normally expect from a mother-child relationship,

in the rearing of her last son. When Perceval returns from his encounter with the knight-devil-angels in the forest, he finds his mother waiting, "le cœur triste et noir" (340-1), underscoring her foreboding and her dismal view of the world and of her son's prospects within it. She later issues a warning whose prophetic consequences her son, true to his unformed nature and intellect, manages to ignore: "'Mon fils aimé, votre retard/ a mis mon cœur en détresse./ Le chagrin a manqué me tuer,/ j'ai failli en mourir'" (348-51), fainting at his mention of "'Des chevaliers!'" Only here, upon her revival, does she reveal the sad fate of Perceval's father and his two older brothers, for whom "'j'en garde au cœur chagrin et souci," and "je mène une vie bien amère [...]" (448-9).

With nothing more than his incipient experience of the world Perceval learns the long-suppressed, partial truth of his father's injury, "blessé entre les hanches" (408), and yet has no concept of its use. Bliocadran's death and the graphic mutilation of his two sons, "Les armes furent cause de leur mort à tous les deux/ [...]/ [De l'aîné il advint merveille,/ car les corbeaux et les corneilles/ lui crevèrent les deux yeux" (447-51),[xxv] underscore the moral and intellectual blindness afflicting both mother and son (albeit quite differently), prefiguring their joint complicity in disasters yet-to-come. Both prowess and vision (having to do with historical perspective, as well as with insight) are decimated in their prime.

> [L]es bons, c'est leur destin que de tomber.
>
> Votre père, vous ne le savez pas,/ fut blessé entre les hanches,
>
> son corps en resta infirme.
>
> Ses larges terres, ses grands trésors,
>
> qu'il devait à sa valeur, tout partit en ruine.
>
> Il tomba dans une grande pauvreté.

Appauvris, déshérités, chassés
ainsi en advint-il, contre toute justice,
[...]. Les terres furent dévastées,
et les pauvres gens, rabaissés.
S'enfuit qui pouvait fuir (397-421).

With no idea or concept of the value of his mother's words, Perceval is "deaf" to her warnings: "Le jeune homme ne prête guère attention/ à ce que lui dit sa mère. [...] Je ne sais de quoi vous me parlez" (453-6). La Veuve Dame's lamentation, which can also be viewed as a futile castigation of the feudal scheme and the defective patriarchy by its most helpless, abandoned members, (to invoke contemporary terminology) the "single mother," calls attention to the reverse aspect of feminine powerless, as seen in such archetypal examples as Medea. While acknowledging the extreme nature of this comparison, it remains impossible to think of the sequestering of this noble heir from his larger patrimony as a purely caring, unselfish act. Despair represents an epistemology of being as much as a sentiment, which, not unlike misery, is palpably and viscerally shared (in the womb, through lactation, first words, an so on). The extent to which Perceval's mother has failed to instill self-knowledge, collective knowledge, or filial consciousness of any kind in her son returns to her in kind through his apathetic response to her "deuil insolite" (472) and neglect of her fallen body at the threshold of their home, "comme si elle était tombée morte" (589). Entirely ignorant of the implications and consequences of his actions, Perceval gallops "à vive allure" into the dark forest, towards a destiny that must *begin* away from, as much as it is determined by, the constricted hermeneutics of the maternal manoir.

Forêt Obscure

Entry into the *forêt obscure* marks the initial stage (separation) of the chivalric hero's journey of transformation. For Perceval, the forest represents a place of separation from the courtly world, a cultural enclave within the "natural" world that maintains many of its social elements. According to its typical ritual function, the forest represents a place of marginality, wherein the hero returns to *nature* as a temporary exile from the *culture* he will eventually rejoin as a new and improved version of himself. Herein, we recognize the relationship between forest and court as one of opposition, as well as one of symbiosis, a place of passage and of trials, *épreuves*, normally prefacing the hero's reassimilation into a stable society. Yet, as we will remember, Perceval's journey deviates from the typical. Although initial structural elements remain intact, as the hero ventures into the forest and encounters unknown experiences and challenges, his relationship to society remains ambiguous. Initially, Perceval experiences the forest as a place of misperceived horrors and wonders. For his mother, the forest represents a place of brutal encounters. From an ecological perspective, the *gaste forêt* is imbued with attributes that we can associate with multiple influences informing 12th century values and environmental awareness. Chrétien's inclusion of both real and symbolic elements of the forest and cultivated nature supports this last assertion.

If we begin with etymological origins, the Italian and Spanish *selva,* the Latin *silva*, the Germanic *Wald*, or *Forst*, becoming *forestis* or *foresta*, and the French *forêt,* attest to long-standing views of the forest as a wild, unkempt, and dangerous place, supported by Tacitus' description of the (German) forest as a place populated with skin-clad, half-wild men, whom he contrasted with the civilized, structured, Roman world. Adding further qualification to the dangerous, wildness associated with early forest dwellers, Tacitus endowed them with moral

values, such as fidelity and disinterest in worldly goods, offsetting their difference from decadent Roman society (Schama). Devoid of the element of enchantment we find in ealier texts, *Perceval*'s Forêt-Désert, or Gaste forêt, conforms to biblical precedents where the desert appears as a place of spiritual test, baptism, solitude, and perilous encounters, such as the "déserts de la mer et du froid" inhabited by 5th and 6th century Celtic monks, or, as seventh century monk Jonas Bobbio describes, transfering the locus *desertus* to the forest, "un vaste désert, une âpre solitude, un terrain rocailleux" (Le Goff, *L'Imaginaire Médiéval* 640).[xxvi] The *Desertum civitas,* a recurring topos in monastic literature, establishes the forest hermitage or monastery as "une micro-cité" wherein "les grands maîtres du monachisme latin réalisèrent dans leur vie et leur enseignement une sorte d'équilibre pendulaire entre la ville et le désert" (60).

Perceval's Déserte Forêt, less wild (we encounter no wild beast) than solitary, appears not merely as a temporary means through which the hero achieves perfection under the auspices of the court; its ascetic quality opposes the ostentatious, increasingly secular values of the courtly world addicted to frivolous entertainment and random violence. To add further context to the multiple views and values involved here, courtly society's discomfort with the forest is related in part to its association with class distinctions, as well as with sacred and profane uses, as a 'réserve de chasse,' particularly for the class of warriors and "les *bellatores*, les hommes de la force physique," who, nevertheless, must divide the forest and all civil society with the primary class of *oratores*, holy men, as well as the *laboratores*, on the margins of society. As twelfth century romances, such as *Tristan et Iseut*, *Erec et Enide*, *Yvain*, and *Perceval* attest, the forest is the topos for all manner of figures across the social stratum. Typically, the Holy man, or the hermit, possesses qualities of the "sauvage," while exemplifying Christian moral values in their unadulterated form (for which we see early origins in the Latin text), the forester, a mediator

(often suspect and untrustworthy) between the values and laws of the court and the laws of the forest, the *laboratores*, those who live within the proximity of the woods and gather its seasonal resources, or those, such as woodsmen, who serve the needs of the court (66).[xxvii]

Feudal morality, which designates the medieval forest as a domain of hallucinations, temptations, and pitfalls, or devious traps, often associated with the desert, equates the density and opacity of the forest with obscured vision: "One who wanders through the pathless *silva* (meaning both 'forest' and 'disordered material') of an untrained memory is one who has either lost the footprints (*vestigia*) that should lead him through, or never laid them down in the first place" (Carruthers 247). Conversely, the inhospitable, uncultivated wasteland, *gaste, dévasté, vide, aride*, is the locus of brigands. In its more positive incarnation, the medieval forest is a place of plenitude and near-paradisiacal bounty, such as honey, berries, wood, and the raw materials of craftsmen and blacksmiths. Yet, exploitation of this bounty is also a real concern of the age. Forest "défricheur," largely a result of warfare, as well as parochial distrust of "ses entreprises profanes," suggests a certain awareness of the limitations of god-given, natural resources, as well as an understanding of profane encroachment upon the "seuil sacré que tout protégeait" (Le Goff 65). Disparities such as those evidenced in Brocéliande, *Yvain*'s "forêt épaisse" (181) and *Perceval*'s "grande forêt obscure" (594) further underscore twelfth century associations with the locus as a place of uncertainty, as well as of physical and moral trials, where the elements conspire against the fragile psyche: "la nuit tomba, obscure;/ et la nuit l'angoissa énormément. Et son angoisse redoubla du fait/ qu'il pleuvait avec toute la violence/ que le Seigneur Dieu avait en réserve" (*Yvain* 4832-6). As a locus of apocalyptic revelatory experiences, both Broceliande and the forêt-désert reflect the penitential movements of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

With respect to the journey of formation, Saint Bernard and Peter Damian designate the forest a place of true learning, more valuable than books. Just as courtly literature makes the forest the place of chivalric adventure, the presence of both Kings and hermits in the forest underscores the need for a dialogue between these respective representatives of society and the spiritual life. The king values the forest for its abundance of resources. The hermit, or spiritual initiate, derives value from its desert qualities. Similar to the Biblical function of the desert, the medieval forest is also a place of hallucinations and temptations, *lieu solitaire*, but also *lieu soutaine, félone, traîtresse*, revelatory of humanity's demoniacal traits (Le Goff).[xxviii]

By its limitless nature: closed and, at the same time, "ouvert de toutes parts," we begin to locate the phenomenological resonance of *Perceval*'s forest; the locus, "un véritable transcendant psychologique, [. . .] naît d'un corps d'impressions qui ne relèvent pas vraiment des renseignements du géographe" (A. P. de Mandiargues).[xxix] Seemingly endless from within its boundaries, solitary and stark, the psychology of this forest suggests the hidden majesty and depth of Chrétien's sheltered hero, whose dormant nature has yet to be awakened. As it reigns in the past, the forest at once evokes the violence of ancestry, of all that comes before *us*, and the silent, sacred qualities experienced by the solitary wanderer; herein, intimate and external spaces influence one another's growth and the hero discovers "son être synthétique" within the *vast* (Bachelard 175).

To further elaborate upon the ecology of the medieval forest and its relevance to *Perceval*'s social and moral outlook, the déserte-forêt, whose prevailing characteristics are barrenness and depletion, departs rather significantly from Broceliande, a dense forest with some barren locations. A leading trait of the barren forest is indecipherability, a metaphor for the unformed vision and the linguistic and contextual void that describes the consciousness of

Perceval at his journey's inception. Perceval's entry into the forest has two primary functions: the first sets the hero on the course of his destiny; the second perfects the hero as a moral example, which, Chrétien indicates, leads him increasingly away from courtly society, on a solitary course towards visual, linguistic, auditory, and spiritual literacy whose full nature and dimensions remain ambiguous, even cryptic, for the reader. *Perceval*'s author does establish an intrinsic relationship between the *défricheur* of lands (forest and agricultural) and the extreme epistemological difficulty of his hero, whose capacity to reverse this trend depends upon his ability to understand. Let me underscore some of the implications of this last point.

Medieval understanding of deforestation points to more than a lack of natural resources. For 12th-century readers, the forêt-désert functions as a cultural critique as well as a form of retribution, "une punition céleste," for exploitation or overuse of resources, or, recalling the classical example of Sophocles (this is ingrained within the medieval psyche, despite the unavailability of classical texts at the time), as a punishment for violence done to an individual of high-ranking social order: the King is the Land, pure and simple, just as the elements of the human body make the universe (Gurevich 57).[xxx] We can trace this mode of reasoning to the wounds suffered in the text by Perceval's father and the Fisher King, wherein Chrétien links violence against kings, "une blessure aux hanches," with "les terres dévastées." The fate of Bliocadran (which constitutes an environmental injury) bodes badly for future generations, as underscored by the gruesome deaths of his eldest sons (cited above), and is revisited as an unfixed calamity in Perceval's encounter with the *le Roi Pêcheur*. The demise of his patriarchal lineage, both from violence and as a result of sadness, reinforces the urgency of Perceval's legacy, his imperative to correct the error. Again, according to the tenets of the period, injury to the king or to his masculine potency, physical and procreative, is mirrored in the land itself. Just

as the king suffers a "blessure aux hanches," the land loses its capacity to thrive and to produce. Similarly, the random, greed-based violence of the knights responsible for Bliocadran's death produces a 'fruitless' result.

Keeping in mind its above implications, *défricheur* serves another motif important to this dissertation (human movement through space) and to Chrétien's text, *errance*. Just as his social blunders before Gornemant's teachings expose his epistemological errors, as the hero progresses, the spare forest ecology through which he wanders increasingly mirrors his spiritual 'errance'. The forest, in other words, contains both the wayward knight and his evolutionary process, while Arthurian society, such as it is, ever dogging its outskirts, serves as a caveat. Perceval's experience of lost direction and moral suffering herein ultimately exposes the nudity of his soul. His spiritual conversion, death of the former self, can then be understood as a symbolic passage to the Other World.[xxxi] While the forest retains symbolic as well as practical ties to civilization, the Désert Forêt, universe of solitary communion with God, opposes the formal structures, the city, towers, law, and courtly values that comprise medieval society.

In *Perceval*, as well as in Chrétien's earlier texts, such as *Le Chevalier au Lion*, the forest, although populated with knights, ladies, hunters, scoundrels, paupers, pilgrims, and hermits, remains, above all, a place of solitude, of solitary quest. Within its contained space, the initiate undergoes a symbolic journey, which includes one or more of the following moral tests: encounters with atypical humans (fairies and hermits) or beasts; the loss of identity, whether through loss of memory, i.e. of self (Perceval, Lancelot, Yvain), through regression into beast-like behavior (Yvain, Perceval begins here), or outright madness (Yvain, Lancelot). According to the traditional motif, a precedent is set in which a prior journey of a knight has resulted in a failure, a lack of understanding, a missed lesson, or a grave injury with far-reaching social

consequences that must be corrected. If we look at the journeys of Yvain and Perceval, we see how Chrétien develops the underlying thematic; although the improvement of the individual knight remains a central focus in both of his texts, the success or failure of Perceval has broader social and environmental implications. Yvain enters the forest alone, and in secret, in an attempt to restore the pride of his cousin, Calogrenant, and thereby his own pride as well: "mais jamais personne ne le saura (c'est là son désir)/ avant le moment où il aura/ esuyé une grande honte ou obtenu un grand honneur [...]" (716-8). Herein, the knight confronts his interior self, through an encounter with a bull, an allegory for false pride and for the animal nature within, and, thereafter, "dans un lieu défriché" (3348), where he encounters a lion, "bête généreuse et noble"— (In Old French: "Vit .i. lion en .i. essart")—whom he rescues from a reptile assailant, "plein de férocité" (3357-61). His progression through the forest enables him to distinguish between worthy and unworthy causes, achieving in the process a mutual, if unequal, rectification between man and beast. To explicate our terms, Yvain must improve himself in order to be worthy of the noble society he represents. In Perceval's case, conversely, society itself is problematic, beast-like, by virtue of its violent nature, and debased. Although Chrétien does not abandon allegory altogether, he provides a 'real' image of aristocratic society that resonates with a 21st-century readership. Human baseness, in this last text, is largely represented by depraved, hideous, and ridiculous examples of humanity in its various defective incarnations: the careless, uncouth behavior of the hero; Gauvain's frivolous knightly and amorous pursuits; and a series of mean-spirited, bickering, deliberately destructive damsels. Chrétien's objective, however, is not merely to critique the declining values of courtly society. As his hero evolves from ignorance to refinement, he begins to reverse a lineage of patriarchal violence in which Yvain, along with many others, is implicated. Perceval's contemplation of three drops of blood on a wintry field

midway into the story (signifying the refinement of his rustic nature) provides a recontextualization of the image of "les blessures qui s'ouvraient" (1197) on the body of Laudine's murdered husband (a sign of the guilt of the as-yet-undisclosed murderer), which necessitates Yvain's redemption.[xxxii] *Perceval*'s difference as a hero is further supported by his author's emphasis upon chronology and timeliness.

Unlike his predecessor, Yvain, Perceval's entry into the forest marks his entry into "human" time, which demands his psychological progression and forces him to reckon with the past.[xxxiii] We can think of three distinctions of time influential to the hero and to the unfolding events of the narrative: spiritual time, which is primarily but not exclusively Christian, cyclical time, having to do with Nature and natural processes and largely unconcerned with temporal precedents or with morality, and (historical) Modern time, an incipient yet assertive presence having to do with new and altered means of communication, contact, commerce, and ultimately disruptive to existing values. According to the laws of Nature, which coincide with the hero's destiny, Perceval must grow away from the maternal womb and realize his potential as a grown man. Christian and feudal morality and the laws of kinship bind him to his matriachal and patriarchal heritage. By Christian standards, self-correction is the only way to go forward. Perceval's disappearance at the story's end indicates that, whatever his eventual fate, the exact nature and destination of his spiritual path remain ambiguous, and, at the same time, an open question. The meaningless exploits of Perceval's counterpart, Gauvain, all-too-visible, gratuitous, broaching the satirical, underscore this last hero's role as a negative model whose example Chrétien's primary hero will reject. In a notable reversal of precedents, Gauvain, the 'model' knight, is implicated as much through his adherence to an outmoded idea of honor as through his incessant, uninterrogated chivalric action. The bittersweet comicality of his

mistreatment by the courtly ladies of Lis and *la mauvaise demoiselle* give us a nostalgically tragic view of knighthood; unlike those of his counterpart, Gauvain's exploits unfold from a narrative distance, as if through glass, a "reflecting surface" for the society with which he interacts. By contrast, narrative proximity between the reader and the story's primary hero is tangible: the reader errs, loves, and enters into deep contemplation with Perceval. Gauvain's captivity in the Other World resonates beyond the scope of the narrative plot in that it can be viewed as a metaphor for the excessive, Carnevalesque display of chivalric exploits whose value is confined to an otherworldy, magical past. Whereas Perceval increasingly emerges as an individual self, close to nature, close to God, Gauvain increasingly recedes as a credible archetype. In the final analysis, Celtic magic, once associated with the primeval forest, is relegated to defunct kingdoms of yore. Gauvain becomes part of a shadow-world of rococo special effects, literally *au-delà* from the actual course of history and the concerns of the changing human world that Perceval's unique journey begins to define.

Plains and Fields

Forest culture, viewed from the field, appears as implacable as it is dark. In the tradition of the medieval narrative, and particularly the case in this narrative, the forest appears as a negative space in relationship to society. Unlike the forest hermitage or monastery, which acts as a mediator between the wayward individual and society, the forest stands for what remains hidden within the social conscience, for what society refuses to acknowledge about itself. For Perceval, early in the story, the cultivated fields surrounding his mother's manoir function as a safe haven at the outskirts of his unimagined life. After his separation from this familiar environment, "là que se trouvent les herseurs de ma mère" (294), the forest becomes his natural habitat, wherein

his interior thoughts and memories may slowly coalesce: “Le voici qui s’enfonce dans la solitude des forêts,/ car au cœur des forêts il se sentait chez lui/ bien mieux qu’en rase campagne” (1663). This last sentiment, expressed after his departure from Gornemant’s castle, alludes to the conflict between the hero’s barely nascent conscience and his knightly ambitions. Perceval’s desire to remain “chez lui,” concomitant with his lingering hope “de pouvoir venir auprès de sa mère” (1659) reinforces the wooded domain as the place of his emerging self, a being with social affiliations, yet distinct and separate from society and society’s designs on him.

Unlike Perceval, Gauvain appears at ease within the open fields and in cultivated terrain; he hunts for sport, “à la lisière d’une forêt” (5591), with orchards, gardens and castles within his view. For this knight, the forest is a place of necessary passage, rather than a place of interior process, “Ainsi s’en va-t-il sur son roussin/ à travers des forêts désertes et perdues,/ pour arriver enfin en plaine campagne,/ au bord d’un rivière profonde,/ si large que fronde,” guiding him, as it were, to his next adventure, “De l’autre côté, [...] remarquable de puissance et de splendeur” (7146-8). Unlike the forest, which stirs the psyche’s capacity for external fears as well as inner growth, Gauvain’s “près” and “vergers fleuris” (7153-61), provide a safe haven between the demands of society and the wild. From these inherently social fields, the approaching knight is observed and “sized up” from “des fenêtres ouvertes;” from the heights of a tower, he in turn surveys “La contrée [...] fort belle,” “les forêts,” “la plaine,” and “le château sur la falaise” (7416-9) his next destination.

Plains connote openness, clarity, and level terrain. Unlike forests, they are often thought of as representing a simplified domain. At first glance, the former appears more manageable and visibly forthcoming than the latter. If, as Bachelard asserts, both domains evoke the infinite, the experience of this quality differs in each case. Whereas one senses both horizontal and vertical

infinity within the forest, vision is obstructed, virtually constricted, by its density (and what potentially lurks within). With plains, on the other hand, infinity is felt as something beyond the limited capacity of our vision. From a horizontal perspective, the former closes in (involutes) and invariably draws the vision upward. The latter offers limitless possibility of expansion (evolution). Yet, because of their intangible quality, plains elicit a feeling of instability that seeks appeasement through the erection of barriers, borders, and structures such as towers. To apply this idea more specifically to our text, while Perceval's fields appear primarily as neutral territory between transitional phases of his journey, their potential is active, as they are also places of approach and retreat from castle to castle, places of pivotal and unfortunate encounters (with the Red Knight, with Perceval's grieving cousin, with the hideous damsel). Fields bordering seas give us something of Bachelard's concept of "immense openness." They appear less as spaces of *concentration* of wandering than as a source of mild anxiety for the hero. The miniature within the vast, specifically within the forest's white, snow-covered field (which I will later discuss), is key to Perceval's relationship to 'fieldness' as an 'inner space' eliciting 'an inner substance'.[xxxiv] Bachelard describes this relationship in his image of the pond as a small island within the open terrain, "l'œil même du paysage," reflecting back "la première vision que l'univers prend de soi-même" (*L'eau et les Rêves*, in *Poétique* 190). Similarly imbued with the metaphysics of looking, in which "[l]'en dehors et l'en dedans sont tous les deux *intimes*," always ready to be reversed, the solitary hero discovers his interior nature in contemplation within a white field; within his interior void, "cette matière de la possibilité d'être" (196).

Quest for Consciousness

Now that we've looked at the multi-faceted implications of forest and field in relationship to medieval perspective and in relationship to the hero's journey, in this next section I will examine some ways in which these bordering spaces inform one another in relationship to the hero's evolving consciousness and the evolution of his distinct Self. First, as we retrace his steps, what at first seems to be an objective of acquiring social literacy, and from this social value, complicates considerably when missed opportunities and mistaken signs become (a painful) part of the instructive process. Initially, his mother, the maiden in the tent, the red knight whom the all-too-eager youth does not spare, all suffer the consequences of Perceval's epistemological ineptitude and his lack of understanding at pivotal moments prior to his Self-perfection. These tragicomical foibles notwithstanding, Perceval's journey of education progresses steadily, within the social imperatives of the chivalric order at first; then, after demonstrating a uniquely sublime mastery of courtly sensibility, the increasingly solitary hero journeys "dans la solitude des forêts," remaining something of an anomaly and an outsider of the once sought after chivalric order, now in the throes of perplexing transition. After his failure at the castle of the Fisher King, as both an exile and a pilgrim, Perceval's encounters begin to stir his spiritual conscience; his recognition of loss, regret, and a sense of personal culpability, coupled with a strong sense of his own destiny as a righter of wrongs, awakens, if we will, the *oculus anima*, "eye of the soul." The Greek *metanoia* describes this process as a change of heart, or, more specifically, an awakening to the consciousness of one's own heart, a conversion possessing both spiritual and affective, interpersonal dimensions.

Perceval's conversion is unique in that it coincides with his journey into an increasingly isolated state, not unlike the isolation-by-ignorance whence he began. At both perceptual and

sentient levels, nevertheless, his conversion has transformed him substantially, yet not primarily as a social being. Something "More" is required of him. The reader glimpses the first signs of the hero's evolving consciousness with the persistent memory of his mother, tracking, as it were, his memory and thoughts even after Gornemant has counseled the newly ordained knight "de ne jamais dire mot, de toute sa vie" (1649). Perceval leaves his new love, Blanchefleur, and the role offered him as sovereign of Beaurepaire to pursue this naggingly persistent sense of duty, which, as the endeavor proves fruitless, leads him to lose his way.

Wasteland and Moral labyrinth

The terrain wherein Perceval encounters the Fisher King is particular in that it is neither forest, nor plain, nor cultivated field. In fact, the landscape appears as something of a wasteland. Arid, ripid, craggy, and seemingly inaccessible from the river's banks, these inhospitable surroundings test the hero's moral agility, particularly his faith, as a preface to what he will undergo at "Le château surgi du val." The hero's unexpected difficulty at the dwelling of the "roi infirme," coincides with a moral and intellectual test, an epistemological labyrinth for which he is insufficiently prepared. As the iconography stipulates, labyrinths may be "moral arenas," created by God, or, when created by humans, products of "deceptive artistry" (Doob 146),[xxxv] which, in this instance, refers to none other than the artistry of the author. The semiotic quandary presented at the castle of the Fisher King can be explained in part by the 'taste' for exegesis of medieval writers who placed a higher value on the meaning of "mythical *integumentum*" than on the material occurrence of events (148). The beautifully complex, otherworldy procession at the castle of the Fisher King is intended to dramatize the obscured perceptions of the maze-walker, as well as the transcendent potential of his ritual context. Concerning this latter criterion, and

contrary to all appearances, the hero's vision is not entirely unworthy, particularly if we consider the metaphorical function of the maze as a process (leading to awakened perception) and not merely as a product. The processional candelabras, the bleeding spear, the lights, confound the hero's imagination in order to lift, as it were, a veil of opacity, thus rendering translucent, which is to say, dimly apparent, the hero's legacy of violence, error, and sin. As part of a process of semiotic and moral education, the hero's failure to comprehend what he sees underscore's the function of the moral maze as a circuitous path necessary to the incremental passages of the initiate who, if he is to succeed, must prove himself worthy of its hidden and complex messages. By its very nature, the moral maze, having "ne voie ne sentier" (177), elucidates the dearth of understanding of the perplexed young man for whom, unlike on earlier occasions, signs mistaken for signifiers fail to suggest a solution. The paradox of an impenetrable labyrinth is that it most likely contains "something good;" yet that good is unattainable and involves the seeker in a perpetual process of trying to get at it. Ironically, as the strange procession passes and repasses before him, the hero's curiosity causes him at least to formulate a question that, unfortunately, he fails to articulate at the appropriate time, missing the true nature of his test: the *conjointure* of temporal and semiotic processes.

Although the story's emphasis on missed opportunity and repercussion would appear to indicate a more irreversible outcome; as an ongoing process, the maze indicates return, reoccurence, and cyclicity.[xxxvi] Concerning this last point, it is important to remember that mazes are prisons unless guidance is offered; Theseus finds his way out by following the silken thread of Ariadne; medieval heroes find feminine helpers and accomplices. Navigating the maze, hereby, has everything to do with one's relationship to the world and to others. But guidance, as Perceval must learn, is problematic in that both its source and its recipient are tested. At this

juncture, the advice of Perceval's first worldly teacher, Gornemant, proves insufficient, certainly misleading, for the hero who has not yet learned to properly use or to decipher the worth of his elder's counsel. What appears increasingly evident is that, as the hero progresses on his journey to the Fisher King's castle, we have moved from a primarily courtly context to one of ritual ambiguity and deeply encrypted semiology. The ritualistic setting of the castle indicates a religious observance of some kind, although not necessarily a Christian one, indicating one "right" path, one choice. This context requires moral rather than literal interpretation; it must be translated by one who is as yet spiritually illiterate. Chrétien's emphasis upon linguistic complexity herein suggests a few additional features of the convoluted topos, for which, as we can well imagine, the hero is entirely unprepared. Just as the labyrinth may contain an "unattainable good," it may also contain sin, which can be associated with "twisting ways," or deviations from the truth (the true path); the labyrinth may in fact be built from sin, *error*, which Christians associate with paganism or heresy, and which we must also view in the context of the defective feudal patriarchy, Perceval's legacy. In its more ephemeral, cyclical permutations, the maze can be thought of as reinventing itself, so that the truth, or the psychological paradigm, may be understood, or revealed over time. As a difficult process, the maze associated with linguistic or verbal complexity is ultimately educational and leads, over time, each perplexing challenge followed by another, to the wanderer's "enlightenment" (83). By the same token, some failures are to be expected. As the motif attests, progress involves detours, false starts, and the retracing of one's steps.

Keeping the above in mind, we must also consider that Perceval's failure to decipher context and to articulate the correct questions at the castle of the Fisher King prefaces three significant kinds of encounters that indelibly further his spiritual and metaphysical evolution: his

brutal castigation by his grief-stricken cousin and, later, *la jeune fille hideuse*, both of whom predict the most dismal future for the hero and for mankind; his introspective contemplation of the three drops of blood in the snow on the eve of his return to Arthur's court; and finally, his meeting with pilgrims and his hermit uncle in the forest, where he experiences contrition and undergoes ritual penitence. These encounters lead the hero increasingly further from the courtly world of the knighthood he once coveted, towards a new kind of penitential existence, in collective, though uniquely solitary search for rectification. Perceval's internal emergence within the natural environment (however much in decline), as opposed to, and away from, the world of men, is intrinsic, indeed crucial, to his evolution.[xxxvii] Given Chrétien's tactic of amplifying through opposition (discussed in my introduction), it hardly surprises that Perceval's transcendence on a spiritual plane, and his eventual disappearance from the narrative, are encased within a series of socially and symbolically wasteful exploits by Gauvain, in a decadent, rudely ostentatious courtly world in the process of unself-critically cannibalizing its own values.[xxxviii]

The Maze: Return of the Father, Death of the Mother

After Perceval awakens to the tendernesses and delights of the heart with Blanchefleur at the beseiged fortress of Beaurepaire, which he defends, defeating both the cruel senechal Aguingueron and Clamadieu, a progressively, epistemologically trying series of encounters and reckonings, both with himself and with the world, awaits him. His meeting with the Fisher King (whose crippling wounds at the haunches closely resembles those of Bliocadran, Perceval's father) marks a ripid crossroad into the mystery and tragedy of Perceval's paternal legacy. In spatial, as well as in psychological terms, the "château surgi du val," with its "grande salle au sol

dallé," represents a semiotically and symbolically complex situation, characterized by the hero's inability to get where he wants to go and to understand "what must be understood" (Doob 80). This latter point is underscored by the hero's physically arduous struggle and his confusion prior to arriving at this obscure juncture "à proximité de rivière et de bois."

Le voilà qui sans attendre monte là-haut,
jusqu'au sommet de la colline, où il parvient.
Quand il fut monté sur la hauteur,
il regarde loin devant lui,
mais il n'a vu que ciel et terre (2972-7).

Perceval's distrust of his host, although impetuous, is not entirely unfounded: "Que suis-je venu chercher ici? s'est-il écrié./ Rien que folie et sottise!/ Que Dieu fasse aujourd'hui la pire honte/ à celui qui m'a envoyé jusqu'ici!/ [...] Pêcheur, [...]/ tu as commis une grande bassesse,/ si tu l'as fait pour me nuire" (2978-87). The hero is in fact grossly unprepared for his next test and presciently intuits damages forthcoming.

The mythic quality of the castle and its surroundings richly insinuate a time of the past; yet, what past? We might well ask, as the society and setting within the castle walls suggest an otherworldy context, certainly a context other than the society of Perceval's earlier courtly encounters. In spite of Perceval's preparation by Gornemant and his knightly and amorous success at Beaurepaire, a "transparent barrier" ("quella fascia che la morte dissolve")[xxxix] separates the hero's perceptive faculties from the highly encrypted world of his most enigmatic host. Importantly, this pivotal meeting determines the course of Perceval's increasingly solitary journey, establishing a triangular relationship between the symbolically fallen hero, his deceased

father, and the Fisher King, tragic figures noteworthy for their similar "crippling" wounds and their withdrawal from active life, a symptom of the "crippling" effects of melancholy.

To return to an important recurring theme, Philippe Walter's melancholic reading of the Fisher King (*Le pêcheur et le Graal*) and, by association, of Perceval, whose father and mother have both died of grief, provides a substantive look at the somber tone of Chrétien's text in relationship to the hero's progressive evolution. Panofsky and others have linked the melancholic demeanor not only to the depressive state of mind often associated with madness, but, moreover, to processes of spiritual growth and the development of wisdom. Errant knights, much like mercenaries (especially in medieval literature), peasants and farmers, hermits and prisoners (occupations associated with the melancholic constitution), prefer solitary places: witness the isolated location of the Fisher King's castle and his solitary passtime.[xl] The melancholic, whose constitution possesses the dual qualities of heat and cold,[xli] is known for deep and often painful meditations, but is also capable of transcending the spiritual depths, capable of visions and revelation. Saturn, Latin god associated with the underworld and the end of the year, is traditionally represented as lame, often accompanied by sexual mutilation. Capricorn and Aquarius, the astrological signs associated with Saturn, govern the areas between the navel and the upper thighs of the body. Thus, an injury to the haunches and the genitals, an injury shared by Perceval's father, as well as the Fisher King, is essentially a Saturnian injury. The Saturnian character, as well as the Saturnian destination, is associated with the North, with cold climates, and with winter, "by far the oldest season,"[xlii] a time of darkness, seclusion, and quiet contemplation. Furthermore, lest we overlook the feminine dimensions of this theme, the birthplace of Perceval's mother, les Iles de la mer, designates the north and northern territories belonging to "l'Autre Monde," place of initiation and acquisition of wisdom and knowledge:

"Perceval n'est-il pas confronté à un périple initiatique qui met en jeu la connaissance suprême? N'est-il pas aussi et surtout appelé à retrouver une vérité perdue: celle de ses origines?" (Walter 69). Indeed, Socratic anamnesis associates the recollection of origins, of *source*, with the recovery of knowledge and wisdom (already within). A variation on the duality of extremes exists in Plato's conception of melancholy as a state of frenzy and, if not outright madness, of moral insanity, which, nevertheless, constitutes "the sole basis of the highest creative gifts," a divine "recollection of an otherworldly realm of supracelestial light, now recaptured only in moments of ecstasy;" progression through darkness and "daemonic perils," in other words, presupposes the path towards the light (Panofsky 41). In Perceval's case, these perils are embedded within the ecological iconography of past errors and re-presented to him in a visual display of semiotic complexity whose impenetrable nature is foreshadowed by the unwelcoming landscape he encounters at this important juncture of his journey. The rocky terrain that leads to the Fisher King's castle, further exacerbated by a daunting river passage, underscores the intrinsic relationship between the hero's epistemological, i.e. moral journey, and the journey's relationship with nature, both as a subject of human action and as a force to be reckoned with.

Natural and Epistemological Obstruction: "Grimpez Donc Par Cette Anfranctuosité"

The semiotic obliqueness characterizing Perceval's disastrous appearance at the castle of the Fisher King has elicited numerous scholarly interpretations concerning origin and influence, which, to take up Howard Bloch's point, "may or may not provide a key to their meaning" (Bloch, "Wasteland" 255-76). My consideration of some of the most prominent arguments seeks to integrate the multiple influences suggested by the episode with the broader social and environmental messages of Chrétien's text. With this in mind, the natural setting surrounding the

castle is significant. Whereas Perceval manages to circumnavigate “l’eau” “profonde et noire” (1258-9) prior to his meeting with Gornemant, after his meeting with the Fisher King, he must contend with a difficult passage whose far-reaching significance he has yet to fathom: “à la descente d’une colline,/[où] il parvint à une rivière./ Il regarde l’eau rapide et profonde./ Il n’ose pas s’y engager [...]” (2924-7). The hero’s lack of understanding is particularly poignant in that his primary motivation at this juncture is to repair past wrongs; in other words, some evolution in consciousness has occurred: “‘Ah! Seigneur Dieu tout-puissant,/ si je pouvais franchir cette eau,/ au-delà je trouverais ma mère,/ j’en suis sûr [...]’” (2928-31). Sadly, the hero’s encounter with this paternal alter-ego underscores the narrative incompatibility between chronological time and the time of consciousness, particularly as concerns the awakening of his heart, synonymous with his memory and desire. Time is against him, of course; Perceval’s desire to reunite with his mother comes too late. The coursing river with its daunting depth and breadth reinforces the importance of timing, of future time, rapidly unfolding, and lost time. Likewise, the hero’s hesitation at this difficult passage reflects the extent to which he is still unaware of the repercussions of the past, and sadly unprepared for what lies ahead of him: “Il s’évertue ainsi à suivre la rive,/ jusqu’au moment où il approche d’une roche/ que l’eau atteignait,/ si bien qu’il ne pouvait aller plus avant” (2932-5). Although the river follows a horizontal course, its obstructive passage insists upon the multidirectional confusion and false starts and stops of the maze. Likewise, the Fisher King’s offer of hospitality, “‘Grimpez donc par cette anfranctuosité/ qui est ouverte dans la roche” (2967-9), only understates the ambiguity and difficulty of the situation the hero is about to encounter. Nothing appears as he is told it will be. “Il regarde loin devant lui,/ mais il n’a vu que ciel et terre” (2976-7). Perceval’s impaired vision echoes his lack of training and preparation in deciphering signs. He approaches this next test, fittingly enough, full of

distrust and doubt: "'Que Dieu fasse aujourd'hui la pire honte/ à celui qui m'a envoyé jusqu'ici!/ [...] Pêcheur, toi qui m'as dit cela,/ tu as commis une grande bassesse,/ si tu l'as fait pour me nuire'" (2980-7). Although his mood changes as soon as he sees a high tower, "carré, en pierre grise,/ flanquée de deux tourelles./ [...] Il se loue maintenant du pêcheur/ et ne le traite plus de trompeur,/ de déloyal ou de menteur [...]" (2992-3001), it remains clear that the hero's perceptions are still largely governed by his reactive nature.

Up to this point, the hero has evolved gradually: wobbling in(to) the light, he has acquired the trappings and tenets of the knighthood much at his own pace. The challenge still ahead of him, for which he is largely untutored, reveals the limitations of Perceval's teachers as well as the student whose learning is founded upon the words of others (too little, too late) rather than the 'lessons' of the world, recalling his mother's words on the eve of their separation, to repeat: "Il n'y a rien d'étonnant, à mon avis,/ à ne pas savoir ce qu'on n'a pas appris./ L'étonnant c'est plûtot de ne pas apprendre/ ce qu'on entend et ce qu'on voit souvent" (487-90). Perceval's topographical impasse reflects his lack of preparation for the onto-semiotic snare within the castle walls, whose destructive potential might be mitigated by "la vertu liberatrice de la question" (Frappier, *Roman Breton* 82).

The resemblance between the Fisher King, "une noble personne,/ aux cheveux grisonnants" (3020-5), and Perceval's father, both of whose crippling battle wounds render them "impotent" as rulers, suggests that the "question" the hero must ask is key to providing a much needed reparation for the forest of past wrongs, likely relating to battle infractions and the interruption or destruction of lineage. As Jean Frappier tells us, the otherworldy procession at the castle of the Fisher King can be interpreted respectively through Christian, Celtic, and pagan ritual lenses, none of which provides an entirely satisfying explanation. Eugene Weinraub, who

does not entirely discount Frappier's assessment, provides a credible interpretation of the above ritual as a Sephardic Passover *Seder* (*Chrétien's Jewish Grail*). Although Weinraub presents a convincingly detailed argument concerning the specific context of the Fisher King's castle, his theories apply in fairly limited terms to the larger scope of Chrétien's text. To offer any single, closed reading of *Perceval* is problematic in my view, and both Frappier and Weinraub allow for this. I would also point to Howard Bloch's view that the question as to *why* these motifs are so potent is more compelling than *where* they may have come from ("Wasteland"). This said, some fundamental assumptions set forth by the Christian, Celtic, and Hebraic arguments (many other theories exist as well) shall be useful to the social and environmental perspectives of this chapter. Let me elaborate briefly and then offer my own conclusion.

In his treatment of Christian iconography, Frappier discounts claims that associate the grail with the chalice that receives Christ's blood. He accepts (with some discrepancies) the processional "communion de malade" (85) allowing that a purely Christian interpretation is problematic as the "porteurs" are female, not priests and the author chooses the word "grail" instead of the Chrisitian "ciborium," or "chalice" (distinctions between the two were not as clear in 12th century as in our day). As the recipient of the processional plate, the father of the Fisher King is not actually sick; he is, rather, an ascetic who sustains himself upon the "nutritive value" of the "simple hostie/ qu'on lui apport dans ce graal" (6348-9); the lame king, conversely, presides over the ample feast.

Now let us turn briefly to some relevant details of Weinraub's argument, which I condense considerably. According to this critic, Hebraic texts, along with biblical, Talmudic, and midrashic passages and citations from the *Haggadah*, the Passover evening ritual prayer book, were known and available during Chrétien's lifetime (49-51). The relationship between both the

ritual phases and the nutritional content of the Passover meal are indeed striking. Weinraub points out that the word '*Seder*' means 'order' in Hebrew. Of particular interest to our inquiry, during the *Seder* ritual meal, four questions must be asked by the youngest member of the party in order to elicit the recounting of the story of Exodus by the head of the household.[xliii] The Fisher King's reclined position corresponds with the Hebraic practice wherein one must recline as a symbol of infirmity. According to the tradition, a young girl of marriageable age normally removes the plate from the table before the meal has been eaten. This is done, once again, in order to elicit the questions: Where does she go? Why does she remove the plate? After which, the questioner receives the response of the officiant who explains the story of the "bread of affliction." Weinraub agrees with Frappier's interpretation of the grail as a "type of plate." He also points out that the Liturgy of the Haggadah contains a parable that speaks of "a *son who does not know how to ask* (Haben Sheeino Yodea Lishol)" (61). Furthermore, the ritual of washing before the meal, the use of candles, and the meal, comprised of peppered venison, fruits, spices, bitter herbs and wine (3218-71) conform to Sephardic origins of the Passover meal. If we accept as much, Perceval's wandering after his failure at the Fisher King's castle corresponds with the diasporic theme. Perceval's subsequent meeting in the forest with Christian penitents and his encounter with his hermit uncle suggest an anti-semitic component supported by disparaging references to merchants and money-changers elsewhere in the text. Although his motivations remain a matter of speculation, even for Weinraub, Chrétien does evidence familiarity with aspects of Hebraic ritual and secular practice and, as I will discuss, in more than one instance, the author appears both to condone and to challenge the othering of Jews. For the moment, I will reiterate Barthes' earlier point that texts invite multiple entryways.[xliv] Weinraub's reading, which is plausible in specific terms, is one of many. As a univocal interpretation, it

draws our focus away from other relevant socio-cultural factors present in Chrétien's unfinished text.

If, for the purposes of comparison, we are to follow the Christian direction of interpretation (which Frappier suggests is also somewhat forced), the tray becomes the "paten," or the Eucharistic plate, and the bleeding spear, the spear that pierced Christ's side (according to John, XIX, 34).[xlv] To return to the central focus of Chrétien's title, *Le Graal*, related terms derived from French dialect suggest alternate interpretations associated with the activities of medieval peasant life, such as: "'assiette' (*greau*), [...]; 'petit vase dont on se sert pour mesurer du lait' (*griau*), 'vase arrondi creusé dans un petit bloc de bois [...] (*grô*),' [...] 'tasse à vin' (*grolle*) [...], 'vaisseau de bois servant à transporter le sel dans les magasins des salines' (*gruau*), [...]" (Walter 20). We can, at the very least, conclude from the above definitions that the "graal" contains solid (bread, salt), as well as liquid (wine, milk) contents, which can be applied either to pagan or to Christian interpretations. As for Frappier's assertion that "Il ne s'agit plus de plats somptueux réservés aux riches mais bien plutôt d'objets utilitaires ou d'application technique pour la vie quotidienne dans tous les milieux de la société" (20-1), we cannot forget that, according to Chrétien's depiction, "Le graal qui allait devant/ était de l'or le plus pur./ Des pierres précieuses de toutes sortes/ étaient serties dans le graal [...]" (3170-3), indicating the high value of the object in both material and ritual terms. Chrétien's designation of the "graal" as a "platter" is sustained by his insistence upon what the platter *does not* contain: "Ne va pas t'imaginer qu'il ait/ brochet, lamproie ou saumon!" (6346-7; Frappier 91). The procession, in fact, prefigures a meal, albeit one with lavishly ceremonial connotations. Let us turn to Frappier's argument against the iconographic plausibility of purely Christian significance concerning these processional relics:

> Voilà le fait significatif, crucial qui doit à mon avis retenir l'attention: quelle qu'elle soit, une mutation s'est accomplis dans le Conte du Graal. [...] La destruction du royaume de Logres par la lance qui saigne, non, cette conception n'est pas d'origine chrétienne; elle empêche au moins de croire que notre auteur a pensé uniquement à la lance de Longin. [...] Rapellons cependant qu'il n'existe certainement aucun rapport de contenu à contenant entre le sang de la lance et le graal dans le roman de Chrétien; la vision mystique et platique du sang du sacrifice coulant dans le vaisseau de la rédemption n'est pas antérieure au Perselesvaus et à la Queste; elle est l'aboutissement d'une évolution prolongée [...]. [...] [Il] faudrait admettre encore cette extravagance que le sang contenu dans le graal sert lui aussi à soutenir et à conforter la vie du saint homme, père du Roi Pêcheur [...]; mais rassurons-nous: il ressort du texte de Chrétien que le Graal est un plat porteur de nourriture et sanctifié par la présence d'un hostie; chez lui, la christianisation de l'objet ne va pas au delà. (88-9)[xlvi]

Further consideration of the iconography surrounding the Fisher King and his castle supports this last assertion, even if we cannot entirely dismiss what subsequent authors, such as Wolfram, have interpreted as a purely Christian theme. Outright dismissal of the Christian message in Chrétien's final work is virtually implausible, however. As our interests include transitional phases between the 12th- and 13th-centuries, I would assert, quite simply, that the author's emphasis upon epistemological complexity, reflected by the reclusive nature of the Fisher King's home and its cryptic ritual context, points to the his acknowledgment of the symbolic rite as a waning, increasingly endangered influence, particularly in a society undergoing processes of 'modernization'. This last point is particularly relevant with respect to

the value of the symbolic as a method of healing and transforming paradigms. We may, therefore, also think of Perceval's impasse at the Fisher King's castle as a representation of a cultural epistemology contemplating its own extinction. Quite fittingly, the romance loses track of the very hero whose imperative task is to decipher and to restore obscure meaning through speech. Linguistic obstruction, as I have indicated, has broad implications that we can link to cultural taboo as well as to collective environmental concerns.

To return to the unmistakeable resemblance between the Fisher King and Perceval's deceased father, pre-Christian, ritual origins provide a literary context for the story's perpetual subtext of environmental wastage whose dire implications become increasingly explicit as a result of the hero's inability to articulate a question during his encounter with this father-like figure.[xlvii] Eastern legends such as those of Osiris, Adonis, and Attis associate themes of mourning and resurgence, "resurrection," with seasonal rhythms and the appearance and disappearance of vegetation.[xlviii] Chrétien (and later Wolfram) associates the wounds of Perceval's father and the Fisher King with infertility as well as with immobility: hence with ungovernable kingdoms and sterile unprotected, lands, vulnerable to further affliction. Medieval association of the king with his land makes the restoration of the king's health a prerequisite of environmental restoration.

The situation at Beau Repaire prior to Perceval's meeting with the Fisher King sustains this last line of thought. At Beau Repaire, the kingdom itself is fraught, devastated by the onslaught of Aguinguerron and Clamadieu, its people reduced to famine, its lands sterile, all means of acquisition and production of nourishment obstructed.[xlix] Aguinguerron and Clamadieu cause Beau Repaire's dire situation; the health and welfare of the kingdom are restored when Perceval defeats these besiegers. The fact that Perceval encounters so much seemingly

insurmountable trouble at his next destination once again calls attention to the author's imperative: something other than chivalric might and societal "niceté" is required of this hero.

As for conjectures designating the procession at the Fisher King's castle as a failed fertility rite, the scene offers little evidence to support this.[1] We are perhaps closer to a useful analogy if we concentrate upon relationships of fertility and paternity. In both Christian and Celtic mythology, the "poisson" is associated with royalty, with fertility, and with divinity: "La présence du triplement, celle de l'eau et du poisson géniteur (un saumon d'argent) et le caractère magique de l'engendrement virginal méritent d'être soulignés. Ils font partie du dispositif primordial de procréation royale. Ils garantissent l'avènement d'un être d'exception;" "le sot ou le nice est un inspiré" (Walter 65). Reminiscent of the wounded father the hero never knew, the "Roi Pêcheur" emerges as an otherwordly father figure whose procreative and sovereign powers have been compromised; his castle provides the domain for Perceval's completion as an exceptional knight. Yet, of crucial concern for the unprepared hero, because of the king's wounds, the son must (linguistically speaking) regenerate the father before he himself can be born.

Speech connotes procreation as well as regeneration, the passing of knowledge from one generation to another. Likewise, the quality of speech, its ability to convey accurately or to mislead, is crucial to this matter. The Middle Ages associates speaking, or "telling on" as a third party, with spying; the spy, or "espion,"[li] is characterized, which is to say misleads and is misled, by his incomplete view of a situation. Thus, silence, through its association with secrecy, the latter often in conjunction with sexual matters, acquires an insidious connotation. A truth, as well as a perception, needs articulation, even under the guise of a question; following this train of thought, we can associate 'silence' with complicity, 'truth concealed' and the perpetuation of

"untruth," as well as with obscured vision, all of which contributes to violence, as illustrated in later medieval texts, such as the 13th century *La Mort le Roi Artur*, wherein the profusion of tombs is a direct consequence not only of concealed lies, but also of "untold" truth.

As for the cause of Perceval's silence, and its cataclysmic repercussions, Gornemant's influence on the hero reveals a latent tension not only between "nature" et "norreture," but, more explicitly, between Perceval's *nature bête*, his uncultivated nature, and his inherent, yet dormant, *nature noble*, earlier recognized by those in strategic positions to bring it forth, such as Arthur. The gentilhomme's instruction to Perceval not to speak, "Gardez-vous aussi d'être homme/ à trop parler ou à nourrir des bruits" (1606-7), lest "on vous impute à bassesse" (1610), recalls the reaction of knights to the uncouth youth who, when questioned, will not answer but, instead, "pour tout ce qu'il voit, demande/ quel en est le nom et ce qu'on en fait," thus engendering, once again, the knight's unflattering equation of "les Gallois" with "bêtes menées en pâture" (234-8). Having instructed Perceval in tactics of battle and in the arts of chivalry: "Pour tout métier il faut,/ du goût, de l'effort et de l'habitude" (1414-5), Gornemant then brings Perceval new clothing to replace the rough peasant garb given by his mother: "Il lui fit apporter en présent/ une chemise et des culottes de lin fin,/ ainsi que des chausses teintes en rouge/ et une tunique faite d'une étoffe de soie violette,/ qui avait été tissée en Inde" (1558-62). Through this donning of clothing of royal quality, Perceval completes his education as a knight, but not without learning the poor quality of his mother's garments, hence, also, of her instruction. The gentilhomme relegates other lessons to the chivalric domain: "'si vous avez le dessus/ de sorte qu'il ne puisse plus contre vous/ se défendre ni se tenir,/ et qu'il soit réduit à merci,/ ne le tuez pas sciemment" (1601-5), which Perceval abides by, showing mercy to others, to his credit. Gornemant's instruction against speaking, "Gardez-vous aussi d'être homme/ à trop parler ou à nourrir des

bruits./ [...] Trop parler c'est pécher" (1606-12), offered with little context other than his association of "untutored" words with shame, is assimilated by his student, quite literally, "au fond de son cœur." The insidious and paradoxical erasure of his mother's memory is accomplished when Gornemant forbids the hero to credit the unfortunate woman for her son's instruction: "car si vous le disiez encore,/ on le prendrait pour de la sottise" (1630-1).

As Gornemant reasons, by abandoning all reference to his mother (*originatore* and *generatore* of his ignorance), exchanging his crude undergarments for the finer garments the gentilhomme offers him and, henceforth, "de ne jamais dire mot de toute sa vie," the novice will satisfy the demands of (this stage of) his educational journey. If, as according to the dictum,"nature" overrules "norreture," however, we must begin to ask the questions: "which nature?" and "(à cause de) quelle norreture?" The "grand peur" of Perceval's mother leads her to suppress all exposure that may deliver her son into his destiny as an adult knight, a neglect that leaves the youth to take his examples from the "natural" (albeit beastly) world. La Veuve Dame fails to accept an essential point, however: only by venturing out into the unkempt 'wilderness', which is also the wilderness of the history of warring clans, can the hero reverse its destructive course. Ironically, Gornemant educates Perceval according to the codes of the dying chivalry the hero is designated to surpass in order to then restore it. Just as La Veuve Dame associates all social learning with the calamity of knighthood, thus denying her son his "nature noble" (i.e. both his heritage and his destiny), Gornemant's teachings offer a code of conduct based upon the perfection of skills and exterior appearances appropriate to the context of the Arthurian knighthood, thus redirecting the hero's natural inclination to question, denying him if we will, that "noble" part of himself which must be brought forth through the act of questioning. Lastly, and importantly, Gornemant distinguishes "trop parler" with giving to others "vos conseils;" "Ce

sera bien agir/ que de savoir les conseiller/ et de pouvoir le faire" (1618-20). At the castle of the Fisher King, Perceval favors Gornemant's counsel over his own, confusing indiscriminate speech with the intentional act of articulating a question. As I earlier mentioned, the hero formulates the appropriate questions, yet counsels himself against them: "Il se retenait à cause du gentilhomme/ qui l'avait doucement blâmé/ de trop parler. C'est toujours là/ au fond de son cœur, il l'a gardé en mémoire" (3232-5). To use a topographical analogy, the hero fails to scale the "afranctuosité" of an inner chasm; when his "courtly" instructions prove their limitations, he fails to act upon the interior wisdom of his inclinations.[lii]

After his "échec" at the home of the Fisher King, Perceval loses his way for five years, "en quête et en attente/ d'aventures et d'exploits chevaleresques" (4100-1), until the Good Friday when he happens upon a group of penitents in the forest and, thereafter, learns from his hermit uncle, the relationship between his denial of his mother and his "parole blessée." As Philippe Walter stresses, Perceval's inability to speak can be traced to the injury of the Fisher King, by physical association with Perceval's father, and by genetic association, with the hero's mother : "Cette attitude s'inscrit plus largement dans un contexte mythique relatif à la parole initiatique. Il relève surtout d'un complexe et d'un empêchement de parler que l'on qualifiera de blésité." The adjective "*blois* ou *bloiseus* [boiteux (my addition)]," Walter adds, connotes "'qui blèse'" in Old French; in Provençal, *bles* signifies "'qui articule mal les mots'" (Walter 117-8).[liii] Latin etymology leads to a correspondence between *blaesus* and "'bègue' ou plutôt 'qui confond les lettres'" and the Greek *blaisos*, "'au jambes torses'" (118).[liv] The etymological correspondence between the infirmity of the Fisher King and Perceval's inability to speak cannot be thought of as incidental. If we look into an additional implication of the analogy, we find correlations between Perceval's maternal wound, which amounts to semiotic and linguistic starvation, the "blessure

aux hanches" of the two kings, and Perceval's inability to speak in a timely manner: "défaut de prononciation" becomes interchangeable with "défaut de locomotion." The symptom, rather than the antidote to the dual affliction articulated above, is seen through the hero's aimless, solitary wandering.

Perceval's aggrieved, abandoned mother is undeniably complicit in the linguistic and semiotic ineptitudes of her son; the knightly virtue of supple intellect, the abiltity to "figure out" what a situation calls for, has simply eluded the hero thus far. Gornemant's intervention underscores this perspective: the son must deny the mother if he is to become a man; yet, paradoxically, the gentilhomme's injunction against the hero's speech, impedes the ability of the latter to intuit, to bespeak, and thus to heal, the very *blessure*/*blésité* with which he and, indeed, an entire kingdom, are afflicted, calling into question the reliability, as well as the worthiness of this teacher's advice. Moreover, in the spirit of the (1960s) generational impasse, as an upholder of chivalric law and courtly conduct, Gornemant has failed to glean the needs of his pupil's soul, just as his courtly lessons have failed to address the ways and the demands of a changing world.

Semiotics and Culpability: A Case of No Exit?

Concerning the implications of the hero's failure to decipher his imperative task, Frappier finds numerous motifs in Celtic mythology that correspond 'credibly' with *Perceval*'s complex symbolism. The 'graal' (a French word "avec une influence visible du provençal") maintains the utilitarian connotation of 'cup' or 'plate', "un plat large et creux" (Frappier 95). In Celtic tradition, the magical properties of such vessels make them "chaudrons d'abondance" capable of producing any sort of victual one might desire.[lv] While these talismans, rooted in Roman Gallic concepts of the "horn of plenty" and Elysium, associated with "l'Autre monde" (93) often

require the hero's descent into the underworld, Chrétien's hero appears in no way interested in possessing the mystical, bejewelled vessels that pass before him; his task, as we have already established, is to articulate the question(s) he has begun to formulate in his mind concerning their meaning.

As I mentioned in the above section, a rite of fertility, which can be associated with Celtic origins, appears misguided, given the spectral, as opposed to the visceral nature of the processional scene whose primary emphasis is the mysterious destination of the "plat." Similarly, the author's emphasis upon fire and the unusually bright lighting in the room, "L'intérieur était illuminé,/ au point qu'on ne saurait mieux faire,/ de tout l'éclat que donnent des flambeaux dans une demeure" (3125-7), draws attention to the "jeune noble, porteur d'une lance blanche/ qu'il tenait empoignée par le milieu./ [...] Il sortait une goutte de sang/ du fer, à la pointe de la lance,/ et jusqu'à la main du jeune homme/ coulait cette goutte vermeille" (3130-9). The notably silent, mystical, procession of "jeunes gens porteurs des candélabres," each with "dix chandelles pour le moins," followed by the grail, "tenu à deux mains, [...] [d']une si grande clarté/ que les chandelles en perdirent/ leur éclat comme les étoiles/ au lever du soleil ou de la lune," create in unison the incandescent spectacle designed to fascinate, to seduce, and to distract both the reader and the hero, as parades and feasts so pleasantly do.[lvi] Its illusory potential notwithstanding, Pagan symbolism associates fire with cosmic energy, hope, and the return of light, "le principe originel de toute irradiation lumineuse" (Walter 166). Before the procession "merveilleux" begins, Perceval is given a silk robe, followed by the sword "venue d'ailleurs." The hero is thus honored because of the potential the Fisher King sees in him: "Il avait vraiment l'air d'un homme qui au besoin/ saurait s'en servir en guerrier" (3116-7) and, because it is predestined: "'Mon doux seigneur, cette épée/ vous a été destinée et attribuée./ Toute ma volonté est que vous

l'avez [. . .]" (3105-7). (We learn that the sword is "broken" after Perceval leaves the castle, having failed in his task.) The gift of the gold-hilted sword, followed by the appearance of the bleeding spear, suggests both the curative and destructive potential of these generative symbols.[lvii]

Consistent with the Celtic model, the castle's luminescent ambience, with its aqueous, craggy surroundings, indicates an otherwordliness correlative to the marine diety, Bran le Béni, the Irish Nuadu (a word signifiying "fisherman"), or Nodens, "dieu brittonique" associated with the cult of water as well as with the dual themes of warfare and fertility: "Ces divinités aquatiques [...] étaient des symboles de force, de vie et de fécondité. On sait en outre que le culte des eaux est lié dans les rites agraires à celui de la végétation et que le poisson pêché est aussi un symbole de fécondité" (Frappier 98). The grail, "lieu d'énergie primitive" (Walter 166) appears as an opportunity for restoration and healing of the Fisher King's wounds, his compromised sovereignty, and his status as a warrior, all of which are inexextricably tied to the devastation of his kingdom and lands.[lviii]

Just as the author juxtaposes seasonal themes, springtime, associated with vegetal fecundity and "niceté," autumn, associated with seasonal ambiguity, or winter, where we find the hero wandering through stark, desert-like, dark forests, Perceval's fumbling journey towards self-perfection is echoed in the juxtaposition of the ascetic meal of the reclusive, elderly king and the "abondance" of the meal the hero shares with his host and his courtly entourage: "le premier mets fut d'une hanche/ d'un cerf de haute graisse, relevé au poivre./ Il ne leur manque ni vin pur ni râpé/ à boire dans leurs coupes d'or" (3218-21). Prior works, such as *Yvain*, have opposed raw (associated with the wilderness, wildness, and beastliness) and cooked (civilization, society) food, particularly meat. The "hostie" represents spiritual nourishment, as opposed to the

peppered venison at the Fisher King's table, profane nourishment of the rich: "the good life" vs. a life of (penitential) contemplation. This last point, which I will return to in a later section of this chapter, is supported by the vegetarian meal the penitential hero shares with his hermit uncle years after his disappointing failure herein.[lix]

The plenitude of the feast, the castle's infirm host, his sterile lands, and the mysterious destination of the (all-but-empty) processional platter, indicate a context whose as-yet-cryptic "sense" needs articulation through interrogation. "Qui pose les questions éclaire et découvre, pour lui-même et pour les autres, les voies qui conduisent au rétablissment de la souveraineté" (Frappier 101).[lx] Yet, Perceval remains silent at every opportunity: "Il s'est retenu de demander/ comment pareille chose advenait,/ car il lui souvenait de la leçon/ de celui qui l'avait fait chevalier/ et qui lui avait enseigné et appris/ à se garder de trop parler" (3143-7). Similarly, as the grail passes, "il n'osa pas demander," and passes again, "entièrement visible," "il ne pose pas de question et ne demanda rien." As for "qui l'on servait de ce graal" (et "de quelle nourriture,"), Perceval "se tait plus qu'il ne convient" (3231-6). Once again, we are reminded of the hero's difficulty with "apprendre," "voir," and "entendre." This indicates, both ironically and paradoxically, that "apprendre" involves the ability to make distinctions of context, hence, to transcend the verbatim of mere instruction.

More to the point, according to the medieval thought of Abelard, meaning must be derived from the activity of the *intellectio* interposing itself between words and things: "Le langage est un interprète infidèle des choses mais un bon témoin des activités de l'esprit; [...] Du sein du langage, nous ne pouvons déboucher directement sur le monde; il faut d'abord traverser la sphère de l'esprit."[lxi] Maturation involves the correlation of dialectics and poetics. Regardless of his progress thus far within the domains of the knighthood and the standards of courtly

conduct, the hero's intellectual Spirit, which we must distinguish from evidence of his Christian devotion after he leaves Blanchefleur, "il ne cesse de prier," has scarcely begun its incipient stages of evolution; he has yet to poetize.

It is important to reiterate that, as the grail passes back and forth before the silent hero, he has begun to formulate in his mind the appropriate questions: "a propos de la lance, pourquoi elle saigne/ et à propos du graal, où on le porte" (3337-8). As I mentioned earlier, whereas the hero perceives and naturally questions, he remains unsure of his intuition, which we can associate with the *oculus anima*, the "eye of the soul." Once again, "real" time intervenes to befuddle good intentions. The following morning, Perceval finds all the bedroom doors closed with no person to respond to his knocks. Still unaware of the gravity of his mistake, he concludes that the young people have gone into the forest "pour inspecter les collets et les pièges" (3333). His solitary departure, "faute de mieux," and the raised bridge that all but fells his horse "à plat au milieu de l'eau," signal the negative turn of his journey's progress.

Integration: Shedding Culture, Arriving at Sense

Perceval's next encounters in the forest have something to do with making sense of recent and past events and contexts. His cousin, the grieving young damsel, confirms that the "pêcheur" is indeed also a "roi" and, like Perceval's father, has been wounded in battle, "blessé et vraiment mutilé" (3448), sustaining an injury to the loins. As for his failure to articulate a question concerning the bleeding lance, "'vous avez très mal agi'" (v. 3493), and the grail, the candelabras, the silver tray, "'encore pire'" (3509). As if to counter his earlier impediment, the hero utters for the first time "que Perceval le Gallois est son nom" (3513), only to be told that his name is now "'Perceval l'Infortuné! [...] Que de biens en seraient advenus!/ Sache maintenant

que le malheur/ va s'abattre sur toi et sur les autres'" (3521-40). The reason for his misfortunes, Perceval learns next, is his sin concerning his mother, "morte de chagrin pour toi" (3533).

As if to contradict the bitterness with which the message is delivered, the news troubles but does not destroy the hero who simply gleans a new destiny ahead of him: "'C'est une funeste histoire que vous m'avez contée,/ mais puisqu'elle est mise en terre,/ qu'irais-je chercher plus avant?/ C'est une autre route qu'il me convient de suivre" (3558-63). Whether we interpret this reaction as evidence of the hero's continued insensitivity, as a facile denial of emotional pain, or, conversely, as a call to a greater destiny (more in accordance with Gornemant's teachings) away from the maternal hearth, at the emotional level, the "spiritus intellectus," he has yet to make the necessary "connection," as his last words to his cousin attest: "'Les morts avec les morts, les vivants avec les vivants!'" (3568).

A more penetrating effect of the sad news of his mother and of his cousin's condemnation is reflected in Perceval's later reacquaintance with the abused 'demoiselle de la tente' whose ragged, pitiful state, much like her malnourished horse, "si affaibli qu'il tremblait/ comme un cheval morfondu" (3642-3), functions as a metaphor for the state of the hero's soul—he too suffers—and, in due course, begins the painful process of his self-correction. Perceval's efforts to right past wrongs with the abused damsel mark his first steps towards this endeavor. Whereas, in his first meeting with the fearful young girl in the forest, "rien de ce qu'il entend/ ne vient toucher le cœur du jeune homme" (696-7), he now comes to her immediate aid, acknowledging the corrective nature of their latest meeting, "c'est mon chemin qui m'a conduit à vous" (3738). One last point, the hero's "errors" of feeling, which he transcends with Blanchefleur (aided by her comeliness and her skills of genteel persuasion) and corrects at last with the abused damsel, underscore the emotional, as well as the cognitive strides he has made to

grasp the relationship between past actions, consequence, and future time, all of which takes place "over time," as opposed to "at the right time."

Coursing Rivers and Daunting Seas

As I touched upon earlier, in view of its relationship to epistemological obstruction, the river merits attention both as a reoccurring metaphor for Perceval's progression in Chrétien's opus and as a particularly new representative of unforeseen, uncontrollable forces alluding to human "progress." The motif appears elsewhere in Chrétien's environmental iconography, as a dangerous adversary in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, for example, as I will discuss in my next chapter. Lancelot's "eau traîtresse" echoes the underlying theme of deceit influencing this knight's every interaction within human and natural domains. As the hero's encounter with the Fisher King attests, *Perceval*'s rivers test and track the hero's epistemological and spiritual formation for which "difficult crossings" and passages serve as a primary metaphor. In ecological as well as in metaphoric terms, these rivers connote the passage of time, synonymous with erosion; yet, incongruously, if not also serendipitously, these unnamed rivers insist upon the future time of a new modernity, as well as the unknown destiny of the hero. Emphasized by their natural force and the frequently depleted landscapes at their borders, these rivers underscore the horizontal, unidirectional movement of the narrative (transpiring largely outside the "magical" time of texts such as *Yvain*) which we can associate both with the progression of the hero and with mortality.

As if to replace the magical qualities we often associate with the superhuman exploits of Lancelot, Chrétien introduces a vaguely Darwinian element to *Perceval*'s raging waters. The story's rivers appear less as a test for knightly virtues (crossings are few in the text) than as as a

psychological trope. As an ever-present disinterested force, these rivers function interchangeably as a physio-psychological barrier (prefacing Perceval's failure at the Fisher King's castle), and as a medium for commerce and cultural exchange (at Beaurepaire and in association with Gauvain's knightly pursuits). Acting as rather impersonal means of communication, these rivers move with force, irrespective of the social codes and contexts that may exist on either side of their banks. As a reoccurring motif in the narrative, the river emphasizes boundlessness, seafaring, and encounters with other, unknown worlds, further complicated by bridges, and dams. At important junctures, the river flows into the sea, suggesting stable but not infallible boundaries on either bank; the "nocher" who ferries Gauvain to *l'autre monde*, for example, appears as a skilled negotiator, a socially ambidextrous merchant commuter, able to give and refuse hospitality at will. At once "mutable" and "immutable," *Perceval*'s rivers assert the inevitable course of destiny and horizontal time; simultaneously, they represent memory, history, and intractability. The hero's amblings alongside, to and from the river's bank remind us that, however much he ignores or forgets himself, he belongs to both a past and a future irreversibly underway; a subtext to the hero's destiny is human destiny. Indeed, the activity upon the vast river Gauvain encounters towards the end of the narrative begins to indicate a parallel course for both nature and for humankind: the expansion of geographical space, a phenomenon we can associate not only with progress, or with environmental degradation, but also with an evolving awareness of a "larger world," beyond perceptible horizons, infiltrating and annexing the "inner space of the human soul" (Gurevich 79).

As a narrative motif, Perceval's progression is tracked by the river's unsettling continuity. Swift, often perilous and obstructive, the banks on either side act as a continual reminder of the illusive dichotomy of *here* and *then*. The sea, a less frequent, yet persistent motif,

ushers in the unknown; at the same time, its desert-like presence suggests something *beyond* and *other than* the immediacy of transpositions taking place within human time. In a strikingly perspectival juxtaposition of man appearing as against a backdrop of nature, the hero's first encounter after leaving his mother, Perceval first beholds the Red Knight approaching from the direction of "une ville forte" situated "en bord de mer" (821).

We become aware of the river as a guide and as a metaphor for the hero's social and spiritual evolution with his arrival at Gornemant's castle. The story's first river sets an atmospheric tone for Perceval's difficult progression towards self-awareness in a landscape all-too reminiscent of his mother's warnings.

> Cependant le jeune homme sans le moindre arrêt/ chevauche à travers la forêt./ Pour finir, il est parvenu en plaine,/ en vue d'une rivière qui faisait/ de large plus qu'une portée d'arbalète./ L'eau était tout entière rentrée/ dans son cours, en se retirant./ Traversant une prairie, il se dirige/ vers la grande rivière qui gronde,/ mais il ne se risqua pas dans l'eau,/ car il la vit profonde et noire,/ et son courant était plus fort que celui de la Loire./ Il longe donc toute la rive,/ en suivant une haute paroi rocheuse à nu,/ qui se trouvait de l'autre côté de l'eau,/ et au pied de laquelle l'eau venait battre./ Sur ce rocher, au penchant de la colline/ qui descendait du côté de la mer,/ se dressait un superbe château fort. (1255-73)

Gornemant's castle is the first example in the text where we find the merging of river and sea. Similar to the fortress of Beaurepaire, the castle is surrounded by a moat and bordered at the back by the sea. This last feature appears more than once in the text as a place of juncture characterized by ambivalent influences, unconventional meetings, partnerships, and crossings:

“Il y avait une fortification avancée/ qui regardait vers l’embouchure/ où les eaux se heurtaient à la mer,/ et la mer venait battre à son pied” (1280-3). Unlike the inhospitable terrain the hero encounters at the banks leading to the Fisher King’s abode, a bridge crosses the river to the tower, giving him easy access to the “gentilhomme.” Other bridges will close behind him. Where Perceval meets the Fisher King, the river is in fact uncrossable, as the fisherman tells him, “car il n’y a ni bac ni pont ni gué,” whereby he must climb through a crevice in the rock and look out from its peak to a valley where the former resides, “à proximité de rivière et de bois” (2972). The island fortification, situated “au-delà des eaux,” marks a transition from an Arthurian courtly context to the otherworldly, magical space of this enigmatic destination.

Perceval’s episode at Beaurepaire, the devastated city, where he meets Blanchefleur, is noteworthy for its depiction of both old-fashioned feudal tyranny and new-fangled mercantile innovation. After leaving Gornemant’s castle, the hero comes to “une ville forte, très bien située,/ mais, à l’extérieur des murs, il n’y avait rien/ que la mer, l’eau et la terre déserte” (1665-7). This segment of Perceval’s journey provides a somewhat panoramic view of environmental and social degradation: “S’il n’avait trouvé au-dehors/ qu’une terre déserte et détruite,/ le dedans ne se présentait pas mieux,/ car partout où il allait,/ ce n’était que rues désertées/ et maisons toutes en ruine,/ sans âme qui vive” (1707-13), and the remnants of human destruction: “des murs/ éventrés et fendus, des tours aux toits béants,/ des portes grandes ouvertes,/ de nuit comme de jour” (1721-3). The situation within the fortress is even more pitiful: “Ainsi trouva-t-il un château rendu désert,/ où il n’y avait ni pain, ni pâte,/ ni vin, ni cidre, ni bière” (1728-31), the starving inhabitants of the half-deserted city subject to Aguingueron’s seige for “tout un hiver et un été” (1972); as the distraught damsel poignantly laments, “Il ne m’est resté ici/ de quoi seulement nourrir une abeille!” (1978). This resourceful captive, a vision of resuscitation amidst

the squalor, “Jamais depuis il ne fit sa pareille,/ avant non plus il ne l’avait faite” (1786-7), in what can only be described as an early (favorable) rendition of mercantile sensibility,[lxii] revises and reimagines the earlier image of hopeless femininity, particularly in Perceval’s mother, by cleverly inciting the hero to come to her defense. A prevailing characteristic of the “mercantile attitude” is resourcefulness under all circumstances, which de-emphasizes Christian morality and suspicion concerning monetary exchange (associated with Jewish professions) and emphasizes cleverness and the ability to use one’s wits and/or personal charms in order to make the best of a difficult situation.

At Beaurepaire, the sea, heretofore a desolate backdrop at the edges of the horizon, becomes a medium for timely salvation. Clamadieu’s attempt to force the survivors back into their fortress where, already weakened and bereft of provisions, they will starve, is thwarted by the castle’s fortunate meeting with the sea at its back, away from the besieger’s reach. As luck would have it, the complicit wind brings a barge “qui avait sa charge de blé/ et qui était rempli d’autres vives” (2466-7), followed thereafter by a rather elaborate negotiation: “‘Débarquez donc, car tout est vendu/ aussi cher que vous en fixerez le prix,/ et venez vite prendre votre argent,/ car aujourd’hui vous n’aurez que l’embarras/ de recevoir et de compter/ les lingots d’or et les lingots d’argent/ que nous vous donnerons pour le blé./ Pour le vin et pour la viande,/ vous en recevrez une pleine charrette,/ ou plus, si c’est nécessaire’” (2486-95). Chrétien’s final assessment of the matter, “Voilà l’affaire rondement menée/ entre acheteurs et vendeurs” (2496-7), introduces the mercantile trope of cleverly “buying” one’s way out of an unfavorable predicament. In this episode, Perceval’s chivalric skills, as indispensible as they may be, are quickly subsumed within a revised tactic of survival. Reduced to a waiting game wherein the former starving captives feast their way out of trepidation and despair, “Clamadieu et ses gens en

crèvent de dépit" (2526). As if to offer a solution to the world of courtoisie gone mad, Chrétien depicts a world of affable commerce, operated by unknown entities. These seemingly inocuous mercantile transactions, which produce gratifying results in this instance, suggest more ambivalent connotations later in the text, as the river, trade, and commerce reappear in conjunction with Gauvain's vain pursuits of lust and glory.

Gauvain's function as a foil for Perceval merits further elaboration, particularly in terms of the conflicting social values embodied by each knight. Our first encounter with Chrétien's lesser hero, as a mediator, cognizant (unlike Sagremor and Keu) of the courtly value of the hero's rapt attention in the snow-covered field, prefaces this formal knight's departure from the courtly manners he so eloquently defends. Introduced half-way into the text,[lxiii] Gauvain's "route à cheval" has none of the psychological implications of Perceval's circuitous wanderings through forests and along the river's bank. Instead, he involves himself in a series of adventures as spontaneous and inconsequential as his hunt of "des biches en train de paître,/ à la lisière d'une forêt" (5590-1). After his accusation of treachery by Guinganbrésil, and newly obsessed with the heartless damsel, Gauvain travels "à travers des forêts désertes et perdues,/ pour arriver enfin en pleine campagne,/ au bord d'une rivière profonde" (7139-41), from one "riche forteresse" to another "De l'autre côté." The artificial agreeability of his adventures, indicated by "les prés et les vergers fleuries" and echoed in the clothing of the young damsels the knight encounters "vêtues de satin [...] au couleurs variées/ et des robes de soie brochées d'or," is soon mitigated by the taunts he receives from the damsels at Tintangel, led by the eldest daughter of Thibaut, and later, from the heartless damsel, "la plus malfaisante créature du monde" (7172), who torments him at the river's bank. Gauvain's vain pursuit of this vixen, necessitating the relinquishment of his horse to the boatman who houses him for the night, underscores the dearth of reflection with

which this courteous knight reacts. Intent on following the girl, “une chose pire que Satan,” this knight’s short attention span, not to mention the insensate nature of his social interactions, stands increasingly in contrast to Perceval’s painful self-reckoning in the stark forest. The knight’s passage to the enchanted castle on the “petite barque,” in fact, highlights the growing oppositional dynamic between society, characterized by arrogant posturing and artifice, and the natural world: the forest is depleted, representative of a defeated past; the river is industrious, forward-looking. As Gauvain’s vain pursuits and negotiations emphasize, the river, first appearing as a guide and an alter-ego for the hero’s progression, increasingly suggests commerce, involving all manner of frivolous transactions between persons of differing social classes and from unspecified places; its ever-present movement, increasingly vast, opens onto the uncharted territory of the sea, minimizing the relevance of the individual quest and leaving the present defenseless against the unknown.

Self-Emptying

In view of this last assertion, what significance or correlation are we to extract with respect to the latter stages of Perceval’s journey into solitude and obscurity? In an attempt to answer this question, I will return to the earlier-mentioned evidence of an emergent dichotomy between historical and symbolic processes, which, in a departure from precedents, also points to a separation between wordly and (increasingly) private processes. The hero’s silence, before and after his pivotal episode with the Fisher King, particularly as it relates to his increasingly remote, if not marginal status in the narrative, marks a dividing point between the hero’s social and personal evolution. The “trouble” with language, as Gornemant explicates, is that, unlike the rustic clothing Perceval can exchange for silk undergarments and robes, his speech reveals the

lack of refinement still within. Before his meeting with the Fisher King, the hero's muteness at Beaurepaire—"ce chevalier est-il donc muet?" (1821)—shows the degree to which Perceval has taken to excess Gornemant's advice. His epistemological muteness (the hero is still ignorant of his own name) is reflected in his continued difficulty with names as a referent for people or things: having asked his mentor's name, according to the directions of his mother, "si quelqu'un vous tient longue compagnie,/ [...] Vous devez finir par savoir son nom" (524-6), he refers to Gornmant as "le gentilhomme," "j'ignore le nom de ce château" (1848), "il ignorait tout/ de l'amour comme du reste" (1899-1900). The hero's ability to respond to Blanchefleur's distress: "Il eut un geste de courtoisie/ et la prit à son tour dans ses bras" (1935-6), suggests that Perceval's cognitive progression is occurring at a level of emotional, as opposed to linguistic literacy. Interestingly, and importantly, Perceval's defeat of Clamadieu, who, like his sénéchal before him, agrees honorably to surrender himself to Arthur's service, coincides with Pentecost. This holy day, which takes place on the seventh Sunday after Easter, is associated with tongues of flames and the understanding of language, "speaking in tongues," a phenomenon that equates indecipherability, or "coded" speech, with holiness.

Perceval evidences the solitary path as an individual choice when, in spite of his acclaim, and against her wishes, he leaves Blanchefleur: "Toute la journée il a fait route,/ sans rencontrer créature terrestre,/ chrétien ou chrétienne,/ qui aurait su lui enseigner le chemin/ Il ne cesse de prier" (2914-8). This transitional passage marks a perplexing phase of the hero's journey wherein the memory of his mother (increasingly tied to his Christian devotion), his newfound "gaieté de cœur," and the knighthood all vie for his attention. Perceval's proof of himself as a "chevalier bien courtois" at Beaurepaire, and his departure thereafter, coincide with his ignorant hope of

reuniting with his mother before his cousin delivers the bitter confirmation of her death. In spite of his accomplishments, at the level of the Spirit, he is found wanting.

To recapitulate events of sequential importance, the hero's reacquaintance with 'la demoiselle de la tente' after his cousin's chastisement confirms the circular nature of his progress; after the proven inadequacy of his knightly skills, the evolution of Perceval's "spiritual" conscience must proceed through a painful reckoning with past mistakes. His initiation into this new paradigm coincides with the recognition of his own name, "Et lui qui ne savait son nom/ en a l'inspiration [...]" (3511-2), followed by his cousin's condemnation of him as "Perceval l'Infortuné." The hero's subsequent decision to "change course," "C'est une autre route qu'il me convient de suivre" (3563), falls short of demonstrating his regret or his impending spiritual metamorphosis, as his parting words attest: "Les morts avec les morts, les vivants avec les vivants!" (3568). Perceval's earlier filial "désir d'aller la voir, /plus fortement que de tout autre chose" (2660-1), a primary reason for his departure from Beaurepaire is, by all appearances, replaced by the next best thing, a search for adventure, the activity in which we next find him engaged, wandering, yet not entirely lost in a wintry field.

In what can be described, to return to anthropological terms, as the *liminal* phase that follows—'liminal' is an appropriate term here as it implies transition, anonymity, absence of status, humility, silence, and sacredness[lxiv]—Perceval's journey leads him to a place of renewed proximity to Arthur's court as a knight in practice (rote practice at that), if not also in spirit: "Au matin la neige était bien tombée,/ car la contrée était très froide./ Perceval, au petit jour,/ s'était levé comme à son habitude,/ car il était en quête et en attente/ d'aventures et d'exploits chevaleresques." Although the reader has yet to glean his interior thoughts, the season, which coincides with the transitional period between late autumn (*autumnus*, from *uertere*, *vertere*, to

turn, to convert)[lxv] and early winter (associated with water, OE *waeter*, and Eg *hua*, a river, connoting kinship),[lxvi] indicates a time of introspection, solitude, and inner searching: "Il vint à la prairie/ gelée et enneigée/ où campait l'armée du roi" (4096-4104). Conforming to the direction of this "autre voie," Perceval's renewed proximity to the king would seem to indicate his eventual return to the collective knighthood, yet he shows little interest in Arthur's nearby camp, "dans une prairie en lisière d'une forêt" (4095).

Chrétien creates a poetic image of Perceval's interior state as he kneels in silent, all-encompassing meditation upon three drops of blood in a snow-covered field, "pas l'affaire d'un rustre," as Gauvain argues on the hero's behalf, but, rather, "chose pleine de courtoisie et de douceur" (4390-1). Perceval's rapt attention resonates particularly in contrast with the disruptive behavior of Sagremor and Keu. Along these lines, and in a reversal of earlier precendents, the author makes an important distinction between wildlife, "un vol groupé d'oies sauvages/ que la neige avait éblouies/ [...]/ car elles fuyaient à grand bruit/ devant un faucon qui fondait/ sur elles d'un seul trait" (4105-11), and "bêtes," unthinking, domesticated beasts, whom Arthur's unfeeling knights, and not the hero increasingly resemble. The knights' disruption of Perceval's deep contemplation of the white field, "là où s'était couchée l'oie,/ et le sang qui apparaissait autour," shows two incompatible views of the knighthood, one sublimely perfected, the other in its deficient stages; the crudeness of Sagremor and Keu underscores the level to which the Arthurian knigthood has fallen from its own standards and further indicates that the paths and destinies of Arthur's knights are not the same as those of the solitary hero. The hero's task, in fact, is to forget the knightood of gratuitous exploits and to remember his Self, which he does at first by maintaning his interior focus, regardless of exterior interference, and secondarily through his inadvertent, because unconscious, repayment of a debt of violence owed to Keu, "Seul un

mauvais cœur oublie/ la honte ou l'injure qu'on lui fait" (2844-5), a sign of his adherence to courtly law (albeit in virtual absentia), rather than to the laws of Christian compassion. In this pivotal scene, a dichotomy emerges between the external, clamorous world of the old knighthood (echoed in the rudeness of courtly society) and the sublime interior world of the solitary knight, in silent contemplation of his essence, transmitted to him through the suggested image of his beloved within the stark landscape.

In his significant translation of "cette semblance" of "le sang et la neige ensemble" into "la ressemblance de la couleur fraîche/ qui est au visage de son amie [...]," Perceval begins to know his interior Self through a prolonged period of self-forgetting, or, to invoke the Greek term, *kenosis*, self emptying: "il s'en oublie lui-même" (4128-36); "Sur les gouttes rêve Perceval,/ tandis que passe l'aube" (4145-6). Here, it is important to stress the relationship between seeing (the image), forgetting (the external or apparent self), and remembering (source, the essential self through the image of the other): *memné*, or *menos*, connotes a force of the spirit occurring within the body. In Indo-European etymology we find associations between *memor* (L), mindful, *mora* (L), a stopping or a pause, *martus* (Gr), a witness, which also takes the sense "witness to God, witness to one's faith" (hence LL *martyr*), and *murnan* (Gmc, OE), to grieve. Classical and medieval semiology stress the "spatial" nature of memory, which provides both distinctions and unions of place and time.

To delve further into the implications of the hero's aesthetic epihany, in which his essence is revealed to him through an elicited memory close to his heart, as Mary Carruthers relates, Plato uses the root *seme*, connoting "'sign' or 'a mark by which something is known'" (24-5). Socrates describes memory (anamnesis, equated with the recollection of one's true knowing) as being like *semeia*, seals made in wax, which underscores "how the eye sees" (as

opposed to "how the ear hears"), and thus encodes or molds (from impression) the world. The memory-image, similar to an impression or an imprinted image within us, causes the re-membering of "what is not present" (18-27). According to both Aristotelians and Platonists, the partial or fragmentary nature of memory, similar to that which causes one to re-member, links recollection with "divine Ideas, which humans have 'forgotten' because of original sin or simply in the act of birth" (29). A similar idea is presented in Augustine's "notion of the 'inner word' or understanding, 'the word which shines within' illuminated by grace," which, with some difficulty, "then must find expression in words 'spoken without' in human tongues conditioned by particular times and places," Perceval's task. Due to its very nature, this "inner truth" and "its human expression in language will be inexact, unequal." A close equivalent to the Hebrew or medieval concept of the "eye of the mind" can be found in Benedict's invocation to the monks: "'Listen, my son, to your master's precepts and incline the ear of your heart,'"[lxvii] which recalls Calogrenant's invocation in *Yvain*: "Prêtez-moi vos cœurs et vos oreilles,/ car une parole qu'on entend se perd/ si elle n'est pas comprise par le cœur" (150-2). Benedict's Rule also uses the visual and spatial cue of Jacob's ladder to aid the mind's "recollection of the stages of humility" (Carruthers 31).

Notably, and by comparison, whereas the hero failed intellectually to decipher signs at the Fisher King's castle, failed to speak the question "au fond de son cœur," in this episode, his "cœur" leads him to see, to decipher, and to re-member what, in the realm of language, remains "indicible." Chrétien thus appears to propose that the language of individual spirituality, unlike the spiritual test of the individual, exists and flourishes in a largely non-verbal domain. To further delve into the implications of this last assertion, the term *apophasis* (Gr.), meaning "negation" or "saying out," emphasizes the mystical connotations of the ineffable; "that which,

without a name can [still] be known."[lxviii] Along these lines, it is important to take into account the hero's choice to exist alongside, e.g. in relationship to, Arthur's knightly court (which we can associate with historical, horizontal processes), while his interior self (which we associate with the soul and with vertical progression), obeying its own unique process of evolution, remains without.

This otherness from society, often associated with melancholia (which I have discussed earlier), (*melas*, black, *choler*, mood), has been depicted by Durer and others as a state of deep contemplation. The melancholic condition, fittingly associated with the season of winter, the direction North, and the northern climate, is also associated with martyrhood, the stigmata, and stigmatization, a condition of suffering that brings the afflicted individual closer to paradise: the sinner is valued proportionately to what he must overcome. The hero's name, Perceval, meaning literally "to pierce the valley," connotes "passing through" or "into," as well as "to break through." At the cognitive level, the term indicates: "to penetrate [the World] with the sight or mind," eliciting simultaneously images of the warrior, the martyr, the mystic, and the intellectual who, by gaining too much knowledge, becomes, or is perceived as melancholic. If Perceval's task is to heal a blighted population, as Chrétien leads us to understand, and as the hero's cousin and the hideous maiden indicate through their accusations, he must avoid the state of the melancholic (his legacy) and transcend the state of the martyr (one who suffers; Gr. witness); as a mystic and a healer in an increasingly chaotic social climate, he is well advised to follow a solitary path. Perceval's brief interaction with Arthur's company indicates that this is the case.

Even after his fight with Keu, which leaves the latter unconscious, gravely wounded at the shoulder, Perceval returns to his deep meditation. By the time of his delivery by Gauvain, who reminds the king of the law that Keu has broken: "vous l'avez vous-même toujours dit/ et

vous nous en avez fait une loi,/ pour un chevalier, de se permettre/ d'en arracher un autre à sa pensée,/ quelle qu'elle soit" (4284-9), the sun has accomplished a near erasure of the image, allowing the hero to return to his "senses:" "Ainsi le chevalier n'était-il plus/ aussi intensément à ses pensées" (4362-3), and to a state where he can, at least temporarily, interact and be received according to newly recognized courtly status. Perceval's episode with Keu, the knight whose lack of courtoisie "proves the rule," amplifies the "fixed" nature of a courtly society stuck in the arrogance of its exterior image: "Arrive Keu qui traverse la grande salle,/ après avoir ôté son manteau. [...] Il n'y avait pas de plus beau chevalier au monde,/ mais sa beauté et sa vaillance/ étaient gâtées par la cruauté de ses moqueries" (2733-41). The author's introduction of Gauvain, who correctly assesses the gist of Perceval's concentration: "'Le chevalier avait en pensée/ quelque perte qu'il avait faite,/ ou bien son amie lui est-elle enlevée,/ il en est au tourment, et il y pensait'" (4292-5), offers what amounts to a final view of the courtly world with its values still intact. As Keu later admits, Gauvain has succeeded, at least temporarily, "là où, nous autres, n'avons pu/ aboutir [...]" (4460-1).

A last word concerning Arthur: Perceval's chosen distance from the king, always a remote figure, with all-too-human limitations to his power, suggests the hero's continued distance from his deceased father and the paternal heritage that, in spite of his knighthood, he has yet to adopt. The hero's contemplation, nevertheless, is reminiscent of the "sad paternity" of kingdoms, soon to be relics, for which the Arthurian golden age becomes an exemplary caveat. Masculine sorrow, as represented in Perceval's father, the Fisher King, and in Arthur, is notably solitary; yet, as the episode of the Fisher King attests, the melancholic male, unlike the hero's mother, immersed in eternal mourning, indicates not only the necessity, but also the hope of a timely and restorative intervention. At times of crisis, these kings are overwhelmingly incapable

of action—by virtue of his role the king is fixed, bound to the laws and location of his kingdom—a condition exacerbated by their crippling masculine wounds (for Arthur, a cuckold in a barren marriage and a father from an incident of incest with his sister, this is true at the level of his emotions); where other knights such as Lancelot have failed, the sacrifices of the scholar and the writer, like the martyr (a last resort), are intended to lead to, even to create, something new, presumably a version, if only fragmentary, of a new world order.

Merchants and Feminine Thwarters

Before I arrive at a concluding analysis of Chrétien's text, let me point to a few additional observations. As we have seen, Perceval's difficulty in apprehending as well as in trusting his inner perceptions presents both an intellectual and spiritual obstacle to the role he is intended to assume. The hero's potent meeting with the hideous damsel, who replicates (albeit by extremes) an earlier meeting with his angry cousin, elicits brief consideration for its epistemological merit. After his renewed reception at Arthur's court, "en chevalier éprouvé/ de haute et belle prouesse" (4526-7), Perceval's encounter with "la jeune fille laide" functions effectively as a trope of dissimulation.[lxix] Her appearance "sur une mule fauve" outside Arthur's castle is emblematic of the untrustworthy nature of all appearances and all contexts at this point in the narrative. Her chastisement of Perceval, similar to his cousin's earlier treatment of him, is yet more emphatic, more intentionally destructive; her predictions broach the eschatological. As Philippe Walter and others have pointed out, this messenger is deserving of skepticism, certainly if we equate her physical appearance—(we speak, after all, of the Middle Ages), "jamais il n'y eut, même en enfer,/ de créature aussi laide à souhait" (4550-2), and beastly attributes, "Ses yeux formaient deux creux,/ pas plus gros que des yeux de rat,/ son nez tenait du singe ou du chat [...]" (4556-

8)—with her interior worth, as a likely indicator of her veracity. As for interpretations equating the hideous maiden's appearance with the hero's unresolved guilt, the interior character of the Hideous Damsel is implicated by association with the deficient courtly society for whom she acts as a caveat. Although a messenger, she belongs to a category of mean-spirited women in the text, such as the ladies at Tintagel, Gauvain's heartless maiden, and Perceval's (understandably) furious cousin, whom we can think of as psychological portraits of disempowered (*mehaigné*), disowned, thus vengeful women. Her prediction, which alludes to the destruction of both feminine and masculine biological and social functions, supports this last point. The hideous maiden's appearance does in fact further test the hero's moral worth at this stage of his journey, particularly in the aftermath of his earlier, grave error. At this juncture, both the hero and the reader are asked to discern the metaphorical and moral plausibility of the speaker.

If the accusations of this damsel can be believed, "Ah! Perceval, la Fortune est chauve/ par-derrière et chevelure par-devant" (4580-3), Perceval's silence has grave implications indeed, not only for him, but for the land and its population. "C'est le tien ce malheur,/ [...]/ le riche roi qui est au tourment/ aurait été tout guéri de sa plaie/ et il tiendrait sa terre en paix,/ dont jamais plus il ne tiendra une parcelle!" (4597-603). Her enumeration of dire repercussions yet-to-come substantiates his cousin's earlier predictions, as well as the pessimistic outlook of Perceval's mother: "Les dames en perdront leurs maris,/ les terres en seront ruinées,/ et les jeunes filles, sans secours,/ resteront orphelines,/ et nombre de chevaliers mourront" (4608-12). The "Gaste" context throughout the text indicates that this less-than-human bearer of bad tidings can be trusted in so much as the general tendency of entropy prevails throughout the text. This said, appearances notwithstanding, her reliability as well as the damsel's ethical worth are reflected in her next destination, the Château Orgueilleux, "ce soir je dois m'y rendre," where the "chevaliers

d'élite" can be found with "des femmes nobles, aussi courtoise que belles," and where "nul ne peut manquer, s'il y va,/ de trouver là joute ou bataille" (4621-8). In fact, her challenge, for all who will listen, to free a damsel from her captivity "dessous Mont Esclair" has the immediate effect of causing a glorified diaspora among Arthur's knights, among whom Gauvain is the first to respond.

Perceval, on the other hand, "lui, dit tout autre chose." Significantly, this relatively new knight is not tempted by the frivolous pursuits so capitivating to veterans such as Gauvain, Guiflet, Kahedin, and others. The hero's choice to take an alternate, more purposeful path, "jusqu'à ce qu'il sache à propos du Graal/ qui l'on sert, et qu'il ait/ trouvé la Lance qui saigne" (4664-7), demonstrates that he has taken his own error, if not also this messenger, seriously and now seeks to make reparations. In the final outcome, his promise proves difficult to keep as the hero has yet to understand the true nature of his quest. The quest itself, as Chrétien alludes, and as *La Mort* further explicates, proves a disappointing and costly distraction, particularly as the fruitless diaspora leads to repeated violence among knights and reflects the manifold dissembling of courtly values. *Perceval*'s hideous maiden both personifies and assists this process.

Vanishing

Our last view of Perceval, before the author relegates the duration of his narrative to the exploits of Gauvain, focuses upon the hero's meeting with a hermit, a holy man, who lives within the forest, "une terre déserte" (6164-5), in keeping with the recurring motif. After his separation from Arthur's company, Perceval has spent five years in aimless wandering, "sans que jamais Dieu lui revînt en mémoire" (6162-3); "Mais pour autant il ne laissai pas d'être/ à la recherche d'actes de chevalerie,/ toujours en quête d'aventures étranges,/ terribles et âpres" (6143-54).

After numerous, inconsequential exploits, the hero meets three knights and ten ladies, "la tête sous le chaperon,/ qui tous allaient à pied/ en rôbes de laine et déchaussés" (6170-2). He has forgotten God, time, and himself, "tant il avait le cœur troublé" (6187-9). The day is Good Friday, of which he is unaware, and, as one of the penitents informs him, "c'est même une faute grave, de porter les armes/ le jour de la mort de Jésus-Christ" (6185-6). Perceval then learns that they have come from "un saint ermite" (6229-30) to whom they have confessed their sins, "ce qu'il y avait de plus urgent/ à faire pour un chrétien/ qui veut revenir à Dieu" (6238-40). Moved to tears by their example, Perceval reenters the forest, "à travers ces bois denses et épais" (6250); "l'eau de ses larmes goutte à goutte/ lui coulait des yeux jusqu'au menton" (6278-9). The hero's tears, a true sign of his remorse, comprise the essential interior transition, or, "connection," the hero needs to accomplish as a developed human being. According to the prescriptions of Christianity, the penitence the hero has failed to accomplish thus far in his search for the grail begins at this juncture.

To return to my initial premise and to Barthe's analogy of the literary text not as a means to a single model but, rather, as an entrance into a network with a thousand entrances, Perceval's final rite of passage leads us to question whether or not his author fully endorses the Christian template. If in his earlier episode of deep meditation Perceval has achieved self-knowing, and through this also a visceral and emotional unification with a larger cosmological notion of Self and infinite Other, (which I believe he has done), his meeting with the holy man, a maternal uncle, accomplishes what has heretofore been denied him: his formal assumption into a family lineage with an established history and a purported destiny. According to the terms of the ritual process, this would indicate an end to the liminal stages of the hero's initiation and the beginning phases of his re-aggregation into society, or, at the very least, into an established social

context.[lxx] But, and Chrétien has painstakingly made this next point, the perfected hero has outgrown the defective society that now comprises Arthur's court. The function of his hermit uncle is not to prepare his nephew for courtly life; rather, the holy man presides over Perceval's acquisition of a textual context within the established domains of royal lineage and Christian spirituality. The hero's penitence establishes his narrative future, with the purpose of also correcting his legacy. In order to accomplish this, a recontextualization of earlier precedents must occur.

Perceval's confession to his uncle adopts and then alters a familiar motif of forest encounters between lost heroes and holy men by imbuing the episode with a recognizably Christian scheme. The hermit, normally a mediator between the *sauvage* and civilization, is, quite noticeably, a member of an established Christian order. For the purposes of our argument, a comparison with a familiar template is in order. To return once again to the example of *Yvain*, this last text's more primitive hermit retreats to his maisonette and lives on bread "grossier" et "dur." *Perceval*'s holy man, on the contrary, begins to look almost urban ("l'église" is nearby). In completion of the full arc of his journey, Yvain's encounter in the forest prefaces his return to society after a bout of madness and regressive savagery. Perceval's meeting with his hermit uncle eludes this outcome, fulfilling another purpose, i.e. to establish the hero's full identity and the extent of his inherited responsibility with respect to his family lineage. The primary cause of his sins, Perceval learns, is filial disloyalty by abandonment of his mother, "car elle tomba évanouie au sol,/ au bout du pont, devant la porte,/ c'est ce chagrin qui l'a tuée" (6322-4); this is followed by punishment: "Le péché te trancha la langue" (6335) and the series of ensuing failures we have already discussed.

We can scarcely ignore the reference to castration in this last declaration, particularly as it echoes the similar injuries of Perceval's father and the Fisher King; nor can we overlook the medieval association of cultural and environmental infirmity, i.e., sterility, with the sin of incest, of which silence is a primary symptom. This last revelation becomes more poignant when Perceval learns that the father of the Fisher King, "qui se fait servir avec le graal [...] d'une simple hostie [qui] soutient et fortifie sa vie" (6336-50), is the brother of both his mother and his uncle. Without belaboring the issue, the influence of Perceval's mother is key: having remained widowed, and having excessively guarded her son from both the perils and the glories of his destiny, as we have seen, she has effectively involved her son in an (emotionally) incestuous relationship from which he had no choice but to escape. Incest recurs in the Arthurian legend both as a royal injury and as a royal vice.

The tabu appears fleetingly elsewhere in the text, in episodes concerning Gauvain. Charles Méla has evoked the Œdipal tradition in reference to Gauvain's accusation by Guinganbrésil of the murder of a father and the knight's subsequent captivity among "des dames de grand âge/ qui n'ont plus de maris ni seigneurs" (7490-1) at the "Château des merveilles." In a more satirical vein, Gauvain's mother, wife of Lot, not recognizing her son, suggests that Gauvain and his young sister would make an excellent couple. For Perceval, the "murder" of his mother is, in its own regrettable way, a prerequisite to his inheritance of the "drama" of his father. His Christian penitence for this inescapably human crime amounts to a social prescription, rather than a balm.

According to the prescriptions of his uncle, Perceval completes his Christian education within a fairly predictable scheme: "Crois en Dieu, aime Dieu, adore Dieu;" "avec l'honneur, tu auras le paradis." One of his requirements is to share "comme pénitence, le même repas que le

mien" (6403), a simple, vegetarian meal. "Il n'y avait là que de menues herbes,/ cerfeuil, laitues et cresson,/ du millet, du pain d'orge et d'avoine,/ et l'eau d'une froide source./ Son cheval eut de la paille/ et un plein boisseau d'orge./ Ainsi Perceval se rappela/ que Dieu reçut au Vendredi/ la mort et qu'il fut crucifié" (6423-31). The meal is significant for its ascetic connotations, which, unlike *Yvain*'s example, suggests renunciation of flesh, which we may also link with the renunciation of violence. Perceval is in need of spiritual resuscitation, which includes his social familiarization; Yvain is in need of complete social reassimilation. The beast-like behavior of the latter is symbolized by his consumption of raw meat, "il tue les bêtes sauvages et mange la venaison crue" (Frappier, "La Folie d'Yvain" 17); likewise, his recovery and reintegration into civilized society is prefaced by his consumption of cooked meat. The relationship between the hermit and the errant knight establishes a cultural enclave within the natural world. Human memory is replaced, temporarily, by "le primesaut et la répétivité de l'existence sauvage" (Le Goff 163).[lxxi] Thus, the mad hunter becomes a mediator between the asymmetric poles of savagery and courtly culture.[lxxii]

Whereas, in Yvain's case, the hero's savage nature must be transcended so that he may become civilized, Perceval must transcend his "original" sin in order to be saved, a rather unsatisfying equation, given the paradox of the hero's filial quandary. His ultimate destiny remains uncertain, nevertheless. Once again, this time in a clearly contextualized rewriting of the hero's paradigm at the castle of the Fisher King, Perceval is counseled against speaking, forbidden in fact to speak the prayer whispered to him by his uncle containing "bien des noms de Notre Seigneur," "sauf au plus grand péril" (6409-15). This "grand péril" fails to arise before the text abandons his story, yet, we have reason to believe, or to imagine, that, given the chance, the hero will allow his intuition to respond accordingly, justified, and justifiably as the situation

demands. As this last view of Perceval also leads us to believe, his destiny is likely to unfold somewhere within the natural (if degraded) forest, with Christian civilization at its borders. Christian miracles may still touch this hero; he may, in fact, be capable of performing them. The last extravagant vestiges of the wondrous, on the other hand, much like his gratuitous adoption of mercantile thinking, are relegated to Gauvain.

To offer a final, pertinent examination of Gauvain's function in the text as a negative model, this last hero's reputation as the king's nephew and one of Arthur's worthiest knights notwithstanding, Gauvain's arrival at Tintagel, nevertheless elicits the coy, unflattering speculation of the castle's women concerning his identity: "'C'est un marchand! N'allez pas dire/ qu'il doit avoir en tête de faire le tournoi!" (4988-9). "Mais non! C'est un changeur! dit la quatrième./ [...] Sans mentir, vous pouvez m'en croire,/ c'est de largent et de la vaisselle/ qu'il y a dans ces sacs et dans ces malles" (4991-7). As I mentioned earlier, the term "marchand" suggests connotations which can be construed as negative, from the handling of money to contact with blood, dirt, and hides, perceived as impure or 'polluted' by the general public. From the perspective of social class, the terms 'marchand' and 'changeur' denigrate the nobility and status of knighthood, which, at its best, can be likened to Godliness, "la chevalerie celestielle" (Girbea). These pejorative terms suggest "common," even a suspect state of humanity: the "time of merchants" replaces "biblical time" (Gurevich 34). The equation of "le plus beau chevalier de la terre" with "un changeur!" (5004-6) further slanders Gauvain, by Christian medieval standards, in which we can recognize anti-semitic connotations. At the same time, Chrétien hardly sympathizes with these mockers whom he represents as defective models of courtly society. For his part Gauvain, his honor offended, proves, rather than disproves, his compliance

with the mercantile associations. When the "seigneur de la lande" offers him food and horses for his long journey across "des terres bien pauvres," "Monseigneur Guavain répond/ qu'il n'a aucun besoin d'en prendre,/ car, si on peut en trouver à vendre,/ il aura à suffisance des vivres/ et un bon gîte, où qu'il aille,/ ainsi que tout ce dont il aura besoin" (5252-7). Gauvain's decline of the seigneur's offer contradicts the generosity and mutual reciprocity we associate with courtly society. In addition, he suggests that courteous hospitality and generosity have become unnecessary when things can be bought and sold.

This situation is not unique as Gauvain's next destination, a castle "qui se tenait sur un bras de mer," is also a site of commerce, merchandise and exchange, "de toutes sortes de marchandises." We encounter a similar fear of merchants, even more explicitly expressed by the penitents Perceval meets in the forest on Good Friday: "C'est aujourd'hui que fut pendu en croix/ Celui qui fut vendu pour trente deniers" (6192-6). And, to complete the circle of guilt by association: "Les juifs menteurs, pleins d'envie,/ qu'on devrait tuer comme des chiens,/ ont fait leur malheur et notre grand bonheur,/ quand ils Le levèrent en croix" (6218-21). The anti-semitic theme is further reflected in Gauvain's accusation of "trahison" by Guinganbrésil, for which the former is sentenced to his own: "quête de la Lance dont le fer/ saigne toujours" (6038-41), a preview of the senseless and endless (unless by death) diasporal theme adopted by the author of *La Mort le Roi Arthur*. In Chrétien's opus, Gauvain is designated to return with the spear within a year to avoid imprisonment and to prove his innocence in a combat with Guinganbrésil. His amorous and chivalric distractions, however, indicate that the knight's true interests reside elsewhere.

As for the narrative function of the above aspersions concerning Gauvain's character, as I have earlier stated, this accomplished "lesser" hero appears here as elsewhere in Chrétien's

œuvre as a foil, offsetting the virtues of the author's main character. In *Yvain*, Gauvain acts as a provocateur, tempting the hero away from his duty to Laudine, hence away from his moral and social restoration: "Comment? 'Serez-vous donc de ceux/ [...] qui valent moins à cause de leurs femmes? Par sainte Marie, honte à/ celui qui se marie pour déchoir" (2484-8). In this last example, Gauvain, an advocate for the status quo, argues for the safer course of returning to what one knows rather than risking challenges that may lead to change. His task in *Perceval* is to argue, by ambivalent example, the benefits and the detriments, respectively, between positive and negative choices, positive and negative directions in life: "si je ne compte pas parmi les meilleurs,/ je ne pense pas non plus être des pires" (8047-8).

In the final analysis, episodes with Gauvain seem to point to a kind of social and symbolic disorder taking place, wherein codes of behavior, dress, and interpretation are strangely out of kilter. In keeping with his ambivalent character, Gauvain notices this but takes no action either way. On his route, he sees "un petit palefroi de race nordique./ Il s'en est émerveillé,/ car des armes et un palefroi n'ont rien de commun/ et ne vont pas ensemble, à son avis" (6450-4). Similarly, and in spite of his unwavering courteous example, the knights he encounters respond to him with hostility, even treacherousness (L'orgueilleux de la lande) and damsels, with few exceptions, hardly improve upon their male counterparts.

Gauvain's first encounter with the heartless damsel, "dans un petit pré, sous un orme" (6586), is echoed by the peculiar behavior of those around her, all of which points to a general pettiness unworthy of the most polite knight who appears unable to distinguish between a worthy and a frivolous action. Just as this hero's attempts at chivalry are interpreted as "le signe d'un grand orgueil" (6696-7), his sense of honor, his "orgueuil," make him "blind" to the poor quality of his company: "et, si je ne le lui ramenais,/ que serai-je venu chercher ici?/ J'aurais en toutes

terres la honte/ d'être un chevalier failli, coupable d'avoir cédé sur son honneur" (6708-11). Gauvain, like his novice counterpart, is afflicted with socio-epistemological grey areas evocative of Matthew 7:6 (pearls before swine). As the cruelty of courtly maidens fails to compute in his mind, he remains "confus," easily seduced, "Elle avait laissé son manteau/ et sa guimpe tomber à terre,/ afin que l'on peut voir/ librement son visage et son corps" (6742-5), and otherwise badly used.

A last, undeveloped motif concerning Gauvain, fleetingly apparent in episodes of the *Lancelot* cycle, is his role as a healer, a "feminized" version (the role is normally relegated to female *fées*) of his more frequent jurisprudential persona as a mediator (between Lancelot and Guenièvre). In an effort to come to the aid of a damsel by curing her moribund lover, the knight demonstrates his aptitude, as well as his willingness for the task: "monseigneur Gauvain savait/ mieux que personne guérir une blessure./ Il aperçoit dans une haie une herbe/ très efficace pour calmer la douleur/ d'une blessure, et il va la cueillir" (6822-32).[lxxiii] In spite of his good intentions, the healed knight takes Gauvain's horse and gallops off, insulting the one who has helped him. In terms of the scope of Chrétien's text, this is a minor incident, yet notable as one of few examples of human nurturing. In a similar vein, Gauvain's obsession with the heartless damsel amounts to a misguided attempt on his part to give aid to one who, as she later confesses, abuses as a result of her own abuse. From an ecological perspective, in spite of its afflictions, nature has not entirely lost its healing potential: "elle [l'herbe] a une si grande vertu/ que si on la plaçait sur l'écorce/ d'un arbre atteint de maladie,/ mais non entièrement desséché,/ la racine reprendrait/ et l'arbre saurait encore/ se couvrir de feuilles et de fleurs" (6859-65). Humanity, on the other hand, is certifiably "infirme."

What we can at least infer from Gauvain's futile attempts at aiding the unaidable is that, although the "baume curatif" exists, in nature and within the defective chivalric order, and herein lies the fundamental cultural impasse, humanity has unlearned the value of the good, and, like its would-be-healers, is "lente à comprendre" (Frappier 33) and quick to adopt the wrong advice. Neither Gauvain nor Perceval returns to Arthur's court, both having passed into their respective versions of "l'autre monde," Gauvain as a chivlaric relic. Perceval's ambiguous fate insists upon the moral dilemma presented by the realized Self with respect to the trends of society. As a would-be-saint, he vanishes into a state of existence we can liken to the process of *kenosis*, a self-emptying, which, like the *zimzum* (*tsimtzum*) of the Kabalistic tradition, tells us that, in order to (re)create the universe, God has to withdraw.

[i] This lack of temporal specicifity is likely a reflection of the period's inconstant view of units of time, which could vary according to the season of the year. See Gurevich, "Ideas of Space and Time in the Middle Ages," *Categories of Medieval Culture*.
[ii] For further elaboration upon this last point, see this chapter's section: "Wasteland, Moral Labyrinth, and Sublime Solitude" 36.
[iii] According to Aristotle's concept of the "unmoved mover," the hero's potential, recognized by a force outside himself, moves him towards the realization of that potential, thus making it a reality.
[iv] *Ésthétique et Théorie du Roman*. Translated from Russian by Daria Olivier. Paris: Gallimard, 1978. Note: Chrétien's use of Gauvain as a foil for the evolution of his primary character is, in many respects, unique to this novel and, although consistent with the widely accepted fundamental characteristics attributed to the beloved nephew of Arthur, is not typical of other, more favorably nuanced portrayals of this lesser knight, in such works as the *Lancelot en Prose* and *La Mort le Roi Artur*, for example.
[v] Wolfram's *Parsifal* and the *Percevalus* complete the legend with the hero's return to society as a Christian king.
[vi] See Bertrand Westphal's explanation: *Geocriticism* 2.
[vii] Bakhtin provides the following explanation: "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. [. . .] What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature: we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture" (184). See "The Dialogic Imagination." *The Bakhtin Reader*.
[viii] A defining feature of the 'tragic' hero of the pastoral genre is his attachment to social and aesthetic ideals and, thus, his inability to adapt to changes. See Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*.
[ix] "Aesthetic Visualizing of Time/Space: the Chronotope." See Morris 181.
[x] Morris 185.
[xi] See D. Delcourt, *L'Ethique du Changement*: "M. Bakhtine en effet ne réussit à évaluer le roman du Moyen Age qu'à partir d'un ensemble de valeurs romantiques dans lesquelles le devenir de l'homme est censé correspondre à la découverte graduelle de sa personalité entendue comme unique et paticulière" (7).
[xii] Delcourt 9.
[xiii] Jean Frappier argues that, had Chrétien lived, he would have completed his novel according to the model adopted by Wolfram (*Le Roman Breton*). Philippe Walter, on the other hand, believes that Chrétien intended to leave the novel as we presently find it (*Le Pêcheur et le Graal*).
[xiv] "Dans les nuits de mai, quand tant de portes sont fermées, [. . .]. Il suffira de pousser si doucement! [. . .] Alors un destin se dessine." Bachelard, "Dialectique du Dehors et du Dedans," *Poétique* 200.
[xv] "L'Immensité Intime VI" 183.
[xvi] ". . . la miniature sait emmaganiser de la grandeur. Elle est *vaste* à sa façon" (195).
[xvii] "Pourquoi ne pas sentir que dans la porte est incarnée un petit dieu de seuil. Faut-il aller jusqu'à un lointain passé, un passé qui n'est pas le nôtre, pour sacraliser le seuil" (200).
[xviii] See Ken Hiltner, *What is Pastoral?* 28.

[xix] "L'histoire du désert, ici et là, jadis et naguère, a toujours été faite de réalités , matérielles et spirituelles entremêlées, d'un va-et-vient constant entre le géographique et le symbolique, l'imaginaire et l'économique, le social et l'idéologique" (65).
[xx] See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."
[xxi] H. Bloch refers to the story as an "upside-down Bildungsroman," in which "learning is essentially a process of unlearning – an undoing of the obfuscating signs of the mother" (204). *Etymologies and Geneologies*: *A literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983, in D. Delcourt 121.
[xxii] Bachelard, note 3, *Poetics* (English translation) 185.
[xxiii] See P. Walter ; also J. Frappier, *Le Roman Breton*.
[xxiv] See D. Delcourt, "Avancer 'En Esprit' ou Le Changement Dans *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*," *L'éthique du Changement* 115.
[xxv] This image appears in the translation from the Old French: "Par armes furent morts endui,/ Don j'ai au cuer dol et annui/ Aüe puis qu'il furent mort" 447-9.
[xxvi] *Biography of Gontron, King of Burgundy*, Le Goff, *L'Imaginaire Médiéval* 640.
[xxvii] "les travailleurs qui, par la cueillette, le bois, le charbon, le miel et la *glandée* des porcs, en ont fait un territoire supplémentaire de l'activité économique" (Le Goff 66).
[xxviii] "La sacralité doit être cherchée dans la forêt et au désert. Le roi – comme le lion – y est chez lui. 'La forêt est terre royale non seulement par les ressources qu'elle fournit mais plus encore peut-être parce qu'elle est un 'désert'" (72).
[xxix] *Le lis de Mer*, 1956 (57), in Bachelard, *Poétique*, note 2: 170.
[xxx] Medieval "Man's flesh was of the earth, his blood of water, his breath of air and his warmth of fire. Each part of the human body corresponded to a part of the universe [...]" (Gurevich 57).
[xxxi] "On a aussi souligné les liens étroits entre le désert, l'océan, la mort, le *shéol*, séjour quasi infernal des morts" (Le Goff 61).
[xxxii] Yvain's guilt, symbolized by the "blessures [qui] saignent" and kept from Laudine and her court by his temporary invisibility, echo the "sin" associated with Perceval's inability to interpret the context at the castle of the Fisher King, and his inability to speak. See Frappier, *Le Roman Breton*.
[xxxiii] "La décision qu'il prend aussitôt de quitter sa mère pour aller se faire 'faire chevalier' par le roi Arthur est bien, en effet, ouverture sur l'avenir: Perceval qui, chez la Veuve Dame, était figé dans un présent éternel s'inscrit, à ce moment-là, dans le temps" (Delcourt, *L'éthique* 155).
[xxxiv] Bachelard 184-6. I've consulted Maria Jolas' translation (1964) from the same chapters.
[xxxv] Penelope Doob stresses, "not all moral mazes are completely evil any more than all visual mazes embody only admirable labyrinthine artistry" (146).
[xxxvi] This particular manifestation of the iconography designates the labyrinth as a topos of moral quandary with phoenix-like attributes; the test is paradigm and continually recreates itself.
[xxxvii] Eric Rohmer's 1979 film, *Perceval*, provides an interesting, if also a highly stylized interpretation of all things "nature," which he associates with a child-like, story-book consciousness, and opposes to the adult, Christian world of human suffering.
[xxxviii] See P. Walter.
[xxxix] In *Purgatory* XVI, Dante likens mortal vision to "swaddling bands" that only "death unwinds." (From Mandelbaum's translation, 1982.)
[xl] "[Ils] évitent la compagnie, aiment les lieux solitaires et errent sans savoir où ils vont [...]" (Walter 145).

[xli] Black bile, like wine, was thought to influence the dispostion. “Black bile can therefore become very hot and very cold [...] .” Aristotle, *Problem XXX,* 1; in Panofsky 22-3.
[xlii] English translation, M. Jolas, *Poetics*, 1994.
[xliii] Both Frappier and Weinraub agree that the number four has importance as Chrétien employs it throughout the scene. According to the Passover practice, “*Four* questions must be asked by the youngest present, and *four* cups of wine must be imbibed during the course of the banquet.” This accords with the *four* expressions of the Redemption, in Exodus 6:6-7 (Weinraub 55).
[xliv] See “Préface to Part One” of this dissertation.
[xlv] Opposing M. Micha’s assertion that “’le ciboire-calice ne peut exister que par la lance qui a percé le flanc de Jésus et fait ruisseler le sang du Crucifié’” (note 3: 89), Frappier argues that “le graal du Conte du Graal n’est ni un ciboire ni un calice ni un ciboire-calice; sa forme, il convient de le rappeler, est celle d’un plat, et d’un plat large et creux, conformément à la définition bien connue qu’a donnée Héliand: Gradalis autem sive Gradale gallice dicitur scutella lata et aliquantulum profunda [. . .]” (*Le Roman Breton: Perceval* 89).
[xlvi] Frappier adds: “scène décrite par Chrétien, mais il me paraît vain d’y chercher et faux d’y trouver une correspondance précise avec une liturgie **réelle** [my highlighting]. [. . .] Quant à la lance, qui passe d’abord, seule, nettement détachée du cortège lui-même du Graal [. . .], elle n’a evidemment aucun rapport avec un cérémonial de cour, mais ce n’est pas une raison suffisante pour qu’elle soit purement et simplement la lance de la Passion [. . .]” (88-9; 91-2).
[xlvii] Frappier uses the terms “rituelle,” “païenne,” and “naturaliste” (92).
[xlviii] The critic cites James Frazer’s influential *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston’s *The Legend of Sir Perceval*, vol. II (1909), also *From Ritual Romance* (1920).
[xlix] Philippe Walter traces the besiegers and the result of their siege to the “monstre tricéphale [. . .], selon la conception mythique traditionnelle, le dieu céleste qui retient les eaux, c’est à dire celui qui menace la terre de sécheresse et de famine. La disette infligée par Clamadieu et son armée au château de Beaurepaire peut donc apparaître comme la forme littérarisée d’un mythe du désastre cosmique” (64).
[l] J. Weston arrives at this conclusion; see Walter.
[li] See D. Delcourt, “La Vérité dans La Mort le Roi Artu. Couverture, Détours, et Labyrinthe,” *Medioevo Romanzo* 18.
[lii] The Greek “*idiotis*” connotes one who blindly abdicates personal wellbeing to public consensus, which coincides with following directions too closely.
[liii] P. Walter qualifies his terms as follows: “Selon le dictionnaire, la blésité est un ‘vice de prononciation qui consiste à substituer une consonne faible à une plus forte [. . .].’ A ce substantif correspond le verbe *bléser* ‘parler avec une espèce de grasseyement, avec le défaut qu’on appelle blésité” (117-8).
[liv] From *Le Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Latine*, Ernout and Meillet, in Walter 118.
[lv] Wolfram von Eschenbach adopts a similar motif in *Parsifal*. See also Frappier 95.
[lvi] J. Frappier’s assessment supports this assertion (95).
[lvii] In Celtic mythology, the spear, an otherwordly talisman, both a royal and a divine arm, is interchangeably “lance de feu [. . .] et lance rouge de sang, [. . .] une arme terrible de vengeance et de destruction. [. . .] L’association de la lance et du sang apparaît ainsi comme l’un des traits caractéristiques de la mythologie celtique” (Frappier 97). Frappier notes that Chrétien modifies the magical and barbaric functions of the Celtic lance while maintaining the potential for both.

[lviii] "Ce sang du fer est l'analogue mythique et poétique de la rouille. Or, la rouille n'est pas seulement une tare du fer, c'est aussi un fléau s'abattant sur les récoltes. La malédiction d'une terre gaste lui est, alors, directement associée" (p. 167). According to Wolfram's interpretation in *Parsifal*, in which both the spear *and* the king bleed, "La lance *est* le roi; le roi *est* la lance" (Walter 168). Perceval's visit to the roi pêcheur, "en pleine période de la lune rousse," coincides with the Roman god Quirinus, "chargé d'exorciser la rouille, à la fin du mois d'avril," as well as with the medieval Saint Quirin, who healed from scrofula, a form of tuberculosis, and whose commemoration date falls between April 30 and the 1st of May. See also Bachelard, *La Terre et les Rêveries de la Volonté* 36 and 134.

[lix] I would add here, after our discussion of Weinraub, that Perceval's penitent meal, which does involve bitter herbs, also contains a rustic bread made of barley, which does not indicate unleavened bread.

[lx] J. Frappier 101. From *La Légende Arthurienne et le Graal* 275-6.

[lxi] J. Jolivet, *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard* (Paris: Vrin, 1969), 76. In D. Delcourt, *L'Éthique* 128.

[lxii] Boccaccio perfects the trope of the "atteggiamento mercantile" in *The Decameron*.

[lxiii] The proposition that Chrétien had planned two separate romances, as opposed to one, before his death, with Perceval and Gauvain as the respective heroes, has been largely discounted. See Frappier: *Le Roman Breton*.

[lxiv] See V. Turner, *The Ritual Process* 106.

[lxv] Classical Chinese thinking designates the three months of Fall as "the period of tranquility of one's conduct" in which "Soul and spirit should be gathered together in order to make the breath of Fall tranquil [...]; this is the method for the protection of one's harvest" (*Nei Ching* 102-3).

[lxvi] A time of *emphasis*, associated with extreme cold and the black sea, the human complexion "without life;" "All things in creation live shut in and (the crop) is stored away" (*N.C*. 177).

[lxvii] Benedict's Rule: "'Ausculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui.'"

[lxviii] According to the 6th century *Dao de Jing*, the ineffable is articulated thus.

[lxix] Weinraub mentions Frappier's theory, which the latter bases upon Celtic origins that would allow us to associate the female Grail Bearer with feminine figures of the Other World, that "the loathly damsel is none other than the Grail Bearer at the Fisher King's castle" (36). Although I would not discount this possibility, my inclination is emphasize the role of the loathsome maiden as representative of tensions between traditional values and those imposed by the multiple influences of modernization.

[lxx] "Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or 'transition' are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation [. . .] (reaggregation or reincororation), [whereby] the passage is consummated." See V. Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," *The Ritual Process* 94-5.

[lxxi] Le Goff, "Lévi-Strauss en Broceliande" 163.

[lxxii] My paraphrasing of Le Goff.

[lxxiii] Condensed in translation from Old French.

Two

Baring Landscape: Humanity and Nature at the Edges of Love and Death in the Arthurian Cycle

Both Perceval and Lancelot induce us to ponder the tentative role of the culture shaper on the outskirts of medieval society, itself verging between two cultures: the first, of the imagination; the second, a dim vision of a new reality coming into being. Whereas, in 13th-century interpretations of the Arthurian legend that favor the Christian ethos, Perceval returns from obscurity to restore a wayward civilization and to take his place at its head (Wolfram's *Parsifal*), Lancelot, "le meilleur chevalier du monde," "la fleur de tous les hommes," is deemed unworthy of the quest in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, having assumed the lackluster robes of a penitent sinner in *La Mort le Roi Arthur*. To date, much of criticism concerning the ambivalent character and the dramatic trajectory of this latter hero has focused upon the dichotomy between the Christian and courtly values by which he is judged. Very simply stated, by courtly standards, Lancelot gives us much to admire; by Christian standards, he shows us the reverberating effects of error. Many of his authors and critics, more concerned with Christian morality than with human psychology, have long held this hero (and the sin of lust) responsible for the demise of the Arthurian kingdom. Interestingly enough, neither Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (late 12th-century), nor *La Mort le Roi Arthur* (13th-century) subscribe entirely to this formula. In yet another 13th-century example, the (multiple) authors of the *Lancelot en Prose* (also *Lancelot du Lac*) indulge the hero's amorous indiscretion as something of a selling point for readers. As a recurring theme of medieval romance, above and beyond its capacity to incite a moral debate, the adulterous affair both addresses and pacifies anxieties surrounding kingship and lineage. Moreover, although our three primary texts represent, as much as they emerge from, a male

perspective, vacillating views of the feminine and of gender roles inform much of the diegesis at hand.

The 12th- and 13th-century romances that concern us do not stop at the representation of two competing systems of value. They also depict and expand upon multifarious concerns having to do with individual identity and with how an emerging culture defines itself and its processes of transition. In this chapter and the chapter that follows, my reading of Chrétien and of the 13th-century prose texts just mentioned is based in a sociological approach, which includes structural elements such as kinship, gender roles and medieval views of otherness. From an environmental perspective, I consider transitional features of both symbolic and real spaces: the prevalence of sparseness in formerly dense wooded spaces, for example, the introduction of the collective observer in places of passage, and the implements and structures of violence that dominate the late prose texts. Whereas a developmental discourse regarding courtly love vs. Christianity can be observed between the 12th- and 13th-centuries, multiple concerns having to do with social and environmental stability emerge as well. This chapter will concentrate upon Lancelot's diametrical features as both a courtly and an oppositional hero, primarily in Chrétien's text, with close attention to the spaces relevant to his progression. The following chapter will elaborate upon the topics of adultery, alterity, and deviation as they relate to our three primary texts, to gender identity and power relations in the late Middle Ages, and to the conflicted worldviews that dominate the two 13th-century prose narratives. My focus upon the multiple dimensions of Lancelot does not aim to take a position on one side or the other of the Christian point of view. My aim, rather, is to represent equally prevalent, although less commonly discussed, modes of viewing the contradictory and, indeed, the pervasively enigmatic roles of this hero in the context of his role as a culture shaper and as a mediator between 'cultures of mind'.

To clarify what we intend by 'cultures of mind', we return to our premise that, whereas the medieval author may draw from the 'real' world around him, he does not attempt to represent objective 'reality' per se; he operates, rather, within the terrain of 'potentiality' offered by the fictional. Concerning the interpretive criteria involved herein, anthropologist Victor Turner makes the important distinction between the 'potentiality' of whole beings in relationship to one another—the relationship is existential as opposed to cognitive—and the potentiality of systems of thinking about the human being in relationship to culture, to cultural hierarchies, and to nature. For our purposes, *potentiality* is the operative concept. In the first instance, 'relationship' is primary, capable of generating heretofore uncharted potential, "generative of symbols and metaphors and comparisons" (127-8). A secondary 'relationship' has to do with epistemological and lingusitic orientation to things perceived as fixed but that must necessarily change over time. More specific to the literary analysis of this chapter, Henri Bergson has gleaned in great works of art and in prophetic writing the emergence of an 'open morality', an expression of what he called the *élan vital*, or evolutionary 'life force'. This suggests that the movement of a culture is not excluded from the evolving meaning of its artifacts, however much these artifacts may appear to represent a given set of standards and the discourses of a particular period. As we have seen in the example of *Perceval*, the jester, the novice, the fool, are all versions of anti-structural elements whose purpose is to move forward, albeit by disturbance, a culture's *fixed* perceptions of itself. What then are we to make of the lover, the consummate knight, hero par-excellence, who acquires a similar function? Chrétien, for instance, saw the potential for innovation as much as for ridicule in the excesses of his love-besotted hero. Lancelot's role as a shaper of culture is supported by his participation in its moral and material substances; he neither conforms to nor

withdraws entirely from the society he serves. In his movements as well as in his epistemology, we find him at its edges.

Existing at the edges of society implies more than a status of (untouchable) difference in relationship to a dominant standard; it often involves both subversive and overt forms of agency. Turner uses the term "edgemen" to refer to the marginal, as well as the generative role of the artist and the prophet, culture shapers, "who strive with passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or in imagination" (128). As we delve into the etymological implications of the term, particularly as it applies to the hero on the outskirts or at the *edges* of society, Middle English gives us *eg*, or *egge*, which is derived from the Old English, *ecg*, akin to the Old Frisian *egg*, and Old Saxon *eggia*; from the Latin *aciès*, we arrive at 'edge', and *àcer*, 'sharp'; also, the Greek *akè*, 'a point', and *oxus*, 'sharp', and Sanskrit *as'ri*, 'edge'; the French 'bord', 'tranche', and 'tranchant' further suggest the association between physical, cultural, and intellectual border crossing, at the 'edges of', thereof, 'sharp' or 'cutting': to pierce, to sever, to disrupt (at one's own risk) cultural standards or cultural meaning. As Turner uses the term, and as its etymological origins indicate, edgemen invariably test the structures and related viewpoints upon which most societies are constructed. Such a function, however, is less oppositional than relational. Relationship, which is vital, implies mutual dialogue (based upon an agreement of terms), play, and acquiescence. Edgemen, or, for our purposes, controversial figures who mediate between current and 'potential' paradigms, thereby, cannot perform their roles within an immutable system. This is why, in a medieval context, such incipient heroes as Perceval, whose individual evolution is intended to evolve society beyond its limited structures, tend either to disappear or to fall victim to a form of textual cannibalization, in which the restorative potential

of the hero is nullified and an ambivalent anti-hero emerges in his place, as appears to be the case with Lancelot. These ambivalent heroes give us glimpses of "unused evolutionary potential" which has yet to be, (and, perhaps, is never meant to be) "externalized in a fixed structure" (128). That is, at least, until the heroes and prophets can be readjusted to fit the structures through which they *can* succeed, which is another way of saying: so that the underlying systemic *status* remains *quo*; *so that nothing actually changes*, culturally speaking.

In the 14th-century *La Queste del Saint Graal*, Galahad's success, where his father, Lancelot, has failed, is due, in large part, to this former knight's adherence to a Christian moral structure that remains intact throughout the text. But, we might ask, does Galahad's faultless character represent a culture's sincere attempt at self-examination? Or, conversely, does a self-identified Christian culture appear to be erasing its own tracks by setting things right, i.e. by eliminating its mediators (perceived as detractors), once and for all? As an evolutionary being and a cultural indicator, the father (Lancelot), unlike the son (Galahad), remains enigmatic from both Christian and courtly perspectives. Lancelot's cryptic identity begs multiple systems of interpretation, 'outside' the norm, to which the concept of an 'open morality' might be applied. Concomitant with this theme, Filmmaker Robert Bresson saw in the Arthurian texts many fragmented truths, rather than one moral truth. Unlike the *Queste* and Wolfram's *Perceval*, for example, the open structures of the late medieval texts I discuss in this and the following chapters elicit an ongoing conversation with both a future and a past, each resistant to yielding meaning, each with the potential of conveying meaning over time.[i] Both the moral and cultural outlooks of readers are implicated in this task. Values of courtly love become blurred, not only by virtue of Christian influence, but as contexts shift from the human-centered courtly world to more socially ambiguous open terrain—places of solitude and unexpected meetings—and,

finally, to the marred natural spaces where conflicts between men and other men (warring clans), men and the environment, and Nature with humanity take place. Christian and Celtic modes of thought alike associate moral and environmental 'wrongdoing' with environmental degradation and cosmological retribution. As I have discussed previously, a host of factors contributes to the demise of Arthur's kingdom, violence between clans and questions of legitimacy and incest, to name a few of the most significant. In the following section, I will develop Lancelot's pivotal role in the Arthurian narrative and as a reflection of the 12th- and 13th-century discourses he serves.

Who is Lancelot? (And *Why* is He Important?)

Lancelot, much like Perceval, is something of an anomaly among medieval heroes. Although he is an outsider in many ways, his outsider status exists in (particularly triangular) relationship to others whose combined influence and personal needs contribute to the formation and the identity of this knight. Unlike Perceval, whose uniqueness is a product of his unformed intellect, Lancelot is an individualist by nature, an outsider, the quintessential knight, a model of chivalric excellence, a sinner (according to Christian values), a passionate lover (in accordance with courtly values), an introspective, an emotionally volatile and fragile individual. Again, unlike Perceval, Lancelot enters the Arthurian domain equipped with social and linguistic literacy, well prepared in the arts of chivalry. This hero remains somewhat awkward nevertheless, extraneous as an exemplary model and as a 'foreigner' whose idenity remains unknown to Arthur's collective knighthood. There is always something otherworldly about him; he is *for* the court, at least temporarily, but not *of* it. Like Perceval, Lancelot is raised in relative isolation from the

daily life and concerns of courtly society; he too is the son of nobility, separated by violence from both of his parents at an early age.

Maternal influence, a persistent subtext of the hero's identity formation, and one of three important triangular relationships (Hélène, Ninienne, Lancelot; Arthur, Guenièvre, Lancelot; Galehaut, Galahad, Lancelot), is fundamental to the evolution of 12th-13th-century treatments of Lancelot. Ninienne and Hélène represent two, at times diametrically opposed, images of the medieval mother, one fit, the other a profane rendering of aristocratic deficiency. In this last incarnation, the careless mother, a shadow of the gentle, nurturing Madonna, either by grief or lack of interest, abandons or rejects her babe, leaving him to the uncertainties of fosterage, monastic life, and warfare (Parson, Wheeler, "Introduction"). This "other" mother, a mere "incubator," according to patriarchal dictates of the time, may have political and economic interest in the future of her children, but demonstrates no emotional bonding with them. A darker version of this shadow figure is the malignant, abusive mother, who manipulates her children according to her own ambitions.

If we consider motherhood further, according to the views of the Middle Ages, stereotypes, both negative and positive, prove inadequate and potentially misleading, particularly as maternal practices reflect "a response to 'the historical reality of a biological child in a particular social world;'" whereas motherhood is a practice, maternity is "a biological fact." Mothering, on the other hand, a culturally constructed activity, is "'grounded in established historical and cultural practices.'" 'Mother*er*s' can be defined as those individuals, male as well as female, who participate in their cultures' definition of maternal practices. Most sources concerning medieval mothering are "filtered through" medieval men. Evidence suggests that male envy and fear of the reproductive capacities of women, potentially threatening to male

royal authority, could be neutralized by ritually emphasizing the nurturing intercession of queens, whose influence allows the king to manifest his own magnanimity and care for his subjects. Medieval mothers and sons, we are encouraged to remember, "lived in shadows cast not only by the figure of Christ and Mary, but also by Augustine and Monica" (N. Partner, qtd. in Parsons, Wheeler xv).

Consistent with the diametrical maternal templates just mentioned, Lancelot's true mother, Hélène, unlike Perceval's obsessively protective mother, loses him as a result of her grief and distraction at the sudden death of her husband, King Ban (*Li rois Bans*), Lancelot's father. The juxtaposition of two contrasting versions of medieval motherhood, as represented by these two women, brings to the fore the erroneous value of aristocratic influence on feminine instinct. In a scene that implies the maternal inadequacy of the biological mother, "de la haute lignée de Davide le roi," Hélène, overwrought with sorrow, leaves her infant son "hors de son berceau et dévêtu" (*Lancelot du Lac* I 71-*L.d.L*. hereafter), at the feet of agitated horses whom, she later fears, may have trampled him to death. His adoptive mother, Ninienne, a fairy, appears in time to rescue the infant from harm and promptly transports him to an idyllic setting beneath an enchanted lake. Hélène's hasty abandonment of her son contrasts starkly with Ninienne's natural maternal instincts, "[elle] le tient tout nu dans son giron, et l'étreint et le serre très doucement contre sa poitrine, et lui baise les yeux et la bouche inlassablement" (77). Not incidentally, Hélène is a product of a faltering, feudal hierarchy, governed by men; Ninienne belongs to the elemental substances of the natural world. Thus, Lancelot's dual experience of abandonment and of nurturing, innate features of the hero's psyche, can be thought of as subliminal, driving forces, as intrinsic to his antisocial tendencies as to his obsessive desire for intimacy.

In her essay, "The Lady of the Lake: Lancelot's Mirror of Self-knowledge" (*'Por le Soi Amisté'*), Anne P. Longley equates Ninienne's influence with that of Merlin's in relationship to Arthur's formation. First and foremost, the Lady of the Lake is a corrective mother figure to the (virtually) orphaned child; her role is reinforced by the protective, womb-like environment of the lake, where Lancelot resides and receives instruction and guidance in preparation for his future role as a knight. Ninienne's dual function as nurturer and teacher points to another important distinction between Perceval's formative years and those of Lancelot. While La Veuve Dame does everything in her power to keep her son from the knighthood, Lancelot's foster mother prepares her charge meticulously for his destined role. As I discussed in my first chapter, Perceval's mother reflects feminine powerlessness concerning royal ascendancy and violence between clans. Lancelot's adoptive mother, on the other hand, is exempt, although not entirely immune, from ties of kinship, property, and marital bonds. La Dame du Lac, unlike La Veuve Dame, has the visionary powers to foresee and to direct selected events with pivotal importance in the drama and in the unfolding course of human history. Similar to Merlin's, Ninienne's influence exceeds her role as a caregiver. As Emmanuelle Baumgartner posits, the special assignment of mothering fairies, counterintuitive to the leanings of the genetic mother, is to rupture filial ties and the burden of lineage "pour produire un héros vierge, pour reformuler à neuf son destin" (qtd. in Longley 314).[ii] The author of the prose *Lancelot* neglects to provide an explicit motive for the fairy's intervention in the child's life, other than Ninienne's timely, sentient response to the endangered child. Critics have offered the following hypotheses concerning Ninienne's abduction of the baby: her desire to save Lancelot from the violence of Claudas (responsible for his father's death), to provide an ideal setting for the youth's education, or, as Baumgartner proposes, to reconcile the old order of chivalry, represented by kings Ban,

Bors, and Arthur, with a new order which Ninienne introduces through her instruction of Lancelot. Paradoxically, even as the hero models an alternate, albeit ambiguous identity for the knighthood, both old and new orders call into question his worthiness. This would suggest that the knighthood is not entirely central to the fairy's concerns. As for her ability to control (through magic as well as through instruction) certain events and not others in Lancelot's life, Longley proposes that the Lady of the Lake "provides a 'blank slate' of sorts" (315) for the hero's future development, leaving ample room for his self-discovery and for further narrative amplification by successive narrators. Longley's observation underscores not only the likelihood but also the centrality of this hero's role in an ongoing cultural dialogue. In many respects, and more so in his case than for other Arthurian heroes, Lancelot's ultimate destiny, much as the true nature of his character, remains mutable as a topic of discourse. Dual characteristics, such as oppositional value systems and conflicting social tendencies, biases of individual authors notwithstanding, remain constant in his psychological portrait.

Both the hero's lineage and the somewhat subversive role of his adoptive mother contribute in fundamental ways to Lancelot's conflicted, role in the Arthurian cycle. Unlike the hero's helpless mother, Hélène, Ninienne controls her inhabited domain and remains unscathed by the actions of men. The fairy perfects her magical skills under Merlin's tutelage, managing successfully to evade the magician's lust. In her role as surrogate mother, she prepares Lancelot for his future as an exemplary knight and, by all appearances, for a return to his origins through his alliance with the Arthurian order. Ninienne alone possesses knowledge of the hero's identity and of his destiny—chivalric excellence, at the very least—which she at turns reveals and withholds from her charge during his formative years with her. As a youth, Lancelot suspects his royal lineage, which he attributes to his compassionate nature, rather than to his birth: "si les

grands cœurs faisaient les gentilshommes, je crois que je serais un jour au nombre des plus gentils" (I*:* 319). He receives further clues concerning his origins when the seigneur de Paerne, a guardian of Lionel and Bors, with whom Lancelot is unknowingly reunited, guesses his identity: "[il] ne pouvait s'arracher à la contemplation de Lancelot et gardait les yeux fixés sur lui, comme un dément; car il pensait avoir deviné qui il était" (317). When the hero refers intuitively to Lionel as his cousin, he receives a coy reprimand from his adoptive mother: "Fils de roi, d'où vous est venue tout à l'heure cette audace d'appeler Lionel votre cousin [...]?" (319); the reader naturally understands this as an admission on her part. In Chrétien's account, the hero does not learn his proper name until pronounced by Guenièvre. In the prose text, Gauvain reveals the hero's name after the liberation of the the Douloureuse Garde: "Ce fut la première fois que l'on connut à la cour le nom de Lancelot du Lac" (683).

The lasting importance of feminine influence in Lancelot's life is made explicit by the youth's rejection of his male tutor (155) and the tutor's subsequent replacement by Ninienne as sole teacher. At the narrative level, this makes perfect sense, as La Dame du Lac is the chief designer of Lancelot's life even if her intentions remain largely hidden from both the reader and the future knight. From the perspective of Lancelot's innate character and his emotional development, the episode demonstrates the hero's natural magnanimity (he makes gifts of his horse and a recently killed stag to those in need), his independence from the influence of authority figures, and his capacity for violence (he defends himself against the unjust bullying of his male tutor). Lancelot's character and physical appearance evidences traits of both his noble and violent origins: "le plus bel enfant du monde et le mieux taillé de corps et de tous ses membres," "ni trop maigre ni trop gros," "le visage enluminé de naturelle couleur [...] la parfaite alliance du blanc, du brun et du vermeil" (141). He is an agile hunter, a fine singer, brighter than

any youth his age, perfect in all respects, with one exception: the oversized cavity of his chest: "Ce fut la seule chose que les censeurs trouvèrent à reprendre en lui [...]" (139-41), a defect whose purpose is later understood by Guenièvre: "car le cœur était tout aussi grand à cet endroit et il aurait dû nécessairement éclater, s'il n'avait trouvé un logis où se reposer, à sa mesure" (143). The hero's corresponding excess of emotion contributes to both his compassionate and compulsive tendencies, exemplified by the dual properties of his heart, 'de diamant'and 'de cire': "C'était l'enfant le plus doux et le plus aimable de tous, quand il trouvait en face de lui la bonté; mais contre les méchants, il était plus méchant qu'eux" (143). Correspondingly, as an adult, Lancelot demonstrates both constructive social tendencies, exemplified by his magnanimous acts and knightly prowess, and anti-social behavior, exemplified by his adultery with the queen and his propensity for excessive use of force, whether on behalf of others or as an extension of his unbridled passion. Emotionally he requires feminine counsel in order to mitigate polar aspects of his character.

In her continuing role after Lancelot's return to the domain of patriarchy and human time, Ninienne sends helpers, maidens who act as messengers, go-betweens, and rescuers at pivotal moments of Lancelot's emotional and chivalric life. Saraïde ('La demoiselle' in *L.d.L.*), one of Ninienne's assistants who, early in the narrative, reuinites the hero with his cousins, Lionel and Bors, prevents Lancelot from suicide after Galehaut's death.[iii] Another damsel, concealing her identity from the knight (505), delivers Lancelot's three shields, on behalf of "ma dame,"along with an important message: "demain, lui dit-elle, vous saurez votre nom et le nom de votre père," thus insuring the young knight's victory at the Douloureuse Garde. Before leaving him, the damsel offers another indicative piece of advice: "prenez garde de ne pas demeurer auprès du roi Arthur ni d'un autre prince" (I, XXIII: 515), demonstrating Ninienne's continuous, yet

enigmatic, influence in the knight's development and the direction of his life. The adoptive mother's role in Lancelot's emotional life is paradoxical indeed. On the one hand, she upholds and promotes the hero's chivalric role as a servant to Arthur; on the other, she assists and even advocates for the illicit affair between Lancelot and the queen, presumably with foreknowledge of its disruptive consequences. Well versed in the arts of medicine and healing, Ninienne's intervention is required when Lancelot loses his sanity due to his forced separation from Guenièvre during his imprisonment at Saxon Rock. The fairy does not counsel Lancelot away from folly and sin; instead, she encourages the queen to return the love of her knight: "vous n'avez pas tort si vous l'aimez, car vous ne pourriez mieux employer votre amour" (901). Longley, who questions whether the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guenièvre "worth the destruction" of the Arthurian legacy, adopts a perspective similar *La Queste du Sainte Graal*'s author. Both foster mother and son are implicated. Due to Ninienne's influence upon the direction of the narrative, Lancelot "becomes a knight who is not worthy of the Grail quest and one who sullies the name of the Arthurian kingdom" (320).

While I differ with this last assertion, for a host of reasons I will develop in this and the following chapter, it is important to stress the teleological evolution within Lancelot's interior self as portrayed in both the 12th and 13th century texts under consideration. A fairly dramatic shift occurs, for example, between the primarily courtly emphasis of Lancelot's role as a lover, devoted to the point of imbalance, in *Charrette*, and the differing emphases of his prose authors concerning the sin of adultery in the *Lancelot* and in *La Mort*, culminating in the latter text with the hero's final years as a Christian penitent.

It is important to stress that the courtly-Christian dichotomy is one among several, *not* the sole factor, defining Lancelot's conflicted identity and his multi-faceted function in these texts.

His role as mediator between gender identity, gender roles, and gendered spaces is overwhelmingly supported by his dual parentage (King Ban, Ninienne) and the inhabited spaces and communities (Ban's kingdom, under siege vs. Ninienne's otherworldy, natural abode) each represents. In a similar vein, the knight's propensity for interiority, for intimacy, captivity, and suicidal despair all suggest the 'feminine' qualities of his character; his chivalric valiance, his rage-driven acts of violence, his descent into otherworldy realms of the dead, and his co-mingling with demonic forces of nature suggest an amplified (if also unique to itself) version of medieval masculinity. Lancelot does not merely travel through the stratified realms of feminine and masculine, nature and court; he embodies aspects of each and thereby elicits a dialogue between these diverse, yet mutually dependent domains.

Once again, feminine influence and feminine agency, whose motivations remain invariably cryptic in these texts, are essential to both the evolution of the knight and to our reading of him as a cultural intercessor. Much as we might attribute the child's survival, as well as his preparation for knighthood, to the efforts of his adoptive mother, Guenièvre's influence is essential to Lancelot's continued performance and development as a knight and as a lover throughout his adult life. In keeping with the secretive domain in which she raises her foster child, La Dame du Lac conceals her reasons for returning the knight to the domain of his forefathers. Most notably, unlike Perceval's mother, Ninienne does not interfere with the destiny of her adopted son, or of his cousins Lionel and Bohort; she performs her duty by all of them, acquiescing to the inevitability of their knighthood.[iv] The apparent objective of this fairy is the perfection of all aspects of the knight, through all necessary avenues, as evidenced by her early instruction of the boy and by her advice on love, which Lancelot receives at the 'Cimetière des merveilles' from another female messenger: "Et quel était le message que ma dame avait oublié

de me faire dire?" Lancelot asks the maiden. "C'était ceci: que vous ne placiez jamais votre cœur dans un amour qui vous incite à la paresse, mais à devenir meilleur" (557). For better or for worse, Lancelot follows this last instruction when he chooses the queen, according to the chivalric code.

The familiar dichotomy between 'earthly' chivalry (Lancelot) and 'heavenly' chivalry (Galahad) is merely one among several potential discursive functions we can ascribe to the imperfect Arthurian hero. If, as Longley concludes, Lancelot, "guided by the Lady of the Lake, sows the seeds of Arthurian destruction with one woman (making way for the Grail quest), producing, with another woman, an heir [Galahad] who will accomplish that quest" (321), his adoptive mother intentionally assists this process. Lancelot's prose authors nevertheless adopt a fairly neutral position concerning Ninienne's ambivalent role. I would add to this that, while Lancelot's adulterous affair produces undeniably destructive results, *La Mort*'s author provides ample evidence of multiple causes for the regressive violence that marks the end of the Arthurian cycle. In accordance with the tragic tradition, both individual character and individual ambitions determine many of the tensions and the disastrous outcome of this last text. Many additional factors are also at play, not least of which Arthur's limitations as king, the eruption of clan rivalries, personal vengeance, greed, and insidious plots within the court. From its initial courtly context to its final incarnation as a testament to end-times, the Arthurian narrative is also a narrative of medieval humanity's changing relationship to the natural environment around which courtly life and, ultimately, the destruction of courtly life take place. The relationship is circular rather than linear, interdependent, multicursal, and deeply rooted in the clash between the fixed (traditional, archaic) and fluctuating (internal and external pressures) of medieval society; all of which informs and describes my approach in this and the next chapter.

Court and Periphery: the A-Social Knight

Whereas, in *Perceval*'s narrative, the forest reigns as the primary locus of the hero's personal evolution, Lancelot's personal trajectory is more difficult to place within a signature space. Psychologically, the lake abode remains paramount. As I discussed in my first chapter, the court both exists and confirms its existence in relationship to its environmental surroundings. Domains such as the court and the forest are both defined and altered by the shifting realities at their peripheries. Passage, ambiguity, and peripheral yet sustained presence at Arthur's court remain constant for this knight. His chivalric feats function as a secondary formation after his idyllic childhood with Ninienne and, from a purely external perspective, determine less what he actually becomes than how he will be defined centuries later. The literary progression of this medieval hero takes place over roughly a century (the late twelfth through the thirteenth century—there will be newer versions of old themes into the twentieth century) and from at least a handful of authorial perspectives. Chrétien depicts the enigmatic hero as an emblem of courtly love, *fin' amour*, (loyalty and refinement) and, conversely, as a borderline figure, known for his lack of measure, *démesure*, excessive use of force, and bouts of madness, underscoring both his social and anti-social characteristics according the codes of medieval courtly life.

In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (*Charrette* here forth), Chrétien allegorizes Lancelot's conflicting characteristics through his opposition of 'Amour' and 'Raison', prefaced by the hero's humiliating entry into the offensive wagon, a type of pillory, reason being the implied loser. *Charrette*'s narrative unfolds over a ten-day trajectory, beginning with Guenièvre's removal from Arthur and culminating on the tenth day with the hero's consummation of his love for the queen, which leaves the incriminating, yet misleading evidence of bloodstained sheets.

Thereafter, the period during which Lancelot becomes the captive of Méléagant, and later defeats his enemy, is more ambiguous. The romance opens at Arthur's court on the day of the Ascension, in late spring, after a sumptuous feast in the company of the queen and "quantité de nobles". Both the holy day and the season evoke a time of purification and renewal. The courtly table, on the other hand, domain of the mannered world of *courtoisie*, is set in direct contrast to the battlefield and to the arrival of Méléagant, "un chevalier soigneusement équipé/ et tout armé de pied en cap" (46-7). From the outset, things are in disarray. This knight, a shadow image of Lancelot, overtly challenges Arthur's potency as a ruler. Foreshadowing Lancelot's impending amorous challenge to the king, Méléagant rudely claims his right to abduct the queen.

Unlike Perceval's inept buffoonery at his first appearance in Arthur's court, which elicits the empathy of the king, the malevolent discourtesy of the 'dark knight' exceeds the literary motif of the exception (rudeness) proving the (courtly) rule. Méléagant, in fact, exposes an innate vulnerability at the core of Arthur's court: its ephemeral nature. Once again, we are reminded of Umberto Eco's recipe for a 'good' Middle Ages: "a great peace that is breaking down, a great (international) power that, thanks to its ungovernable complexity, is on the verge of collapse, particularly because 'barbarians' are pressing at its borders (*Travels in Hyper Reality*). Bound by a system of laws that constrict his movement—the king in the twelfth century is a weak individual[v]—Arthur is unable to act; his challenger, who has already taken prisoners, "des chevaliers, des dames, des jeunes filles/ qui sont de ta terre et de ta compagnie" (53-4), exploits the king's *fixed* position to the fullest extent: "Je veux te dire [...] que tu n'as la force ni la richesse/ nécessaires pour les ravoir./ Sache-le bien, tu mourras/ sans jamais pouvoir leur venir en aide" (56-60). Characteristically, we find Arthur in a sedentary position: "le roi ne bougea pas" (34); "Le roi répond que force lui est bien/ de le supporter, s'il ne peut y remédier" (61-2).

As Méléagant's taunt would have us understand, knights (good and bad), not 'sitting' kings, provide the momentum required to determine the future of kingdoms.

The arrival of the 'nameless' knight, "sur un cheval épuisé de fatigue" (272), who then borrows another horse from Gauvain, "ni le plus beau ni le plus grand" (292), "laissant là le sien qui tombe mort" (296), introduces the reader to another external mover, whose loyalty and dedication exceed the rational limit. Even at the story's inception, an asymmetrical set of power relations is evident: 1) between the king and his divided court, 2) between fixed and unstable values of the courtly world, and 3) between warring factions and individual agents in relationship to the non-human world. In Chrétien's version of the story, the reader must deduce an earlier meeting between the queen and her chosen knight, who has yet to be named. Lancelot's obsession with his goal, Guenièvre, reduces him to a 'beastly' state, characterized by dual aspects: a superhuman, even inhumane strength, evident in his treatment of horses – Gauvain finds the second horse dead, "le sol tout piétiné [...] et, tout autour,/ un amas de lances et d'écus brisés" (308-10), or, conversely, a regressive interiority, "pris dans ses pensées/ comme un être sans force ni défense" (711-2). In this instance, the knight's "pensées" unlike Perceval's meditation in the wintry forest, occur simultaneously with his frenetic chase of the queen's abductor. Lancelot's concentration, similar to his obsessive drive, precludes all awareness of entities external to him, to the extent that he loses all cognizance of his own identity: "Et dans ce penser il en vient au point/ où il perd toute notion de lui-même" (714-5). The hero's loss of Self and of the accoutrements of his identity prefaces a subtext of lost history and uncertain destination (destiny) expressed by the numbing of all faculties of perception: hearing, sight, sound: "À celle-là seule il pense si fort/ qu'il n'entend, ne voit, ni n'écoute rien" (723-4). Chrétien's strategic intermittent references to the passage of time, 'vèpre' and 'none' (735),

reinforce the hero's internalized obsession (oblivious to time) and his cognitive blindness concerning social and religious cues around him.

To further expand upon this last point, in light of the knight's social function, and according to the literary iconography, both the all-absorbing interior thoughts of Lancelot and his annihilation-by-forgetting of the external world point to anti-social tendencies, which we must distinguish from deliberate malice. Amour, an anti-social force associated with the private interests of the lover, erases the social memory of the hero. On the other hand, the hero's determination to save the queen, and presumably to restore her to the king, is a redemptive, socially altruistic act. In other words, the private and, as yet, secret desires of the knight motivate a reparative action that Arthur is unable to perform (sexual innuendos may apply). The negation of all social responsibility that accompanies the loss of self, and which we can think of as a form of possession, not unlike an epileptic seizure, is instrumental to our understanding of this hero, particularly as regards the unfolding destiny of the Arthurian order.

Lancelot's much maligned resort to the *Charrette* earlier in the story, an expedient if unfortunate choice of transportation, suggests base, 'animal' qualities, particularly by its association with 'low life': "tout criminel," "exclu de toutes les dignitées" (336). Here, Chrétien toys with the ironic connotations of fin' amor—reason is sacrificed on behalf of refined feeling—as well as with the implications of unbridled passion. Lancelot's self-despoiling act is exacerbated as he further sullies his reputation in exchange for information concerning the queen's whereabouts, which the "infâme nain, cette sale egeance" (354) promises him only if he will ride in the cart. Raison represents a chronological order dependent upon the responsible actions of the individual, as earlier stated. Furthermore, according to medieval iconography, an individual's capacity to reason elicits the important distinction between 'man' and 'beast':

"[Raison] lui dit qu'il se garde de monter;/ [...] Mais Amour qui est enclos dans son cœur/ lui commande vivement/ de monter [...]" (366-79). Yet, Chrétien's exacting criticism and opposition of values are not as diametrical as they might appear. Another code of values particular to this rather anomalous knight credits Lancelot's choice of Amour with a morality defined by his refinement of feeling. If the hero's 'reasoning' is also ingenuous, impractical, even criminal, the emotional justness of his feeling is underscored by its contrast with the *mass* vulgarity (across the social spectrum) of his detracters.

In support of this last point, Gauvain, model of courtly convention and perfect foil (this is consistent in Chrétien's romances), reaffirms the author's deprecatory view of conventional vs. exceptional choice: "il estima que c'était pure folie/ et il refuse d'y monter" (389-90). Although this 'reasonable' knight (who evades the humiliation Lancelot so readily accepts) might pass as a corrective model for his faulty companion, Chrétien confirms his position concerning the value of 'error' in relationship to personal evolution. Throughout the romance, the faultless knight, who has nothing to 'live down' at court, falls aimlessly under the shadow of his companion whose moral path is both revealed and inscribed by his difficult progress through space and time. For Chrétien's complex hero, feats performed have larger social implications than the courtly sphere. At first glance, the knight's otherworldly successes provide a means, by slow degrees, of exculpating him at Arthur's court and in the eyes of the queen for whom his dignity has been sacrificed. Shame, in this instance, functions as an external motivator by virtue of its relationship to the court, inextricably associated with the queen. Beyond this, the physical sacrifice required by Lancelot's trials contributes to and in many ways defines the purgative process of self-discovery, which includes knowledge of the past, his own death, and the destiny of the Arthurian knighthood—herein we begin to glean a larger application to the hero's 'self-discovery' than

provided by Longley's view (see above, 13). If Lancelot's function is to restore memory to an amnesic society, Perceval's virtual absence, in this text and in the prose *Lancelot* (he is finally declared dead in *La Mort*), points to what the kingdom has lost: a capacity for self-reflection, remorse, and hope. Lancelot's '*soi* divisé', associated with his knightly prowess, as well as with his adulterous relationship with Guenièvre (not yet consummated in the story),[vi] moves his chivalric trajectory forward, and downward; an integral component of this hero's quest (as with Dante after him) is descent.

Both *Charrette* and the prose *Lancelot* link the hero's amorous predispositions with death, dramatized by the hero's intensity of feeling, his compulsive tendencies, self-mutilation, and the social consequences of his love for the queen. Such themes, once again, expound the impasse between the courtly world, which favors lovers at the expense of marital ties, and the increasingly pessimistic direction of the Arthurian romance, which resorts to fears of retribution, ultimately linking the hero's infraction with social and environmental disorder. Guenièvre's character, as evidenced through her person and her actions in the three texts, represents more than the choices between Amour and Raison; the queen embodies both courtly and natural (Nature) qualities that we recognize in the dual origins of Lancelot. In *Charrette*, the hero's meetings with the queen take place within the courtly realm, specifically at Arthur's court and in the symbolic chamber at Bademagu's castle, where she is a captive of Méléagant. The prose *Lancelot* allows the queen greater liberty of movement, within and about the court, particularly where her management of private meetings with the hero, and between Galehaut and La Dame de Malehaut are concerned. *La Mort* further juxtaposes secretive meeting places between the queen and her lover, where the 'espion' is implicit, and public spaces, such as the dining hall, where Guenièvre is subject to schemes, personal attack, and humiliation by members of the

court. In Chrétien's text, Lancelot's brief glimpse of the queen as she winds through the forest in Méléagant's captivity reinforces her identity as a valued object of exchange between powerful men. The queen's constant captivity, by virtue of her status and marriage, creates a subtext for the higher value of the mutual bond between the hero and herself. In relationship to the queen, the knight temporarily suspends and, at the same time, reinforces his peripheral status to the court. The queen's adultery (both physical and emotional) is an expression of personal freedom (not without consequences) that she lacks in other areas of her life. For *Charrette*'s Lancelot, mnemonic signs—objects or emblems, often glimpsed or found within a natural setting—evoke memories of the feminine that reach across a broad range of experiential and spatial dimensions, related to the queen, to her affiliation with the court, but even more integrally, to the hero's interior life.

Rivers, Lakes, and Sea in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, *Lancelot du Lac*, and *La Mort le Roi Arthur*

Three predominant elements specific to Lancelot emerge from the three texts under investigation: water, 'douce' and 'courante'; stone, associated with history, asceticism, inscriptions and tombs; and metal, related to warfare and suggestive of new technologies. This chapter will focus on the changing features (both symbolic and real) of the natural landscape. My next chapter will address most specifically the relationship between the denatured environment, monuments of power and death, and the social processes that bring them about. Water, metal, and stone all have associations with the underworld and with death; the distinct physical properties of these elements, as well as their distinct qualities: fluid, malleable, and fixed, are indicative of the meanings they acquire with respect to medieval society and the Arthurian narrative.

I'll begin with water, which has dual connotations. Much as is the case for the hero of *Perceval*, water is thematically important to the identity of the heroes of *Charrette* and the prose *Lancelot*. In Chrétien's romance, the river appears primarily as a metaphor for the physical and moral obstruction the hero must overcome. With respect to the Arthurian panorama, the river symbolizes the uncontrollable ravages of time. As an additional, contrasting influence, the prose *Lancelot* emphasizes the pacific lake and hidden forest environment of the hero's youth. From the cautious approach of outsiders, the location is described as follows: "Du côté de la forêt se trouvait le Lac [...]. Ils arrivent au bord d'une rivière, dont les eaux couraient un peu au-dessous de la forêt. Entre la rivière et la forêt il y avait une belle et grande prairie" (299); with one additional, important detail: the lake is an illusion.

> À l'endroit où il semblait qu'il y eût un grand lac profond, la dame avait des maisons fort belles et fort riches, et au-dessous d'elles coulait une rivière petite, très plantureuse en poissons. Et cette habitation était si bien cachée que personne ne pouvait la trouver; car l'apparence du lac la protégeait de telle manière qu'on ne pouvait pas la voir. (99)

Both the lake's enclosed environment and the translucency of water suggest hidden processes whose purpose is slowly revealed over time. The lake's enclave is never entirely distinct from the linear, quotidian domain of human time. Bachelard's insistance upon the feminine quality of water, "tout liquide est une eau" and "ensuite toute eau est un lait" (*L'Eau et les Rêves* 158), corresponds with the womb-like, nurturing quality of the lake abode. As Lancelot's guardian, Ninienne's function is to give birth to possibility, an objective that may or may not coincide with the social or moral structures of the medieval kingdom. After the violent

loss of his parents, the hero is taken into this mysterious sub-aqueous world where, epistemologically, he is re-ordered.

Concomitant with her chosen environment, the adoptive mother demonstrates remarkable tenderness towards the infant, caring for him "plus tendrement que n'aurait pu le faire aucune femme qui l'eût porté dans son corps" (99). The idyllic aspect of Ninienne's domain is infused nevertheless with a moral opacity underscored by her abduction of the child. The hero's early life, inscribed by the chaotic separation from his birth mother, remains central to his inner drive and to the processes of his self-discovery. The polar epistemologies of his earthly and sub-aqueous environments drive the hero's character and motivations thoughout his life. His early preparation and idyllic formative life will eventually intersect with the tragedy of both his maternal and paternal lineage; Lancelot's lost mother, Hélène, a consecrated nun until her death, renames herself "la reine des Grandes Douleurs," reminding us that, "L'eau, substance de la vie, est aussi substance de mort [...]" (*L'Eau* 99). To evoke another relevant motif of water, its association with the underworld, memories of the womb also connote death. Arthur is ferried to the otherworldly realm by his sister, Morgain, a woman duplicitously capable of black magic, and the mother of Mordred, a product of the incestuous relationship between this brother and sister. For Lancelot, the lake remains emblematic of the protected, gestational domain of early consciousness; its mirror-like quality elicits self-knowledge, transmutability, and potentiality within the sphere of human affairs.

Charrette's Rivers: Mnemonic Forces of History

The still containment of Lancelot's childhood lake abode in the prose *Lancelot* contrasts with the violence and horizontal movement of rivers appearing in his adult life, particularly as depicted

by Chrétien in the *Charrette*. Echoing river motifs in *Perceval*, to reiterate Simon Schama's words, the river represents a "linear, not circular" progression, evocative of masculine drive, "pushing history relentlessly downstream."

> So if the self-regulating arterial course of the sacred river, akin to the bloodstream of men, has constituted one permanent image of the flow of life, the *line* of waters, from beginning to end, birth to death, source to issue, has been at least as important. It has, moreover, dominated the European and Western language of rivers: supplying imagery for the life and death of nations and empires and the fateful alternation between commerce and calamity. (*Landscape and Memory* 261)

Linear waterways, Schama posits, are prescriptive of the western imagination. The temporal and topographical loops of classical Eastern and Near Eastern sacred rivers, reconstituted in the Roman West as roads and "highways that could be made straight," facilitated commerce, border surveillance, and military operations. The aqueduct, a model for the "well-behaved watercourse," represents a pinnacle of Roman engineering. Correspondingly, Latin texts effectively "straightened out" history in linear development, reinforcing the temporal and linear role of rivers (the Tiber, the Po, etc...) as emblems of empire and power, as well as conductors of resources from source to expansive destinations. At the same time, and paradoxically, whereas the sight of riverbanks suggest a kind of security (the sight of land) unknown to mariners, limited knowledge of watercourses "from end to end," along with the unpredictability of currents, create a sense of unease about the future and destination of travelers who might as easily become captives as victors at any point along their route (261).[vii] Joachim Du Bellay's mid-sixteenth-

century view of the Tiber as a natural force quite apart from the city's "mondaine inconstance," further emphasizes the divergence between nature and empire: "Le Tybre seul, qui vers la mer s'enfuit,/ Reste de Rome. [. . .] Ce qui est ferme, est par le temps déstruit,/ Et ce qui fuit, au temps fait résistance" ("Les antiquitez de Rome," 3, *Les Regrets* 275). As Du Bellay suggests, although rivers evoke a linear progression of events, as motifs of the medieval romance, they also emphasize human impermanence and even irrelevance with respect to historical and, ultimately, natural processes.

For both Gauvain and Lancelot, rivers are places of physical and psychological test, particularly for the latter. Lancelot's submersion and near drowning serve as prerequisites to important crossings, from one realm, one challenge, to another. Two operative concepts reassert themselves: descent, *chute*, and going 'against' (Nature and what is natural to men): "Ce serait pécher *contre vous-même*/ que de vous mettre consciemment/ en un péril de mort aussi certain" (3075-7 – my italics). Lancelot not only braves the ravaging elements, he appears immune to them. Through his successes he conquers chronological time, at least temporarily, just as he proves himself superior or extraneous to the social structures that impart him with a designated influence over the direction of history.

In addition to amplifying the hero's prowess, Lancelot's river passage at the Pont de l'épée reminds the reader of the discomfiting partnership between descent, submersion, and resurgence: "et ils voient l'eau traîtresse,/ un rapide qui grondait, aux flots noirs et boueux,/ d'une laideur si effroyable/ qu'on eût dit le fleuve infernal,/ si périlleux et si profond/ que toute créature en ce monde,/ en y tombant, s'y fût perdue/ comme dans la mer aux eaux salées" (3009-16); the realm of "fluvial death" is also the realm of "rebirth" (Schama 258). Never entirely dissociated from the underlying death wish (suicidal tendencies) of this hero, the dark, violent

water beneath *Charrette*'s Pont de l'épée is symbolic of the moral and psychological abyss: "sinistre est la façon et l'art/ de ce pont, et sinistre l'ouvrage de charpente" (3044/5). The river coursing beneath the bridge indicates an oppressive historical force, a mnemonic torrent rife with the cumulative debris of humanity, which the hero fearlessly sets out to conquer: "Ce pont ni cette eau ne me font peur" (3086). Lancelot's propensity for intrepid daring is infused with willingness, even desire, for self-sacrifice, particularly through the mutilation of his body, exemplified by his traversal of the bridge's sharp blade.

> Il s'était assuré une bonne prise sur l'épée,
> plus affilée qu'une faux,
> à main nues et tout déchaussé, [...]
> il aimait mieux se mutiler
> que tomber du pont et nager
> dans cette eau d'ou plus jamais il ne sortirait.
> En grand souffrance, il passe au-delà
> comme il le voulait dans ses tourments.
> Il se blesse aux mains, aux genoux et aux pieds [...]. (3100-12)

The masochistic component of Lancelot's physical mutilation, "Il lui était doux de souffrir" (3115), underscores the erotic dimensions of heroic martyrdom, a thematic revisited, albeit inverted, in the prose texts' reimagination of the hero as a repentant ascetic. The recurring mention of bodily fluids, particularly blood—Lancelot uses his 'chemise' to wipe the copious blood that flows from his wounds as he contemplates Bademagu's tower, echoing a later scene where the hero sacrifices his body, once again, in order to consummate his love for the queen, a

captive of the king's son, Méléagant—reinforces the Christian iconography herein, which, beyond its capacity for miraculous healing, announces the intractable, polluting influences of unbridled physical passions. Water, conversely, returns as a symbol for the afterlife and as a testament to humanity's failure in *La Mort*: the funerary vessel of the Lady of Chalot floats to the base of Arthur's tower at Camelot; after the demise of his knights and his kingdom, Arthur's body is ferried to sea, according to the custom, under the uncertain auspices of his sister, Morgain. Acquiescent to his own part in this failure, the repentant hero remains within the destroyed world of men, with little hope of *régénérescence*; relegated to "une montagne plein de rochers," "lieu . . . d'une grande pauvreté," he subsists on "que de pain, d'eau et des racines qu'il cueillait" (*La Mort* 303).

Crossings and Passages: Forest Paths, Meadows and Fields

Whereas both the river and the forest are associated with passages, river passages in particular involve confrontations with destiny and with nature's unconstrained forces. *Charrette*'s forest passages are more closely aligned with the hero's memory, with self-forgetting, and with (guided) deviation. In contrast with Perceval's *forêt obscure*—a dense, unkempt space associated with wildness and the unformed psyche of the hero—a general sparseness of trees common to woodlands, and spaces open to, if not actually created by humans, are a more prevalent characteristic of the wooded areas traversed by Lancelot. As Gillian Rudd asserts, density, unkempt growth, and wild animals are characteristic of the medieval literary imagination, whereas 'real' forests could be sparse (*Greenery*). Wildness is not a dominant characteristic of *Charrette*'s forests, which belong primarily to a socialized courtly domain where the hero undergoes a succession of brief encounters with canny, self-interested damsels and occasionally

engages in a chivalric sparring match. These semi-populated, fairly uniform places of passage lead to clearings, meadows and trodden paths. While even the sparse forest maintains the potential of solitude and dangerous encounters, for Chrétien's Lancelot, forests are less the domain of chivalric test than the domain of remembrance of the fragmented self. Joined forests and fields represent places of passage between the courtly world, associated with the queen, and the spaces where the knight's superhuman feats unfold. Episodes of 'oubli' 'pâmoison', and 'vide', which occur repeatedly throughout the text, although not exclusively within the forest's boundaries, can be associated with Lancelot's amorous obsession with the queen—synonymous with the lost moral path, according to *La Queste*'s interpretation—as well as with his divided psyche.

Lancelot's "oublie de soi," "et pour celle-là/ il a mis toutes les autres en oubli" (721-2), which includes episodes of fainting, and loss of consciousness, often accompanied by suicidal impulses, is generated in the hero through fragmentary, fleeting, or remembered images of Guenièvre, which incite the hero's desire "de se laisser tomber,/ de [...] basculer dans le vide" (564-6). The sight of the queen's comb at the foot of a forest fountain conforms to the literary forest's designation as a symbolic space with magical attributes. The golden strands of hair, fragments of her body, filled with "tant de beauté, de clarté, de lumière" (1415), produce a visceral (fetishistic) experience of desire for her presence and agony for her absence: "son corps se courba,/ pris d'une soudaine faïblesse. [...] Il éprouvait une telle douleur dans son cœur/ qu'il en perdit un long moment/ la parole et toute couleur" (1424-37). Duality (of character and of choice) presents itself as a persistent subtext of Lancelot's suffering; the knight undergoes psychic fragmentation through the regressive process of self-forgetting: "Et dans ce penser il en vient au point/ où il perd tout notion de lui-même,/ il ne sait pas s'il est ou s'il n'est pas,/ [...] il

ne sait où il va, il ne sait d'où il vient,/ toute chose c'est effacée de sa mémoire [...]" (714-20). For Lancelot, 'penser', turning inward to recall the image of the queen, an innately anti-social act, is a means of staying the course of his destiny. 'Parler', on the other hand, a social act, is equivalent to wandering astray (morally and literally). Christian interpretations of the love-besotted knight, attempting to overturn contradiction (fundamental to the psyche), have reversed this equation: obsession with the queen represents the knight's moral straying; renunciation thereby becomes the only moral choice. Chrétien, quite differently, asks his readers to consider the moral value of the discursive quandary.

To make a brief comparison between Lancelot's loss of self and Perceval's self-forgetting, an important difference is that the pleasurable experience of a leisurely meditation is absent in Lancelot's remembrance of the queen. Perceval's meditation in the winter forest produces an experience of integration, not with Arthur's court, which proves its vulgarity around him, but with his own essence in relationship to natural and cosmological Essence. For Lancelot, the 'soi-divisé' occurs at polar ends of his worldly and private selves. His highly subjective interior experience broaches self-annihilation. Although his temporary amnesia is rife with torment, Lancelot does not abandon his goal to find the queen; instead, he forgets all vestiges of his own identity and re-members himself only through the interiorized re-membering of "celle-là seule." In his emotional absence, the knight continues his quest with machine-like obsession, exhausting one horse after another: "Cependent son cheval l'emporte avec rapidité,/ *sans prendre de détours*" (725-6 – my italics). Words themselves (which we must associate with social codes) *deter* the hero from his objective. In this instance, Chrétien's use of the terms "ne . . . mie" with "voie torte" (O.F.) would appear to condone the knight's actions, particularly if we are to understand "ne . . . torte" as "droite," or as the 'just' path. Lancelot's "rapidité," and the

rate at which he travels "molt tost" (O.F.), on the other hand, indicate his lack of measure and his inability, or unwillingness, to meditate upon his actions. His "horreur des paroles et discours" (133), a manifestation of 'idée fixe', single vision, single thought, is symptomatic of the limitations of his social self. Oblivious to his surroundings, the hero allows himself to be transported by his horse "dans une lande" (729); "L'heure de none était bien passé déjà" (735). Chrétien makes his next point at his hero's expense when yet another disposable horse, attracted by "la belle eau claire/ du gué, et sa soife était grande" (738-9), gallops forward into a ford with his unconscious rider. In spite of the warnings of the river's guardian, Lancelot "n'écoute pas, il n'a pas entendu./ Son penser y a mis obstacle" (744-5); 'sordité' connotes dumbness. The comical scene, which results in an altercation between the two men, reminds us of the mutable contexts to which 'staying the course' and 'deviation' can be applied.

Through his insistence upon speed, the physical dexterity of *Charrette*'s hero, and the speed at which he moves, "à toute allure," Chrétien further amplifies dual components of "idée fixe," which connotes less a rigidity of thought than an intense immutability of emotion. This last dynamic reflects the conflict between the courtly values that exalt a love whose extramarital nature is implied, and Christian values that condemn both the 'act' and all forms of secrecy surrounding it. Lancelot's accelerated velocity and the speed of horses, used to the extent of their physical capacities then discarded by the hero, indicate the burgeoning concept of the horse as a technological device, much as the use of bows and arrows introduces a vantage point unavailable to armor-clad knights with swords. Although Chrétien in particular emphasizes the horse in relationship to impending technology, the motif of rider and horse persists throughout the cycle. The horse's appearance once again as an expendable tool of warfare in the final chapters of *La Mort* provides a poignant reminder of humanity's persistent exploitation of the non-human world

(301). In one of *Charrette*'s many examples, having exhausted one horse in his haste to find the queen, Lancelot enters the forest at such a pace that a second horse dies beneath him, causing him to take the regretable passage in the pillory. This last episode reinforces the involuntarily public nature of Lancelot's private feelings, as his humiliation is witnessed and reported by many for miles around and stains the knight's character. Above and beyond its function as an active metaphor for the hero's unmediated obsession with the queen, speed must also be viewed in terms of its anesthetizing properties, which preclude self-discovery. The forced velocity of the knight reinforces the machine-like qualities associated with knighthood, and thus with men, with warfare, and with historical progress. Lancelot's unique capacity for feeling, on the other hand, which at its most extreme causes him to 'forget' or to lose control of himself and of his surroundings, is another anesthetizing characteristic that functions quite differently from the machine-like impulses of his body. For this knight, passion and identification with the other interchangeably produce self-annihilating impulses, which, from a courtly perspective, return the knight to wholeness through his realization of emotional and physical union with the *one*. Whereas Chrétien critiques the excesses of his knight, he colludes wholeheartedly with the hero's objectives.

As an addendum to the motif of addiction suggested by the hero's excesses of passion and 'toute allure'—the English translation, 'speed', is apt—the knight's societal deaf-dumb-and-blindness, "il n'entend, ne voit, ni n'écoute rien" (723-4), perceived (much like autism) as societal indifference, is less a choice than an affliction. Unlike with Perceval, this has nothing to do with intellect or with education. Lancelot's propensity for suicidal despair provides some explanation for his lack of moderation in relationship to the queen. At a psychological level, something of a domino effect is at work: loss of self, caused by his inability to dissociate his own

identity from that of the queen, leads to the fragmentation of the hero's interior psyche, a precedent for bodily mutilation: at the Pont de l'épée, for example, and at the Bademagu's tower, the hero tears his flesh in his attempt to gain access to the queen. A reduction to beast-like qualities occurs, "pris dans ses pensées/ comme un être sans force ni défense" (711-2), along with a loss of moral and psychic powers of discernment. The permeability of the knight's body through his wounds and loss of blood belie what is naturally human. In the episode of *la lance enflammée,* for example, Lancelot 'forgets' his physical self; the burning lance touches his skin "sans vraiment le blesser" (527). Self-mutilation prefaces two potential outcomes for the hero: self-annihilation, or, self-realization through re-union with the queen, or, if we like, with the interiorized feminine. Moreover, it is important to note that the forest's suggestion of interiority, often associated with the feminine, contributes to this cycle; nevertheless, the forest's capacity to hold, to teach, and to transform the knight is virtually absent in *Charrette*. Lancelot's evolution, once again, occurs within the separate domains we can associate with medieval gendered identity, which, although it implies fairly diametric roles, evidences an intermediary zone as well.

In other episodes of *Charrette*, forest encounters provide tests of fealty as well as of physical strength. Experience of the mystical, to the extent that it appears at all, occurs in Lancelot's relationship to the queen. The traversed forest with its multicursal paths eventually leads to the closed spaces of personal test and self-discovery. As I mentioned earlier, the hermitage or chapel with an enclosed cemetery is a recurring motif in *Charrette* and a frequent place of passage in the prose texts. The hour is announced at these junctures, "vêpres," or "à l'heure de none," where, after hours of riding, the knight and his companions discover "dans un lieu vraiment très beau/ une église avec, à côté du chœur,/ un cimetière enclos de murs" (1836-

9). The cemetery serves as a constant reminder of the subterranean, a domain of moral and religious revelation.

Meadows and Fields

In addition to the general aridity and sparseness characteristic of *Charrette*'s forests, which retain the potential of enchantment even as they imply lost direction, fields and meadows appear as frequent spaces of passage, more typically spaces of juncture between the interior processes of the knight and the collective public conscience, quotidian as well as courtly. Ultimately, *Charrette*'s intermediary spaces, between forest and court, lead the hero to encounters with his own reputation, whether in open fields, in castles, in villages, or along paths bordered with rocky outcrops. One such example occurs early in the romance when Lancelot and Gauvain approach a tower "qui donnait de plain-pied de côté de la ville./ De l'autre part se trouvait une prairie,/ et tout contre se dressait/ la tour sur une roche brune,/ haute et taillée à pic" (423-7). These paths are never entirely solitary, as this most recent episode demonstrates. In this instance, Lancelot and Gauvain receive sumptuous hospitality until the former realizes that he has lost "tout honneur sur terre" as a result of his base association with the pillory and the dwarf and thus must prove his worthiness of a bed "digne d'un roi." Always something of an outsider among Arthur's knights, Lancelot invariably contends with courtly expectations and a gawking collective populace, unlike him, and eager to pass judgment.

In a later episode of the romance, still in pursuit of the queen, the two knights find a passage: "Au sortir de la prairie, ils entrent dans un enclos/ où ils trouvent un chemin empierré./ Ils ont poursuivi à travers la forêt/ jusque vers la première heure du jour" (602-5). When Lancelot faces combat with a knight over the young girl who is his companion and guide, he

demands “une prairie ou bien une lande” in which to fight: “Mais si nous voulions comme il faut/ combattre, nous ne le pourrions/ dans ce chemin, même avec de la peine!” (1612-5). The resolution of conflict in a meadow, normally a pacific space associated with courtly games, emphasizes the intrusion of combat upon the social sphere, underscoring at the same time the importance of the (ubiquitous) witness, a role in which all of society participates; all private desires, feelings, secrets, reputation, and transgressions are subject to the collective eye of public scrutiny and to the voice of collective judgment. Resolution or understanding may occur at the interpersonal level, as is the case with Lancelot’s hostess, who first chides him for allowing the ruination of his reputation, then performs a generous act of ‘courtoisie’, offering the knight a new horse and a lance “en signe de paix et d’amour” (560).

At the advent of the prospective combat just mentioned, the disputing knights turn from a trail so narrow that the horsemen take pains to change direction without damaging their horses. The social regularity of this sort of altercation is reinforced by their chosen location, “une région bien dégagée et de vaste étendue” (1632-3); the woodland clearing opens onto a comely meadow, a far cry from the average battle-ground: “Un prairie/ où l’on voyait des jeunes filles,/ des chevaliers et des demoiselles/ en train de jouer à plusieurs sortes de jeux,/ car la beauté du lieu les invitait” (1635-8). Once again, Lancelot is reminded of his stigma when the courtly players halt their spring game to ridicule him: “Regardez, regardez le chevalier/ qui fut mené dans la charrette!/ Que personne désormais ne s’occupe/ à des jeux, tant qu’il sera là!” (1667-72). Among his detractors is the braggart knight, who desires the hero’s female traveling companion, and against whom Lancelot will later prove his prowess. This episode echoes the father-son dichotomy presented later in the text by Méléagant and his father, King Bademagu, wherein the ‘wrong-headed’ knight is dicouraged by the wise father who recognizes Lancelot’s

superiority as a knight, as well as his capacity to do harm. The persistence of shame and public slander, nevertheless, culminates in the hero's unwitting brush with destiny on the third day of his journey, in the cemetery of the future. Episodes designated to exculpate public shame, premised upon private culpability (Lancelot's love for the queen), inform the larger context of the hero's interaction with his patriarchal history and with destiny.

When Lancelot parts with his female companion after discovering his own tomb and the tombs of other knights, he remains alone for a brief time, "Jusqu'à une heure très tardive/ il a chevauché sans compagnie," until his next encounter with the vavasseur and the captives of Logres, "Après vêpres, à l'heure des complies" (2012-4). Here, Lancelot reveals that, although he is from the kingdom of Logres, "jamais encore je n'avais été dans ce pays" (2082). Under the governance of "des gens déloyaux," "pires des Sarrassins," Logres has become a place of servile entrapment, "car on est libre d'y entrer,/ mais contraint d'y rester" (2101-2); the freedom of all prisoners depends upon "un qui sorte." Not incidentally, Lancelot's feat at the Passage des Pierres, which prefaces his liberation of the Douloureuse Garde (173-191), occurs "à l'heure de prime exactement" (2199), a time of day associated with intellectual and spiritual awakening. To further nuance this, the knight undergoes a ritual initiation (with scarification and martyrdom) in order to re-create a degenerate social paradigm; remaining imperfect even as he becomes an integral participant in an evolving social order.

Once again, Lancelot's primary role as a social agent, as opposed to a socialized being, is exemplified by his refusal to accept hospitality at nones, declaring that "C'est une lâcheté que de traîner en route/ ou de chercher le repos et le confort/ quand l'entreprise est grande" (2268-70). Once inside the Garde's fortress, protected by a circumference of high walls and a moat, the door closes behind them, preventing their escape: "ils se croient le jouet de quelque enchantement"

(2334). By his introduction of Lancelot's ring, Chrétien makes (the first) explicit reference to his hero's upbringing and the influence of his foster mother: "Cette dame était une fée/ qui l'avait donné l'anneau/ et qui l'avait élevé durant son enfance" (2345-7). Yet, as the hero looks to the ring for help, it fails to deliver him from his predicament: "il n'y a là aucun enchantement" (2353). This latter reference may indicate the subjugation of Celtic influence to Christian values; Lancelot may receive aid from the otherworldly realm; yet his prowess, unique among Arthur's knights, cannot entirely differentiate him from other men, to whom he will be morally compared within both feudal and Christian systems. Christian undertones appear in an otherwise popular scene that follows, when Lancelot and his companions, leaving a dark forest, accept the hospitality of a knight and his wife, "une dame qui avait l'air bonne." The brief episode is vaguely reminiscent of the Fisher King's castle for its dreamlike and ritual (albeit quotidian) aspect. The guests partake in a meal of venison; candles are lighted; the knights are given a basin of water in which to wash their hands: "Rien de fâcheux ni de pénible/ ne se laissait voir en ces lieux" (2564-5). For a brief moment, Lancelot enjoys social communion; the basin suggests baptism, a cleansing of former sins, i.e. the knight's recent shame (the sins of his father remain implicit), all of which is then interrupted by the appearance of the 'chevalier orgueilleux' who reminds the hero of "la charrette où tu es monté" (2595). Exculpation of 'public' shame, an arduous process for this knight, which corresponds with his ambivalence concerning social integration, leads to the stigma of adultery, at the center of the conflicting values of Christianity and feudal society; ultimately both are overshadowed by the larger burden of ancestry, i.e. collective conscience, which informs the lengthy diegesis of the prose texts.

As we have seen, *Charrette*'s forests, which retain certain elements of the Celtic tradition, lose symbolic value in proportion with their sparseness and visual penetrability. This general trend continues in the prose texts, with the added distinction that features of landscape and specific attributes of courtly space, with a few notable exceptions, figure less prominently in the lengthy episodic unfolding of the prose narrative. In the *Lancelot du Lac*, the hero follows a solitary path, through sparse and thick woods, interspersed with brooks and streams; from one monastery to another, each with adjoining cemeteries and priests or monks who offer hospitality: "Le chevalier nouveau [. . .] passe la nuit au cœur de la forêt, dans une maison de religion" (I: 493) where he discovers the tomb of Leucain, nephew of Joseph d'Arimathie. After his feats at the Douloureuse Garde, Lancelot, "gravement blessé," happens upon a cemetery where he sees "un homme de religion à genoux devant la croix" (XXI), and an adjoining monastery where the hero convalesces "dix jours entiers, à la prière des frères" (603). Mention of the depleted "terrain marécageux," "desseché," and filled with "crevasses [...] larges et profondes," functions as a symbol for Lancelot's wounded body and for the violent history he is destined both to exhume and to perpetuate.

The prose author's rather neutral commentary upon the deteriorating value of humanity becomes particularly evident in the de-natured, albeit ritually impoverished, context of the forest in the prose text. Vaguely reminiscent of Perceval's apprenticeship, young Lancelot is easily led "hors du grand chemin" by both arrogant and helpful knights who offer him his first awkward adventures (I, XXII), as befits the status of the apprentice: "si impatient de la joute qu'il en oublia tout à fait son écu" (475). Later in the text, the lone, more experienced knight becomes witness to senseless acts of cruelty and violence. In one such incident, "au milieu d'une grande forêt épaisse," the hero encounters a band of travelers, among whom a cruel knight brutally drags

a younger knight, bound by his neck to the tail of a horse; "attaché au cou, par les cheveux;" the young knight, accused of adultery, is forced to carry the decapitated head of his captor's wife (XXXI: 599). Oddly enough, although the despicable act impresses Lancelot, echoing his own future situation, it provokes neither response nor corrective action. The very randomness of knightly wrath reinforces the forest's loss of sacredness, its symbolic irrelevance as a place of personal evolution. Correspondingly, the forest's magical, transformative potential, associated with arboreal density, recedes, overshadowed by the density and doings of itinerant men. Concomitant with this last situation, a series of ascetic monasteries, where the hero intermittently takes refuge from the violence of chivalric life, and adjacent cemeteries, quietly instills in the reader the dismal prospects awaiting both anonymous and known travelers. Two parallel realities emerge in the relationship between *Lancelot*'s forest and its monastic enclaves. The first, represented by the chivalric order, performs violent acts, often with no apparent objective or motive; the second, belonging to the remembered spaces of the dead and to monastics who, although powerless against the cummulative effects of violence, intervene with small acts of charity on behalf of the wounded. Importantly, the function of the monastic here is not to correct the wayward knight; nor does he assist in the knight's return to society. The sequence of forest monasteries Lancelot encounters announces the limited powers of influence of those who preside within; they allude in fact to this hero's reclusive destiny as an aged knight. In conjunction with the moral ambivalence of forest encounters, the author's morally androgynous indulgence of the fourway tryst between Lancelot and the queen, and Galehaut and La Dame de Malehaut, informs a portrait of dissipated morality in a court whose once distinct, socially stratified functions give way to indiscriminate comingling.

Whereas the reader gleans much of the calamitous future of the Arthurian order by virtue of the dearth and impotence of its natural spaces, *Lancelot*'s author reserves the ineluctably symbolic domain of dreams to communicate the full scale of human-environmental cataclysm. As an intercessor, Lancelot remains peripheral, yet essential to the 'message onirique', which has to do with Arthur's dearth of vision. What society and, in particular, the ruling monarchy persist in overlooking is explicitly visited upon Arthur in dreams of disaster. Particularly relevant to the king's body, interchangeable with his authority and with the land, impending calamity is conveyed through images of bodily mutilation: Arthur's loss of hair and beard; the loss of all of his fingers, with the exception of his thumbs; and the loss of all but his big toes, all of which predicate his destined loss of "toute honneur terrestre" (XLIII: 695). By medieval standards, dreams are viewed as "vrais" if they are percevied as 'coming from God' and "faux" if the devil is behind them (Le Goff). Although Arthur's dream appears to be of the former order, it is interpreted badly, initially, which points to the degradation of both the social and clerical order in the text. The state of the king, as I have discussed in my first chapter, is viewed as inseparable from the state of his kingdom. As a mitigating device, Arthur seeks the counsel of a series of clerics, whose mediocre capacity to interpret dreams is finally brought to light by an "homme sage," a "claivoyant" who admonishes the king to mend his sovereign ways: he must turn "envers [Dieu] et envers le siècle" by showing mercy and justice to the poor, by validating character over wealth, and by attending not only to his wealthy barons, but also to "tous les chevaliers, pauvres et riches" (755-7). The prescient cleric equally advises the king to develop an economy of equity in his use of the land: "tout ce que tu donneras restera dans la terre, et de beaucoup d'autres terres les richesses afflueront dans la tienne. [...] Tu n'useras jamais l'or et l'argent de la terre. Ce sont eux qui t'useront, comme l'eau use la roue du moulin" (XLVIII:

761). Finally, the riddle of his salvation presented to the king by his earlier advisors—nothing can save him, "sinon le Lion de l'Eau et le Médecin sans Médecin, par le conseil de la Fleur"—is deciphered by this last cleric, whose *lucidité* exceeds that of his predecessors; the decoded message, which follows, conveys man's inability to live in the century. In allegorical terms, the lion stands for Christ; le Médecin sans Médecin *is* God, who alone can heal souls; la Fleur, "la Vierge glorieuse, [...] parce qu'elle a gardé sa glorieuse fleur, pure et intacte, là où toutes les autres périssent" (767). (We find related, if ironic, use of symbolism in the same text: Lancelot is referred to as a "*lion* furieux," 557, and as "la *fleur* des chevaliers du monde," 875—my italics). What appears to be water, an inverted image of the sky, connotes "le siècle," which the clerics, "corrompus par le péché du siècle," misinterpret: "Et cette eau, où ils ont cru le voir, c'est le siècle; car de même que le poisson ne peut vivre sans eau, de même nous ne pouvons vivre dans le siècle, c'est-à-dire sans les choses du siècle" (761). According to Arthur's advisor, the state of humanity on earth reflects the Augustinian dichotomy between wordliness and ascetic life: "La terre [...] est la fosse et l'enterrement de l'homme qui vit dans le monde d'orgueil, de cruauté, de méchanceté, d'avarice, de cupidité, de luxure et de tous le péchés de la damnation" (763). The land itself is infected with the "pêchés" of men.

Sadly, although the dream's prophetic message temporarily assuages the king's anxiety, as avenues of expiation appear possible, nothing of a reparative nature actually occurs in the text. Among Arthur's continued errors is his dependence upon the aid of his all-too-human knights, particularly as exemplified by "le bon chevalier," "le meilleur chevalier du monde," whose elusive role as defender of the king's land conflicts with his role as consort of the queen. Escalation of violence, infidelity (of both Arthur and Guenièvre), and a battling, wounded knighthood permeates the second volume of the *Lancelot du Lac.* At Arestel, where Arthur

travels to defend his kingdom from the Irish and the Saxons, the knights find twelve leagues of grounds "ravagé, à l'exception d'un château" (*L.d.L*. II: 505). Emphasis upon the battlefield, tombs, knightly friendships and rivalries, continues as a dominant 'outdoor' theme, which culminates in Arthur's death on the Salisbury Plain in *La Mort*. In the final account, the potential suggested by Lancelot's presence among Arthur's knights is simultaneously curative and destructive. The king's implacable dilemma then reduces to the manner in which he will use and (mis)understand his best knight.

Feminine Guides and the Misguided Feminine

The role of the feminine 'guide' in *Charrette* is indicative of an ongoing dialogue concerning gender roles and gender identity in late medieval society, as we have already witnessed in *Perceval*, and will consider at length in the prose texts. Above all, Lancelot's encounters with feminine presence in the forest reinforce his conflicting loyalties to knightly duty and to love. As I have indicated in an earlier section, as a domain of externalized interior processes, *Charrette*'s wooded spaces maintain many of the magical attributes associated with Celtic origins. Conforming to a fairly standard view of females, Lancelot's encounters with young women herein are fraught with capricious forms of trickery, self-interest, and misguidance capable of distracting the knight temporarily, but ultimately proving his single vision/ one love: "le chevalier n'a qu'un cœur" (1228). The dense forest that hides crimes and secrets is replaced by a pervasive social innuendo whose mediator is invariably feminine. Both as witnesses and as deterrents, forest damsels ultimately prove the incorruptibility of the knight. In keeping with the motif, the hero meets a series of young women who simultaneously give aid and try, with little success, to distract the hero from his objective: the queen. *Charrette*'s lovesome maiden, who

insists upon hosting Lancelot in her abode, “un enclos,/ le plus beau qu’on pût voir jusqu’en Thessalie” (967-8), later stages her own false rape in order to lure the reluctant knight into her bedroom, where he finds her “dénudée jusqu’au nombril” (1082). The knight, forced to choose between chivalric duty towards his hostess and his quest to recover the queen from her captors, complies with her designs; ridding them both of her false attackers, he shares the damsel’s bed, albeit chastely, “il ne retire pas plus sa chemise [...]” (1214), and “sans plaisir”: “Il se garde avec soin de toucher à elle” (1216). Among other things, this last episode sheds light upon the nature of the knight’s devotion to the queen, exemplified by his ascetic response to coporeal temptations, which nuances as well as contradicts his reputation as a sinner of the flesh.

In a scene previously visited, Lancelot’s temporary guide attempts to thwart the knight from his discovery of Guenièvre’s comb at a forest fountain, “elle ne veut pas qu’il les voie: elle préféra changer de route” (1359-60); “il ne s’aperçoit pas tout de suite/ qu’elle l’écarte de son chemin” (1363-4). The damsel’s earlier attempts to engage the knight in conversation prove equally disappointing: “il en a horreur paroles et discours:/ penser lui plaît, parler lui pèse” (1334-5). A steely pragmatist, the damsel serves both her own interests and the interests of courtly hierarchy, quite literally leading the knight’s eyes astray from “le sentier battu/li droiz chemins battuz” (1379). Failing at this first endeavor, the damsel assures Lancelot that the golden strands of hair do indeed belong to “la femme du roi Arthur” (1423), thus reminding the knight of the queen’s role as property of the king, and thereby also of the hierarchical distance between himself, the queen, and Arthur. As if to underscore medieval disdain for the self-interested messenger, Lancelot’s emotional epistemology leaves him virtually immune to the logic of her message. To satisfy her request, Lancelot relinquishes the queen’s comb (a vessel) to the damsel but retains the strands of golden hair (flesh), a surrogate for the queen’s living body.

Alexandre Leupin has identified the loss of hair with the reccurring motif of bodily fragmentation in the Arthurian romance: "les cheveux sont une synechdoque qui vaut pour elle-même, effaçant la totalité comme concept" (*Le Graal et la Littérature* 117-8). Most specific to *Charrette*'s intention, the fragmented body functions as an object of individuation (C. Jung, B. Steigler) through which "remembrance" of both a genetic and historical past can occur. Concerning the affair between Lancelot and the queen, the 'past' remains rather ambiguous. Chrétien lets his readers deduce an earlier meeting between the queen and her knight.

We observe a similar, if more overtly politicized version of femininity in the prose *Lancelot*. La dame de Nohaut acts as an intercessor, testing the valor of the young knight on behalf of the queen; soon after, Guenièvre, pleased with the knight, reveals emotion when, fearing bad news, she hastily defends herself from questions concerning Lancelot's whereabouts: "Pourquoi me posez-vous cette question, fait la reine, par votre salut et par l'être qui vous est le plus cher?" (I, XXII: 499). The episode marks the first public disclosure, albeit by sous-entendu, of the queen's *feelings*. Lancelot's obsession with the symbol, a form of internalized eroticism, never entirely belongs to the private sphere as both his feelings and reactions can be observed by others at all times. Once the affair is consummated (in both texts), all feelings and thoughts concerning the queen, all words exchanged, all carnal relations occurring between the two in 'private', take place within the social domain. The observer, whether an individual or society at large, is always implicitly at the edges of medieval adultery: *adultery*, like its twin sibling 'fin amor', *needs a witness*. The limitations or strengths of a society are brought to light by the behavior of its members concerning the *secret*.

An additional point is indicative of the generally negative view of feminine character in late medieval romances. Leupin has attributed Arthurian women, particularly Guenièvre, with

the power to "pervert" the usage of the fragment (particularly if we invoke its Christian association with the bodily *relic*), and therefor to exert a disruptive, profane influence upon the knight; Delilah comes to mind. This appears to be the case in several respects. Because of the queen, Lancelot loses cognizance: of his whereabouts, space, time, past, and present. The knight's loss of physical power, his fainting spells, his fragmented body and psyche, reactions attributed to the corrupting feminine influence, which associates loss of hair with loss of power. In this instance, metaphors are reversed; in the absence of the queen, her power 'over' the knight is transmitted through a relic of her living body, the golden tresses: "son corps se courbe,/ pris d'une soudaine faiblesse./ Il fut si bien forcé de prendre appui/ sur le pommeau de la selle" (1424-7). When Lancelot's companion comes to his aid, she does so on behalf of society, not the knight; reminding the knight of his chivalric role, she takes pains not to instill the shame that would confirm her awareness of the truth of the situation: "il aurait été honteaux, angoissé,/ [...] si elle lui avait avoué la vérité" (1448-50). We recognize, furthermore, the trope of "ravissement," in French, 'delight', or, conversely,'ravishment', 'rape', for which the subject, or victim, refuses both spiritual and medicinal aide: "Le voici qui méprise la poudre de perles,/ l'archontique, la thériatique/ et tout autant saint Martin et saint Jacques!" (1474-6) (medieval medications). Lancelot's loss of his social self, always marginal in relationship to his exceptional qualities as a knight, is accompanied by a simulacrum of union with the feminine; his ecstasy, fetishistic, as earlier mentioned, broaches madness. The knight's individual memory in *Charrette*, based in personal feeling, is transferred to an externalized, historically based, collective memory in both the prose *Lancelot* and in *La Mort*. Importantly, as I stated earlier, these two kinds of memory are incompatible in their essence: they occupy different semiotic and linguistic domains.

It is important to point out that, in *Charrette*, the principal episodes of loss of identity and loss of place occur away from the court and the queen's presence. In these instances, visual artifacts representative of the queen elicit the knight's absorption in her memory, and a loss of all cognizance of the present moment. The hero's loss of self does not entirely coincide with his impulse towards self-annihilation, however. By virtue of her presence, the queen induces an interior awakening within the knight: "mais toujours il s'arrêtait/ devant sa dame, la reine,/ elle qui a mis en lui cette flamme" (3748-3750). As evidence suggests, Lancelot's prowess is positively influenced by the queen, if not also dependent upon her: "cette flamme qui lui donnait/ si grand ardeur contre Méléagant" (3753-4). The knight's awakened senses, visual, auditory, and so forth, resonate within his 'cœur' and thus move him to action.

We find a clear example of this last phenomenon's occurrence in a social setting when Bademagu, observing Lancelot's near defeat of Méléagant, requests the queen's intercession on behalf of his son. The mere sound of her consent, addressed to her host and not to him, awakens Lancelot's desire to serve the queen to the fullest extent of his abilities. In accordance with courtly values, the knight obeys his queen by showing mercy and moderation to his enemy. This much said, Chrétien makes an important distinction between prescribed courtly behavior, i.e. rote observance of a social code, and sense signals—the auditory sense is amplified in this instance—that move the knight to obeisance through devotion:

> Cette réponse ne fut pas/ dite à voix basse: elle fut entendue/ de Lancelot et de Méléagant./ Celui qui aime sait obéir./ Il fait bien vite et de bonne grâce/ ce qui doit plaire à son amie,/ s'il aime d'un cœur entier./ Il était donc normal que Lancelot obéît,/ lui qui aima mieux que Pyrame,/ si jamais on a pu aimer plus./ Lancelot a entendu la réponse. (3795-805)

If the body's memory, which is tactile and objective, quiets the auditory memory of the knight,[viii] it is equally true that, in the presence of the queen, we observe a natural progression between hearing, understanding, and acting. Guenièvre's influence has the power not only to move Lancelot's heart, but also to awaken his consciousness and guide him towards humane action: mercifully, he spares his enemy. The knight's devotion to Guenièvre cannot be purely obstructive as her influence elevates his behavior, and therefore his value as a knight. The queen, in fact, provides a mnemonic cord (umbilicus) to the feminine domain of Lancelot's upbringing—the affectionate memory of his foster mother and the ideal, nurturing environment of his youth—and to the highest values of courtly society. In this respect, she is both a mediator between two opposing worlds and an educator. Chrétien's inclusion of Pyramus in the above passage reminds us, nevertheless, of the frailty of this unequal relationship and of the dangers of overly identifying with the other.

For Lancelot, the queen remains a universal symbol. She is also a woman of high social rank whom he can possess with her full consent. While Lancelot's devotion to the queen has undeniably beneficial consequences, we must remember that Guenièvre belongs to a patriarchal system in which her status, however comely, amounts to little more than exchangeable goods. In relationship to Arthur, the queen's feminine powers are all but inexistent; her capacity to influence and to obtain loyalty among Arthur's knights is dependent upon her reputation, easily subject to attack for legitimate as well as for insidious motivations.

Although in romances, as earlier mentioned, women appear to have gained importance as central foci of the knight's quest, they are often portrayed as using their image as powerless individuals to manipulate knights, as is the case with the damsel who stages her rape in

Charrette; they are equally distrusted for their 'negative' power, which is to say, *power over* otherwise stalwart, sensible men. Negative, or mischievous, *intention* is implied in the iconography of the feminine, and is considered innate to feminine constitution and character: the chief power of comely medieval damsels, and influential queens, is to distract the knight from his duty, and, even more insidious, from his ordained destiny to save humanity. This conforms to clerical views of secular women, as well as to a general anti-feminist sentiment that associates feminine 'unpredictability' with social chaos and historic strife. Hélène's inadequacy as a mother, forgiven by her author through her sanctification as a nun, contributes to the unspoken, volatile historical (and hysterical) subtext inherited by her son. Lancelot's foster mother is unique in that she exists outside the realm of chronological history yet acts on its behalf by returning her charge to fulfill his destiny as a descendent of royal lineage in need of resuscitation. As we have seen with Perceval, a mother's power is indelible, by virtue of her role, and particularly in the case of the widow, whether or not she does well by her child. As I mentioned earlier, Lancelot's involvement with the queen is prescribed by Ninienne, through both her counsel and her complicity. And who can ignore Guenièvre as both a reparative and destructive reimagination of lost intimacy with the birth mother?

Concerning the personal evolution of the knight, Lancelot's attraction to the 'clarté' and 'lumière' of the queen, provides a luminous counterpart to his sub-aqueous and subterranean exploits. Arthur, on the other hand, both in his relationship to the queen and to the adulterous relationship between Guenièvre and her knight, evidences 'dimness' of understanding. As an intertextual evolutionary character, Lancelot navigates, in love, towards light. In chivalry and by virtue of his family history, he is bound to fluid water, a giver and taker of life, and implacable substances, such as rock, metal, and tombs, tokens of death and of the underworld. A similar

evolution, or, more appropriately expressed, a regression, is evident in the landscape: the populated forest, fields, and orchards of *Charrette* are replaced progressively in the *Lancelot* and in *La Mort* by a desertified landscape and the solid material debris of failed humanity, which can be assigned a historical function (towers, tombs) and a documentary function (platforms for inscription): the symbolism of enchantment and potential of the 12th century is overtaken by the symbolism of destruction and pessimism of the 13th century. A disjuncture in the epistemology of resuscitation is a shared trait of these texts.

Self-Annihilation: Between Society, Nature, and Self

At the level of *identitas*, Lancelot's internal process of self-discovery, albeit through self-annihilation, distinguishes his individual 'progress' from that of Perceval in significant ways. Whereas Perceval can change, acquire knowledge and flourish progressively, there is no direct correlation between Lancelot's emotional and physical mutability and his perfection. As the *Lancelot* in prose tells us, this hero is imbued with every characteristic of perfection at birth. Because of his oversized heart, which disposes him to excessive displays of emotion, as well as to magnanimous acts of charity, moderation is not innate to his character but must be learned through the tutoring of his foster mother. Feeling is the predominant epistemological lens through which he responds to the world. Lancelot's identity, as we find him at Arthur's court, is both mutable and constant. From an external perspective, he is subject to periodic identity 'blackouts', as I have discussed above. His armor and his arms change, from white to red to black; his mood alternates between inebriated love, melancholy, despair-driven paralysis, and violent rage. The knight's interior fragmentation is most visible when he exhibits suicidal thoughts, associated not only with entrapment and with his love for the queen, but also with his

chivalric feats. His crossing of the Pont de l'épée with bare hands and feet affects a degree of bodily mutilation worthy of Christian martyrdom—the river is anthropomorphized in negative terms: "l'eau traîtresse" and "le fleuve infernal." A degree of masochism, as well as self-sacrifice, is present in the knight's wounded body as he traverses the abyss: "l'eau infernal." Once again, he prefers bodily and psychic mutilation to the abandonment of his quest. In this instance, Amour appears both as a guide and as a medic. Elsewhere in the romance, she appears as an intoxicant, debilitating to the knight, "un être sans force ni defense" (712). In both of her incarnations, she represents the queen.

In a later episode, already distraught by the queen's apparent rejection of him, Lancelot learns mistakenly "que morte est sa dame et son amie" (4253); overwrought: "[...] il fut désespéré/ au point de prendre en dégoût sa vie/ et de vouloir sans tarder se tuer" (4256-8), he acts upon his self-destructive compulsion, making "un nœud coulant/ à l'un des bouts de sa ceinture" (4260-1). His devastation is both psychological and physical: "'Plein de vigueur, déjà je me sens faible./ J'ai perdu mes forces et ne sens aucun mal,/ excepté le chagrin qui me pénètre le cœur'" (4265-7). As Chrétien makes explicit, his "but" is "de se détruire" (4287); "Il ne veut vivre une heure de plus" (4294). Due to the interference of other knights, the hero's self-inflicted strangulation does not kill him. In the author's visceral dramatization, the would-be-suicide is left mutilated at the neck and throat and temporarily mute, "le lacet avait déjà/ si peu épargné sa gorge/ qu'il resta longtemps sans parler" (4306-8), and regretful at his failure, "car les veines du cou et de la gorge/ avaient bien failli se rompre toutes" (4308-10). At both figurative and literal levels, the strangulation occurs between the hero's head (reason/ society) and his heart (emotions/ individuality). The body communicates the state of the psyche (which we can also

equate with the restricted, subjugated condition of medieval women): mutilated, muted, linguistically *and* emotionally suppressed.

The location of bodily injury caused by the despondent lover's suicidal attempt underscores another important element of Lancelot's character, e.g. his communicative isolation. Although this hero excels in physical prowess and as a defender of others, he lacks the opportunity and, by association, the capacity to defend himself with words. Once again, this does not suggest lack of linguistic preparation; rather, it points to an impasse for the knight whose epistemological reality exists between two worlds. After his humiliating association with the pillory, in *Charrette*, Lancelot remains mute before his accusers and critics (the queen among them), responding only through his deeds, which, little by little, absolve him of his mistake. The hero's true motivation for sacrificing his reputation, much like his enigmatic presence in the Arthurian domain, remains, like the early years of his life, latent in the public conscience.

As Lancelot, at last, gains access to the queen, Chrétien further develops the tension between private and public spheres, in which we also recognize a juxtaposition of unbridled and cultivated qualities of human nature. In literal terms, passion must contend with, i.e. scale and supersede, existing social hierarchies and taboos, represented by Bademagu's castle, where Lancelot and the queen first consummate their mutual desire. The knight's progress from the forest, a topos for sexual passion, to the orchard, which we can associate with both fertility and fruition, to the tower's formidable structure, provides an important metaphorical context for the knight's accomplishment. As Chrétien makes explicit, the queen is both consenting and complicit: she encourages and instructs her lover, with a caveat: "Vous passerez par ce verger,/ mais vous ne pourrez pas entrer [...]:/ je serai dedans, vous resterez dehors,/ vous ne parviendrez pas à pénétrer" (4511-5). Entry into the queen's chamber presents a challenge whose unlikely

success the knight must disprove. All of the appropriate obstacles are in place. Keu, bleeding from his wounds, sleeps in the adjoining room; the door at the other side is locked and closely guarded. True to his character, the hero remains confident of his abilities, immune to threats of social ostracism or bodily harm: "je ne me laisserai épier par personne/ qui penserait à mal en me voyant ou en médirait" (4529-30). After the rendez-vous is confirmed, the two separate "dans la joie," until Lancelot "si heureux qu'il a oublié/ la somme de tous ses tourments" (4534-5), is newly tortured by the hours, "la nuit qui se fait trop attendre," and "le jour [...] plus long à devoir le supporter" (4536-8), that must elapse before their next meeting. The hero's anxiety is allegorized as a struggle between night and day, a refusal of sleep, until "la nuit profonde et ténébreuse/ remporta enfin la victoire" (4544-5). By all appearances, the lunar cycle aids and abets the secrecy of his mission; an absence of light dominates the scene: "Ce n'était pas pour lui déplaire/ si ne brillait lune ni étoile,/ si ne brillait dans la maison/ chandelle, lampe, ni lanterne" (4560-3). Metaphorically speaking, darkness connotes blindness, or poor judgment. The return of daylight, of communal eyes and social conscience, is also implicit in the motif. While Chrétien is aware to the minutest detail of the social implications of this adulterous crossing, he stops short of condemning the act.

As Lancelot makes his approach through the orchard, a symbol of cultivated nature, Nature under control, chance, acting on his behalf, sees to it that "un pan de mur entourant le verger/ se fût depuis peu écroulé" (4572-3), allowing the hero to ascend from nature ordered, quite literally, to leave it beneath him, so that another order may be created. This last scene and the next dramatize the foreplay between access and obstacle, exterior desire and interior (penetration).[ix] When, after scaling the castle walls, the hero, exceeding the capacity of most mortals, bends "de gros barreaux de fer" to gain access to Guenièvre's room, he forgets his body,

the iron bars “si coupant” that he all but severs his fingers: “son esprit est ailleurs/ et il ne sent rien du sang qu’il perd/ ni d’aucune de ses blessures” (4643-5). The knight’s use of the term ‘doucement’ speaks to his indifference, or, even more pointedly, to his willingness for physical sacrifice.

In a similar vein, a certain transfiguration takes place with the queen’s image; before Lancelot’s entry into her chamber, Guenièvre appears as a woman, “dans la blancheur d’une chemise,/ sans robe ni tunique par-dessus,/ un manteau court sur les épaules/ en soie d’écarlate et peau de souslik” (4578-82). Her body, apparent beneath the robes, in a suggestive contrast of white and vermillion, is replete with the symbolism of sacrifice as well as of violence and sexuality. Soon after, the wounded knight, bleeding from his difficult entry into her chamber, contemplates the queen in her bed with the reverence of a spiritual apprentice: “Devant elle il s’incline et l’adore/ car il ne croît pas autant aux plus saintes reliques” (4652-3). As a reward for his sacrifice, which evokes both Christian and courtly martyrdom, the knight is invited into the domain of physical pleasure by the queen’s expression of her own desire: “elle l’attire à elle dans son lit/ et lui fait le plus bel accueil/ qu’elle puisse jamais lui faire” (4657-9). The author takes pains, nevertheless, to underscore the disproportion of their shared feeling: “Mais si grand que soit pour lui son amour,/ il l’aime cent mille fois plus” (4662-3). Their mutual satisfaction, “la plus parfaite/ et aussi la plus délicieuse” (4682-3), is followed by Lancelot’s physical and psychological martyrdom upon departure, “si douloureux fut cet arrachement” (4690), underscored once again by the fragmentation of the lover’s body, chivalric agency vs. feeling: “Le corps peut partir, le cœur reste” (4697).[x]

Much as we would expect, remnants of the knight’s body, incriminating signs of his transgression, lead to a false reconstruction of the actual crime. “Vers la fenêtre il se dirige,/ mais

il reste aussi un peu de son corps,/ car les draps se trouvent tachés/ par le sang qui est tombé de ses doigts" (4698-4701). The gravity of Lancelot's wounds underscores the social and physical implications of this infraction: "Ses doigts n'étaient plus entiers,/ car ses blessures étaient profondes" (4708-9). His exit from the queen's bedchamber is noteworthy as it resuscitates the motif of ritualistic prostration: "En partant, il s'est prosterné/ devant la chambre, en agissant/ comme s'il était en face d'un autel" (4706-8). Later, when Lancelot becomes cognizant of his wounds, he readily accepts the sacrifice of his body: "car il voudrait mieux avoir/ les deux bras arrachés du corps/ que de n'être pas allé plus avant" (4731-3). Characteristically, he shows no more concern for the attitudes and laws of society at few paces from the queen's bedchamber than he appears aware of his own suffering. Although Chrétien suspends judgment concerning the culpability of his hero, he creates the context that becomes central to the dramatic downward spiral of moral and social order in *La Mort le Roi Arthur*. To his credit, the author of *Le Conte du Graal* and *Le Chevlier de la Charrette* is as highly attuned to epistemological processes and differences in individuals as he is to incompatible value systems within society.

Although the conflicting views of Christianity and courtly love remain a constant source of tension in *Charrette,* Chrétien makes evident his interest in the complexity of character, which includes visible traits of good and evil in individuals, as well as disjunctions between individual character and the implacable structures of society, such as the law. The hero's function, once again, is to mediate between these disparate entities. The author places Lancelot in Arthur's court to serve the interests of courtly love—which we expect—but also to show us the limitations of a society that, unable to sustain its rigid legal and moral codes, resorts to insensate practices that become particularly prevalent in the thirteenth century texts. *Charrette*'s hero, at odds with the society he serves, operates to the n-th degree according to a moral code relevant to him, a code

both governed and amplified by the truth of his feelings; these feelings, although constant, and subject to polar excesses, take no single form. As the author makes explicit, Lancelot's 'exceptional' nature highlights, in less than flattering terms, the predictable conformity of other lovers (such as Gauvain) within the courtly realm: "[...] Amour a laissé les autres cœurs/ à l'abandon, mais pas le sien./ Amour a repris tout entier/ vie dans son cœur, et de façon si absolue/ qu'il est partout ailleurs resté médiocre" (4664-8).[xi] This is not to say that Chrétien ignores or wishes to contradict the destructive or the manipulative aspects of Amour; the hero *is* indeed tormented, in keeping with the motif, and, in a fleeting commentary by the author, driven beyond his own ideas of right and wrong: "Lancelot voit à présent tous ses vœux comblés" (4669). The question of individual agency, and culpability, is mitigated, although not sacrificed entirely, by the author's use of the allegory. Raison's rigid conformity is antithetical to the truth of feeling. By the same token, Lancelot's capacity for feeling, like his dauntless courage, is a result of innate interior traits particular to him. Amour, as no other moral or legal structure external to him, can influence the ascetic tendencies of this hero because of the propensity of his 'cœur' for absolute sacrifice and devotion. Refined *amour*, whose pleasures broach the inexpressible, *l'indicible*, "Cette joie que le conte doit nous taire" (4684), can be nothing other than antithetical to all social and moral factions external to it.

The hero's negative double, Méléagant, who personifies the archetypal potential of sibling rivalry, allows us to probe another important aspect of Lancelot's indiscretion. Méléagant's discovery of the bloodstained sheets the morning after the lovers consummate their relationship flounders, by mere association with his character, as a revelation of the truth. To begin with, his impetus is lust; likewise, the lens through which he views the evidence, "les draps tachés de fraîches gouttes de sang" (4748-9), is tainted by "l'esprit prompt à voir le mal" (4751-

2). In fact, neither his visual nor his intellectual perceptions delude him. Rather, in keeping with the motif of the medieval 'snitch', Méléagant's arrogance, coupled with his self-serving intentions, distorts the 'truth' of his discovery into a lie. His rude entry into the adulterous bedchamber is accompanied by a bawdiness of conduct befitting the tavern: he intrudes, unannounced and uninvited, upon the queen, "doucement assoupie," and as yet unaware of the incriminating drops of blood; next, his gruff attitude lacks the emotion-charged jealousy of a lover, "Il donne une bourrade à ses companions" (4750). The intruder draws his conclusions from a similar set of bloodstains on Keu's sheets (a result of the seneschal's wounds, reopened during the night), quickly miffed, as he later complains to his father, "quand je la vois me haïr et me mépriser,/ tandis que chaque nuit Keu couche avec elle" (4817-8). Guenièvre's captor, in fact, demonstrates little respect for the queen's rank or her person, and treats her with misogynistic aggression: "Il faut être fou, c'est bien vrai,/ pour vouloir garder une femme./ C'est perdre son temps et sa peine" (4758-60). The ensuing falsehood of the queen's defensive excuse—the blood is due to a bloody nose, she insists; "Elle croît dire la vérité" (4784)—is morally permissible, from the author's perspective, as the carnal connection between herself and the wounded seneschal is indeed false and the fact of Lancelot's wounds remains unacknowledged, i.e. unperceived, in her consciousness. Méléagant's accusation forces another significant issue pertaining to disparate gender roles in the 12th-century. The law of ownership over a woman's body allows her no 'private' enjoyment, even with her husband. Méléagant not only constructs a 'lie', he reinforces the view of the queen's body as a public object. His entry into the queen's room, however, contradicts and disparages Bademagu's will and the hospitality of his court, which, we begin to understand, operates according to different standards than Arthur's court. The question of Arthur's betrayal by his wife is secondary in this argument as the

'indiscretion' of the true lovers takes place within a domain corresponding to, but outside of, Arthur's castle. Moreover, as we have seen, Lancelot, not the king, rescues the queen. Méléagant's insistence on revenge underscores the point that the insensate brute, not the embarrassed husband, is the first to evoke and to manipulate the law to satisfy his designs. Prowess, not logic, must resolve the matter, and, once again, Lancelot is the superior knight. Through Méléagant, Chrétien uses *dédoublement*, related to the bodily fragmentation of the hero, to personify the split psyche of the hero. Much as with the mirror image, an identical yet opposite image (the German *doppelganger*), the motif directs the reader to examine darker, if not altogether sinister aspects of the hero's character. After all, before his incarnation as a failed Christian, Lancelot is emblematic of the hermetic figure, a traveler between worlds, psychic, otherworldly, past and future, feminine and masculine.

In the final analysis, Chrétien's infusion of an implied public conscience in *Charrette*'s 'natural' spaces and places of passage, a subtext for explicit surveillance at the court, provides a point of departure rather than a template for the 13th-century prose texts, whose spaces lose much of the polyvalent meaning and descriptive texture put forth by the 12th-century author. The prose *Lancelot*'s 'natural' spaces, reflecting the condition of the human world, register as symbolically inert; often slipping into descriptive ambiguity, emphasis turns to linearity, clan relationships, and royal succession, and yet never entirely abandons memory of the otherworldly domain of Lancelot's early formation. As I will discuss in my next chapter, *La Mort*'s obsession with culpability and death follows these last concerns to their final, overwhelmingly pessimistic conclusion; women, not incidentally, acquire a marginal status and presence in the text. Episodes of madness, physical illness and indifference to life in the prose texts maintain their relationship to the context of separation from the queen, which points to original separation: "car je ne

maintiens ma vie que par elle et d'ailleurs je ne perdrais pas autant qu'elle si je mourrais" (*L.d.L.* II: 333). *Lancelot*'s emphasis upon the hero's tragic origins prefaces his return to the domain of history, presumably, to set things right. Correspondingly, access to knowledge of both his past and his destiny requires superhuman feats of strength and descent into otherworldly realms that foreshadow his death and the death of his comrades. The prose hero's emotional life, on the other hand, remains (historically speaking) unscripted. The two worlds that Lancelot inhabits, through birth and upbringing respectively, further establish an oppositional relationship between the protected, private, uterine world of the lake, an existence taking place outside the chronological progression of human time, though not immune to it, and, conversely, the increasingly violent, hierarchical, domain of his forefathers, whose obsession with lineage, moral culpability, and material impermanence informs the next chapter.

[i] This perpsective is influenced by Bresson's vision of the Arthurian story as well as by Michael Dempsey's article, "Despair Abounding," in *Robert Bresson*, 1998.
[ii] See Longley, note 8: 314; see also Emmanuelle Baumgartner's 'L'Enfant du Lac,' *Lancelot*, ed. Mireille Séguy. Paris: Autrement, 1996 (33-49).
[iii] Micha VII, XIa-XIIIa, 101-24 and II, XLIX, 12, respectively. See Longley 316-7.
[iv] "Quand Lancelot sera chevalier, il lui restera Lionel et Bohort en sa garde. Quand Lionel devra être chevalier à son tour, au moins lui restera-t-il Bohort. Elle essaie ainsi de se consoler de l'un par l'autre" (*L.d.L.*, *I*: 321).
[v] To paraphrase Eugene Vance, lecture, "Epopée et Pouvoir," University of Washington (2007).
[vi] See S. Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*.
[vii] See chapter five, i, "The Flow of Myth" (254-55), and ii, "Circulation, Arteries and Mysteries" (256-62).
[viii] Virginie Greene writes: "[...] la mémoire du corps (mémoire surtout tactile et objective) fait taire la mémoire auditive." *Le Sujet et la Mort dans 'La Mort Artu'* 347.
[ix] Guillaume de Lorris does something similar in verse 3833 of *Le Roman de la Rose*. See also my section on Towers, chapter three.
[x] This amounts to something of an inversion of Matthew 26: 41: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
[xi] In Old French: "Car a toz autres cuers failli/ Amors avers qu'au suen ne fist,/ Mes an son cuer tote reprist/ Amors et fu si anterine/ Qu'an toz autres cuers fu frarine" (4664-8).

Three

Getting to the Arthurian Wasteland: Gender, Violence, and the Ecology of Feeling

The death of nature in the Arthurian narrative has as much to do with the obscuring of boundaries of identity as with the systemic failures and transgressions of human laws that lead to moral disorder and uncontrolled violence. For a society to whom the Round Table served as a metaphor for the world, even the cosmos, degradation of the order of human relations cannot be overestimated. How we get from isolated instances of social transgression, what Howard Bloch refers to as the "absence of moderation of social conduct" ("Wasteland and Round Table" 260-6), to the process of devastation of human-environmental relations—Lancelot's role is pivotal yet not entirely causal— is the focus of this chapter. Both the presence and the dissolution of boundaries of difference are at issue here: the failure of agriculture and trade, the obfuscation of territories of cultivation and vegetation, the insertion of human culture into an undifferentiated natural landscape (259-60). Whereas advancements in law, administrative and ecclesiastical structures appear as rational, positive features of progress, they retain a subtext of repression, imposing conformity upon a heterogeneous community, defining categories of exclusion based upon difference, and punishing dissent.[i] Our close examination of medieval adultery in the section that follows, particularly in its central role as a destabilizing element in the 13th-century prose texts, is indicative of the circuitous methods and costs involved in the retention of an 'idea' of order in medieval society, whose sacrifices involve not only individuals and nature, but also cultures of feeling between individuals and in the human relationship with the natural world.

Medieval Adultery: the End or the Beginning of the Moral Universe?

Central to Chrétien's romance (and as proposed by Andreas Capellanus), the treatment of adultery in the Lancelot cycle is indicative of wavering cultural discourses concerning identity and ownership between the 12th- and 13th-centuries. 12th-century romances, such as *Tristan and Iseult*, and Chrétien's *Cligés* treat the adulterous relationship with the caution it deserves as a broadly recognized (although not universal) disruptive element in both tribal and civilized societies. In *Charrette* and the 13th-century prose texts, treatment of the adulterous affair between Lancelot and Guenièvre vacillates between its tantalizing and cautionary aspects. Broadly speaking, medieval preoccupation with adultery, before its association with Christian morality, is rooted in clan-based concerns over power and lineage. Questions of paternity, which rely upon the chastity of the queen, become central to attitudes concerning the infraction of the lovers as well as to fears concerning reverberating social repercussions.

In this section, I will discuss the underlying premises and discursive objectives of adultery in order to demonstrate in specific ways how the contentious topic, differently nuanced by Chrétien and the authors of the prose texts, expresses both deeply-rooted and emergent beliefs concerning the relationship between gender roles and social and environmental stability from the 12th- and 13th-centuries. To begin with, adultery scenarios in medieval romances depart from fundamental precepts of clan-based social organization. Anthropologist Mary Douglas confirms this point when she reminds us that taboos—concerns over bodily and environmental 'uncleanliness', food, pre- and post-marital sexual practices, including adultery—are essentially 'devices' designed to protect "distinctive categories of the universe" (*Purity and Danger*, 2002).

When a community's established consensus on how the world is organized is tested too far, uncertainty (Douglas uses the term "cognitive discomfort") results, followed by intellectual and social disorder. The function of taboo (based upon pre-modern ideas of the sacred), or, from a contemporary perspective, social and environmental pollution and danger classifications, is to restore conceptual order to ambiguity. In other words, societies and individuals tend to prefer the known, classifiable threat to the unknown threat, or the unknown Unknown (chaos, anarchy, cataclysm). Theories of attendant harm are therefore useful in reestablishing 'order', for which mass conformity, imposed by authoritarian structures, becomes a common reactionary, if also a deficient measure. [ii]

It figures as no accident that texts that bring adultery to the forefront invariably also speak of power relations, based in differences of gender roles, as well as in perceived threats of succession, i.e. the replacement of old rulers and structures by younger generations. The incest taboo appears as a related (albeit more insidious) subtext to adultery. Additional pressures, having to do with changes in social and environmental circumstances, are also inherent in the theme. As for equations of adultery with Arthurian end-times, particularly as concerns the cuckoldry of kings, evidence suggests that both pre-Christian taboos and Christian moral dictates are at play. Cataclysmic thinking in the late Middle Ages, as we shall see, finds its base in deeply rooted fears of shifting gender equity, the purity of gender lines, and the influence of women upon children and hierarchies governed by men. Once again, two opposing objectives reassert themselves: the fixed structures of society (tradition, law), which resist change, and the need for a fluid response to external pressures, both intercultural and in the environment. René Girard's earlier mentioned assertion that the inability to adapt to changing conditions is a trait characteristic of religion in general (39) underscores Rudd's earlier point concerning volatility in

fixed cultural systems. Literary historians, such as George Duby, Erich Köhler, and Howard Bloch, have long asserted the close relationship between courtly discourse and the concerns of the medieval aristocracy in a changing society. The existence of practices of courtly love within a society dominated by Christian morality provides ample context for conflict.

How nature is represented in our primary texts, particularly as a reflection of the moral condition of humanity, is indicative of the interdependence of the eco-human relationship in medieval society. Similarly, fluctuations within a society, or within the external environmental, in which something valued or necessary is perceived as lost, contribute to a general mood of uncertainty (Douglas, Eco, and Girard all make this point).[iii] Ultimately, these uncertainties influence how societies treat their own members, as well as other societies. In this latter case, individual or even communal 'concern' is often appeased, if unconsciously, by authoritarian influences seeking consensus (i.e. conformity), rather than heightened awareness: hence the role and function of an identified *problem*, or a collective scapegoat.

Collectively, a culture seeks mediation between its epistemological orientation, behavioral practices, and unpredictable processes underway. As a community cannot survive without the complicity of its members, collective consensus of some sort is indispensable. At one end of the spectrum, consensus may involve what Laurence Buell has termed "the shock of awakened perception," a disturbing form of environmental epiphany, or, at the other end, organized or spontaneous displays of violence. In view of medieval association of human immorality with cosmological repercussions, this becomes increasingly relevant. According to symbolic, or 'magical' (equated with medieval) thinking,[iv] the elements, earth, air, water, animal and vegetal life may be seen as rising up "to defend the founding principles of society" (Douglas), invariably by extremes: earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, etc. . . .[v] Change or

obfuscation (naturally or unnaturally occurring) of founding principles, which ordinarily assume a consensus of worldview and practice, creates anxiety which may be experienced at both individual and communal levels as cataclysmic. The function of taboo becomes particularly relevant here. As "a spontaneous coding practice" involving a defined set of spatial limits and physical and verbal signals, Taboo is designed to get around the volatile potential of vulnerable relations (Douglas). Classification is a rational behavior inherent in organization, and, the act of classifying is a human universal (Douglas, Durkheim, and Mauss). Anomaly becomes problematic inasmuch as it fails to correspond to a given system of classification. By the same token, perceptions and anxieties concerning social or environmental 'danger' are dependent upon classifications in use. As we have seen in *Perceval*, an injury to the loins of the king is perceived as calamitous to the fertile landscape surrounding his kingdom. Similarly, the rape of an individual will have repercussions in nature. In an effort to mitigate or ward off danger, a negative ritual necessitates a corrective ritual, such as sacrifice, to reverse its effects.

Just as risk assessment is a cultural phenomenon, anxiety is culturally selective and largely related to group status and goals within a given society (Douglas). Medieval anxiety, an aristocratic construct, invariably trickles down and throughout the social and environmental spectrum. As I have indicated, because it concerns itself with the destabilization of paternity and lineage, the character of the queen, not the king, is central to the concerns of adultery. Although the queen's individual powers prove limited, her social position imbues her with a potential to disrupt both power structures and a web of alliances far beyond her political or sovereign influence. The distinction between the 'real' and the literary medieval queen is an important one. Peggy McCracken has identified three central concerns influential to the evolution of queenship in the 12^{th}-13^{th} centuries: the importance of female chastity and legitimate succession in royal

marriage, allowances and limitations concerning a royal wife's influence on her husband, and the queen's symbolic value in the display of the king's sovereignty (*The Romance of Adultery,* 1998). According to McCracken, most medieval queens were queens consort (made so by marriage) and entirely dependent upon the king. Religious texts and didactic treatises such as the *speculum dominarum*, written for Jeanne de Navarre (1273-1331), wife of Philip IV of France (1268-1314), and translated into Old French as *Le miroir des dames*, promoted chastity and the importance of childbirth. The queen could nevertheless extract some influence through her access to financial resources, influences gained through intimacy with her husband and as a child bearer, particularly as a mother of sons. In the early ninth century, for example, queens began to participate in court documents, a practice that added to a certain level of discomfort with the prominence of the king's wife in the royal court and may have led to various forms of subterfuge designed to discredit the queen and her allies, among which, the accusation of adultery.[vi] Although medieval queens continued to have prominence and to share power with their husbands until the 12th century, by the 13th century, queenship in most European monarchies had been reduced to symbolic and reproductive functions. The queen's role as intercessor on behalf of her own interests or on behalf of the king's subjects appears to correspond with her diminished role as part of the government. As an outsider where government was concerned, she became more important as an intercessor, while remaining sexually suspect, particularly as she could be thought to receive 'petitioners' in her bedchambers.[vii]

As an indicative juxtaposition to the above, McCracken points to a relationship between the queen's marginalization from political power, which likely increased her value as an intercessor in the eyes of her husband's subjects, and Mary's symbolic function on behalf of Christian supplicants. Thus, we find on either side of her role as intercessor, her roles as mother

and secondary regent, or, conversely, as seductress and potential traitor. Her marginal status, however, which could be exacerbated by her failure to produce heirs, leaves the queen vulnerable to accusations of adultery, sexual indiscretion, murder, witchcraft, and other forms of scheming.[viii] This corresponds with Guenièvre's situation in Arthurian romances, for example.

In the dynastic court in particular, as opposed to empires, the queen's chastity becomes the central focus of legitimate succession. McCracken attributes the absence of reproduction of romance queens to the "distinct difference" between fictional and actual queens of the period. For real queens, the imperative to produce royal heirs and to exert the power and influence allotted a royal mother were defining factors of her identity and role as a medieval queen. In romances, infidelity, closely associated with political duplicity, expresses related, although less directly explicit anxieties about reproduction and succession. Only in the thirteenth century does bastardy become a disqualifying factor to the succession of a throne; dynasties were patrilineal in medieval France and, correspondingly, in medieval fictions concerning dynasties.[ix] Once the queen becomes a mother, vassals who might compete with her lover for influence in the court turn their focus away from the queen, in the direction of her son.

Much as we might expect, literary emphasis upon the queen's adultery, treated differently from the king's infidelity, addresses concerns over the status of the child who must carry forth the lineage of the royal family. In early chronicles and Celtic tales where both Guenièvre and Arthur appear, the queen is adulterous in some narratives and not in others. Once again, McCracken, who identifies Chrétien's *Charrette* as the first example of the queen's adulterous association with Lancelot, makes the important distinction between medieval queens, who defend their innocence through oaths and ordeal, and romance queens, who use tests and ordeals not to disprove a false accusation but, rather, to falsify true accusations made by self-interested

parties. Thus, romance narratives about adulterous queens adopt a fairly consistent moral framework to represent a pedagogical position about status and legitimacy: the "*function*" of the queen's adultery remains stable in all of these narratives, both as a component of social stability and instability. Revealingly, not only does the adulterous motif reflect anxieties about legitimacy and legitimate succession among kings and in the aristocracy, it reflects anxieties about women's "illegitimate access" to power (McCracken 20-4). At first glance, potential illegitimacy, resulting from adultery, paves the way to the potential usurpation of the king's power. From a broader and more complex social perspective, however, the illegitimate (childless) relationship works to maintain stability, at least temporarily.

This leads us to a secondary, yet equally relevant concern of the adulterous motif, and elaborated in the prose *Lancelot*: the relationship of high-ranking men with other high-ranking men.[x] The queen's sterility, with both her husband and her lover, alludes to another important sterile relationship: between the king and his best knight. The twofold concerns of this last motif point to a) fears of inappropriate succession and, b) to discomfort with 'insider' alterity, e.g. difference that makes a difference. Among its potentially disruptive influences, medieval homosexuality blurs distinctions between gender roles that medieval society would prefer to remain intact.

If we accept the premise that the (gendered) body functions as a symbol of society, "'a model which can stand for any bounded system'" (Douglas 115), we find its literalization in medieval characters whose physical attributes reflect their virtues and vices. In both the literary text and in medieval society, the queen's body has value not only in terms of her attractiveness to her lover and subjects, but moreover, and predominately, as property of the king. Correspondingly, the royal body has a "*semantic* value" and is invested with *meaning* (Kristeva,

qtd. in McCracken 33).[xi] The royal female's simultaneous participation in a sexual system, a political system, and a system of amorous transgression determines the value her body acquires in romance narratives; negotiated through the rhetorical exchange of rumors, inuendo, accusations, and the defense of knights, the queen's body defines the sovereignty of the king. Unwarranted access to the royal female body is therefore equal to a usurpation of royal property and an assault upon the integrity and stability of the royal domain. The adulterous queen establishes a dichotomous relationship between unshared marital love and reciprocal adulterous passion, and between marital duty and forbidden desires. In the medieval romance, the queen's body belongs to several symbolic systems relative to her hierarchical position in the feudal court, in a system of dynastic continuity (reproduction), and to her incompatible functions as royal wife and courtly lover.

The king's body and, as we would expect, his infidelities, function differently. Although the adulterous king shows a weakness of (moral) character, his extramarital indiscretion does not otherwise threaten succession. The complicity of cuckolded sovereigns, such as Arthur and Marc (*Tristan*), which wavers between ignorance, cognizance, and tacit tolerance of the guilt of the lovers, articulates a general awareness of the limited powers of kings who, in spite of their hierarchical superiority, display imperfections and weaknesses that spill over onto and infect as it were the governed body. Moreover, as we will remember, according to medieval iconography, the king's body (not separate from his character) *is* the land. The king possesses two bodies, one representing his immortal nature and his ability to transcend earthly limits, the other representing his human nature, his human fallibility in moral matters, and his susceptibility to the usurpation of his powers (Le Goff, "Head or Heart?" 3). If we look beyond the function of the king, the male body, by which we intend in particular the knight's body, circulates between several

systems of significance, relative to his chivalric prowess, his friendships with other knights, kinship networks, and amorous relationships. Lancelot's dual origins, his divided psyche and emotional nature, in many ways skews gender precedents established by romance heroes such as Yvain, who appear as distinct from, although not indifferent to their female counterparts.

To the extent that he queen's role, unlike the king's, is purely corporeal, this is primarily so in terms of her role as a possession of the king and inasmuch as her primary function is reproduction. From the court's perspective, her symbolic body is defined by the "products and transgressions" of her material body (McCracken 25-46). The queen is only able to transcend her corporeal limitations through the production of children which then permits her an "official" role not defined by the natural limitations and functions of her material body (Parsons, *Medieval Mothering*). The sterility of Guenièvre (Arthur begets children elsewhere) begs us to look at her larger social as well as her symbolic functions. Symbolically, the queen stands for the integrity of the kingdom, past, present, and future; her public and private demeanor influence the emotional development of the knight, agent of the king. The knight's possession of the queen's body thus reinforces the polarity between the chaste, maternal queen, upon whose image dynastic continuity depends, and the queen, whose enjoyment of mutual sexual pleasure defines her body as transgressive and threatening to the king's sovereignty. Between the lovers, the (albeit limited) 'private' consummation of their mutual desire constitutes, beyond the fulfillment of lust, a means of self-integration and self-realization for the fragmented knight. Even in her restricted role as property of the king, the queen can be seen as 'whole' and thus capable of engendering both symbolic and emotional wholeness in her lover. Implicit in the queen's power over the knight, which services his evolution and ultimately establishes him as a worthy rival to

the (legitimately childless) king, is the threat of a re-ordered succession by the knight, an alternative to succession by the king's bastard son (by another woman).

To further advance the above themes as they concern the triangular relationship between Arthur, Guenièvre, and Lancelot, public tests and demonstrations of the state of the queen's body (chaste or adulterous) function as a reaffirmation of the king's sovereignty and of the stability of his court. Ironically, in the Arthurian romance, as in other romances of the period where adultery appears, the queen's actual lover, not the king, is the one who defends her reputation, thus helping to create the illusion of stability and chastity in the court. Much as is the case with Guenièvre, the queen's body is often subject to threats of torture and violent, painful death. 'Truth' about the queen's body is dependent upon a series of manipulative rhetorical devices performed on or against the queen's behalf, with the primary purpose of manipulating the perceptions of the king. The extent to which dynastic continuity relies upon the capacity of individual agents to manipulate the king's interpretive imagination cannot be underestimated. The magic drinking horn in the *Prose Tristan,* for example, is intended to expose the adulterous state of the queen. In a similar vein, Arthur's exposure to Lancelot's painted murals at Morgain's castle lead him through an arduous psychological and emotional journey towards the painful truth he would prefer to ignore (*La Mort*).[xii]

It is important to note that, although the queen cannot absolve herself of accusations of adultery (this is the knight's job), her personal agency lies in her ability to undermine as well as to uphold the conventions and political structures that define her: even as queens such as Iseult and Guenièvre reverse their positions between two men "by putting two men between [their] thighs" (McCracken 78),[xiii] in order to maintain the acceptable illusion of integrity in the king's court, queens must actively participate in their own reinvention as "innocent" adulteresses. In

keeping with the Arthurian 'legal' code, the knight's proof of the queen's innocence both protects and reinforces the intellectual and emotional blindness of the king. Whether he punishes brutally or feigns ignorance (Arthur does both), the king's actions with respect to his adulterous wife confirm the weakness of his character. R. Howard Bloch's assertion that King Marc's reluctance to execute Tristan and Iseult reflects a changing culture of government in which contractual marital obligations become "internalized" and emphasis shifts from "group vision" to subjective vision, supports my last point. As monarchic power descends through the king to the community, the king is held above positive (legalistic) but below natural (biological, traditional) law (*Medieval French Literature and Law* 90). What we can gather from this is that, although power relationships between the king, the queen, and the knight conform to a fixed hierarchy, their manner of implementation proves anything but fixed. It becomes the job of the author to speculate as to how these relationships might arrange themselves and as to how they might unfold, for better or for worse.

To further develop adultery's relevance to the developmental dialogues taking place between 12th- and 13th-century texts, uncertainties concerning courtly relating evidence 'real' political and, if we look a little further, environmental implications and consequences. Medieval thought, as we have seen, associates the moral impurity of the king (inseparable from the kingdom), whether through violence or sexual transgression, with environmental degradation. Moreover, as exemplified by the progressively volatile behavior of Arthurian knights, interpersonal feeling, largely as a result of its subjection to public scrutiny, generates consensus-based reactivity, which in turn produces negative consequences, such as scheming, infighting, and destruction of the natural environment. Robert Bresson captures this last paradigm with graphic precision in his 1974 cinematic adaptation, primarily of *La Mort le Roi Arthur*, entitled

Lancelot du Lac. According to Bresson's insightful reading, competing discourses concerning the benificent vs. the disruptive power of 'feeling' between the queen and Lancelot leads to a fatal escalation of violence between Arthur's knights and the devastation of the natural environment. Bresson's Guenièvre provides an embittered counterpoint to popular logic and to Lancelot's (read medieval male) reasoning: "Vous vous êtes acharnés. Vous avez tué, pillé, incendié. Et puis vous vous êtes jetés les uns contre les autres, sans vous reconnaître. Et c'est notre amour que tu accuses de ce désastre." In a related vein, Kay Milton has used E. O. Wilson's understanding of biophilia—this includes an emotional affiliation between humans and other organisms and a need for affiliation with life and lifelike processes, as well as both positive and negative responses to nature—to link the 'dumbing down' of human emotion with the extinction of species and natural environments: "the destruction of nature deprives us of countless opportunities for emotional fulfilment, [...] the extinction of other species is, in some ways, the extinction of our own emotional experience (Nablan and St Antoine, 1993)" (Milton, *Loving Nature* 61).[xiv] In keeping with the standard motif of medieval romances, the queen faces tests of chastity; the knight faces tests of prowess and of character; the king faces tests of sovereignty and of personal integrity, based upon his capacity to decipher the truth of his situation and to act 'justly'. As nature and human nature are interdialogical, the failure of any facet within this courtly ecosystem filters upward, to the king, and thus outward, to the natural environment over which the king presides.

The extent to which hierarchical and gender distinctions become increasingly blurred in later medieval texts is evidenced in the prose *Lancelot*'s treatment of the close male bond between Lancelot and Galehaut, followed by *La Mort le roi Arthur*'s emphasis upon incest and multifarious forms of treachery, wherein all players are subject to tests of fidelity as well as of

veracity. Guenièvre's redirection of La Dame de Malehaut's obsession from her own lover, Lancelot, to the hero's closest friend, Galehaut, represents one fairly sophisticated example of shared complicity between courtly adulterers (*L.d.L* I: 903). The alliance between the two women, initiated by La Dame, who proposes that four make better company than three: "nous aurions à nous deux, les dames, les memes consolations qu'ils pourraient avoir l'un de l'autre," is indicative of the limited power of the feminine position and the necessity for complicity between women: "ils [Lancelot and Galehaut] ne resteront pas ici long-temps. Et vous, vous demeurerez toute seule, aucune dame ne connaîtra votre secret et vous n'aurez personne à qui confier votre pensée." Through their mutual pragmatism, the women succeed in mitigating the disastrous potential of not one but two potential rivalries (Galehaut loves Lancelot as well). This precarious, although pleasurable, alliance between the foursome also creates an opportunity for mutual surveillance. Just as the queen is subject to lethal punishment by her husband for her alleged infidelity, the knight's unique reputation as a servant of the court may be reconstructed as a state of isolation through his alliance with the queen: one among many may easily turn to one against many.

If adulterous romances tend to prove the status quo that presumes the infidelity and duplicity of women and the mutual cuckoldry of men, the good or evil intentions of intercessors often determine the extent to which they realize their subversive objectives.[xv] In the *Prose Tristan,* for example, the horn, sent by Morgain to Arthur's court is then rerouted to King Marc's court and becomes a focus of contest between women (Nichols, "Seeing Food"); likewise, a piece of poisoned fruit, offered in innocence by the queen through a subversive act intended to discredit her character (*La Mort*), indirectly proves the superiority of the bond between Guenièvre and Lancelot who, unlike the king, repeatedly comes to her defense. By virtue of their

gravity, accusations of infidelity test the integrity of the court's character, as well as its ability to discern truth from slander. Secrecy concerning the adulterous relationship aims at preserving power relationships among men.[xvi] Much as the feudal court is characterized by a desire to know secrets, politically speaking, accusations of adultery between the queen and her knight can also be interpreted as a displaced attack on the relationship between the king and the knight, threatening both for its homosexual connotations as well as for its potential to undermine the king's power.[xvii]

Emphasis upon the transgressive sexuality of the queen in romance narratives, which correspondingly de-emphasizes the transgressive sexuality of her lover, underscores the role of her body as part of a system of exchange that defines chivalric honor and status. Possession of the queen's body by the knight demonstrates his chivalric superiority over that of the king; at the same time, it reinforces his marginality and outsider status within the chivalric order. Ironically, the secrecy and subterfuge required to maintain the knight's superior chivalric status, which is dependent upon his relationship with the queen, does not obviate his agency on behalf of the king's sovereignty. Méléagant's aggressive removal of Guenièvre from Arthur's court in *Charrette* (an open demonstration of this knight's unrequited lust) signals the king's political impotence, which only Lancelot (whose secretive, although scarcely secret, passion is requited) can remedy.

Although recurring attributions of fickleness, or coyness, to Guenièvre, particularly concerning her relationship with her chosen knight, would support medieval views of the untrustworthiness of female character, these apparently inconstant characteristics also suggest the queen's conscious resistance to the ongoing commerce of her person: as property of the king, then of Méléagant, then of the knight who rescues her.[xviii] The queen's resistance, however

troubling to her suitor, proves inadequate as a legitimate source of power, however, particularly as the desire of the male subject is dependent upon her resistance; feminine models, after all, are constructed by men and serve male discourses; the *chanson de geste* (male-centered) and the romance (seemingly female-centered) evolved simultaneously, rather than sequentially and thereby exist as parallel, rather than progressive discourses.[xix] The custom that defines the 'good' knight in negative terms, "as one who does not kidnap or rape unprotected women" (Gaunt 94), is indicative of the underlying premises of chivalry. While the role of women in hierarchies and kinship structures of society remains relatively marginal in the *chanson de geste*, women become a central focus of the romance particularly as objects of exchange within masculine feudal hierarchies. Masculine identity, even as it appears as subservient to the feminine, proves no less problematic than the epic model. Even so, the queen's ability to resist and to exert influence through her resistance makes evident the ideological assumptions upon which the amorous exchange is based. Guenièvre's adultery, for example, guarantees Lancelot's presence in the court, as long as the infraction is kept secret. The lover's choice to remain in this role guarantees the perpetuation of the established hierarchy; his decision to leave the situation threatens its erosion.

With respect to this last assertion, the immoderation of the lovers in *Charrette* and the prose *Lancelot* is indicative of a system of tacit complicity. Just as chastity tests in romances articulate the perceived instability generated by the 'unknown' state of the queen's body in relationship to the integrity of the king's rule, the barrenness of the queen, parallel to the adulterous motif in medieval romance points to serious anxiety about illegitimacy in the monarchy. As George Duby asserts, "Bastardy was too serious a matter to be treated lightly, even in literature; people were afraid to use it as a subject for a tale" (*The Knight, the Lady, and*

the Priest 222).[xx] Historians concur that increasing anxieties concerning medieval paternity correspond with major transformations in political and social structures between the early tenth and the mid eleventh centuries characterized by the weakening of sovereign powers, the multiplication of sources of authority, the dismemberment of tightly-knit groups and clans, the instability of wealth, and the resettling of members of the aristocracy on patrimonial lands (Y. de Ponfarcy, *Paternity and Fatherhood* 62). Duby finds evidence that growing use of the patronymic system, which emphasized paternal ancestry, continued throughout the twelfth century.[xxi] The extent to which illegitimate male birth could evoke fears of severe retribution is made evident through the correlation of illegitimate birth with (the king's) incest, a sin whose insidious effects contribute to the disastrous outcomes in both *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Mort le Roi Arthur*. Both Charlemagne and Arthur are illegitimate sons of kings; both are guilty of incestuous relationships; Roland is the nephew of Charlemagne and the (speculated) product of incest; Arthur produces a disloyal son, Mordred, with his half-sister, Morgain; the respective empire and kingdom of both rulers fall to violent and tragic ruin.

As we approach even broader questions of agency and culpability in medieval romances, it is important to stress that Church and clan-based systems figure as an important subtext of the evolving discourses of the Arthurian text between the 12th- and 13th-centuries, as we shall soon see. First, feudal models of marriage, which allowed endogamy (marriage within a kinship group), repudiation at will on the part of men, and family control of the choice of marriage partners, diametrically opposed those of the Church, based upon strict exogamy (forbidding marriage between persons related to one another, particularly closely related parties), indissolubility, and the required consent of both partners. Although the transition between these

models took more than two centuries, the first half of the twelfth century and the pontificate of Alexander III (1159-81) prove most pivotal, particularly as the Church became more influential in the disintegration and consolidation of secular economic and political power bases. Hereafter, Church emphasis upon the 'consent' of both partners in a marriage, whether consciously or not, promoted the interest of the male individual against that of the group and strategically shifted the latent topic of women's choice (and thereby desire) to a discourse within the public domain. As the Church challenged the rights of secular men to regulate their marital affairs, the role of women as 'valuable' objects of exchange in the formation of feudal alliances gained increased attention. The central role of sexuality in French romance has important implications for gender as romance constructs masculinity in relationship to femininity, a relationship based upon alterity. Medieval authors approach the issue indirectly in a variety of ways: the queen's infidelity facilitates the relationship between the king and his knight; homophobic diatribes are often put into the mouths of women (*Roman d'Enéas*).[xxii] We see something of a reversal of this last trend in the prose *Lancelot* in a highly suggestive repartee between Arthur, Galehaut, Gauvain, and Guenièvre, all of whom express their respective admiration and desire for the "chevalier à l'écu noir." In this instance, Gauvain's spirited declaration of his desire for sexual conversion, "je voudrais être aussitôt la plus belle des demoiselles, pleine de santé et de vie, pourvu qu'il m'aimât plus que tout le monde" (*L.d.L.* II, LI: 863), stands as a *mis-en-abîme*, simultaneously distracting the king's awareness from the true feelings of the queen, while prefacing the (even more unspeakable) disaster of Galehaut's excessive love for Lancelot. As a corresponding theme, the suppression of femininity in men is reflective of misogynistic views and contributes to the oppression of women. Furthermore, femininity is not only problematized in relationship to its opposite, masculinity; the 'blending' or obfuscation of gender traits—

Lancelot would be an example of this—suggests an attempt to mediate between these two polarities.

As for Gaunt's assertion that medieval romances replace the homosocial bonds of epic, which frequently exclude women altogether, with a new ideology that places the individual in the foreground at the expense of the group, I would argue that bonding between Yvain and Laudine, and Erec and Enide occurs less on behalf of the individuals involved than on behalf of society and the institutions it upholds. In this respect, individual desire, both male and female, remains problematic. Lancelot's obsession with Guenièvre can be viewed negatively purely in terms of its excessive nature. Chrétien also makes the point that the hero's 'uniqueness' does not make him an entirely oppositional figure. Unlike Yvain, who kills Laudine's husband, thus making a virtue of his amorous interests, Lancelot does not kill Arthur. The knight, albeit subversively, continues to serve his king: his body secures lands and goods usurped by hostile exterior forces; in relationship to the queen, the knight receives consensually what the king takes as a legal right of ownership.

As to why the fuss about Lancelot's love life so persistently drives the discourses of 12th and 13th century texts, the replacement of the feudal, clan-based model by a monarchy whose function is primarily symbolic is a likely indicator.[xxiii] Church policy on marriage, which promoted agnatic lineage (male descent from the same forefather), rather than the cognatic lineage of feudal society, contributed to a shift from "horizontal male bonds" to "vertical male bonds" (Gaunt 84). As the introduction of female characters as objects of desire in romances disrupts and expressly alters the bonding patterns of epic heroes, heterosexual desire can be viewed as an antidote to the comradeship of the battlefield. Borrowing from Virgil's classic, the author of the 12th-century *Roman d'Enéas* reiterates an important distinction between feminine

models: Dido is cast as an unacceptable object of desire because her sexuality belongs to her (and is uncontrollable) and because it does not belong to a system of exchange between men; Lavine, on the other hand, who is given to the hero by her father, insures a continued lineage within a patriarchal system. The contrast between the two women underscores the underlying prerogative associated with courtly love: heterosexual desire is insufficient in and of itself; it must, rather, be directed towards a 'specific object' in order to enhance the communal good. This said, courtly love's predilection for adulterous alliances not only places the individual against society, it forces us to question what is meant by 'communal' good in late medieval society.

Chrétien's heroes indicate the author's lack of resolution concerning the individual Self and the society in which he is expected to function. The author's mockery of Perceval and Lancelot (irony is "endemic" in courtly culture) does not preclude his treatment of them as valuable alternatives to the courtly standard. This much said, the lingering influence of both Ninienne and Guenièvre on Lancelot's development in the 13th-century prose texts, his dual male and female characteristics, as well as his close relationship with Galehaut, preclude the argument that this hero serves an entirely male discourse. Feminine influence remains crucial not only to the development of Lancelot as a knight but, more importantly, to his masculine individuation among other knights. Lancelot's personification as a problem of articulation concerning masculine identity (echoed in the conflict between public identity and private desire) reflects conflicting discourses between chivalric and Christian values that 'celestial' chivalry proposes to resolve by separating the knight from his desires.

As a means of broadening the 13th-century's use of adultery to indulge scenarios of violence against women, against characters with ambiguous sexual identity, and between men, I return here to a pivotal scene in *Charrette*, in which, after their indiscretion, Lancelot's defense of Guenièvre (4901-86) prefaces a judicial combat. The ethical irony, as I have noted in an earlier section of this chapter, is that Lancelot, complicit in an adulterous affair, defends the queen against Méléagant's charges. The 'true signs' are true in that adultery occurred between the queen and *Charrette*'s hero and false because Méléagant has accused Keu, dying of his wounds, and not Lancelot (4812-8). Interestingly, and paradoxically, through her denial of Méléagant's charges, the queen eulogizes Keu and mounts a defense on both of their behalves based upon character, loyalty and trust. The incident is particularly ironic in light of Keu's role as 'deliverer of goods' after the queen's abduction from Arthur at the beginning of the text. She is 'given' to Keu who will deliver her to her captor against her will (209-11). Both Guenièvre (an adulteress) and Keu (innocent as charged) describe adultery as an offense (4845 and 4954-69). In her relationships to the king, to Lancelot, her rescuer and lover, to Keu, and to Méléagant, her captor, the queen becomes a commodity—Guenièvre's body is entrusted to Keu as "La rien que plus anime an cest monde" ("ce qu'il a de plus cher au monde" 4857)—central to the negotiation of male honor. Consequently, adultery 'breaks' the law of ownership, while simultaneously fulfilling the codes of courtly love: the queen takes ownership of her own desire and consents to the affair. The *déloyauté* of the lovers against Arthur is potentially more threatening to the king's sovereignty than Méléagant's challenge through his abduction of the queen. Chrétien's allusion to this most delicate and volatile topic, "Cette joie que le conte doit nous taire/ fut, de toutes, la plus parfaite/ et aussi la plus délicieuse" (4684-6), has greater implications than the precepts of courtly propriety: "*Taire* (4680 and 4684) may indicate suppression ('to silence'), but can also

mean to mute', 'to make less noise about'; *celer* (O.F., 4684) means 'to conceal'" (Gaunt 99-100)—I will return to the motifs of muteness and silencing shortly, with respect to the escalation of violence in the prose texts.

If indeed, in his allusion to the "muted" subtext of courtly love, *Charrette*'s narrator posits adultery as an innate and pernicious threat to aristocratic lineage and to the future of kings, his reference to the "deduit" of the knight—"*delit* means 'pleasure', but also 'crime'" (100)—further suggests interchangeable and concealed meanings in the text's language, particularly in association with dual aspects (heroic and treacherous) of Lancelot's character. (We are reminded here that Marie de Champagne, Chrétien's patroness, and not the author, chose the text's subject matter.)[xxiv] More to the point, the author's oppositional attitude to adultery (which, I would I argue, is not absolute) does not preclude a complex reading of Lancelot. Paradoxically, heroes, such as Tristan, a prototype to Lancelot, who make attempts at social integration, cannot suppress antisocial desires and behavior, which eventually undermine the heroic ideals they seek to represent. In Lancelot's case, the question of integration is not explicitly designated as a moral conflict within the hero until the opening of *La Mort*, whose treatment of women, particularly of feminine power, is predominantly negative. Whereas Lancelot's intermittently subjective role to stronger men and women (Galehaut, Morgain—Guenièvre has dual roles) may reflect the critique of his authors; in conjunction with his difficulty in renouncing the queen, the hero's susceptibility suggests not only a conflicted relationship with spirit-flesh, but, moreover, a cause for mediation between the diametric gender stratifications imposed upon the collective psyche.

Rock, Towers, Tombs

Towers

Now that we've looked at some important underlying social implications of the latter-day Arthurian narrative, I would like to explore some ways in which concerns with gender identity and relating 'play out' in the unfolding drama of the human-environmental relationship. The backgrounding of the natural features of landscape and the foregrounding of *man-made* structures is instrumental to processes underway. Standing as manmade "pierres colossales" against the softer elements of the surrounding landscape, towers assert their immobile nature and, in Bachelard's words, produce "une impression toujours active de surgissement" (*La Terre et le Rêveries*). Beyond the tower's obvious function as a safeguard, it is important to remember that medieval society bases its idea of stability upon the maintenance of equitable relationships and conduct taking place in and around these structures. Whereas the artificial quality of courtly relating features as a prominent motif of *Perceval*'s tower scenes, the repetitive presence of towers in the Lancelot cycle insists upon the persistent subtexts of access, captivity, and surveillance in the three texts. Lancelot's exhibition of prowess in his scaling of Bademagu's tower and entry into the queen's chamber in *Charrette,* for example, is reversed by his captivity in a series of towers, by Méléagant in this last text, by the sorceress Morgain, in the prose version, and as something of a love captive with Galehaut on the Ile Perdue in *Lancelot du Lac*. In the last examples, the hero can be seen as feminized through captivity and the captive space—phallic from an external perspective, a claustrophobic tomb from an interior perspective—and thus rendered temporarily powerless. The medieval tower hereby emerges not only as a symbol of power within and between kingdoms but, somewhat surprisingly, also as medium through which normally fixed gender roles and gendered spaces can be reversed.

To begin with the standard, for the knight, towers act as signposts, markers of social intercourse, altercation, or places of passage. As emblems of power, towers tend to represent either the integrity and beneficence, or, conversely, the arrogance and dictatorial nature of a particular sovereign. Lancelot's impression of Bademagu's tower, "jamais il n'en avait vu, de ses yeux, d'aussi puissante" (3140-1), is confirmed by the physical appearance and character of this king, defined by "honneur," "vertu," and "loyauté." The tower's height provides aerial perspectives from protected vantage points for the king and his barons. Its enclosed, circular structure also connotes restriction from an interior perspective: dark interiors and stairwells, secret chambers, and the ever-present potential of surveillance from within. A passage from Guillaume de Lorris' *Le Roman de la Rose* illustrates this last point: "En plein milieu, c'est avec une singulière habileté qu'une tour a été édifiée par les maîtres d'œuvre: il ne pouvait en exister de plus belle, car elle est grande, large et haute. Impossible que le mur fasse défaut, quels que soient la machine de guerre et ses projectiles [. . .]: elle est dure comme l'aimant" (3833). As places of imprisonment, with the added threat of psychological and physical torment, towers function as devices of control for those close to the king as well as for outsiders. In accordance with the motif of courtly love, the tower insists upon the queen's legal captivity, as property of the king, and upon the unequal relationship between the queen and her suitor: she looks down from above; he looks forward to an arduous rite of access. Guillaume cleverly demonstrates both the temptation and the challenge the aspiring lover faces by placing his symbol of desire, "en rangs serrés les rosiers avec des roses à foison [. . .] entre le mur et la tour" (*Ibid*). *Charrette*'s tower scenes reinforce the courtly trope with an added psychological dimension: the obstacle of height, the separation of Heaven and earth, the womb and the world, (original) separation, related to Lancelot's identification with the feminine, as I have discussed earlier. The hierarchical

stratification between the queen and her knight remains intact, even when their physical positions become reversed. In an earlier scene in Chrétien's text, for example, Lancelot looks down at the queen from a tower window where, recognizing his spatial and, we may also infer, his hierarchical distance from her, nearly falls to his death (560-74). In a later episode, the wounded knight, faltering in ground combat with Méléagant, hears his name pronounced and turns to look at the queen "là-haut, assise aux loges de la tour" (3671-2). In this instance, although the polarity of their vertical positions reflects their inherent social inequality, the knight's glimpse of the queen serves as an effective reminder of her emotional proximity and, potentially, of his requited desire. Thus, mere vision of the queen produces the dual experience of separation and intimacy; her presence acts as a healing balm, restoring the knight's 'ardeur' and enabling him to reclaim his honor against his foe.

In the same text, Chrétien uses the tower to amplify disparate qualities of character in the triangular relationship between the two knights and King Bademagu. After his passage of the Pont de l'épée, Lancelot, bleeding from his wounds, arrives at Bademagu's tower. The king's good character is directly opposed to the character of his son, Méléagant, "déloyal." At Méléagant's behest, Lancelot is soon taken prisoner, "les pieds attachés sous son cheval," by the people of Gorre; the queen, hearing, falsely, of the hero's death, is filled with remorse for her earlier cruelty to the knight, and "Prête à se tuer" (4180). Later, on his island near Gorre, Méléagant erects a tower, "bien fortifiée, les murs épais, de larges dimensions" (6129), where the imprisoned Lancelot is kept from the outside world, "Pas de porte ni d'ouverture,/ sauf une petite fenêtre" (6138-9). The cruel knight, chastised for his "folie furieuse" by king Bademagu, finds himself disowned by his father who takes the side of Lancelot in the final battle between the two enemies. Not incidentally, Lancelot's superior character and his superior abilities as a knight

supersede Méléagant's genetic bond with his father. Whereas we might question the disloyalty of the father, the episode puts forth as conditional (and potentially unstable) the status of clan-based units and royal patriarchies. As if to underscore this last point, Méléagant's sister performs a similar, 'disloyal' function when she happens upon Lancelot, her brother's captive, in the throes of suicidal despair (Gauvain has failed to rescue him). As a means of reparation for an earlier service (Lancelot performs the decapitation of the arrogant knight despised by her), the damsel provides a pickaxe with which the hero frees himself, returning, like a caged bird to "l'air libre" (6630). Feminine intervention, acting as something of a wild card in this respect, has the potential either to uphold or to overturn power relations among men and, at the same time, to reverse our notion of captivity as a predominantly feminine predicament.

Towers of the prose *Lancelot* expand further upon the hero's role as a mediator between heretofore gender-specific designations, such as vulnerability and force, captivity and aggression. Lancelot is particularly susceptible as a 'love captive', through his emotional association with the queen, first and foremost, and as the object of love/lust for both men and women. The love-stricken Dame de Malehaut holds Lancelot prisoner on the pretext of correcting an infraction against her seneschal and can only be dissuaded from her obsession by Guenièvre's diplomatic entreaty: her offer of the knight's best friend, Galehaut, as a replacement (XLIX-LI). In a similar vein, Lancelot's residence in Galehaut's tower at the Isle Perdue turns from an enjoyable situation of camaraderie to a feeling of entrapment, provoked by his friend's absence: "Il [Lancelot] ne prend plus le temps de rire, de se distraire, de boire, ni de manger, et ne trouve de réconfort que dans ses pensées. Il passe toute la journée en haut de la tour, à scruter les abords ou les lointains, en proie à son obsession" (II: 485). Upon Galehaut's return, the hero expresses his sentiment of entrapment and regret for lost time, weary of the friend who conspires

to keep him at length from the heroic world: "nous sommes ici en prison, [...] nous perdons notre temps et notre jeunesse" (481). Galehaut's personal tragedy, which he invites through excessive displays of arrogance, ultimately liberates Lancelot from the company of his ardent companion. In the prose *Lancelot*, as a captive in Morgain's tower, the hero is able to generate his freedom in response to a visual cue outside the tower walls, whereupon he becomes the re-creator/artist of his chivalric and romantic identity, thus securing his sanity and creating the venue of his eventual liberation when with renewed strength, he bends the bars of his tower window and devises his escape (*Lancelot en prose*, LXXXVI: 18-23). The visual evidence he leaves in the tower is revisited, with serious consequences, when Arthur becomes an unwitting witness to Lancelot's affair with Guenièvre in *La Mort*: "Par foi, fet il, se la senefiance de ces letres es veraie, donques m'a Lancelos honni de la reine [. . .]" (*La Mort*, 1956, 61).[xxv] Consistent with the revolving thematic of public and private discourses, amorous encounters are reliably prefaced or followed by dangerous obstacles and the aura of eventual discovery.

In an episode of the prose text in which the author simultaneously exploits and makes light of the tensions caused by indiscrete relations, the hero defies Galehaut's possessiveness to join Arthur's fight against the Saxons. Upon his return, Guenièvre promises to heal the wounded knight and, with an imperviousness characteristic of this text, invites Lancelot to sleep with her in her tower, with Arthur in close proximity. For his part, Arthur accepts the advances of a young maiden, appearing at her castle with his nephew, where the arrangement soon becomes a foursome: "le roi se couche avec elle dans un lit magnifique, tandis que Guerrehet partage celui d'une très belle demoiselle, dans une autre chambre" (II, LXVIII: 519); duped by a ruse of their enemies, both Arthur and Guerrehet are later imprisoned for this indiscretion. A similar arrangement takes place between the queen and her knight and Galehaut and La Dame de

Malehaut. In this instance, the author proves more empathetic: “ils furent emmenés dans deux chambres séparées et chacun se coucha avec son amie; ils partageaient le même amour intense et ils eurent toutes les joies que les amants peuvent avoir” (521). An indication of providential approval asserts itself when, the next morning, the queen discovers Lancelot’s cracked shield, sealed, as if new. Whereas the author appears to overlook the narrative potential for tension and foreboding, the episode serves the social function of providing a sign of Lancelot’s integration and belonging as a knight at Arthur’s court. The affair is further sanctioned, and justified, by La Dame du Lac, who explains to the queen the reasons for Lancelot’s madness: “Les péchés du monde ne peuvent être faits sans folie, mais il a bien raison d’être fou celui qui trouve dans sa folie sa justification et son honneur. Et si vous trouver folle votre passion, cette folie est honorable entre toutes, car vous aimez le seigneur et *la fleur de tous les mortels*” (547 – my italics). La Dame’s oratory does more than adhere to the standards of courtly love. Her endorsement imbues *this* adulterous relationship with an exemplary status, which places the adulterers above blame, a privilege not afforded Arthur. *La Mort*’s author, as we shall see, adopts a more pessimistic view of the matter. Galehaut’s disastrous fate and the destruction of his towers in the prose *Lancelot* are symptomatic of an emerging cultural consensus concerning the value and uses of towers. As its association with the ‘épreuves’ of amorous conquest diminishes in value, the tower stands primarily as a structure of oppression, of arrogance, and of impermanence.

As an addendum to this last motif and within the purview of our discussion of adultery, Galehaut merits further attention, particularly as a rival to Guenièvre. A social deviant by medieval standards, Galehaut’s author constructs a complex portrait of excessive desire,

represented by the massive towers the tragic hero erects: "Je croyais qu'il n'y avait pas au monde de plus puissant château-fort, et en raison de cette puissance que je lui connaissais, je l'avais appelé l'Orgueilleuse Garde" (II: 591). The relationship between Lancelot and Galehaut is significant at many levels: for its candid treatment of male bonding, for its longevity (Lancelot is buried beside his friend), and as a mirror (although imperfect) into the troubled psyche of the Arthurian hero. Frappier's characterization of Galehaut as "un héros de la fatalité," brought down by his primary sin, immoderation, *démesure*, is emblematic of the tragic leanings of the prose texts and of *La Mort*'s author. As befits the medieval *contrapasso* (punishment that fits the crime), "L'objet de sa passion deviendra l'instrument de la vengeance divine et de sa mort" (Frappier, *Etude* 138).[xxvi] Lancelot appears as a leopard in a prophetic dream, as destiny ordains, in order to dismantle the pillars of pride upon which Galehaut bases his identity as a ruler; in corporeal terms, he removes *le cueur, l'onor,* and *la vie du cors* of his friend. Guilty of two cardinal sins, "son amitié hypertrophiée pour Lancelot," and "son orgueil de conquérant," the unfortunate hero's death is foreshadowed by both exterior and interior dramas: exterior in that destiny contrives against the hero, whose destruction is symbolized by the disintegration of his castle, l'Orgueilleuse Emprise, much as it later contrives against the Arthurian world; interior in that Galehaut lives with tragic foresight the knowledge of the encroaching end of his life.[xxvii] More than is the case with his primary hero, the prose author invites his reader into the drama of Galehaut's interior state and most intimate thoughts. Lancelot's demonstrations of passion, on the other hand, are externalized through displays of anxiety, madness, and overwhelming emotion: tears, fainting (pâmoison), artistry, excessive feats of strength, and violence.

Similar to Méléagant in *Charrette*, Galehaut mirrors Lancelot's shadow side: the fatal aspects of his love for the queen: "je ne saurais vivre sans lui" (II: 581). Galehaut succeeds, if

only temporarily, in feminizing Lancelot who, even the queen admits, is inextricably tied to his friend: "il appartient à Galehaut dont il est le compagnon" (579). The shared, yet unequal bonding between the two progresses as a sentient death-march, from "la Roche-aux-Sesnes" and Karlion, towards Sorelois, to the secluded island of Galehaut, whose awareness of his eventual fate looms first as a "simple pressentiment," followed by "la prémonition de la mort," and, finally, by "l'obsession mentale" (*Etude* 139).[xxviii] Galehaut's awareness of his intractable condition, his vacillation between humility, resignation, and isolated despair, provide a rare close-up view of an interior psychology in relationship to an exterior reality from which this character is increasingly isolated. His recourse through penance—he attends a mass of the Holy Ghost and fasts for an entire day—although most probably a sign of true humility, falls short of conversion, as the penitent hero never entirely rids himself of his 'orgueil'. Destiny's voice is confirmed by Galehaut's observation after the crumbling of his fortresses at Sorelois: "il y a là un signe" (II 591). His troubles notwithstanding, the unfortunate hero demonstrates a unique strength of character through his internal fortitude, a comic resilience of attitude in the face of personal adversity of incomprehensible proportions. He accepts his fate "avec une dignité qui touche au sublime" (*Etude* 142).

The triangular relationship between Galehaut, Lancelot, and Guenièvre shadows and in many ways presages the outcome of the central triangular relationship between Arthur and the two illicit lovers. Both Arthur and Galehaut experience prophetic, ominous dreams. As Galehaut's dreams attest,[xxix] both Lancelot and the queen are implicated in his fate. "Le léopard" (Lancelot), who initially acts as a mediator between two lions, the first "couronné" (Arthur), the second "sans couronne" (Galehaut), ultimately kills the latter. Galehaut learns that his death will come from a "douleur qu'il vous faudra en perdre la vie" (II: 609). The drama of destiny and of

triangular love is further elaborated in *La Mort* when both Guenièvre, as the serpent, and the leopard prevent the troubled hero from obtaining his objective: “Le pont atteindrait l’autre rive si le léopard et le serpent n’en ôtaient les planches nécessaires. Or, elles pourraient être remises par ceux-là mêmes qui les ont enlevées, si la destinée y consentait” (qtd. in Frappier 143). Galehaut’s obstructed passage over ‘l’eau onirique’—the metaphoric chasm between his heart’s desire and that which is socially, and morally preordained—signifies what remains of the hero’s life. He has three years and nine months to live, but could live much longer if the queen would only consent to leave him the company of his beloved friend. Importantly, Galehaut’s destiny gives us a glimpse into the larger destiny of his contemporaries, as the maître Hélie de Toulouse, the tenth and wisest of Arthur’s clerics, has access, “[à] l’avenir réservé aux autres” (in Frappier 143-4). Lancelot’s inability to value friendship above his love for the queen, “Mais je pensais que notre compagnage ne peut pas durer longtemps” (II: 587), adds a final ironic tone to the cataclysmic reckoning awaiting his ill-fated friend.

To point to an additional similarity between this last hero and the king, Arthur experiences a similar conundrum in *La Mort* when, prior to the battle of Salisbury, he has the possibility of preventing the destruction of his kingdom, if he would only look beyond his cuckoldry and call Lancelot to his aide. Codes of honor prohibit such a solution. The impasses of both Arthur and Galehaut take place on the moral plane, with the exception that Galehaut’s consigns his fate to others, whereas much of Arthur’s fate depends upon the combined forces of limited vision and ineffective action. As a contributing factor to the tragedies at hand, both Galehaut and Arthur accept their destinies as indelible and therefore virtually immune to the positive forces of human intervention.

Galehaut's attitude towards his inescapable fate, along with his relatively perfunctory resort to spiritual outlets, is important for another reason. As a means of atoning for his sins (*racheter ses péchés*), he performs magnanimous acts of charity, distributes alms, tends to the education of orphans, lowers taxes, founds monasteries, and so on. This role of penitent benefactor takes place primarily at a social level, in a temporal rather than a spiritual sphere. A general absence of religious zeal—such as we might expect with such a crisis as impending death—is evident: no confession, unprecedented fervor or attempts at asceticism. Unlike in *La Mort*, where distinctions are clear, the temporal domain of fatality and the spiritual domain, where humans obtain freedom from good and evil, remains implicit in the prose text. Personal fortitude, the hero's "drame de la solitude," as opposed to contrition, is Galehaut's ironic strength, which he demonstrates by keeping his secret from Lancelot—"[il] montre un air heureux qui ne correspond guère à ce qu'il éprouve au fond du cœur" (II: 609)—although not without a modicum of *false* hope. When at last Lancelot disappears, for good by all appearances, Galehaut succumbs to morbid, and by medieval standards, despicable desire for his own death. Galehaut's death from grief is explained in literal terms by his "empoisonnement" from an unhealed wound as he retrieves Lancelot's sword from the people of Escalon. In the same vein, Lancelot, although indirectly, also gives the mortal blow to Gauvain. In the final assessment, which counts, even by medieval standards, Galehaut faces adversity with valiance befitting a hero. The absence of this quality in *La Mort*'s obstinate heroes, "ils préféraient la guerre à la paix" (210), is instrumental to the outcome of this last work.

If a contradiction exists in the prose author's treatment of the two male friends, it seems to be in the condemnation of Galehaut for his excessive love of Lancelot. Lancelot's moral struggle in *La Mort*, for which his friendship with Galehaut remains a subtext, prevails through

collective inability to control the course of events. The author appears to remain neutral concerning Lancelot's choice to be buried beside the remains of his friend, as the inscription confirms: "Ici repose le corps de Galehaut, le seigneur des îles lointaines, et avec lui repose Lancelot du Lac, qui fut le meilleur chevalier jamais entré dans le royaume de Logres, après son fils Galaad" (203, 308). Lancelot's role as both an intermediary and a marginalized figure is evidenced in his entombment between the fallen 'seigneur des îles', who, because of his penitential acts, retains something of his former majesty in a tomb "d'une richesse sans pareille," and his inscribed lesser status to his son, Galahad, 'chevalier celestial' and model of Resurrection adopted by the author of *La Queste*. Galehaut's decimated towers (II: 591-3) (monuments to the living) and the numerous tombs that take their place (monuments to the dead) provide a final view of the 13th-century's assessment of knighthood.

Tombs

Even as they announce death, the inefficacy of towers, and the futility of knighthood, tombs in the Lancelot cycle have a mediatory function important to the 13th-century perspective. At once venues for inscription and documentation: of patriarchal lineage, of relationships (genetic and emotional), of wrongs done to individuals and between clans, in both *Charrette* and the prose *Lancelot*, the tomb serves the central purpose of revealing to Lancelot the secret of his identity. In *Charrette*, the hero, not yet free of the stigma of riding in the pillory, finds the future tombs of his comrades in the last hours of daylight: "Ils ont chevauché jusqu'à l'heure de none/ et découvrent dans un lieu vraiment très beau/ une église avec, à côté du chœur,/ un cimetière enclos de murs" (1837-9). Here, Lancelot enlists an aged monk to lead him to the cemetery

where he finds "les plus belles tombes/ qu'on pourrait trouver d'ici jusqu'à la Dombes/ et de là jusqu'à Pampelune" (1957-9), inscribed with the names of the knights who *will* occupy each one: "'Ici reposera Gauvain,/ ici Louis, ici Yvain'" (1865-6), and "bien d'autres" among the elite knighthood. The monk warns the hero that he will never see the interior of the largest tomb, as its marble slab requires "sept hommes plus forts que vous et moi" to lift it. The lone individual who manages such a feat will deliver the prisoners, lost souls who reside in the enchanted underworld: "au pays/ dont nul ne sort, ni serf ni noble,/ à moins d'y être né" (1903-5). Lancelot's effortless removal of the marble slab, "sans trace de la moindre peine," exposes a fateful message: the tomb is destined for him: "celui qui délivrera/ tous ceux qui sont pris dans la trappe" (1934-5). Whereas his ultimate destiny resides in the long term, the feat, which proves Lancelot's 'valeur' as a knight and (by all appearances) reconstitutes his damaged reputation, prepares him to make his historical mark, through the queen's rescue and the rescue of the people of Logres. Chrétien makes allusion to (without entirely explicating) the potential chaos resulting from human arrogance and the impropriety of lovers.

In the prose text, Lancelot discovers his own tomb at the cemetery of the Douloureuse Garde, where, similar to Chrétien's version, he learns his own name and the name of his father from the tomb's inscription: "Ici repose Lancelot du Lac, fils du roi Ban de Benoïc" (XXIVa: 32). In a subsequent scene, an amplification of Chrétien's rendition, the hero discovers two ancestral tombs at the Saint Cimetière; the first tomb belongs to the hero's great-great paternal grandfather, Galahad (XXXVII: 30), the younger son of Joseph of Arimathea; the second belongs to Joseph's nephew, Simeon (XXXVII: 37-40), "le fameux chevalier dont, descendit le grand lignage par qui la Grande-Bretagne devait être illuminée; car ils portèrent le Graal et conquirent cette terre païenne à Notre Seigneur" (*L.d.L.* II, XXII: 493). In yet a later episode,

Lancelot finds the tomb of his close friend and companion, Galehaut (XLIX: 5-24). Finally, the hero discovers the tomb of his paternal grandfather, Lancelot (XCIII: 1-23). As Donald Maddox explicates meticulously in his essay, "'A Tombeau Ouvert': Memory and Mortuary Monuments in the Prose Lancelot," these sepulchral episodes represent several distinct types of memory, which we can identify first with identity and lineal memory and, second, with intratextual memory (328-9). Together, the monuments provide a reconstruction of Lancelot's patrilineal genealogy, from the inception of the Christian era to the collapse of the Arthurian regnum, culminating in the unbroken agnatic line (father to son) through six generations.

Whereas the primary purpose of Lancelot's discovery of his own tomb in *Charrette* is to establish his destiny within a patriarchal lineage, regardless of his emotional dependency upon feminine influence, the prose *Lancelot* and *La Mort*'s authors expand upon the implications of tombs both as moral intercessors and as emblems of culpability. The hero's difficulty in approaching the tomb of Siméon in the prose version, for example, is attributed to his 'Pêché de luxure'; Lancelot's father, the roi Ban, is also guilty of adultery.[xxx] Maddox provides an intricately detailed account of the uses of *locus* and topographical extremes as mnemonic stimuli in the prose text whose tomb settings function as sites of juncture "at which a considerable variety of odd or uncanny details are in evidence" (328). Although the author does not sacrifice the marvelous (*merveille*), an imposing vision of patriarchy dominates the iconography at hand. Lancelot discovers the tomb of Leucain, nephew of Joseph of Arimathia, within a thick woods, "dans une maison de religion" (Saint Cimetiere) (*L.d.L.*, XIX: 493), where he has spent the night. The elder Galahad's tomb, located in a scenic meadow, and "reminiscent of the 'intercolumnar' place recommended by the *Ad Herennium* and its medieval avatars" (*Op.Cit*), contrasts with the harsh, odorous depth "molt parfonde" of Simeon's cell (prose *Lancelot*, XXXVII: 28). In the far

lengthier and more macabre rendition of Chrétien's brief scene at the Douloureuse Garde, the hero enters "un cimetière très merveilleux, [...] clos de toutes parts de murs entièrement crénelés"; the battlements are full of "des têtes de chevaliers avec leur heaume," accompanied by gravestones inscribed with each of their names. The prevalence of metal carcasses, testaments to the transience of human flesh as well as to the mechanized function of knights, accords with the prose author's replacement of Lancelot's marble tomb slab with "une grande dalle de métal, merveilleusement ouvragé d'or, de pierres et d'émaux" (*L.d.L.*, XXIII: 528-9). The elder Lancelot's tomb, located near a fountain, shaded by tall pines, and guarded by lions, features classical elements of the *locus amoenus*, recalling the tombs of hagiography, from which blood endowed with miraculous healing powers exudes (XCIII, 3 and 20—Maddox 329). After his death, Galehaut's gilded tomb is placed in "bold relief" inside a church, and guarded by five knights. Lancelot later moves his friend to the Joyeuse Garde (formerly the Douloureuse Garde), to the site of his own original tomb opening, where Galehaut's tomb is ornately adorned, in accordance with medieval romances of antiquity (Maddox 327-30). The lack of ornateness of *La Mort*'s funerary monuments is reflective of the condemnatory outlook of this text's diegesis.

Much as proves the case with the hero, the medieval tomb has an intermediary function in the Lancelot cycle. Both vacant and occupied tombs function as "active mediator[s] of fundamental contradictions: between life and death, presence and absence, present and past" (Maddox 324). And, I would add, through the action of uncovering his patriarchal lineage, Lancelot also mediates between the past of his feminine upbringing, with its acqueous, womb-like environment, and the intractable imprint of men, of hu-*man* destiny, to which he contributes and to which his identity shall furthermore be held accountable. As emblems of genesis and initiation, imbued, like the hero, with cryptic contents, and suggestive of an "invisible alterity,"

both the prose *Lancelot* and *La Mort*'s tombs serve as a monuments to the failure of humans who concede the harsh testimony of their world-making to inscriptions in stone.

At an intratextual level, Lancelot's found tombs reveal a progressively diagenetic landscape devoid of the transformative qualities of the forest and the maternal pond. Together, the 'found' tombs represent the hero as a "genealogical mediator" between the Arthurian age and the remote Arimathean era. According to the specifications of his patriarchal destiny, Lancelot is denied access to the Grail whose early sacralization was witnessed by his Arimathean ancestors (331-4). He remains central, nevertheless, as the "primary addressee" of the eschatological messages expressed by these tombs and having to do with his own ancestry, his destiny, and the elusive history of the Grail.

Important to the outlook of *La Mort*'s author, Lancelot's identity as an 'homme corrompu' is revealed to him by an ethereal voice in association with his father's one adulterous sin (*La Mort*, LXXIX). Generational culpability asserts itself through the division between clans—Lancelot, a descendent of King Ban, and his cousins Boort, Hector, and Lionel, vie against Arthur's clan, Gauvain, Mordret, Gaherit (whom Lancelot kills), Agravain (who exposes Lancelot and Guenièvre), and Gherrehet. The death of the word and of the court is formally evidenced by inscriptions and monuments, in contaminated friendships, and in the de-natured, petrified environment, as exhibited at Arestel, where Lancelot and Galehaut rejoin Arthur engrossed in warfare, "assiégeant la Roche;" "tout l'espace intermédiaire était ravagé" (*L.d.L.* II: 505). Both the masculine and the eschatological emphases of these sepulchral sequences inscribe, as-in-stone, Lancelot's status and function in a system well on its way to extinction.

Although the shift from Lancelot's earlier associations with the feminine domain, and thus the feminine psyche, is unmistakable, these influences do not disappear entirely. Rather, similar to Arthur's body, ferried by Morgain to the mystical island of Avalon after his death, the Lancelot of "un seul cœur" is relegated to the domain of emotional memory. Women nevertheless maintain a role as vessels of memory in concert with the knight's evolving identity. We will remember that, in *Charrette*, the queen reveals to Lancelot his name; in the prose *Lancelot*, Ninienne withholds the child's name from him, "personne ne savait son nom qu'elle seule" (*L.d.L*. I, VI: 99). After his first night of conquest at the Dolorous Guard, a fairy, sent by La Dame du Lac reveals to Lancelot that "demain [...] vous saurez votre nom et le nom de votre père" (XXIII: 515). The same damsel counsels Lancelot to develop his chivalric reputation away from Arthur's court and the court of other princes: "ma dame veut qu'il en soit ainsi, pour que vous vous éleviez en gloire et en valeur." During the early courtship between Lancelot and the queen, Guenièvre recapitulates the hero's first exploits at Arthur's court (II a: 101-10). In yet another context associated with the feminine, Lancelot becomes the artist of his own memory when, as mentioned earlier, he paints scenes of both his chivalric and his amorous exploits with the queen, thus eliciting a mnemonic record of his transgression (LXXXVI) whose disastrous potential is realized to its fullest in *La Mort* when Morgain deceptively lures Arthur into the room where he will witness, *in flagrante*, the adulterous scenes between the two lovers. The lasting repercussions of Arthur's unfortunate illumination are evidenced in the tombs of his fallen knights. Every monument becomes an accusation; neither Christian nor courtly laws are observed; all are implicated by the tragic combination of arrogance and vengeance cycles fueled by jealousy, suspicion, singular ambition, and unmitigated grief. Yet, neither military conflict nor the single-mindedness of knights can be held entirely accountable for this outcome.

Additional factors pertaining to the reverberating influences of cultural shift determine both the manner and the means through which we arrive at the final collapse of the Arthurian *regnum*.

Nature, Culture, Violence

The pessimistic outcome of *La Mort le Roi Artu*, often attributed to the adulterous relationship between Guenièvre and Lancelot, can just as well be likened to the dying off of an ecosystem whose original state of symbiotic cohabitation has devolved into one of antipathy, weakening and isolating its individual entities to the point of extinction. As I have indicated with respect to the broad implications of medieval adultery, a major source of unrest within Arthur's court can be located in the shifting boundaries of gender and kinship roles within the aristocracy, which, as the texts demonstrate, is also subject to the pressures of upward mobility, of mercantilism, and of conflicted relationships between humans and their natural environment. Lancelot's propensity for self-mutilation (physical and psychological) in *Charrette* and the queen's brutal treatment by both the court and the king in the prose texts reflect internalized and externalized versions of the destructive impulse. Knights kill one another in succession, as we know. The fate of Galehaut is also indicative of the trend of 'othering' individuals within the collective. An accompanying theme, the targeted victimization of women, of Guenièvre in particular, in *La Mort*, is particularly relevant as a tactic of selecting individuals within a group with the specific objective of expiating collective fears of wrongdoing. In the pages that follow, I will talk about an intricate web of components that contribute to the Arthurian break-down and, even more emphatically, reflect divisive epistemologies concerning gender roles and responsibilities and gender distinctions attributed to natural and unnatural spaces and the elements that comprise them; as we

have seen, the replacement of wild elements of nature, and of pleasantly cultivated natural spaces such as the courtly meadow, by rock, metal, towers, and tombs emphasizes the prose texts' obsession with patriarchal power relations. Lancelot's role as both a captive and capturer of the castle's prize belonging (the queen) is indicative of his mediatory function in this respect.

Tacitus, who has been credited with creating the prototypical barbarian woman, has linked the partnership of women and men to the uncivilized world, to wildness, and to a problem of boundaries[xxxi] (which can only be underscored by the existence of the adulterous relationship). In the *Lancelot*, the queen's adultery is articulated as a problem of power in relationship to the king. The potential threat of the queen's autonomy, which her adultery suggests, is treated with the severity it merits when a "fausse Guenièvre" appears at court and, unrecognized by Arthur, denounces her rival as a fraud; after which, the true queen is hastily imprisoned, with no hope of intervention from Arthur. In a particularly pointed display of sovereign power over his wife, the king iterates the queen's gruesome sentence of humiliation, "elle sera traïnée à travers cette ville," torture, "elle aura l'intérieur des mains écorché, parce qu'elle y a reçu le sacre et l'onction," and execution, "elle sera brûlée et ses cendres jetées au vent: ainsi le bruit de cette justice qui aura été rendue se répendra partout et plus jamais une femme n'aura l'audace de perpétuer un tel forfait" (*L.d.L. II*, LXX: 659). Let it be noted that the king's diatribe is not merely directed at the queen, victim of a ruse to undermine the king, but, more specifically, at the character of all women.

Both distrust and calumny of women are prevalent features of a courtly society under duress in *La Mort*. Boort's attack upon feminine character—he evokes the histories of Salomon, Samson, the Trojan War, and Tristan to make his point: "Jamais aucun homme ne s'éprit profondément d'une femme sans en mourir"—is directed at the negative effects of female

influence upon knights, and hence, upon otherwise stable social, moral, and political structures. Not only is Guenièvre a threat to Lancelot, she threatens to destroy the highest ideals of *courtoisie*: "Et vous, sachez-le, vous ferez bien pis que toutes les autres; car par vous disparaîtront, en la personne d'un seul chevalier, toutes les qualités par lesquelles un homme peut s'élever dans l'honneur de ce monde et qui le font dire comblé de toutes les grâces, c'est-à-dire la beauté et la vaillance, la hardiesse et la courtoisie, la noblesse" (*La Mort*, 109, 59). Above and beyond historical precedents invoked by Boort, as I have indicated, male designation of women as the identified 'problem' has to do with courtly society's inability to incorporate paradox, and plain old difference, into cognitive processes; as a result, both 'truth' and 'untruth' must be channeled to 'safer' avenues, whereby publicly sanctioned catharsis (or 'honor killing') may occur.

Arthur's revelation at Morgain's castle, where Arthur views incriminating paintings made by Lancelot during his period of imprisonment, provokes, quite literally, an apocalypse of the psyche, whereby irremediable fragments of truth become 'unveiled' to his conscience.[xxxii] This pivotal incident marks the moment when the heretofore 'private' affair, already a topic of derision within the public domain (Arthur's court), enters the domain of rulership, policy, and application of the law. First, Arthur must undergo an excruciating process towards cognitive literacy: "il entreprit de les déchiffrer; [...] il fut stupéfait, et l'inquiétude le gagna; il les considéra de plus près, et se dit à voix basse: 'Par ma foi; si cette légende dit vrai, Lancelot m'a donc déshonoré avec la reine [...]" (52, 100). At a rational level, Arthur is unable to reconcile Lancelot's demonstrations of honor and fealty as a knight with his identity as the queen's lover. Doubt and suspicion have infected his mind: "il ne put jamais s'empêcher par la suite d'être plus soupçonneux envers la reine que par le passé [...]" (62, 114). The king's lengthy and labyrinthine

process towards the truth begins to intersect with, and even to promote, unstable, competing factions within his kingdom. As a result, a general aura of incredibility permeates the entire kingdom, eroding the stability as well as the courtliness of courtly life.

In another pointed incident of *La Mort*, the malicious ruse of a disgruntled lesser knight underscores the costliness of the social situation just described. Just after Arthur's return from Morgain's castle, the queen, newly suspect in the king's mind, is falsely accused of the death of a knight to whom she serves, unwittingly, a piece of poisoned fruit. The envenomed food, initially intended for Gauvain by his enemy, functions foremost as a means of instilling doubt in the public mind as to the queen's moral credibility (62-85, 113-145). From a symbolic as well as from a sociological perspective, to invoke a classical example, Plutarch has associated the corruption of the table and the food there offered not only with the dissolution of the household, but, moreover, with the dismantling of the earth's resources and the confusion of the universe. At its most rudimentary level, the poisoning of fruit—we will remember the orchard through which Lancelot passes to gain access to the queen in *Charrette*—disrupts the sanctity of a social communion where food is shared, an unmistakable sign of the insidious direction of Arthur's court: the destruction of the Round Table and thereby of the universe it represents. Although the false accusation deflects attention from the as yet unproven adultery in question, it succeeds in poisoning collective thought. The queen's culpability in this instance is an illusion, a falsehood later disproved; nevertheless, both malice and suspicion remain instilled in the public conscience. Words likewise, ingested and expelled, become toxic.

As I have mentioned in my first chapter, truth-telling can be problematic in the Middle Ages, particularly as secrets revealed lead to insidious consequences, which neither the 'truth' teller, nor h/er victims can predict. The term *ek-phrazo*, "telling out of," associates literal

regurgitation with "telling on," which is to say: the voluntary revelation of a secret, or the disclosure of a truth for ulterior motives (Nichols 824). Once again, the Middle Ages associates speaking, or "telling on" as a third party, with spying. Of pivotal importance, the 'espion' is characterized by his or her incomplete view of the situation,[xxxiii] her visual, as well as moral turpitude. To further complicate matters, the courtly love tradition, which values feeling above all else, condemns all words and deeds that interfere with the love between a man and a woman. The ekphrastic message of Lancelot's painted walls penetrates, where earlier words and allusions have failed, both public awareness and the resistant consciousness of the king, whose inability to reconcile the double identity of his best knight provokes both a cognitive and moral rupture that permeates and divides his kingdom and, ultimately, determines its fate. When *La Mort's* author, maître Gautier Map,[xxxiv] undertakes the task of recording the pessimistic results, "selon la vérité des événements" (204, 309), courtly emphasis upon the moral truth of feeling, a unifying element, is replaced by a need to document the consequences of divisive actions.

The grave of the poisoned knight marks the first in a series of accusatory inscriptions serving as testaments to a declining kingdom *unable* "to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world:"[xxxv] "Ici repose Gaheris le Blanc de Karaheu, Frère de Mador de la Porte, que la reine fit mourir par le poison" (63, 116). A similar accusatory inscription, incriminating Lancelot, appears after the death of la Dame d'Escalot, whose dead body floats (in her funerary vessel) to the foot of Camelot's tower. In this instance, the king, in his sympathy for the young woman of a lowlier social class, "morte de chagrin" (70, 127), has her buried in the church of Saint-Etienne, thus elevating her status after death. Conversely, when, subsequent to the crime for which she is falsely accused, Guenièvre, once again, faces 'justice' after the insistence of Mador, brother of the murdered knight, Arthur, in keeping with the custom, adheres

to the rule of law, refusing to come to her defense: "Non, dame, dit le roi; je ne saurais faire d'entorse au droit, ni pour vous ni pour quiquonque" (125, 68). Not only is the queen's social status irrelevant here, the episode exacerbates the division between the clans of Lancelot and Arthur, as Guenièvre well understands, "car elle savait bien qu'elle ne trouverait absolument aucun chevalier qui acceptât de prendre les armes pour elle, sinon, dans la parenté du roi Ban [...]." Although Guenièvre is rescued at the final hour by Lancelot, the renewed tryst between the lovers, who behave "avec tant d'imprudence que la plupart des gens de la cour s'en aperçurent" (145, 85), further fuels divisive factions within the court, as evidenced by the divided moral sympathies of Gauvain and his three brothers. Agravain and Guerrehet, (particularly the former) eager to disclose the truth to Arthur, oppose Gauvain and Gaheriet, who refuse to utter what they know, for fear of social repercussions. Gauvain, who declines Guenièvre's request for defense against Mador's accusation, "car il n'est pas encore né, celui pour qui j'accepterais de manquer à la loyauté" (139, 79), explains to Arthur his reasons for refusing to speak against the queen: "car si vous y accordiez crédit, encore que ce soit le pire mensonge au monde, il pourrait s'ensuivre un malheur plus grand que n'en a jamais connu votre époque" (146, 85). All are bound by codes of law and kinship and the limited scope of their individual visions. Adding to the prevailing chaos, Arthur's tragic inability to resolve a paradox, i. e., Lancelot's "trahison" vs. his "valeur" (149), is symptomatic of, as well as tributary to, his inability to perceive and to successfully counter more insidious forms of disloyalty within his knighthood. The mutually ascribed culpability of Lancelot and the queen, for which both character assassination and physical mutilation (potential or real) serve as ambivalent metaphors, suggests a sacrificial function for these two lovers. Lancelot's wound at the left haunch shortly before his return to court echoes the vital wounds of the Fisher King and of Perceval's father. Because of its placement, we can

ascribe several messages to this sort of wound: damage to the patriarchal line, sexual culpability, infractions of violence, and sexual victimization. Arthur's last effort at preserving the continuity of his court through the queen's elimination—the tentative ultimately goes awry—invariably disproves the purported legal and moral arguments at its basis.

In order to better understand its relationship to *La Mort*'s denouement, let us consider both the universal and specific implications of the sacrificial impetus. Ritualized sacrifice, as variously manifested in modern as well as pre-modern cultures, has a corrective social function, relevant to medieval society and to the conflicted social conditions prefacing the end of the Arthurian cycle. For our purposes, René Girard has identified two opposing aspects of ritual sacrifice, which we may consider universal: the first involves a *sacred* obligation ignored at grave peril, the second, a *profane*, i.e. criminal act, with serious consequences for both perpetrator and victim (*Violence and the Sacred*). Gaheris' death provides an example of the latter, a criminal act, which, from the narrative perspective, simultaneously illuminates and deflects from the actual guilt of the queen. Arthur's role then becomes the expiation of (collective) malaise by elimination of its identified cause, the queen. What actually takes place amounts to a dialogue, even more precisely to a form of deal-making, between the disruptive and the restorative elements of society; Girard refers to what follows as a "circular line of reasoning" that produces '*ambivalence*', or "no real explanation" for the fact that "Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed." (In *La Mort*, both the identified problem, adultery, and its purported solution, sacrifice of the perpetrators, evoke a double bind scenario.) According to prescribed practices, the sacrificial process entails a certain degree of misunderstanding: "The celebrants do not and must not

comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act" (Girard 7).[xxxvi] At the same time, participants must believe that an undesirable situation has been resolved. Impulsive violence, by any standard, cannot be perceived as curative. When performed as a ritual (socially sanctioned) act, the object of sacrifice must have a designated value relevant to the structure of the society in question. Selection of the 'victim' is key. Contrary to Joseph de Maistre's assertion that sacrificial animals were "always those most prized for their usefulness: the gentlest, most innocent creatures, whose habits and instincts brought them most closely into harmony with man. . . ." ("Eclaircissement sur les sacrifices"),[xxxvii] Girard sees sacrifice not as expiation of guilt, but rather as a strategy of deflection in which a relatively "indifferent victim" is sacrificed in order to protect the members of a society from one another in otherwise unanimous violence. In order for this to occur, uniqueness must be marginalized, or vilified, as in Lancelot's case; likewise, Guenièvre must be removed from her status as a representative of the king's power and demoted to generic status that equates her with 'all women'. As two fundamental components of a perceived problem, and much in accordance with their respective authors, both Guenièvre and Lancelot undergo processes of victimization in order to accommodate, if not also to expiate, incompatible and unresolved discourses. Sacrifice, after all, functions as a collective act of substitution in which the victim is offered up by the community, as a substitute for all members of the community, and as a protective measure for the community against its *own* violence (Turner, Girard).[xxxviii]

As I have discussed in earlier sections, much of medieval (feudal) anxiety stems from the persistent threat of usurpation from within the clan or the aristocratic social unit, whether by queens, or competing males. Normally, tensions are channeled to sources outside the community; an external problem is identified and dealt with; disruptive elements within the

community are thereby eliminated and order restored (at least temporarily). A common premise for selection, physical resemblance, is generally based upon positive value where animals are concerned and negative value (defectiveness) where humans are concerned. When victims come from within the community, as begins to be the case in the 13th century Arthurian text, particularly in *La Mort*, they are so selected because of their marginality, in other words, because of their outsider status: "between these individuals and their community a crucial social link is missing" (hence the outsider status), "so they can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal" (Girard 13). The insider, unlike the outsider, remains without perspective. [xxxix] Queens are easily eliminated and replaced by other queens. Lancelot's situation as the queen's lover is dual in that, as a mediator between two disparate systems of value, one that allows, the other that disallows his behavior, he operates both as a protector (on the outskirts) and as an outcast (from within). The point of ritual substitution—and this is intricately embedded within the contexts and the (ab)uses of both gender and character in the medieval texts under scrutiny in this chapter—is to divert the violent impulse toward the sacrificial victim who cannot be defended as he/she/it lacks a champion.

For Guenièvre, rescue and restoration to the venerable role of queenship depends upon the intervention of Lancelot, an outsider whose positive value is proven through his unique ability to reverse the inverted status of the queen. The cathartic, and thus the restorative effect of this intervention proves tenuous at best, however, as similar occurrences of the queen's victimization, along with the escalation of random violence amongst Arthur's knights persists. Ultimately, the failure of a 'viable', i.e. a truly expendable anathema results in the multiplication of anathemas: both the queen's accusers and Lancelot's detractors are revealed as the worst of perpetrators.

To borrow a perspective from Greek culture, physical contact with the anathema is perceived as dangerous; one does violence to a violent person only to be contaminated by his violence. The underlying logic of the substitute victim is to avoid the "connecting link" between the initial violent act and the act of reprisal that must follow. Very simply stated, violence is a religious concern because it leads to ritual impurity. The collective fear of contagion[xl] informs the escalation of infighting and clan warfare in the Middle Ages. Although violent acts often occur impulsively, medieval man takes very seriously the consequences of his actions and looks for signs of reprisal in the surrounding landscape: nature is the ultimate recipient of human violence and the mechanized propensity for warfare—this is Bresson's point (*Lancelot du Lac*, 1974). Yet, in resounding irony (which the film also does not miss), nature, in her resilience, incorporates and eventually wears the artifacts of her destruction.

From the perspective of a medieval community, disharmony between its members may not directly affect solar and lunar cycles or alter the seasons; direct correlations can nevertheless be observed between internal tensions and the daily care of crops, animals and children. The distracted individual mistreats the barley and misses signs of the wolf at the village outskirts. For the purposes of cleansing the present of the past, the ritual outlet allows for the exportation of the accumulated grievances of many through 'proper' channels. Conversely, violence occurring between community members outside the ritual framework of the society incites the persistence of unjustified and unjustifiable violence, much as we observe in the sequential deaths of knights, by other knights in *La Mort*'s final chapters. The subtext of sacrifice is its acceptance as an inevitable component of society; because the violent impulse must be appeased, its redirection away from the community is viewed as the better of two evils.

Bresson's cinematic *Lancelot*, once again, provides an insightful example of the redirection of violence. After failed attempts to retrieve the grail and massive loss of life, Arthur agrees to a tournament in a neighboring kingdom in order to assuage mounting disloyalty against his leadership and to redirect the aggressions of his knights away from one another. The occasion also allows for Lancelot's appearance at the tournament *déguisé*, which both deflects from and attracts speculation concerning his alleged tryst with the queen. Similarly, the author of *La Mort* recognizes interminable and repetitive acts of vengeance as a major threat to the entire social body where "the least false step can have dire consequences" (Girard). Arthur's need to be reminded of the importance of land stewardship, and of equity concerning land distribution and communication with high and low ranking knights, is echoed in his "comportement affreux" (Frappier, *Etude* 84) concerning his wife, as well as in his inability to clearly perceive the torrent of impending disasters afflicting his kingdom. The king's tendency to act in accordance with the fixed structures of the law, as opposed to the individual requirements of the volatile circumstances around him, creates a list of false steps as well as lost opportunities, for all concerned. A state of "now familiar" anxiety persists, marked (to paraphrase N. Frye) by a capacity for pity and fear that have become "'states of mind without objects.'"[xli] The important distinction between 'primitive' societies, which have only private vengeance (hence the need for sacrifice), and 'civilized' societies, which have the judicial system (which ought to diminish the need for sacrifice), points to a failure at both ritual and judicial levels in the Arthurian situation and in a medieval society that vacillates between changing feudal structures, conflicting moralities, and felt pressures of the impending 'rational' era.

Uncertain Futures: the Nature of Aberration in the Lancelot Cycle

As the major themes of this chapter indicate, embedded within the indistinctness of boundaries (of place and identity), we easily locate fears of encroachment. To turn to a related theme, focalized episodes of social deviance (or aberration) appear in classical examples and in medieval adaptations of these examples as typically coded forms of behavior: sexual alterity, madness and, less overtly evident, incest. These scenarios express extreme articulations of medieval concern about power relations, succession, and lineage in literary texts. First, to reiterate some important distinctions, as a literary motif, the adulterous theme expresses anxieties over lineage and legitimate succession and can be seen as both maintaining and disrupting existing patriarchal structures. Madness, as I discussed in my first chapter, normally represents a transitory phase in which the hero distances himself from society, often regressing to a beast-like existence, before he can be reborn again and return to society as an improved version of himself. Lancelot's madness, as I have indicated in my discussion of self-forgetting and self-annihilation, deviates from this model in that he remains a marginal figure, never completely society's child, and even less so as a penitent after his renunciation of the queen in *La Mort*. Before I turn to the role of incest, a tacit yet influential subtext of the Arthurian narrative, I would like to look at the role of literary madness as a mediatory device between fixed and unstable elements of culture and of culture in relationship to nature.

As one of several 'altered' states experienced by Lancelot, madness does not conform to a single literary standard; its primary purpose, for example, is not to return the 'recovered' hero to a functional role in society. The disordered melancholy of Tristan provides a more accurate prototype, proving his otherness with respect to more stable, less feeling members of society. Late medieval authors tend to pit their wild heroes against the conventions and the contradictions

of the aristocracy whose chivalric values, such as valor, generosity, and service to others, succumbed to the reality of "political expediency," "brute force," and artificiality (Bernheimer 144). As an antidote, reversion to primitivism announces the shock of the 'real', i.e. authenticity in its most basic form (Tacitus's skin-clad wild man). A less primitive version of the trope is evident in popular pastorals, or *bergerettes*, stories that ultimately represent a diversion on the part of the aristocracy at the expense of the peasant classes. Unlike this last example, wildness among the chivalric classes imbues the individual with temporary power to rise up, much like unpredictable nature, and thereby to exorcise from his own nature the oppressive forces of society. His return to sanity presents him once again with clarity of choice between his social and anti-social nature.

As a Christian motif, the altered state connotes both interior and exterior purgation (of non-Christian entities, such as dragons, demons, threatening to society). The restoration of sanity to the temporarily insane provides reassurance against moral, natural and political anarchy, much as Carnival promotes exhibitions of disorder and chaos for a brief period, in order to reestablish social order.[xlii] In late medieval texts, forays into wilderness, the wild unknown, underscore the important correlation between lack of control, uncertainty, and historical thresholds. The wild or insane man is perceived not only as uncivilized; he is considered 'spiritually blind'. We can trace this thinking to Augustine for whom knowledge of God, however bleak, constitutes the fundamental prerequisite to any further mental activity (12). Hildegard of Bingen's association of the melancholic state with sin and with 'les dérèglements morals et physiques' adds a constitutional dimension to emotional Godlessness, literally exile from God; or, as Theresa of Avila expresses it, the terrain of confrontation between 'Dieu' and 'le Démon', between obscurity and the Good. By these standards, the madman can be viewed as less godly than an

infidel; the latter, at least, is perceived as capable of some conception of God, however distorted. When wildness and, in Perceval's case for example, 'niceté', become characteristic or transitory features of the medieval hero, a chivalric subtext, with Christian overtones (read Resurrection) normally applies: the hero has to lose his heroic image, face his shadow, in order to be worthy of his task as a culture-bringer (Fletcher),[xliii] as is the case with Lancelot. A redeeming attribute of madness is periodic extra-lucidity or exceptionalism of some sort. Those who undertake its journey are also intended to retrieve something of cultural value; which is why Chrétien both critiques and encourages the fanaticism of *Charrette*'s hero.

Another important point, which contradicts the often perceived dichotomy between the sinner and the celestial knight, the stigmatized, whether by melancholy or madness, can be viewed as 'closer to God'. The value of the "pêcheur" is determined by the substance and quantity of what s/he must overcome.[xliv] The *lunatic*, like the medieval hermit, is a holy man.[xlv] Grief-driven madness, conversely, has a negative function, as exemplified by the unbridled cyclical vengeance of (the decidedly non-prophetic) knights of *La Mort* whose rage destroys all and uncovers nothing of worth.

As a courtly motif, the melancholic or irrational behavior of the knight besotted with 'love madness' reiterates familiar notions of feminine fickleness in medieval society. Jilted men, having lost their strongest ties to courtly society, resort to the unkempt forest as the environment most suitable to their disorientation; thereafter, only a miracle, or the grace of feminine touch, can restore them to sanity. It is important remember, however, that love-induced wildness functions differently in individual heroes with respect to their feminine counterparts. Laudine's rejection of Yvain causes the hero's 'fall' on behalf of the society he is meant to serve; first, he must shed his pride and learn the true value of loyalty. Lancelot's madness as a result of

Guenièvre's apparent rejection, in both *Charrette* and the prose text, has a less overtly social function; the queen's rejection acts as a beacon for the knight's self-improvement, but not necessarily as a perfected model of Arthurian society. Yvain 'forgets' his queen temporarily in order to re-member his social role through a process of penance and regret; Guenièvre, on the other hand, is so intricately embedded within Lancelot's identity ("Sans Guenièvre, il n'y aura pas de Lancelot," in Bresson) that, through her remembrance—and let me stress that the social implications of this next point indicate the *perceptions of* and *effects upon* the fixed structures of society—the knight is subject to "endless doubling and repetitions" (Fletcher 338) of self-forgetting, with the result that he becomes virtually blind to societal eyes, judgments, and repercussions.

Erotic dimensions of wildness (King Kong/Méléagant), which Chrétien applies in a more sympathetic vein to Lancelot, represent the arboreal abode as a sensual paradise, juxtaposing the choice of Pagan vs. Christian life. In the latter case, the damsel who chooses her erotic nature over the edicts of society is left to her fate, by which brutal dismemberment and death is frequently the implication. Guenièvre is threatened with a similar fate by Méléagant, in *Charrette,* and by Arthur and the court in the prose texts. A subtext of male wildness in the Middle Ages, not surprisingly, is the perceived vagary of feminine virtue. From a profane perspective, the stakes are precise: the inconstancy of females disrupts kinship ties, raises questions of royal paternity and property rights and ultimately derides male 'puissance'.

Without question, unresolved relationships to courtly society and to the fulfillment of knightly roles are common denominators in the temporary madness of medieval heroes. Both the prose *Lancelot* and *La Mort* reiterate the social ambivalence of their focal hero. Prior to Arthur's battle with the Saxons, for example, the knight, afflicted with "une telle folie furieuse que rien ne

lui résiste" (*L.d.L. II*, LXIX 535), displays the psychotic symptoms of paranoia-induced violence and must be isolated in his cell. The queen, suicidal with despair, finally cedes her position to the Lady of the Lake, who alone can bring him back to his senses. As is the case in *Charrette*, muteness, inability, or refusal to speak accompany the hero's loss of 'raison': "Lancelot est si furieus qu'il en perd presque la raison et qu'il ne dit plus un mot" (563), which, as I've mentioned earlier, appears to indicate a communicative impasse related to the hero's bi-polarity and his bi-polar origins. *La Mort*'s negative view of the extramarital affair is indicative of a trend away from a purely amorous context; only one of Lancelot's four separate episodes of insanity is related to Guenièvre's rejection (due to a misunderstanding between the lovers). As the collective capacity of knights for violence against one another escalates, madness, induced by grief and desire for revenge, loses its association with the individual and becomes a collective affliction.

One last point: beyond its obvious destructive attributes, Lancelot's rage also has a forward-looking social function. Whereas the knight's volatile responses when angered demonstrate his capacity for immoderation and lack of self-control, his otherworldly strengths in both *Charrette* and the prose versions of the romance, indicate the hero's unique ability to direct his actions towards the benefit of (patriarchal) society at pivotal junctions in the cycle. Once healed, the knight's erratic fury is transformed into a noble fury and thereby channeled towards its intended objective, restoration of Arthur's power: "Il ressemble au lion furieux au milieu des biches, qui tue de part et d'autre, non par voracité, mais pour manifester sa noble férocité et sa légitimité" (557). In this respect, Lancelot is a Hermetic figure, capable of tricking human time—consistent with the Hermetic motif of descent—in order to generate movement and produce results of which the king is incapable.

Whether or not Lancelot's devotion to the queen, with all of its disastrous implications, constitutes imbalance, weakness, or simply incongruity of character is to a large extent dependent upon the views of his many authors and critics. It is equally important to note that, unlike Yvain, Lancelot's episodes of madness and immoderation never entirely conform to a standard model of medieval wildness. Never entirely devolving into the bestial state, a condition that opposes societal norms in order to reconfirm them, Lancelot, desired by many, remains at best at the edges of Arthur's courtly domain, neither a product nor a fixed member of the social order. This knight's alterity evades formula in that it appears to be a personal choice of the hero's, "toute personnelle" (Frappier 79-80) constitutional to him rather than acute and temporary.

It is also important to point out an essential distinguishing feature of Lancelot's particular brand of alterity. Unlike more socially inclined knights, this hero does not emerge purified of his past; rather, in alchemical fashion, he transforms the shadow into a useful tool, which we might equate with awareness and memory; the hero neither erases nor forgets the wrongs of the past but, rather, reconstitutes the present through painful lessons and scars of the past (Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 4:33; also, Luke 8).[xlvi] Although this hero's bouts of insanity do not transform him in fundamental ways, his movement between and at the edges of parallel, as well as conflicting domains, discursive, sociological, topographical, and imaginary, unalterably disturb, and thus force to the surface embedded epistemologies. Let me emphasize that perfection of the hero is beside the point here. As Angus Fletcher aptly reminds us, the underlying story of obsession is its aspiration to boundlessness (*Centre and Labyrinth* 333).[xlvii] If Tristan's madness is equal to a trap, an impasse between his individual self and the society with which he must contend, Lancelot's madness suggests a way of breaking free of the fixed

paradigm of culture. The feminine role, reduced to its minimum in *La Mort*, remains essential to whether or not the hero succeeds or fails in his task. Before I return to this last point, I will address one final topic pertaining to its conclusion.

Incest, which I broached in my discussion of *Perceval* and in this chapter's discussion of adultery (*passim*), remains an implicit, recurring theme of literary kingship (Arthur's among them) for which social and environmental degradation and the destruction of kingdoms act as retributive symptoms. The issue, once again, beyond its universal taboo status, appears to point to questions of gender inequity and the legitimacy of rule. As we examine its historical implications, Yolande de Pontfarcy links the occurrence of incest motifs in medieval texts to the disappearance of ancient Indo-European society's observance of the law of exogamy, which delegated transmission of power through the woman. Due to anxieties among the medieval patriarchy concerning the potential menace of ambitious sons-in-law, a daughter's right to inherit from her father was diminished. Pontfarcy indicates that, where women are concerned, incest becomes something of a political tool, rather than merely a sin of lust: "In a system in which power is transmitted through the woman, incest between father and daughter becomes a political crime because it signifies an abusive appropriation of this power. The taboo of incest comes to the fore in medieval literature when there is a question of succession in the absence of a son" (*Paternity and Fatherhood* 63). The story of *Apollonius of Tyr*, for example, rewritten several times between the third and eighteenth centuries, provides a model of incestuous relations between a father and daughter. In this example, the regent Antiochus, something of a brutal tyrant, takes his daughter as a mistress after the death of his wife, followed soon after by his systematic slaughter of the kingdom's young men, potential suitors to the young woman. The

male victims prove unable to decipher a riddle, devised by the regent as a test, which would reveal his incestuous relationship. When Apollonius uncovers the riddle's meaning, he is forced into exile. The complicity of the king's daughter, who remains without power or voice throughout the story, is indicated when she perishes with her father who, by an act of God, is struck dead by lightening (64-9). Notably, silence and culpability are viewed as intrinsically related; in a similar vein, a greater negative value is attributed to the silence of the victim, particularly because of her potential to bear children.

In a familiar scenario of both the Epopée and medieval romances, attention given to the affection of kings for their sisters' sons, Charlemagne's affection for Roland, for example, points to speculations, both credible and incredible, about incestuous relations between brother and sister. Concerns naturally point to the subversion of the order of succession from uncle to nephew. In the Arthurian romances, the problematic role of 'real' paternity is deflected by the introduction of mentorship roles between the king and his knights. Arthur's affection for his nephew, Gauvain, as opposed to his rarely mentioned son, Loholt, is representative of an emphasis, not upon filiation but, rather, upon paternity and kingship based upon merit rather than upon inheritance. In Chrétien's romances, *Erec et Enide* and *Perceval* in particular, the royal function of paternity appears in relationship to the creation of 'adventure.' When Perceval refers to Arthur as "the king who makes knights," he speaks, both verily and in ignorance, of more than the function of dubbing (70). In Chrétien's example, the knight is required to perfect himself in order to merit an inheritance he may be entitled to by birth. The implied guilt of the dead father, nevertheless, revisited in the errors of the son, dominates the moral discourse of the romance. Some of the repercussions we might expect to see manifest from the sin of incest emerge in thirteenth century developments of Mordred's character, in the nefarious manipulations of his

mother (Arthur's sister) Morgain, and by the simultaneous patricide and filicide that ultimately destroy the Arthurian kingdom in *La Mort*.

Values attributed to gender, yet again, appear as pertinent indicators of fears concerning the potential power of the royal female. Incest insists upon a fundamental discrepancy: between the value given to paternity and the actual production of heirs. Speech becomes forbidden; the incestuous 'product', whose origins remain repressed, continually asserts the disastrous consequences of the act: succession by a monster.

Until relatively recently, anthropologists have treated fatherhood as a social construction and motherhood as a "natural" or biological function, regardless of socio-political, religious, or historical variables under scrutiny.[xlviii] *Le Robert*, defines *paternité* at once as a feeling, a legal bond or, in metaphorical terms, as one who performs a generative act, such as authorship, the creation of a piece of work, or one who instigates an action. *Robert*'s definition of *maternité*, on the other hand, refers exclusively to the biological process of giving birth to a child and, by metonymy, to the ward of a hospital or the clinic where this process normally occurs.[xlix] As to the question of origins, *nature* ou '*norreture*', Lévi-Strauss posits a mutually dependent, if unequal relationship between the two: "la culture n'est, ni simplement juxtaposée, ni simplement superposée à la vie. En un sens, elle se substitue à la vie, en un autre elle l'utilise et la transforme, pour réaliser une synthèse d'un ordre nouveau" (*Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* 4). Above and beyond general anxieties concerning the potential of feminine influence as a result of "norreture," evidence suggests that the biological influence of women, as a result of childbearing, raises serious concerns as well. As to why this is so, a distinct relationship exists between incest, the childless marriage, whose implications I have touched upon earlier, and the

prevalence of infanticide and parricide scenarios in late medieval texts; origins can be traced to classical myths, whose 'monstrous' scenarios shed light upon the Arthurian narrative.

According to Marina Warner ("Why do Ogres Eat Babies? Monstrous Paternity in Myth and Fairytales"), the prevalence of infanticide and cannibalism, as told by Hesiod in the *Theogony*, corresponds to the "divine patriarchal prerogative". As the famous origin myth relates, Kronos (the regent) devours all of his children so that none will supplant him. Zeus' escape of this fate with the help of his mother Rhea, who tricks the murderous father into devouring a large stone wrapped in swaddling bands, indicates the importance of feminine intervention on behalf of future generations. Correspondingly, Goya's early nineteenth century paintings of the Greek myths, executed during his black period, emphasize the underlying subtext of the origin story: Kronos's arousal as he devours the body of one of his children. Here, devouring has "erotic force"; with all of the indices of sexual union, it suggests coupling, the literal "incorporation of the female" (197), as well as the desire of the male for sexual transfiguration. When, in a later episode of the myth, Zeus tricks his father into vomiting his devoured children (Hera, Demeter, Hades, Hestia, Poseidon), Kronos gives figurative birth, literally rebirthing, by bringing them forth living from his body; devouring thus functions as "a prelude to birth," which, in turn leads us to the surrogate pregnancy of the male (198). Not incidentally, the story favors the victory of vanquishing children over the patriarch. By consuming his children, Kronos attempts to halt time; his children, who represent the future, announce the futility of his efforts as well as the incontrovertible fact of succession.

As a template for the shady subtexts of the Arthurian narrative, the concerns of Kronos remain prominent. In medieval iconography, cannibalistic ogres suggest, among other possible meanings, "the jealousy of women's bodies as birth givers" (199). To take this logic a step

further, patriarchal cannibalism—the Arthurian text culminates with the 'necessity' of infanticide—expresses the king's fear of usurpation by his legitimate and illegitimate offspring. Moreover, as the womb-like pedagogical environment of Lancelot's foster mother suggests, the underlying patriarchal distrust of feminine stewardship of male heirs extends to the womb and to the gestational period. Depictions of sexually manipulative, fertile fairies, such as Morgaine, and abject queens and mothers, such as Hélène, Lancelot's birth mother, indicate two versions of a perceived threat. The queen's sterility in medieval romances, even as it further expresses concerns of lineage and social continuity, insures the literary immortality of the king. The adulterous affair between the queen and the knight, on the other hand, insists upon the ephemeral nature of kingship, manhood, and power: the knight himself appropriates the filial role and redirects the emphasis of royal lineage from genetic inheritance to earned and proven legitimacy. Without the intervention of the knight, a mediator between contexts, the king, similar to Kronos, by virtue of his association with 'fixed' laws and rigid customs, remains stalled in time. Much as we observe in the Kronos myth, questions of adultery and incest in medieval texts express unspoken fears about the limits of patriarchal authority. They struggle with fundamental questions of social relations: between identity and origin; as to whom babies belong, mothers or fathers; the relationship between biological origin, social and gender roles, and so forth. The mutual murder of father and son, each by the sword of the other, at the end of *La Mort* most certainly points to the cyclical, the social, and the chronological (genealogical) damage caused by incest, both literary and genetic, whose ultimate contribution is the annihilation of future generations.

Let me close with a few final observations concerning *La Mort's* obsession with the destructive potential of humans and the environmental legacy of the medieval world. First, with

respect to the failure of the imperfect hero, which Lancelot represents, it is necessary to remember that a mediator can never *be* or represent only one thing; his function, rather, is dialogical. Moreover—and let me emphasize this—if we insist upon this knight's perfection, we miss his essential *raison d'être*. Lancelot enters the Arthurian paradigm as an outsider in order to lead the way out. In so doing, he must bring to the fore buried legacies and otherwise disrupt fixed paradigms and structures so that others may emerge. As a mediator between gender roles and the disparate realities of the gendered psyche, Lancelot points to the unrealized potential of the Arthurian principle, for which the Round Table stands: the integration of the individual into a broader community. Feeling and interiority (between knights) form the "binding mediatory thread" of the principle of Arthurian integration, intended to weaken individual clan autonomy and vertical power relations between men (Bloch, "Wasteland" 267). The failure of this ideal is evidenced by knighthood's trend towards mutual annihilation.

Let us return momentarily to a related theme: the subservient role of the female in the Arthurian texts, first of which, her non-inclusion in the Arthurian model of non-hierarchical, reciprocal relations. As we have seen, both female victimization and the destabilizing influence of feminine influence figure as prominent, if contradictory motifs throughout the narrative. Supernatural females, such as Ninienne and Morgaine, offer both positive and negative views of the creative potential of women, which include but are not limited to their roles as mothers. Just as fairies reign within their domains, in which men figure selectively, queens, who represent the highest order of femininity in the human world, can be subjected at will to many forms of humiliation and violence. As a negative consequence, the queen's vulnerability and isolation detracts from the king's image as a fixed geographic center whose stability encompasses and restores the "wasted margins;" The *terre gaste* is predicated upon the isolation of individuals and

individual functions: the reversal of natural processes, the failure of agriculture, infertility, a breakdown of all society (266-70).

Paradoxically, unlike the stratified relationship between king and queen, Guenièvre's relationship to her knight envisions continuity. Without his emotional link to the queen, she a re-imagination of the two lost mothers, the hero encounters "an unbridgeable gap" between the domains of the imaginary and the real he seeks to unify. As much as the queen represents an externalized embodiment of Lancelot's inner psyche, much like Ariadne for Theseus, she provides the essential silken thread without which the hero suffers from "a breaking, a splintering, a rupturing of *continuous* awareness" (Fletcher 337-8). What then, we might well ask, does this hero actually achieve, given *La Mort le Roi Artu*'s violent end and *La Queste del Saint Graal's* 14th-century interpretation of him as an unworthy savior, a lost wanderer who strays from his destined course? And, to whom or what is failure directed, to the hero, to his authors, or to his readers?

Once again, the lesson of the classical labyrinth can help us decipher some of the implications of *La Mort*'s ambiguous message concerning the future of 13th-century humanity. When youthful Theseus (son of Aegeus, or, by a second account, illegitimate son of Poseidon) must be purified of his immoderation, which includes a zeal for violence, entry into the labyrinth necessitates a directed, forward-moving path, even as the convolutions of the structure obliterate all sense of direction. The Cretan myth, which also provides a focused object of fear, the Minotaur, suggests a dual potential for cultural violence and the meaning of sacrifice. This relates to the idea of purification through directed (as opposed to random) violence, in this instance, through the sanctioned elimination of a social nemesis. Symbolic focus, i.e. the non-randomness of intention, much like the silken cord, is central to finding one's way 'back out' of

the moral and psychological conundrum of cultural growing pains. To further draw upon related 'threads' of the Theseus myth, Ariadne's sacred marriage with Dionysus, whereby the "god of discontinuous conversion," (the culture-shaper), "marries the goddess of continuous flow," (culture herself), allows us to further glean the vital function of this merger: the discontinuous element (Theseus, Dionysus, Lancelot), capable of conversion as well as *conjointure*, becomes essential to culture's ability to *move* forward her *fixed* perceptions of self. Prior to this occurrence, however, Theseus must descend into the depths of the labyrinth, and, on culture's behalf, confront his own, and with them culture's cumulative fears (Fletcher 329-46).

Medieval authors such as Dante, and Virgil before him, understood the need for cultural connection, as well as the need for descent. Moreover, cultural transformation, which involves both successes and failures, is neither a solo nor a purely incidental act; it requires a series of successive agents to perform successive tasks. The hero, like the modern Everyman, needs a guide, however fleeting the relationship. Not incidentally, Lancelot's 12th- and 13th-century authors invariably demonstrate empathy for their hero's imperfections, which include his dependency upon others. Christian morality for that matter discourages antipathy. The failure of heroism does not stem from the imperfection of its heroes; rather, it arises when culture, not liking its own shadow, abandons its faculties of perception; with the result that its capacity for seeing is relegated to imaginary faultless heroes whose presence precludes heroism in those with whom fault can be found.

Without over generalizing the distinction, both Chrétien's and the prose versions of the Arthurian cycle give us examples of heroes who possess a full range of feeling and dimensionality of character, which we might also associate with the choices or avenues still available to them. *La Mort*'s emphasis upon tombs, inscriptions and the hard metals of war is

also symptomatic of an overall rigidity of attitude, related to the adherence or non-adherence to social and religious laws, as well as to stratifications between feeling and moral action. The chivalric test, central to the knight's personal evolution in *Charrette*'s narrative and fundamental to his access to the queen in the prose text, is denigrated to the status of infighting and senseless bloodshed in *La Mort*, where extant laws and codes of honor preclude common-sense survival tactics and promote inhumane forms of punishment whose error is never fully addressed or expunged in the sphere of human relationship. With the exception of the author's cautionary note at the beginning of *La Mort*, the reader never actually witnesses Lancelot's struggle between 'right' and 'wrong' doing. Institutionalized human action and interaction finds an appropriate metaphor in moral and emotional blindness; signs are missed everywhere.

But, returning to our earlier inquiry, does Lancelot actually miss signs, and therefore lose direction, as *La Queste del Saint Graal* insists (signs that his son, Galahad, assimilates unproblematically), or does Christianity's intolerance of imperfection simply erase the cultural opportunity it proposes: evolution? In *La Mort*, Lancelot's function indeed appears to be far more discursive than dramatic. Drama unfolds around the hero, for which he is held responsible, at least in part, and in which he, like other knights, participates to his fullest chivalric (if anti-heroic) and fallible human capacity. Both directly and indirectly responsible for the deaths of many of his esteemed comrades, Lancelot outlives Arthur, yet, as the heir of King Ban, succeeds no one. A final irony perhaps lies in Arthur's posthumous return to the domain of feminine wizardry, Avalon, while the aged knight, in the aftermath of the deaths of Guenièvre and his cousin Lionel, spends his last days as an ascetic, at the cusp of sainthood, in a solitary mountain hermitage, "pleine de rochers," "à l'écart de tout passage," in the company of the archbishop of Canterbury, and his cousin, Bléobléris, each a refugee and "homme religieux" after the brutal

battle at Salisbury plain. In addition to their testament to the results of violence, La Mort's final scenes underscore a vision of men as irretrievably flawed and of women, however powerless in their own right, as the cause of their destruction. Morgaine's stewardship over the dead body of Arthur, both her brother and one-time lover, indicates an alternate view of women, with dual connotations. These 'otherworldly' females, with no binding ties to the patriarchy, possess the potential for regeneration, with unpredictable, generative as well as destructive, even abnormal results. A product of incest, such as Mordred, exemplifies the negative potential of select mingling, which by its very engineering, severs ties with the 'normal' and forces to the foreground problems innate within ties of kinship.[l] Whereas the Arthurian narrative considers the necessity to move beyond fixed paradigms associated with the past and with kinship practices, it cannot see beyond the disastrous consequences of such a shift.

As Fletcher's interpretation of the classical myth above reminds us, "a sense of direction implies a continuous linkage with the past" (339); generations who fail to remember the errors of the past are doomed to repeat them: the rupture of all ties, of kinship, of camaraderie, of feeling, set in motion the violent unraveling of the Arthurian kingdom. Direction "found" has to do with the reacquisition of the past, and, most significantly, of its relevant signs. In Lancelot's case, as for all medieval heroes, the sins of the father apply. At a broader archetypal level, the marginal hero asks us to remember pre-feudal consciousness: Celtic (the magical domain has no aversion to movement, i.e. transition, transformation), and archaic, where movement first arises from original unity,[li] as well as the anxiety of between-ness: between 'here' and what follows. What is primarily asked for is perspective, and, in particular, perspectival flexibility and complementarity, as well as distancing: from fixed notions of the present, from the present paradigm, and from fearful, monothetic insurmountable notions of the future. If we allow the

movement to complete itself, lost memory becomes an initial stage to regaining the past; moreover, it is key to its re-imagination. The complex structure of the labyrinthine paradigms teaches us that the straight path cannot take us there: evil moves in a straight line.[lii] Nor is the maze-walker (whose purpose is self-correction) without sin. The celestial knight, the 'shadowless' super*ior*man (Galahad), permitted access to the polished realm of the Grail, induces us to abandon the future to a paucity of elusive saviors, and thus, to undervalue his father's task of exhuming, and liberating the *prima materia* of civilization's spectral remains. Far beyond its condemnation of knighthood and of humanity, the extent to which the domains of spirit and nature can be reconciled with the domain of cultural advancements, such as technology (a culture-bringer well beyond the medieval imagination) and the subjugation of emotion by both Christianity and the mechanized world, remains a persistent and dubious question *La Mort*'s author leaves to the discretion and the scrutiny of future readers.

[i] See P. Freedman "Medieval Marginality" 17.
[ii] Jean Gebser uses the term "deficient" to refer to transitory phases occurring between distinct phases of the evolution of human consciousness, beginning with archaic, magical, mythological, rational, and integral (which Gebser sees as potential but as yet unrealized in human development). As the term connotes, deficient phases are often associated with extreme examples (barbarism, paranoia, intellectual psychopathy) of human behavior in relationship to other humans and the environment.
[iii] See my Introduction to Part One of this dissertation.
[iv] Gebser associates the medieval mindset with a state of consciousness he defines as 'magical', applicable to the period but also available throughout human development. See also Le Goff, *L'Imaginaire Médiévale*.
[v] Since the 1950s, the idea of 'primitive thinking', as applied to both tribal and modern civilized peoples, has been a topic of social contention, particularly through its association with racism. Mary Douglas addresses this in her introduction to the 2002 edition of *Purity and Danger*. Gebser has used the term 'magical consciousness' to speak about the worldviews and psychological orientations of both tribal and medieval peoples who represent a 'pre-rational' phase of human consciousness. While his interpretation of magical, also known as pre-perspectival man (one step further along the path of evolution than archaic man) has attracted criticism for its oversimplified conclusions and racist overtones, Gebser's goal is to argue for integral, rather than rational thinking. Anthropology equates 'magical' thinking with highly coded systems of thought that (increasingly) may or may not refer to tribal and medieval cultures, as Umberto Eco makes explicit in his vast oeuvre.
[vi] Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, in McCracken.
[vii] McCracken quotes from J.C. Parson's chapter, "The Queen's Intercession in Thirteenth-Century England," *The Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995 (149). See also Parson's introduction, "Family, Sex, and Power: The Rhythms of Medieval Queenship," *Medieval Queenship*.
[viii] See Pauline Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries," *Medieval Queenship,* note 36: 10.
[ix] Dominique Boutet, "Bâtardise et Sexualité," in McCracken.
[x] See McCracken; also S. Gaunt, *Gender and Genre,* 1995.
[xi] See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.
[xii] See D. Delcourt: "La Vérité dans *La Mort le Roi Artur*."
[xiii] This last quote comes from an observation by E. Jane Burns concerning the importance of visual truth in Iseut's trial and in Béroul's romance. See McCracken, chapter 2, "Royal Sovereignty and the Test of the Queen's Body" 52-54.
[xiv] Milton refers to Wilson's "Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic." *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, S.R. Kellert and E.O. Wilson, eds., 1993.
[xv] "Just as the possession of the queen [by her knight] substitutes for the possession of the king's power, the possession of knowledge about the queen's adultery can be seen to substitute for the possession of the queen" (McCracken 86).
[xvi] Lochrie, "Women's 'Pryvetees' and Fabliau Politics in the Miller's Tale," *Exemplaria* 6, 2 (1994); in McCracken 87.
[xvii] See McCracken 92-100.

[xviii] Roberta Krueger asserts this point with respect to Guenièvre's initial dismissal of Lancelot; see Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*.
[xix] See Penny Schine Gold, in Gaunt 73.
[xx] See McCracken, "Adultery, Illegitimacy, and Royal Maternity."
[xxi] Yolande de Pontfarcy, "The Heredity of Power and Paternity of the Text in some Medieval Works," *Paternity and Fatherhood*, 1998.
[xxii] In the *Roman d'Énéas*, Lavine's mother accuses the hero of sodomy, thereby creating a necessity for him to prove his conformity by falling in love with her daughter. In this instance, the accusation comes from a discredited source. The episode nevertheless points to an important transition between epic and romantic motifs in which the epic hero, "defined in relation to other men," is reborn as a romance hero, "defined (along with his masculinity) through his relationship with a woman." See Gaunt 83.
[xxiii] In Gaunt's words, the monarchy "acts as a cohesive symbol for a society of self-governing individuals" (84).
[xxiv] By some accounts, the text is completed by Godefroy de Lagny. David Hult suggests that Chrétien and Godefroy represent not two distinct narrative voices but, rather, the competing narrative voices of a single author. Gaunt agrees with Roberta Krueger and Hult that 'Godefroy' is in fact a fictitious creation of Chrétien's, the former also being the author of other romances attributed to Chrétien. Importantly, *Charrette*'s narrative, which begins with the author's deference to his patroness, ends with an agreement of trust between two clerks. As Gaunt points out, both Marie and Guenièvre are excluded from the epilogue and Lancelot's fate, much as the 'true' nature of his character, is left in suspension: "A man whose identity is guaranteed by a woman is pushed aside by a man whose identity is guaranteed by another man, the 'author' or 'authority' behind the narrative" (102).
[xxv] *La Mort le Rois Artu*, Jean Frappier ed., Genève, Librairie Droz, 1956.
[xxvi] Frappier, *Etude sur La Mort le Roi Artur*.
[xxvii] "Il vit dans une solitude morale la tragédie de celui qui connait à l'avance le jour de sa mort" (138-9).
[xxviii] In volume IV, Sommer Edition, *Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artur*.
[xxix] Frappier cites two distinct versions, a long and a shorter version: "La tradition manuscrite offre une double rédaction de deux épisodes qui forment à eux seuls, du moins dans leur version longue, plus de la moitié de la *Mort de Galehaut* : le *Voyage en Sorelois* et l'épisode de la Fausse Guenièvre" (83).
[xxx] See Frappier 88.
[xxxi] Erler and Kowaleski 27.
[xxxii] See D. Delcourt, "La Vérité dans La Mort le Roi Artur."
[xxxiii] Delcourt 18.
[xxxiv] Frappier sustains the argument that *La Mort* has more than one author, *Étude.*
[xxxv] I have used one of Catherine Bell's definitions of the features of ritual practice, and, for the purposes of the Arthurian paradigm, reversed its positive value. "Practice is (1) situational; (2) strategic; (3) embedded in misrecognition of what it is in fact doing; and (4) able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world, or what I will call 'redemptive hegemony'" (Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 1992: 81). In Susan Mark's essay: "History vs. Ritual in Time and End-Time: The Case of Early Rabbinic Weddings in Light of Catherine Bell," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 79, no. 3, September 2011.

[xxxvi] This accords with Bell's definition above: (3).
[xxxvii] J. de Maistre, from *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* (Lyon, 1890), translation in Girard.
[xxxviii] See in particular *The Drums of Affliction* (1968) (mentioned in R. Girard's chapter on "Sacrifice," *Violence and the Sacred*) and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1995).
[xxxix] See Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature*. Lutwack compares the 'native' vs. the outsider, or non-native's perspective of place.
[xl] Girard explains this as follows: "Two men come to blows; blood is spilt; both men are thus rendered impure. Their impurity is contagious, and anyone who remains in their presence risks becoming a party to their quarrel" (27-8).
[xli] A. Fletcher 341; see Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 150, *Fearful Symmetry*, 221, 369-70, 380.
[xlii] See Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*.
[xliii] Fletcher.
[xliv] From lectures by Professor Olivier Pot, "Folie et Mélancholie dans la Littérature et les Arts de la Renaissance à l'Époque Classique," Université de Genève, 2006.
[xlv] Geoffrey of Monmouth's "Vita Merlini" (1150) depicts the madness of Merlin in the Caledonian forest; see Bernheimer.
[xlvi] Christian mysticism of the ancient and early period also applauds negative theology, the western apophatic 'cloud of unknowing' that is truly knowing, cf. *neti neti*.
[xlvii] Fletcher.
[xlviii] See C. W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation* 7.
[xlix] See Philippe Bolusset "*Père* and *Mère*: Unequals in Language," *Paternity and Fatherhood* 75.
[l] Jill Casid provides an interesting and relevant perspective on hybridity in her essay entitled "Chimerical Figurations at the Monstrous Edges of Species." *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, 2011.
[li] This corresponds with Gebser's earlier-mentioned elaboration of the evolution and permutations of human consciousness (structures of consciousness).
[lii] Dictum: South Africa.

Part II

‘Dix-Neuvième Siècle’

Preface

As a way of broaching the tenor of early 19th-century French 'travel' abroad, two related themes come to mind: exile and the sense of 'placelessness' resulting from the eradication of distinct features of *place*, which, for our purposes, designates the *local* and includes elements of both nature and culture whose "special *ensemble*" makes them unique.[i] Let us provide some context for our first theme. A letter received by Mme Germaine de Staël and penned by the secretary of police, a général Savary, shortly after her publication of the censored version of her manuscript, *De l'Allemagne* (1810), articulates in no uncertain terms the lasting precariousness of the aristocratic position in France twenty years after the Revolution of 1789.

> Il ne faut point rechercher la cause de l'ordre que je vous ai signifié, dans le silence que vous avez gardé à l'égard de l'empereur dans votre dernier ouvrage, ce seroit une erreur; il ne pouvoit pas y trouver de place qui fût digne de lui; mais *votre exil* est *une conséquence naturelle* de la marche que vous suivez constamment depuis plusieurs années. *Il m'a paru que l'air de ce pays-ci ne vous convenoit point*, et nous n'en sommes pas encore réduits à chercher des modèles dans les peuples [les Anglais et les Allemands] que vous admirez. (Préface, *De l'Allemagne*, 1820—my italics)[ii]

Although the great wave of French emigration occurred between 1789 and 1794—hundreds of thousands of aristocrats and non-aristocratic dissenters—outspoken aristocrats, including Mme de Staël, Chateaubriand, and later, Lamartine, still found themselves at odds with

the powers of their generations. More is implied of course than a difference of opinion; the 'non-convenance' of "l'air de ce pays-ci" alludes to the erosion of old orders of frenchness, which includes ancient régime distinctions of class; even more essentially, "l'air de ce pays-ci" insists upon the incompatibility of old and new values based upon the ordered arrangement of culture and land that defines French identity. Mme de Staël's rebuttal: "je ne crois pas qu'on puisse m'accuser de ne pas aimer la France" (10) addresses a central motivating factor of French Romantic travel. The necessity to redefine "what" is French, "who" can live (peaceably) in French society, and which models or cultural characteristics can be found in foreign countries to replace those lost in France inform the projects undertaken by the Romantic travelers above and, in different terms, by Nerval at mid-century. Whether as self-professed exiles or voluntary explorers, French Romantic travelers contend with how one recovers a distinct sense of place (of one's distinct self in place), under the duress of the eradication of distinctive places; they ask, and attempt to answer, how one locates meaning amidst the upheaval of standardization and the altered society and landscapes of the impending industrial age.[iii] Mme de Staël's observation that "les Allemands *n'étoient pas une nation*" speaks to an impulse of displaced aristocrats of her generation who turn to Germany's division of provinces as the "center of the local,"[iv] a place where one seeks, against all probability of success, recovery of the lost proximity of the familiar.

To amplify some accompanying themes, in a document published in 1819, the Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) makes the distinction between socially 'useful' professionals, such as chemists, physicians, poets, and painters, on the one hand, and, on the other, nobles such as the Duke of Orléan and the Duke of Bourbon, whom Saint-Simon deemed, along with the majority of men, socially parasitic. According to the doctrine, one had not only to be useful but "passionné" as well; the recovering aristocrat could therefore best define his/her distinctness by

producing something ‘useful’ out of the wreckage of waste. This does not exempt the everyman, who can no longer be defined as ‘abject laborer’ or ‘peasant’. Labiche’s comedy, *Le voyage de monsieur Perrichon* (1860), for example, uses the pleasure trip, i.e. the heretofor unprecedented family vacation, to address the redistribution of the culture of waste from the aristocracy to the *petit bourgeoisie* of the Second Empire. From the perspective of an insider, the playwright focuses his attack on the ordinary, self-satisfied figure of Perrichon, vain “petit-bourgeois parvenu,” prototype for the French bourgeois who is oblivious to his “out-of-placeness,” both at home and abroad. Obsessed with order and averse to (aristocratic) idleness, the protagonist brings a journal, “Pour écrire d’un côté la dépense, et de l’autre les impressions,” (28), unclear as to the distinction between himself, “un homme du monde” and an “auteur.”

Unlike their fictional petit-bourgeois counterparts, and in large part because of their displacement, aristocrats are neither ignorant of nor immune to the realities and trends around them. As an exile across the channel, Chateaubriand had observed the intial effects of industrialization. England’s urban population had grown by just over 31 per cent between 1811-31, setting a precedent for the period of heavy industrial expansion during the July Monarchy (1830-48) in France. An immediate result of the introduction of spinning-looms, steam machinery, and mechanized tools was a loss of livelihood for rural craftsmen and women. To escape their subsequent poverty, these rural workers migrated to cities, unaware of what awaited them: long periods of unemployment, inadequate wages, housing shortages, and squalid slums, particularly in industrial centers such as Lille and Rouen. In 1832, under the reign of Louis-Philippe, one seventh of the population depended upon charity. Once again, French society could be defined by its stratifications, between those who had and those who had not. Workers responded to an approximate 25 per cent decrease in wages (to under 500 francs per year, when

over 800 were needed to sustain the average working family) between 1816 and 1849 with social unrest and the Lyon riots of 1832 and 1834. Women earned an average of one franc per day to every two earned by a man; children, sent to work "as soon as they have the strength to stand,"[v] earned between 45-75 centimes (Evans).[vi] In 1830, in Great Britain as well as in France, the first newspapers published by and for workmen began to appear, Cabet's *Le Populaire* (1833-5 and 1841-51) and *L'Atelier* (Buchez, ed.), in collaboration with working class poets such as Poncy and Eugène Pottier, among them. Progressive trends such as demonstration of solidarity with the masses could nevertheless be reversed, or obstructed, as George Sand discovered when her *Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), in which she denounced the social caste-system, was rejected by the *Revue des Deux Mondes* whose editors took pride in their mission to expand intellectual and geographical horizons (Evans 38-9).

Even as a privileged and costly exercise in the first decades of the 19th-century, Romantic travel, particularly to the Orient, is frought with reminders of the mass momentum of movement that obliterates the uniqueness of the individual journey. The social visionary conceives at once of oneness with the larger world and of utter obliteration of the known world. Even as Chateaubriand critiques "Une société où des individus ont deux millions de revenu, tandis que d'autres sont réduits à remplir leurs bouges de monceaux de pourriture pour y ramasser des vers [. . .],"[vii] he cannot avoid a sober assessment of social progress, seeing as a regrettable consequence of France's transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy the loss of aristocratic distinction.

> Comment les fortunes se nivelleront-elles, comment le salaire se balancera-t-il avec le travail, comment la femme parviendra-t-elle à l'émancipation légale? Je n'en sais rien. Jusqu'à présent la société a procédé par agrégation et par famille;

> quel aspect offrira-telle lorsqu'elle ne sera plus qu'individuelle, ainsi qu'elle tend à le devenir, ainsi qu'on la voit déjà se former aux Etats-Unis? Vraisemblablement l'espèce humaine s'agrandira, mais il est à craindre que l'homme ne diminue, que quelques facultés éminentes du génie ne se perdent, que l'imagination, la poésie, les arts ne meurent dans les trous d'une société-ruche où chaque individu ne sera plus qu'une abeille, une roue dans une machine, un atome dans la matière organisée. (Saint-Beuve, "Avenir du Monde." *Revue des Deux Mondes,* April 15, 1834)

An attempt to re-orient themselves amidst the eradicated elements of the special and the local, defining elements of France and Frenchness, is where Romantic travelers such as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Nerval begin. How each traveler takes up the task and what each strives to create as well as to restore through travel is indicative of an evolutionary dialogue with 19th-century France and with both the emergent and obsolete elements of 19th-century French culture.

Four

Ambivalent Harmonies: Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Wandering and Reclamation *En Orient*

French Romantic travel to the Orient harks back to (and continually echoes) the impetus of the Crusades. Thereafter, Renaissance voyagers, such as Chardin, Thévenot, Tavernier, and Paul Lucas, who traveled to coastal countries of the oriental Mediterranean, under control of the Ottoman Empire, provide two primary models for nineteenth century voyagers: the subsidized journey, undertaken in the economic interests of the motherland, involving the appropriation of goods and resources; and the project of cultural and ethnographic inquiry, which involved the meticulous documentation of everything pertaining to the business of seafaring (navigation, weather) and encounters with the flora, fauna, and practices of non-European ('uncivilized') humanity. Galland's eighteenth century translation of the *Mille et Une Nuits* (1704-17) inspired the imaginations of pre-Romantic 'orientalists', for whom travel was largely relegated to the imagination. Preceding the Romantic travel narrative, eighteenth century epistolary novels (*romans à clé*), wherein the traveler's role is secondary to his encounters with foreignness and foreign places, sought to draw attention to the moral virtues and shadows of French society and politics (Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, for example). Late eighteenth century travel narratives began to anticipate a change in the public's needs, marked principally by Rousseau's autobiographical writings. In addition to the personal narrative, the terrain of bawdy exoticism appealed particularly to latter-day Romantics, such as Théophile Gautier, and Gérard de Nerval.[viii] Early Romantics, René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), considered the 'first' Romantic *voyageur en Orient*, and Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), both of whom initially (this

changed for Lamartine) identified themselves as Christians, sought to reverse the precendents of 'un siècle antireligieux' by returning to the 'berceau de la religion'.

In a sardonic commentary on the popular trend of his century, Gustave Flaubert defines the *Orientaliste* as an "homme qui a beaucoup voyagé" (*Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, 1911-13). Prior to the nineteenth century, *l'Orient* designated astronomical concepts. Diderot (1713-84) used the term historically, to refer to Byzantium, and philosophically, to speak of the Zoroastrian tradition. Larousse's *Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* (1874) uses the geographical term 'l'Orient' to refer to such countries as Greece, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt. The *Levant*, a commercial and diplomatic term, was used interchangeably to designate the geographical *Orient*. In a similar vein, French travelers tended to employ these terms according to pragmatic and/or spiritual associations with the East. In his "Préface de l'itinéraire," Chateaubriand credits the Holy Land's reputation as an all-but-inaccessible destination, "au bout du monde," to the accounts of M. le comte de Volney, "Le dernier voyageur dans le Levant" (*Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* 35). Conversely, when Lamartine refers to "la nature solennelle et primitive de l'Orient," he codifies his journey within an established lineage "de cette vie simple et merveilleuse des premiers hommes" (*Voyage en Orient* I: 9). In the aftermath of the Revolution, a disappointed generation of French aristocrats and activists began to associate peregrination with reclamation. The Revolution of 1830 renewed the sentiment of loss: "on faisait une prière le soir à bord des vaisseaux! Depuis la révolution de juillet, on n'en fait plus" Lamartine laments, voicing his desire to reverse "ce vieux libéralisme du dix-huitième siècle, qui n'avait lui-même rien de vivant que sa haine froide contre les choses de l'âme" (28). By the turn of the century, the affirmation of the self became an integral part of the travel genre: the traveler set out to record his *impressions* while remaining faithful to the *real*.

Chateaubriand, who traveled around the Mediterranean between July of 1806 and June of 1807, believed that a voyager's task was like that of the historian who reports what he witnesses or hears. Accuracy became a motif of *Itinéraire* (1811), as the author claimed, "'Rien ne le [...] recommande au public que son exactitude' ("Préface pour l'Edition des Œuvres Complètes" 35)." Just as the "armchair voyage" characterizes the eighteenth century genre of the exotic novel, the *voyage expérimenté*[ix] becomes a motif, a rite of passage par excellence, for nineteenth century Romantics. As Jean-Claude Berchet asserts, "Si le voyage en Orient a pris au XIXe siècle ce caractère rituel de célébration collective, c'est qu'il a une valeur initiatique, sociale: affirmer un ordre culturel occidental" (Berchet 12). Early Romantic poets hoped to influence public opinion and thereby "d'agir sur les affaires [de l'humanité]."[x] For mid-century travelers and literati, thereafter, the term '*ailleurs*' refers to the social experiment of the voyage, the ritualistic testing of social, geographical, and epistemological boundaries, whose objectives, like the term itself, remain ambiguous, "toujours là," yet largely a construct of the traveler's imagination (Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* I: 119).

To the extent that it conforms to the tradition of the medieval *quête initiatique*, the Romantic *voyage en Orient* replicates the solitary adventure of the initiate. Unlike their literary predecessors, the first Romantics travel at mature ages, for personal as well as ideological motivations. Much as in the initiatic model, the progression of the journey and its outcome depend upon a host of variables: the favor of the winds, the management of uncertain routes, the endurance of horses and other animals, and the reliability of guides and interpreters. These displaced aristocrats draw upon substantial personal resources in order to finance their trips. Both Chateaubriand and Lamartine travel for long, uncomfortable periods through *la Terre Sainte*, each as the chief protagonist of his respective journey, each journey an elaborately

choreographed feat, with impressive, largely anonymous local staffs. Chateaubriand testifies accordingly: "Notre troupe était composée du chef arabe, du drogman de Jérusalem, de mes deux domestiques, et du Bédouin de Jafa qui conduisait l'âne chargé du baggage." Both Chateaubriand and Lamartine adopt "la contenance de pauvres pèlerins latins" in order to 'blend in' to their local surroundings and to avert unwanted attention from unwelcoming local inhabitants: "Nous gardions toujours la robe mais nous étions armés sous nos habits" (335).

Although these Romantics travel independently, each, for separate reasons, at odds with French politics and society, as authors, they answer to public scrutiny. Chateaubriand claims to have been "ruiné" by the expenses of his trip. For his part, Lamartine felt compelled to defend himself against popular speculation: "On a répandu en Europe, à mon retour, que j'avais dépensé des trésors pendant ces deux années de peregrinations en Orient [. . .]. Il en résulte qu'en réalité ce voyage ruineux ne m'a rien coûté [. . .]" (*V.O.* II, "Note Post-Scriptum" 551-2). Chateaubriand, skirting a formal apology, introduces the central role of the narrative 'self'—"je parle éternellement de moi, [. . .] puisque je ne comptais point publier ces Mémoires" (Itinéraire, "Préface" 42). Lamartine, whose 'moi' posits a conduit of free association, "*Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages pendant un Voyage en Orient*, 1832-1833," understates his intention to initiate a dialogue between East and West that will count in his political favor. Questions of faith, which remain ambivalent at a personal level, contribute to this latter author's development of a formulaic 'solution' to French social inequity. For these early Romantics, and those who follow them, engagement with 'l'Orient', both a public and private endeavor, neither begins nor ends with the trip in question. Romantic pilgrims not only contribute to an ongoing dialogue initiated by a lineage of predecessors, they stake the sustainability of their present circumstances upon their abilities to mold the past in favor of future outcomes.

The "First" Romantic Voyager[xi]

"Je serais peut-être le dernier français sorti de mon pays pour voyager en Terre-Sainte, avec les idées, le but et les sentiments d'un ancien pèlerin," Chateaubriand announces in his *Itiniéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811). His mission is twofold: to reclaim a cultural memory suppressed during the previous century: "Lorsqu'en 1806, j'entrepris le voyage d'outre-mer, Jérusalem était presque oubliée; un siècle antireligieux avait perdu mémoire du berceau de la religion: comme il n'y avait plus de chevaliers, il semblait qu'il n'y eût plus de Palestine" ("Préface" 36); and to undertake a journey of education: "un voyage en Orient compléterait le cercle des études que je m'étais toujours promis d'achever" (53). More comprehensively, his three motivations can be summed up as religious and humanistic, literary: "une quête d'images" (for *Les Martyrs*), and amorous: a secret rendez-vous steeped in the Romanesque tradition (18).[xii] Chateaubriand's fleeting allusion to his estranged status in France underscores the situation of the post-Revolutionary aristocrat: "En quittant de nouveau ma patrie, le 13 juillet, 1806, je ne craignis point de tourner la tête, comme le sénéchal de Champagne: presque étranger dans mon pays, je n'abandonnais après moi ni château, ni chaumière" (54). In the fifteen years between his departure for North America (April 1791- January 1792) and his Middle-Eastern pilgrimage, the author had lived an itinerant, at times squalid existence in England (1792-1800), followed by a brief sojourn in Rome and a short-lived appointment (Novembre 1803) as chargé d'affaires in the Valais, from which he resigned in protest in March of 1804.[xiii]

By his affiliation with a lineage of illustrious crusaders and pilgrims, Chateaubriand establishes a symbolic repatriation with his country of origin: "j'allais aborder à ces rives, que

visitèrent comme moi Godefrey de Bouillon, Raimond de Saint-Gilles, Tancrède le Brave, Hugh le Grand, Richard Coeur-de-Lion, et ce saint Louis, dont les vertus furent admirées des Infidèles" (qtd in Berchet 590); "Du pèlerin Robert Guiscard jusqu'à moi, pèlerin Breton, il y a bien quelques années [. . .]" (*Itinéraire* 62). Time and 'lecture', he concedes, will let the reader determine the worthiness of this traveler. Unlike the older generation of aristocrats who fled the Terror, Chateaubriand does not become "un homme du passé." Disappointment, rather, at the unrealized aspirations of eighteenth century thinkers and the melancholic outlook of 1800 prefaces his attempt to restore Christianity to his century.[xiv] His credentials notwithstanding—a post-Restoration royalist sympathizer, consecrated at seven to the Virgin of Nazareth, and descendent of an earlier baron de Chateaubriand, one-time companion of Saint Louis in the Orient—Chateaubriand makes allusion to the risks of exhuming a forgotten tradition: "Obscur pèlerin, comment oserais-je fouler un sol consacré par tant de pèlerins illustres?" (221). His project conforms to both the documentary model of the 'Grands voyageurs' and to the Christian template.

Early in the text, *Itinéraire*'s author identifies an adversarial model: "En Turquie, [. . .] l'Etat ne fait rien pour l'Etat. [. . .] D'où l'on doit conclure que chez les Musulmans la religion s'affaiblit, et qu'avec la religion l'état social des Turcs est au moment de s'écrouler" (75). His criticism of Islam, exemplified by Turkish presence in Greece, remains intact throughout *Itinéraire*'s narrative. As for pagan Rome, "jamais nous n'arriverons à la dépravation de l'antiquité, tandis que nous serons chrétiens," he asserts in *Génie du Christianisme* (Ed. Ballanche-Migneret, 1804, t. VIII: 277-87). The author's pro-Christian sentiment, however, is not as single-minded as it would appear. In its broader aesthetic, ruins elicit a comparative

meditation upon the frailty of human society and the destiny of all 'men': "Mémorial du temps, la ruine est l'emblème de notre mortalité, du triomphe du 'passage' sur l''être.'"[xv]

> Il y a deux sortes de ruines très distinctes: l'un, ouvrage du temps, l'autre, ouvrage des hommes. Les premiers n'ont rien de désagréable, parce que la nature travaille auprès des ans. [. . .] [S]ans cesse occupée à reproduire, elle environne la mort des plus douces illusions de la vie.
>
> Les seconds ruines sont plutôt des dévastations que des ruines; elles n'offrent que l'image du néant, sans une puissance réparatrice. (t. VI: 18-23; qtd in Mortier 171)

As the above passage suggests, factional politics matter less than the author's ongoing study of the internal mechanisms of human society in relationship to the natural world: "l'alliance du végétal au monumental;" "les noces du marbre et de la mousse" (Mortier 171-2). His first impression of Greek antiquity—which, it must be stressed, he has previously viewed in numerous artistic reproductions available to his generation—elaborates upon the above thematic. Although he could find little to admire in Modern Greek culture, Chateaubriand approaches antiquity with an attitude characteristic of other Romantics who follow in his wake: "Et moi, voyageur obscure, [. . .] je ne suis pas Virgile et les dieux n'habitent plus l'Olympe" (Itinéraire 57). It is important to note, moreover, that, although Chateaubriand's attention to the Greek landscape reveals a morose sense of historical loss, his aesthetic strays from the eighteenth century preoccupation with loss of empire to the contemplation of a host of visual relationships elicited by "le caractère ouvert du monument ruiné" (Mortier 171). His sensibility applies to harmonies between the ruin and the countryside, in the Arabian Desert, in Egypt, and in Greece,

to variations of light and shadow upon elements of architecture within spaces reclaimed by nature over time.

The traveler's first impression of the Peloponesian islands, which appear "sombres et arides," illustrates an additional point of focus. Echoing the perceptions of later travelers, such as Lamartine and Nerval, the aspect is one of utter desolation: "Pas un bateau dans le port; pas un homme sur la rive: partout le silence, l'abandon et l'oubli" (63); "des femmes enveloppées de voiles blancs et semblables à des ombres: ce fut la seule chose qui me rappela un peu la patrie des Muses" (64). Chateaubriand equates this desolation with the austere spirituality of the deserts of the New World: "je croyais errer dans les deserts de l'Amérique: même solitude, même silence" (67). And yet, the presence of ruins in Greece's landscape underscores the author's evolution from novice to mature traveler. His mature perspective corresponds with his evolving view of the function of ruins within the individual life. "Tout cela [la nature primitive] plait à vingt ans, parce que la vie se suffit à elle-même [. . .]," he writes in retrospect, twenty years after his voyage to America (1791, he published *Atala* in 1801); "mais, dans un âge plus mûr, l'esprit revient à des goûts plus solides: il veut surtout se nourrir des souvenirs et des exemples de l'histoire. [. . .] Or, quoi de plus propice que la ruine à la perception presque physique de la présence du passé?" (Ed. Regard, qtd in Mortier 186). As this last quote suggests, the relationship between the individual observer and the ruin is integral. As the poet ages, 'primitive' nature's testament to life alone no longer suffices. And, just as the youth's earliest ideas associate ruins with rupture, for the mature man, ruins become both a symbol of historic continuity and of the human condition. They exist, not as a fixed entity within a given space but, rather, as a tangible medium through which the individual sensibility may recognize its own evolution.

Taking into account his conceptual leanings, the author of *Itinéraire* struggles to find evidence of life in his first impressions of ancient 'Lacédémone'. Greece, succumbed to its self-destructive tendencies, has undergone a 'man-made' progression of desertification. The author identifies two shrubs, the "lauriers-roses" and "l'agnus-cactus," last to decorate "ces solitudes jadis si riantes et si parées" (68). Athens, by contrast, still lives. Thanks to the play of light upon her landscape, her ruins appear "riantes, légères, habitées." Chateaubriand's meditation upon antiquity, which harks back to the imperial regime, attributes Greek decline to the vices of absolutism, of Turkish Tyranny, and the abject servility of the Greek population whose misery inspires little more than pity. As an inanimate presence in *Itinéraire*'s narrative, the systemic failure of Greece underscores the incompatibility between western and eastern modes of being, a contrast that becomes especially distinct as, once in the Holy Land, the traveler describes his approach of Carmel, whose mountain appears "comme un tache ronde, au-dessous des rayons du soleil."

> Je me mis alors à genoux à la manière des Latins. Je ne sentis point cette espèce de trouble que j'éprouvai en découvrant les côtes de la Grèce: mais la vue du berceau des Israélites et de la patrie des Chrétiens me remplit de crainte et de respect. [. . .]. Une main secourable semblait élever ce phare au sommet de Sion, pour nous guider à la Cité-Sainte. (in Berchet 590)

Mythological Greece, even at its best, fails to inspire. For its part, 'la Grèce moderne' functions as a caveat for the modern traveler. In more general terms, the centrality of the Terre Sainte, which, to the annoyance of this last traveler, designates multiple populations as well as multiple faiths, tends to subvert or minimize other *loci*, of his journey. As the century trends,

only two decades later, the locus acquires broader as well as more ambivalent associations. Lamartine testifies to this effect:

> Nous arrivâmes à midi, après une marche de sept heures, au milieu de la plaine de Tyr, à un endroit nommé les Puits de Salomon; tous les voyageurs les ont décrits [...]. Parti à cinq heures des Puits de Salomon ; - marché deux heures dans la plaine de Tyr ; - arrivé à la nuit au pied d'une haute montagne à pic sur la mer et qui forme le cap Blanc ou Ras-el-Abiad [. . .] ; [. . .] l'ombre de Tyr se montrait à l'extrémité d'un promontoire, et le hasard, sans doute, avait seul allumé une clarté sur ces ruines, qu'on eût prise de loin pour un phare: *mais c'était le phare de la solitude et de son abandon*, qui ne guidait aucun navire, qui n'éclairait que nos yeux et n'appelait qu'un regard de pitié sur des ruines. (*Voyage* I: 238-40; my italics)

In addition to his propensity for inclusive thinking, Lamartine's doubt functions as a motivating factor, broadening the scope of 'faith' beyond the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy while, at the same time, adhering to the symbol. Chateaubriand, an unwavering Christian, wastes no time in expressing his disdain for the clichés of pilgrimage: "Cette foule de veillards, d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants ne fit point entendre, en mettant le pied sur la Terre-Sainte, ces cris, ces pleurs, ces lamentations dont on s'est plu à faire des peintures imaginaires et ridicules. On était fort calme; et de tous les pèlerins, j'étais certainement le plus ému" (223-4). For this last traveler, the emotive moment, such as it may be, suffices by mere allusion. And, unlike Lamartine, who demonstrates affinity for the Biblical meek, this author pretends no sympathy for the pastoral motif: "*On* ne croit plus à ces sociétiés de bergers qui passent leurs

jours dans l'innocence, en promenant leur doux loisir au fond des forêts. *On* sait que ces honnêtes bergers se font la guerre entre eux pour manger les moutons de leurs voisins" (386). Chateaubriand's use of "on" remains ambiguous. Aside from the "je" of the narrator, the reader encounters little mention of human beings as distinct individuals; the narrative's Christian inhabitants appear within the collective category of "les religieux de Terre-Sainte." As Sarga Moussa points out, "nous" functions primarily at a practical level in Chateaubriand's narrative (*La Relation Orientale*).[xvi] The author uses the term interchangeably to refer to "mon domestique," the "Arabes," who serve the pilgrim in various ways, guides, cooks and Christian hosts. Its deferent role notwithstanding, "nous" remains nevertheless essential to the first person account in that it allows both the pilgrim and the pilgrimage to advance with apparently little struggle. Implied relationships, such as we observe in the following anecdote, make light of disparate roles whose unequal structures, in spite of outward appearances, remain intact.

> Il se passa là une scène assez plaisante: mon domestique était vêtu d'une redignote blanchâtre; le blanc étant la couleur de distinction chez les Arabes, ils jugèrent que mon domestique était le scheik. Ils se saisirent de lui, et l'emportèrent en triomphe malgré ses protestations, tandis que, grâce à mon habit bleu, je me sauvais obscurément sur le dos d'un mendiant déguenillé. (in Berchet 591-2)

Above and beyond its practical applications, the narrator's incognito functions primarily for the entertainment of his reader, at the expense of his servant. The episode, nevertheless, broaches the topic of 'influence', which becomes a central concern for later travelers such as Nerval. Even here, identity, for both the traveler and the 'local' staff upon whom he depends,

becomes obscured, misinterpreted, and, because of this sort of exchange, fundamentally, ineluctably altered. This said, Chateaubriand shows no evidence of reflecting further upon the matter. Nothing changes his manner of viewing others. Increased strain on economic relationships, which appear later in the century (a central feature of Nerval's argument both on behalf of and against the needy traveler in "Les femmes du Caire," 1848), do something to reverse this trend.

Itinéraire's author has been criticized (by Said, among others), with reason, for an overarching imperiousness of tone with respect to the Mediterranean and Muslim populations. His account of a violent altercation in Jerusalem with two young Turks, "ivres à tomber," "à la honte de Mahomet," serves as a case in point. In Jerusalem in particular, the author draws attention to his distaste for coexistence, as, for example, when he complains of his reception by the Turkish sentry at the *église du Saint-Sépulcre*: "je payai de nouveau à Mahomet le droit d'adorer Jésus-Christ." (315). In a similar vein, his classification of monuments as 'hébreux', 'Païens', 'grecs et romains sous le Christianisme', 'arabes ou moresques', 'gothiques sous les français', 'turcs' (316), points, beyond his propensity for detail, to this author's general tendency to perceive and to weigh the negative potential of difference. The author's emphasis upon factional struggles in this instance draws attention to the Holy Land as a region of strife: "Ces jardins ont été ravagés par les différents partis qui se sont disputé les ruines de Jafa" (in Berchet 594). One gleans an almost self-protective stance in his liberal expression of anti-Muslim, anti-Turkish sentiment.

> Le sol est une arène fine, blanche et rouge, et qui paraît, quoique sablonneuse, d'une extrême fertilité. Mais, grâce au despotisme musulman, ce sol n'offre de toutes parts que des chardons, des herbes sèches et flétries, entremêlées de

> chétives plantations de coton, de doura, d'orage et de froment. Ça et là paraissent quelques villages toujours en ruines, quelques bouquets d'oliviers et de sycomores. (233)

Contrary to what we might expect from the Christian apologist, Chateaubriand's representation of an observant population appears, almost counter-intuitively, somewhat wary as well. Although "Cette réception si chrétienne et si charitable" provides refuge from Muslim presence in the Holy Land, very little interaction actually takes place between the traveler and his Christian hosts. As he advises the reader in his "Préface de la première édition:" "je n'ai point la prétention d'avoir connu des peuples chez lesquels je n'ai fait que passer." Neither does the physical geography of place merit prolonged consideration: "Un moment suffit au peintre de paysages pour crayonner un arbre, prendre une vue, dessiner une ruine" (41). The monastery retains a primarily practical function as an outpost, "par [lequel] le voyageur trouve des amis et des secours dans les pays les plus barbares" (in Berchet 592). Just as the 'drogman', the cooks, and nameless Arabs who transport the voyager across rivers upon their shoulders assure the progress of the pilgrimage, the Christian 'Pères', "[qui] m'installèrent dans ma cellule, où il y avait une table, un lit, de l'encre, du papier, de l'eau fraîche et du linge blanc" facilitate, albeit in a supportive role, the author's objective: "d'élever en silence un monument à ma patrie" (*Itinéraire* 443).

Itinéraire's author, in fact, records with obsessive interest the material details of monuments. The Greek ruins evoke the "grandeur passée" and the "abaissement actuel" of this "terre sacrée" (169). Chateaubriand critiques the corruption of styles, particularly as they represent a rupture between religious inspiration and design. Both modern Christian and Greek

architecture evidence cultural deficiency, as the purity of their original designs has been debased by mixed influences: "Remarquez [. . .] combien nos édifices imités de l'antique sont pour la plupart mal placés! [. . .] Les monuments grecs modernes ressemblent à la langue corrompue qu'on parle aujourd'hui à Sparte et à Athènes: on a beau soutenir que c'est la langue d'Homère et de Platon, un mélange de mots grossiers et de constructions étrangères trahit à tout moment les Barbares" (168). The mixture of styles, among other things, corrupts the natural cycle of the idea whose destiny is to become a ruin.

At the Saint-Sépulcre, he records with intimate attention to detail the architectural styles of its various spaces, the eight nations for whom a separate domain within the church is reserved,[xvii] as well as the diverse qualities and origins of its stone relics: "la pierre de *l'onction*," by certain accounts derived from the rock of Calvary; the slab of rock that received the body of the dead Christ, ravaged by pilgrims over the years and later covered in white marble; the slab of grey marble "à douze pas du Saint-Sépulcre," that marks the place where Christ appeared before Mary Magdalene "en forme de jardinier" (276); "une colonne de marbre gris, marqueté de taches noires" (277), "la colonne d'*Impropere*," where Christ received the crown of thorns; (Calife) Hakem's destruction of Christ's tomb in 1009; "Telle est l'histoire évangelique expliquée par les monuments" (295). The real utility of monuments, the author insists, is their moral (above and beyond their practical) use; their ruins exist as "une partie essentielle de toute société humaine" (380), which they are destined to outlive.

Lamartine: "Ni l'un, ni l'autre": Duality or Fusion?

Alphonse de Lamartine's account of his travels to the Orient, *Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages pendant un Voyage en Orient, 1832-1833* (published in 1835), is representative of the two-fold, if somewhat covert, objectives of its author. By the time of his departure, in 1832, Lamartine had enjoyed nearly a decade of recognition in France as a poet (*Méditations poétiques*, 1820; *Nouvelles Méditations*, 1823; *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, 1830). Even as he establishes his discursive footing, "en poëte et philosophe," his bitter rebuttal to the Revolution of 1830, in *Sur la Politique Rationnelle* (1831- *P.R.* hereafter), prefaces the author's call for the establishment of a French colony in the Middle East, which he introduces in detail in the 'Avertissement politique' at the end of *Voyage*'s second volume. Congruent with his status as something of an outsider on either side of France's ruling elite—due to his unwillingness or inability to align himself with a distinct social or political identity—Lamartine's political ambivalence is echoed in his dual roles as linguistic impressionist (poet) and (by his own estimation) undervalued statesman. He had deeply lamented the demise of the Bourbons, "cette famille, qui semblait condamnée à la destinée et à la cécité d'Œdipe!" Even more emphatically, he deplored what he viewed as the rupture between aristocratic tradition and social progress: "ce divorce sans nécessité entre le passé et l'avenir! L'un pouvait être si utile à l'autre!" (*V.O.* I: 23). In the aftermath of his professional disappointment, Lamartine's two-year voyage to the East conforms not only to an objective of 'regenerescence', but, moreover, to an underlying strategy of intervention on behalf of French society, which he undertakes in the spirit of reconciliation. More emphatically than Chateaubriand before him, Lamartine seeks to renew his influence. His mission, as he describes it, is to mediate between "le passé," associated with Royalist sentiment, and "l'avenir," which he envisions as a merger of Christian and liberal sentiment. A social

pragmatist as well as an ambitious social visionary, Lamartine sets out to advance his divided nation "vers le but de sa destinée divine" (*P.R.* 19), using diplomacy, as opposed to the sword. The Middle East, the Holy Land in particular, thereby becomes an initiatic terrain whose trials, planned or otherwise, prepare him to take on this desired role. Although this traveler deviates in distinct ways from the lineage of Christian pilgrims and crusaders evoked by Chateaubriand, his methodology, as we shall see, borrows from precedents that, in the final account, tend to obstruct or to contradict his purpose.

Paradoxically, given his objective to promote areas of social, spiritual, and politcal commonality, Lamartine has a tendency to construct both his personal and his professional identity through negation, not of a single entity but, rather, of two entities which appear to stand at two opposing ends of a (theoretical) spectrum. The opening sentence of the 'Avertissement' in *Voyage*'s first volume illustrates this point: "Ceci n'est ni un livre ni un voyage; je n'ai jamais pensé à écrire l'un ou l'autre" (3). At the very outset, the author invokes a negative (theological) model, not only through his use of the "ni . . . ni" structure, but also through his conceptual opposition of the product, 'un livre', and 'un voyage', the latter of which designates both the act of moving through a given terrain and the act of writing, a process that accumulates and distills fragments, recollections, impressions, and products of the imagination. As a means of distinguishing himself from his predecessor, Chateaubriand, who travels "en pèlerin et en chevalier, la Bible, l'Évangile et les Croisades à la main," Lamartine bases his journey upon receptivity: "J'y ai passé seulement en poëte et en philosophe" (4). Notably, this author chooses the double negation, 'ni . . . ni', as opposed to the preposition, 'de', potentially a unifying agent: e.g. 'livre ***de*** voyage.' *Voyage en Orient* is neither a book, nor a journey (and, by negation of both associations, also not a book about journeying); rather, its author presents his readers with

"innombrable multitude d'impressions, d'images, de pensées, que la terre et les hommes parlent à qui les interroge," painstakingly "amassé, classé, ordonné, éclairé, résumé." Thus taken, the reader should not expect to find a discursive train of thought within the pages of the text's two volumes.

As a point of departure, Lamartine defines his roles not only as interpreter, and, eventually, translator, but, more fundamentally, as an apprentice to both "la terre" and "les hommes." Although his French audience remains at the forefront of his address, the author evokes biblical as well as ancestral origins when he speaks of "terre." Likewise, the author applies the term "hommes" to a wider spectrum of humanity than the 'homme français'; one gleans, more precisely, allusion to a francocentric populace with whom, *the author hopes*, the French reader will gradually begin to identify himself. The journey's impetus, Lamartine asserts, is re-education "de la pensée par la pensée, par les lieux, par les faits, par les comparaisons *des* temps avec *les* temps, *des* mœurs avec *les* mœurs, *des* croyances avec *les* croyances, rien de tout cela n'est perdu pour le voyageur, le poëte ou le philosophe; ce sont les éléments de sa poésie et de sa philosophie à venir" (4). As his use of indefinite, followed by definite articles implies, physical contact with place, with all of its sensory implications, corresponds with the traveler's expectation of the embodiment of beliefs held heretofore in the abstract. Polarities between the respective landscapes and climates of the homeland and the destination figure as important components of the traveler's intellectual and spiritual maturation: "L'imagination languit dans les regions intermédiaires, dans les climats trop tempérés: il lui faut des excès de temperature" (12). In the final outcome, the traveler, "quand il a mûri son âme et ses convictions," returns, renewed and newly authorized to impart his wisdom, "à son tour, [. . .] à sa génération, ou sous

la forme de poëme, ou sous la forme philosophique" (4). Thus, from the outset, *Voyage* alerts the reader to its pedagogical intentions, if not specifically to its discursive content.

With regard to the pictorial and topographical accuracy "des pays qu'on a parcouru," the author defers to a host of predecessors, such as M. de Laborde, M. Fontanier, M. Michaud, M. Poujoulat, and M. Caillet, whose respective poetic, artistic, and topographical renderings "je n'aurais pu me flatter de surpasser" (5). Rather than advising his readers concerning what they will find in his text, Lamartine, once again, advises them of what they will not find: "Il n'y a là ni science, ni histoire, ni géographie, ni mœurs; le public était loin de ma pensée [. . .]; Il ne peut y avoir un peu d'intérêt que pour des peintres" (6-7). How were the notes conceived? Haphazardly, "à l'ombre d'un palmier ou sous les ruines d'un monument du desert; plus souvent le soir, sous notre tente battue du vent ou de la pluie, à la lueur d'une torche de résine," with interruptions, distractions, the interference of jackals or the encroachment of the sea. Lamartine's use of visual and metaphoric tropes points to (among other things) the author's attempt to establish familiar signposts based upon popular images available to and recognized by his sedentary readers. Although his predecessor, Chateaubriand, provides the intitial model for the nineteenth century journey 'en Orient', Lamartine, in keeping with his initial aim, avoids the concise form of cataloguing characteristic of *Itinéraire*.

In his 'Préface de la première édition' of his text, Chateaubriand, in what we might initially view as a hierarchical disconnect between journeying and its by-product, the commercial travel narrative, declares: "Je n'ai point fait un voyage pour l'écrire. . . . J'allais chercher des images; voilà tout" (41). After its publication, the text functions "moins comme un Voyage que comme des Mémoires d'une année de ma vie." Lamartine, adopting a deferential position, credits Chateaubriand with having produced not merely "un livre" but "plutôt un poëme sur l'Orient":

"il a imprimé pour toujours la trace du genie sur cette poudre que tant de siècles ont remuée" (*V.O.* I). Departing from the example of his predecessor, who reflects upon his notes and experiences after his return from the Orient, Lamartine presents his notes as an unedited text, left in their original state, as he had written them at the time. As a form of disclaimer to his readers, the poet refers to his volumes as "ses fragments d'impressions," recomposed, yet unaltered. The reader is advised to close the volumes before reading them if he seeks something other than "les plus fugitives et les plus superficielles impressions d'un voyageur qui marche sans s'arrêter" (7). Nerval, two decades after Lamartine, employs a slightly different tactic of negation in his opening declaration, which has less to do with identifying opposing or incompatible entities than with identifying a general domain of vagueness whose primary unifying characteristic is paucity: "C'est une assez triste litanie de mésaventures, c'est une bien pauvre description à faire, un tableau sans horizon, sans paysage . . ." (*Voyage en Orient* I: 56). In Nerval's case, the city is central. Lamartine emphasizes his presence within a vast landscape that must be survived as well as traversed.

From a chronological perspective, Lamartine's *Voyage* progresses as a narrative of personal resuscitation. More precisely, the text's two volumes trace a process of Conversion, which unfolds in both familiar and unfamiliar ways. In its most rudimentary terms, this phenomenon begins with the author's personal crisis, precipitated by professional failure, the impetus for his trip to the Orient. If we trace the logical trajectory of this author's fall and redemption, his letter of resignation to Louis-Philippe on September 13, 1830 precipitates a period of uncertainty and spiritual questioning in the desert (fall), followed by an elaborately staged meeting of like spirits and minds with Lady Hester Stanhope (redemption), in the mountains of Lebanon, and thereafter by the unfortunate loss of his adored daughter, Julia, in

Beirut, (sacrifice). Finally, after a long period of discursive silence, the text's second volume culminates with the author's "Résumé politique," wherein he offers a socially regressive (by eighteenth century as well as by modern standards), if also visionary solution to Post-Revolutionary social ills by proposing the creation of French outposts for upwardly mobile workers, former peasants, in the Middle East. What is particularly noticeable in this rather condensed scenario is the author's abrupt shift from the personal narrative to a closing, somewhat desperate, dogmatic rhetoric. In summary, the text begins with the author's insistence upon the personal and poetic dimension of his journey; it ends with a political entreaty by a marginalized, yet still hopeful politician, to the French intellectual classes. As the author visits the limitations of his faith (never entirely separate from national identity), records impressions of the passing landscape, and explores the potential, as well as the problems of French expatriation, he not only merges the normally segregated roles of poet and statesman, he does so as a prophet who sets out to fulfill a pre-ordained destiny.

Projects of Resuscitation

By his own account, Lamartine (Alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine) had envisioned a trip to the Holy Land since his inheritance of a family Bible: "[J]e rêvais toujours, depuis, un voyage en Orient, comme un grand acte de ma vie intérieure [...]" (I: 9-10). By the time of his departure, in 1832, he had reached his forty-second year and a point of crisis in both his personal life and in his political career. 1830, which the author describes as "le suicide de juillet," signaled the definitive death of the monarchy. In its aftermath, mature intellectuals sought to adjust to a new present that consisted of a condemned past and an unknown future. The general

atmosphere of uncertainty, fueled both by morbid fears and morbid hopes, influenced poets of Lamartine's generation to address the "inquiétudes" of their time. They looked to models from two opposing sides of the spectrum: liberals, such as Benjamin Constant and Mme. De Staël, and royalists, such as Ballanche and Chateaubriand.

Years before the cataclysm of 1830, Lamartine professed his conviction of a divine mission, which he inextricably associated with Fate. In his *Ode* [*aux Français*] (1817, believed), he speaks of possessing "les clefs du terrible avenir" (Bénichou 21).[xviii] His conviction that poetry should serve the future of mankind, and thus inspire action, was further complicated by his opposition to government's interference between God and men. Although he sought to be in government, on behalf of "la paix, l'ordre et la justice," he distrusted its methods, believing that "le seul moyen de gouvernement est la force" (letter to Mme. Canonge, '27 juin, 1818).[xix] Legislation, ideally, would prevail over despotism.

'La Révolution de juillet' marks two important changes in France: the dismantling of Catholicism as 'religion d'Etat' and the advance of liberalism. This upheaval, from the perspective of several members of France's elite classes, coincides with Lamartine's resignation from his position as secretary of the French embassy in Italy. Following a subsequent electoral defeat in France, in 1831, Lamartine announced his impending voyage to the Orient, 'en guise d'exil'. In a farewell address to the editor of the *Revue européenne* he writes:

> Adieu, monsieur; tandis qu'inutile à mon pays, je vais chercher les vestiges de l'histoire, les monuments de la régénération chrétienne et les retentissements lointains de la poésie profane ou sacrée dans la poussière de l'Égypte, sur les ruines de Palmyre ou sur le tombeau de David; puissiez-vous ne pas assister à de

> nouvelles ruines, et ne pas préparer à l'histoire les pages funèbres d'un peuple qui porte encore en soi des siècles de vie, de prospérité et de gloire! (*P.R.* 130-1)

In a similar vein, in a poem written for his brother-in-law, entitled "Pensées en Voyage," the poet contextualizes his journey as a regrettable, but necessary flight from "Cette Europe où tout croule, où tout craque, où tout lutte" (I: 75). His bitterness notwithstanding, the Middle Eastern destination is essential to Lamartine's re-imagination of Christian polity—unlike Chateaubriand, who opposes the Koran to the Bible, "comme la tyrannie à la liberté" (Moussa 86),[xx] Lamartine adopts a position of religious inclusivity. The Holy Land also designates a mystical and poetic topography, "la terre des prodigies," wherein "tout y germe, et tout homme crédule ou fanatique peut y devenir prophète à son tour" (475). As a tactical component of the exilic narrative, the author draws the reader's attention to the 'specialness' associated with social 'éloignement': "Malheureux les hommes qui en tout genre dévancent leur temps! leur temps les écrase. C'est notre sort à nous, hommes impartiaux, politiques, rationnels, de la France. La France est encore à un siècle et demi de nos idées" (54). In defiance of his martyrdom: "je me suis présenté à la France avec la conviction d'un devoir à remplir, avec le dévouement d'un fils; elle n'a pas voulu de moi" (*P.R.* 7), the author shows no intention of retreating to lick his wounds. Adhering to a familiar stratagem, 'reculer pour mieux sauter', he calls for further action:

> Nous revenons de ces demeures de paix avec un esprit chargé de trouble; une voix importune et forte, une voix qui descend du ciel, comme elle s'élève de la terre, nous dit que ce temps n'est pas celui du repos, de la contemplation, des loisirs platoniques, mais que si l'on ne veut pas être moins qu'un homme on doit

descendre dans l'arène de l'humanité, et combattre, et souffrir, et mourir s'il le faut avec elle, et pour elle ! (6-7)

Nor should we underestimate the scope of the role Lamartine envisions for himself: "Tout est débris, tout est vide devant nous," he charges, "les cœurs sont libres comme les consciences; le sol est nivelé comme pour une grande reconstruction sociale préparée par le divin architecte" (*P.R.* 41). As Roland Mortier puts it, the poet shows us "*in actu*" the phenomenon of universal destruction: "Il est ainsi *d'avance* le spectateur de la désolation universelle et de la ruine de grandes civilisations, y compris la sienne" (*Poétique des Ruines* 168).[xxi] Unlike the poet, however, the politician demands more than mere spectatorship. The messianic tendency, although a pronounced trait of Lamartine's rhetoric, is not unique to him. Similar examples of excessive zeal appear fairly predictably among surviving members of the post-Revolutionary aristocracy. As prominent (because excessive) leaders of this trend, both Chateaubriand and Lamartine represent themselves as messengers and divinely ordained teachers of their century. Chateaubriand continues to define himself as a Catholic. Lamartine's spiritual vacillation and eventual renunciation of his Christian identity is symptomatic of his general experience of the absence of French culture; i.e. faith is perceived as a casualty of post-Revolutionary French society; France can be defined in negative terms by what it no longer is and no longer possesses.

For Romantics, whether as self-imposed exiles or members of the persecuted classes, prolonged distance from the geographical point of origin tends to amplify, rather than to extinguish, identification with the sets of values and orientations from which individual travelers seek refuge.[xxii] In her essay on post-Revolutionary French refugees, Kristy Carpenter describes the dilemma of an earlier generation of French émigrés who found themselves "at the centre of a

bizarre identity crisis," premised upon their incontestably French nationalities abroad and their simultaneous exclusion from the very human rights upon which the former homeland prided itself (*Romantic Diasporas* 10). Lamartine's childhood had been steeped in the warning of his aristocratic forebears. Correspondingly, his 'chosen' exile from France echoes the trauma of his newly widowed mother who fled to Germany with her infant son during the Reign of Terror.

Unlike Lamartine, Chateaubriand had become a veteran itinerant before the voyage that produced *Itinéraire*. Although a confirmed royalist and Catholic, the latter believed that the Catholic Church should adapt to the real circumstances of nineteenth-century French society. He denied the Roman-Catholic position, which upheld Catholicism as an immutable entity around which society and its institutions should acquiesce. Christianity, who, posits Chateaubriand, "croit avec la civilization et marche avec le temps," owes her perpetuity to her ability to remain: "toujours du siècle qu'elle voit passer, sans passer elle-même" (*Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, t. III).[xxiii] Thus humanized, along with humanity, rather than succumb to the demolitions of the eighteenth century, Christianity would survive "les âges de ténèbres et de force" and resurrect herself as "la perfectionnment de la société [moderne]." Chateaubriand had introduced this argument in 1829, in his role as French ambassador to Rome, with little effect as far as the Roman papal hierarchy was concerned. As he saw it, Catholicism's unwillingness to advance with the times amounted to a blind acquiescence to the Protestant forces that had overtaken northern Europe during the Renaissance. Anticipating what would become a prominent motif of Lamartine's political philosophy, Chateaubriand adhered to a view of Christianity, Catholicism in particular, as a crusading force against the destructive elements of paganism and barbarism. He left to 'providence' the task of distinguishing between the Good (those who could be saved) and the Bad.

Not entirely an advocate of the dualistic project of the Middle Ages, Chateaubriand had begun to envision a societal remedy through the fusion of (Christian) opposites, rather than by calling attention to existing rivalries. In his *Etudes Historiques* (1829), he argues for the unification of Catholic and Protestant factions.[xxiv] From his pragmatic perspective, religion, philosophy, and politics, which form the trinity, "les trois vérités" of social organization, along with the circumstances of the moment, produce history. The evolution of nineteenth century society, he argues, depends upon religion's rupture from its long-standing bedfellow, politics (the 'ancien régime') and, thereafter, from its new alliance with the philosophical ideas of the eighteenth century. In other words, religion has a duty to realign its interests and its perspectives in service of the political and social visions of the nineteenth century.

Unable to rid himself of the 'dépaysement' and remorse of the post-Revolutionary generation: "Vous saviez où vous étiez né, vous saviez où serait votre tombe" (*Mémoires,* t. IV), Chateaubriand manages nevertheless to reimagine *le 14 juillet* not merely as a catastrophic event, divisive at its core, but, moreover, as part of a progressive continuum leading to an uncertain, yet malleable future. As he writes in 1833, "Nous ne sommes pas, comme il le semble à plusieurs, dans une époque de révolution particulière, mais à une ère de transformation générale: la société entière se modifie" (*Mémoire sur la Captivité de la Duchesse de Berry* 20).[xxv] In a similar vein, Christian ruins, much as the ruins of antiquity, testify to the collective amnesia of generations and to the impulsive recourse to violence: "Sacrés debris des monuments chrétiens, vous ne rappelez point, comme tant d'autres ruines, du sang, des injustices et des violences!" (*Génie*, t. VI: 33).[xxvi] Even as he acknowledges the inevitability of social trends—he stands against tyranny yet remains skeptical of the results of self-determination—Chateaubriand tacitly acknowledges

the limitations of his own position, which is destined to remain insecure and overwhelmingly itinerant.

In the last pages of *Voyage*'s second volume, Lamartine revisits a sentiment similar to Chateaubriand's, above, taking the role of the critic a step further. The former emphasizes the importance of timely and directed participation in the outcome of a future 'societé', which he intends in its broadest terms: "La révolution française a été le tocsin du monde. Plusieurs de ses phases sont accomplies, elle n'est pas finie [. . .]. Dans la marche des sociétés et des idées, le but n'est jamais qu'un nouveau point de départ" (II: 508). An underlying assumption for Lamartine is the leadership of the elite, which is to say, the intellectual classes. Furthermore, although both thinkers agree upon the essential role of religion as a stabilizing agent in society, they differ concerning the precise terms of its implementation. For Chateaubriand, Christianity, even as disfigured through time, exists as a collective language essential to French identity: "c'est toujours le Verbe qui se fait Chair!" (*Etudes Historiques*, t.1, "Préface").[xxvii] Lamartine, who maintains the importance of his own Christian orientation, asserts a broader, more inclusive role for faith. As part of a larger plan to unify East and West, he emphasizes the concordant, as opposed to discordant, aspects of Christianity and Islam: "Ces dogmes du Koran ne sont que du christianisme altéré, mais cette alteration n'a pas pu les dénaturer! Ce culte est plein de vertus, et j'aime ce peuple, car c'est le peuple de la prière" (I: 116). The comparison alludes to the author's growing personal misgivings as well as to his nascent affinity with non-Christian modes of worship, particularly as we consider the secondary stage of inclusiveness: transference. The task of the nineteenth century, Lamartine tells us, is to reimagine and to overcome the single-minded legacy of early Christianity: "heureusement le dix-neuvième siècle passe, et j'en vois approcher un meilleur, un siècle vraiment religieux, où, si les hommes ne confessent pas Dieu dans la

même langue et sous les mêmes symboles, ils le confesseront au moins sous tous les symboles et dans toutes les langues!" (I: 28). Ultimately, *Voyage*'s author argues for a shift of perspective from the (European) local to the global context, which, as he sees it, demands, if not mutual empathy, mutual coexistence.

As for the dual dimensions of his pilgrimage, much as is the case with Chateaubriand, Lamartine sought to heal and, most ideally, to make constructive use of the wounds incurred by the vagaries of French political life. In his "Avertissement de la première edition" of *Voyage*, the author describes his state of mind in the aftermath of 1830: "Mon cœur était brisé, mon esprit était ailleurs, mon attention distraite, mon loisir perdu [...]" (7). Once again, a recurring concern of Lamartine's poetic, equally relevant to his personal life, is the effects of social and institutional chaos upon the domestic sphere. Concommitant with the domestic motif, the Holy Land of Lamartine's earliest imagination corresponds with a place of resuscitation where "les doutes de l'esprit, […] les perplexities religieuses devraient trouver là leur solution et leur apaisement" (10). Risks notwithstanding, the voyage is worth undertaking if, once returned to the "foyer solitaire," the author has succeeded in reanimating "des souvenirs froids" and "un passé mort" (8). Roland Mortier has suggested that Lamartine's poetic allusions to historical ruins, which amount to a 'clichéd vulgarization' of an aesthetic, distract from his true sympathies: the family residence: "le banc rustique où s'asseyait mon père" (209). Mortier's point invariably leads us to question the relationship between Lamartine's poetic orientation and his obsession with leaving a lasting political legacy.

As much as his elaborate preparations for departure conform to the aristocratic standards of the period, the author's meticulous attention to maintenance of the comforts and security of family life underscores the central role of the home(land) in the larger scope of his journey: "Le

brick est encombré de provisions de tout genre que nécessite un voyage de deux ans dans des pays sans ressources. Une bibliothèque de cinq cents volumes [. . .].” In addition, such precautionary measures as “[des] faiseaux d’armes sont groupés dans les coins, [. . .] un arsenal particulier de fusils, de pistolets et de sabres pour armer nous et nos gens,” underscore the traveler’s misgivings as well as his preconceptions concerning what may be encountered ‘out there’, such as “Les pirates grecs [qui] infestent les mers de l’Archipel [. . .]” (17). The risks, in fact, were not inconsequential. Lamartine arranged for a full crew of outstanding reputation to travel with his wife, Marianne, his nine-year-old daughter, Julia, and three companions: Amédée de Parseval, a close friend, M. de Capmas, sous-préfet, “privé de sa carrière par la révolution de juillet” (18), and physician M. de la Royère. One of several reflections, made after a tempestuous night at sea: “Nuit douloureuse! Combien de fois je frémis en pensant que j’ai mis tant de vies sur une seule chance!” (117), reveals not only a sense of patriarchal responsibility, instrinsically tied to his private endeavor, but, furthermore, the existence of a ‘wordly’ mission, i.e. to conduct France, “cette avant-garde de la civilisation moderne, [. . .] hors de la terre d’Égypte, de la terre d’arbitraire, de privilége et de servitude” (*P.R.* 20). The ‘ruins’ of the past, associated with antiquity, with the Bourbons and with Lamartine’s own political loyalties, are necessary to the reconstruction of the future, particularly through a ‘rapprochement’ between social and geographical polarities. Interestingly, Lamartine’s renown for ambivalent political loyalties—“Il y a longtemps que les ultra m’appellent libéral et les libéraux ultra: je ne suis *ni l’un ni l’autre*” (*Correspondances II* – my italics)[xxviii]—contributes to his ambivalent status as an anomaly and ‘individu suspect’ among his political contemporaries. Along these same lines, in his (embellished, if not predominantly fictional) account of his meeting with Lady Hester Stanhope, Lamartine circumnavigates the defining issues of affiliation characteristic of his period:

> ‘J’espère, me dit-elle tout à coup, que vous êtes aristocrate; je n’en doute pas en vous voyant.’
>
> ‘- Vous vous trompez, Milady, lui dis-je. Je ne suis *ni* aristocrate *ni* démocrate; [...] je suis homme et partisan exclusif de ce qui peut améliorer et perfectionner l’homme tout entier, qu’il soit né au sommet ou au pied de l’échelle sociale! Je ne suis *ni* pour le peuple *ni* pour les grands, mais pour l’humanité entière [...].’
> (184—my italics)

Ironically, Lamartine’s hostess identified unapologetically with the aristocracy that had cast her out of England. For *Voyage*’s author, the passage from “un excès à l’autre” (II: 510) was to be avoided at all costs. He neglects to mention exactly how one might put into action an affinity for “l’humanité entière,” only that action, global and moderate, is indicated: “On peut préparer un instrument à un autre pour remuer le monde et le changer de place; voilà tout” (509). In his estimation, both the geographic and fictive, i.e. mythical, potential of the ‘berceau de la religion’ offer a viable means of going about this.

Ambivalent Relations

‘C’est Dieu qui vous amène ici pour éclairer votre âme’: A Visit with Lady Hester Stanhope

Lamartine’s visit with Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839) in the remote mountain region Lebanon illustrates, above and beyond a rather ambitious attempt to elevate his image by association with the legendary English expatriate, the author’s methodical exploration of the potential of exile and French repatriation in the Orient. The author’s account of their meeting

(comprising approximately twenty pages in *Voyage*'s first volume), which took place between late September and early October, 1832, at Lady Hester's estate at Dar Djoun, generated public curiosity as well as scrutiny, not only amongst readers of the two-volume text, which first appeared in 1835, but, thereafter, in a host of *récits de voyage* and biographies of such aristocratic travelers as German Prince Hermann von Pückler Muskau (1785-1871) and Alexander William Kinglake (1809-1891). Lamartine's brief interaction with the reclusive expatriate, a disinherited, shunned aristocrat—prophetess to some, madwoman to others—points to a trend of mimesis as well as mutual disaffection amongst exiled and displaced individuals throughout northern Europe. For the aristocratic traveler, Lady Hester had acquired an irresistible pedegree as an eccentric and an authority on the religions (particularly the Druse sect) of the East. She had been the confidante of her uncle, Prime Minister William Pitt (1759-1806), until his death, in whose aftermath she remained with few financial resources and even fewer friends among the English aristocracy. The English expatriate's reputation as mystic, eccentric, dauntless survivor, and stalwart influence among the tribal sects and factions of Lebanon, had gained her the status of a visit "not to be missed" among aristocratic, and otherwise curious, travelers to the region.

According to Lamartine, his meeting with Lady Hester precipitates a spiritual renewal based upon affinities, rather than divisions, between Christianity and esoteric religions of the East. After the publication of *Voyage*, subsequent travelers who managed to obtain an invitation to Dar Djoun did not resist the opportunity to comment: William Kinglake published *Eothen* in 1844, followed by Prince Pückler Muskau's *Briefe eines Verstorbenen*, in 1846. Both of these authors indicate that Lady Hester considered herself not only mis-portrayed by the French poet, but, more importantly, misinterpreted. As her biographer and physician of many years, Dr.

Charles Meryon, relates, Lady Hester complained bitterly that "Half of what the writer says is false" (*Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope* I, 1845: 368).[xxix] Pückler Muskau relates similarly that, after tirelessly pressing Lady Hester to reveal her knowledge of the "mysterious creed of the Druses," she hedged, "sometimes rather irritably, peevishly declaring that [...] there were already too many false and superficial accounts of the East, for her to wish to add to their number by any half-comprehended utterances of her own. 'You might, after all,' she concluded, holding up her finger at me, 'do no better for me than M. de Lamartine. Have you read his *Voyage en Orient*?'" (Pückler Muskau, qtd. in the memoirs of the Duchess of Cleveland 299).[xxx]

Evidence suggests that Lamartine had taken some trouble to arrange a visit with Lady Hester, with a particular objective in mind. He had, as I have mentioned, hoped to recover his political reputation and, as much of his rhetoric indicates, he maintained a lifelong belief in a unique providential mission. An earlier prophecy, related to the poet in childhood by his mother, had convinced him of a great destiny ahead of him, *une mission à accomplir*, which he would take possession of *au moment juste*.[xxxi] His conviction of imminent disaster in France, along with an unrelenting sense of personal duty, fueled his vision of a future, for himself, as well as for Europe, in the Middle East: "L'excès de vie qui va déborder chez nous peut et doit s'absorber sur cette partie du monde [. . .]" (II: 516). Addressing the consequences of post-Revolutionary social reform and the impending education of the masses, Lamartine sought to mitigate its consequences. As he saw it, "le besoin d'expansion," would cause cities to overflow with an insatiable population from the surrounding countryside who would compete for space and employment with the upper echelons of the working classes. The results held forseeable consequences: "où serait le refuge contre une seconde barbarie?" (515). Their solution could be achieved by broadening, rather than narrowing, national interests. As for the specific role the

author imagines for Lady Hester, her reputation in the East as well as her former affiliations in England bequeath to her an undeniable authority to promote both the politician and the role of France: "La France et l'Angleterre sont les deux pays d'expérience, chargés, dans ces dernières époques, de promulguer et d'éprouver les idées" (511). France, "plus hardie," has taken the first steps.

To follow this train of thought a step further, and as his extended residency in the region attests, the author leaves little to chance.[xxxii] At the time of his arrival in Lebanon, Lady Hester, who left England in 1810, had lived at Dar Djoun, for nearly twenty years. At roughly fifty-five, a self-proclaimed hermit, the former English aristocrat, who dressed in "a long sort of white merinos cloak [...] [which] covered her person from the neck to the ancles [...]," and a "*red* fez or *tarbôosh*, which covered her shaved head," the "costume" of a Turkish gentleman (Meryon 1: 98-9), admitted no more than two foreign visitors per year. With these obstacles in mind, Lamartine's account of his invitation to visit Dar Djoun materializes rather seamlessly.

By September of 1832, Lamartine had established himself in Beirut, with his wife and daughter, and their three traveling companions, whom he housed in five spacious apartments, joined by a series of arcades and wooden stairs which he had transformed into "une espèce de villa italienne" (I: 145), before preparing his caravan for a voyage to the interior of Syria and Palestine.[xxxiii] His encounter with Lady Hester prefaces the author's visit to the Druse Emir Beschir and his subsequent journey through the Holy Land. Once in Beirut, the author hosts a multitude of local Arabs, Francs, and European consuls. From a pragmatic perspective, his efforts at promoting good will are standard, given the uncertain terrain "du désert que nous avons à parcourir" (149) and the reputation of its inhabitants, "des bandes d'Arabes voleurs qui pillent et massacrent les caravans" (301). Because of her influence with tribal leaders, Lady Hester

fulfilled the unofficial role of ambassador and mediator between the European traveler and his tribal hosts. For his part, Lamartine sought to appeal to "l'imagination sensible, exaltée des Arabes," relying upon "la rapidité de la parole, d'une tribu à l'autre," to secure for himself "une renommée [...] faite en quinze jours" (158). The poet's hospitality towards the population of mountain people, Maronite monks, Druse sheiks and the sick who visit his estate earns him the name of *l'émir Frangi, le prince des Francs*—echoing Lady Hester's "crowning" in Palmyra, twenty years previously, by the Sheik of Talmud who named her the "English Queen."[xxxiv] After shipwreck, financial ruin, and survival of the plague, the 'fallen' English aristocrat had taken years to establish herself in Lebanon. Lamartine alludes to anticipated affinity between himself and Lady Hester when, after fifteen days in Beirut, he deems the early events of Lady Hester's life "à peu près semblables aux miennes [...]" (158). Unbeknownst to Lady Hester, the author seeks her approval in support of France's future intervention in the Mediterranean,[xxxv] which includes the distribution of spheres of influence in the Turkish Empire between Russia, Austria, France and Britain. [xxxvi] In his letter of introduction, the poet presents himself as a "like soul," appealing to Lady Hester's reclusive nature: "Voyageur comme vous, étranger comme vous dans l'Orient, n'y venant chercher comme vous que le spectacle de sa nature, de ses ruines et des œuvres de Dieu [...]" (168). The poet received a prompt reply from his future hostess, and left within a few days for Dar Djoun.

Contrary to her gracious portrayal in *Voyage*, Lady Hester in fact greeted all of her visitors with some caution. Her reputed ability to mould her own image and to manipulate her guests is underscored by her reception of the French visitor. Lamartine and his companion, (M. de Parseval, whom the hostess ignored until the last hours of their stay), waited for a good part of the day in one of Lady Hester's "cellules," before being summoned to visit the prophetess in her

personal drawing-room late in the afternoon. Lamartine describes his impressions at the instant of their meeting: "Une si profonde obscurité y régnait, que je pus à peine distinguer les traits nobles, graves, doux et majesueux de la figure blanche qui, en costume oriental, se leva du divan et s'avança en me tenant la main" (172). In his *Memoirs*, Meryon provides a sober explanation for the spectral effects produced upon her visitors by the prophetess when he reveals that it was Lady Hester's custom "on almost all occasions," to place her visitors near the candle light while her features were left "in obscurity, [...], as I have reason to believe, to watch the play of people's countenances" (Meryon 2: 174). The French poet, far from being unsettled by his hostess' tactics, insists upon an instant mutual compatibility between himself and Lady Hester, as her reported reason for receiving the unfamiliar visitor would indicate: "'Quelque chose, d'ailleurs, me disait que nos étoiles étaient amies et que nous nous conviendrions mutuellement'" (173). Later in their conversation, she declares: "'je ne vous vois que depuis quelques minutes; et bien, je vous connais comme si j'avais vécu un siècle avec vous'" (174). As to the question of recognition, Lady Hester, along with subsequent travelers in whom she confided, enjoyed recalling the poet's dismay and embarrassment at her ignorance of his fame in France. She had never heard of him and said so. Lamartine had attempted to disguise his initial surprise; the echo of his European success, he stated, "est trop faible pour traverser votre mer et vos montagnes [...]" (178). Moreover, as critics such as Paul Bénichou and Sarga Moussa have pointed out,[xxxvii] Lady Hester's apparent ignorance served the poet's cause: "Comment, lui dis-je, Milady, honorez-vous si vite du nom d'ami un homme dont le nom et la vie vous sont complètement inconnu? Vous ignorez qui je suis. –C'est vrai, reprit-elle; je ne sais ni ce que vous êtes selon le monde, ni ce que vous avez fait pendant que vous avez vécu parmi les hommes; mais je sais déjà

ce que vous êtes devant Dieu" (173-4). Lamartine trusts the reclusive prophetess, and not the worldly aristocrat, to announce the true character and destiny of her visitor.

Although the author initially declines his hostess' offer to read his stars—"je n'ai pas besoin de leur révélation pour me connaître moi-même: corruption, infirmité et misère!"—Lady Hester soon confirms the poet's birthright under three stars, "heureuses, puissantes et bonnes, qui vous ont doué de qualités analogues et qui vous conduisent à un but [...]" (174). The "*but*" in question substantiates the author's vision of a combined spiritual and worldy mission:

> C'est Dieu qui vous amène ici pour éclairer votre âme; vous êtes un de ces hommes de désir et de bonne volonté dont il a besoin, comme d'instruments, pour les œuvres merveilleuses qu'il va bientôt accomplir parmi les hommes. [...] Bientôt vous retournerez en Europe; l'Europe est finie, la France seule a une grande mission à accomplir encore; vous y participerez, je ne sais pas encore comment [...]. (174-7)

Whether we can attribute Lamartine's imagination of Lady Hester to mere exaggeration or to deluded fantasy of self-aggrandizement remains an open question. Additional factors point to the author's belief that his destiny lay in the East. Before embarking upon his political career, the poet had claimed a preference for "'a life of philosophy in the East'" over "'a life of politics' in France" (Fortescue 82). By all apearances, he seeks an invincible formula to establish his dual identity. Towards this end, Lady Hester delivers accordingly: "'Vous retournerez dans l'Occident, mais vous ne tarderez pas beaucoup à revenir en Orient: c'est votre patrie'" (177-8). "Résumé politique" confirms the author's intention to make a project of the Middle East. As to

the veracity of Lamartine's narrative, anecodotes offered by later travelers point to the fictional as well as the ironic dimension of their interaction. Although Lamartine emphasizes the spiritual connotations of the term 'patrie," subsequent guests of Lady Hester's did not hesitate to elaborate upon the literal significance of this last statement.

During their visit, Lady Hester had evoked the poet's physical traits, the shape of his eyelids, his "finely formed" foot, in support of her prophecy that Lamartine would return to the East: "'Ne riez pas, reprit-elle, c'est votre patrie véritable, c'est la patrie de vos pères. [...] regardez votre pied. [...] C'est le pied de l'Arabe, c'est le pied de l'Orient; vous êtes un fils de ces climats, et nous approchons du jour où chacun rentrera dans la terre de ses pères'" (179). Although Lamartine, perhaps intentionally, misses the essential point of Lady Hester's prescience, a later account, however, by Pückler Muskau, reveals yet another dimension of the prophetess' observation, underscoring her discomfiting ability to discern the secrets of others. According to the prince, the French poet had failed to mention the entirety of his conversation with Lady Hester. Lamartine had apparently admitted to Lady Hester that, after the Crusades, members of his family had returned to France with Arab prisoners from Gaza, who settled in his native province, among them prisoners of high rank whose blood the poet had reason to believe had mingled with his own. He had used this revelation to his advantage during his travels. Lady Hester later enjoyed revealing to Pückler Muskau, that the "renowned warriors" in question had in fact descended from a tribe of camel-drivers who had inhabited the region of Gaza for centuries. "From them," she added, "M. de Lamartine may well have derived his peculiarities, for they have generally very good feet and high insteps, are greatly esteemed as minstrels and storytellers [...]" (P. Muskau, qtd. by the Duchess of Cleveland 301), thus completing the poet's demotion.

To place Lamartine's situation within the broader context of European opportunism in the Orient, Lady Hester, who had no interest in writing her autobiography, distrusted (with just cause) the motivations of her would-be biographers. The European, she felt, was inherently self-interested and, moreover, incapable both of understanding and of accuracy. Whereas she had devoted her life to the hardships of a solitary life in the East and to its esoteric traditions, travel narratives, and their authors, produced, at best, facile, incompetent interpretations of culture and context. Her own 'misrepresentation' (as a lunatic, an exotic, and a cross-dresser, for example) in a handful of travel narratives of the period proved her point.

If Lamartine exaggerates the felicity of his exchange with this controversial *légende de l'Orient*, he is conscious, nevertheless, of the need to validate not only her authority, but her credibility as well. The prophetess, not her guest, broaches the subject of her widespread reputation as a madwoman: "'Ne me prenez point pour une folle, comme le monde me nomme souvent; mais je ne puis résister au besoin de vous parler à cœur ouvert'" (174). His ambivalent feelings concerning Lady Hester notwithstanding, Lamartine had legitimate reasons for absolving her of her stigma:

> Non, cette femme n'est point folle. [...] S'il me fallait prononcer, je dirais plutôt que c'est une folie volontaire, étudiée, qui se connaît soi-même et qui a ses raisons pour paraître folie. La puissante admiration que son génie a exercée et exerce encore sur les populations arabes qui entourent les montagnes prouve assez que cette prétendue folie n'est qu'un moyen. (180)

The politician's credibility is at stake, and not merely by association. Lamartine's political cronies had questioned his sanity and accused him of megalomania. Unbeknownst to her

visitor, Lady Hester also seeks a last word. Meryon, less than a reliable source, relates the sharp criticism the hostess had visited upon her guest shortly after his departure from Dar Djoun.

> 'Look at Monsieur *********, getting off his horse half a dozen times to kiss his dog, [...]: the very muleteers and servants thought him a fool. And then, that way of thrusting his hands in his breeches-pockets, sticking out his legs as far as he could --- what is that like?
>
> 'Monsieur ---------- is no poet, in my estimation, although he may be an elegant versifier: he has no sublime ideas.' (qtd. in Meryon 1: 300)

In an account by William Kinglake, "The peculiarity which attracted her ridicule was an over-refinement of manner. [...] he had none of the violent grimace of his countrymen, [...] but rather bore himself mincingly, like the humbler sort of English dandy," whereas Lady Hester advocated "a downright manner, amounting even to brusqueness [...]" (qtd. in the Duchess of Cleveland 242), especially with the "Oriental." Additional points of discord emerge. When the poet reveals his sympathies for "l'homme sans lumière et sans pain," over "l'aristocratie vicieuse," Lady Hester is unsympathetic: "[...] mais laissez-moi croire que vous êtes aristocrate comme moi [...]" (185). For this confirmed, if also disinherited aristocrat, convinced up to the last days of her life that "everybody should be kept in his place" (Meryon 3: 116), the poet's appeal for "la même liberté et la même perfection morale" (185) appears a false as well as an undignified position.

With respect to Lamartine's view of the matter, Lady Hester's disparaging criticism, *ex post facto*, remains perplexing in several ways. To begin with, their visit lasted roughly two days,

when common courtesy allowed for no more than three hours of her hospitality. More revealing still, during his stay, Lady Hester had invited the poet to the "sacred" areas of her estate, a privilege she shared with few. The fact that she employed her own means of discerning Lamartine's "mystical" as well as intellectual aptitude is evidenced in the progression of their conversation from her drawing-room to her private garden, and finally, to the meticulous stables, where the prophetess kept her two sacred mares, reserved for the coming of the *Messie,* a practice that no doubt contributed to the speculations about her mental condition. The very nature of the rebuttal of the reclusive 'celebrity', who claimed not to "care a fig about what men thought," borders on the coy. Her complaints, as a matter of fact, remain consistently general. Inaccuracy is her primary accusation: "I can only judge of the article on myself, which Dr. Meryon read to me. Of this I can assure you, that one half is invented, and the other half is incorrect" (Meryon; P. Muskau in Duchess of Cleveland 299). Misinterpretation is a secondary complaint: "Some of it made me angry, and some of it made me laugh very heartily, for it showed how comically travellers interpret to their advantage speeches very differently intended" (Meryon). One or two exchanges point to further discord between the two.

In *Voyage*, if not also in person, the poet had not shared Lady Hester's enthusiasm about the imminent arrival of the *Messie,* whom she would accompany to the Promised Land, riding one of her two mares. "M. Lamartine talked about religion to me," she relates to Dr. Meryon, "I told him—'Does not the Testament say, 'But there is one shall come after me, who is greater than I am'—who is that?' He hummed and hahed, but could make no reply" (Meryon 1: 198).[xxxviii] Lamartine's account of his visit to Lady Hester's stables reveals not only the poet's skepticism in the matter, but also his awareness of the need to provide a logical explanation for her beliefs. Lady Hester truly believed one of her mares the incarnation of the apocalyptic horse,

born fully saddled. Lamartine's initial reaction to this reveals his skepticism: "Je vis en effet sur ce bel animal un jeu de la nature assez rare pour servir l'illusion d'une crédulité vulgaire chez des peuples à demi-barbares [...]" (183). But the poet quickly offers an explanation for this illusion when he remarks upon a large cavity at the mare's shoulders that so closely resembles "une selle turque, qu'on pouvait dire avec vérité qu'elle était née toute sellée [...]." This token, however, can only accentuate his bewilderment at Lady Hester's gullibility.

As if to rebuff his "notion' of *her* naiveté, Lady Hester draws attention to the poet's own gullibility. During his stay, Lady Hester, believing her visitor might be a spy (Day 321-4), concealed a population of survivors to whom she had given refuge after Ibrahim Pacha's siege of Acre, an incident that went unnoticed by him. In a letter to Lord Hardwicke in England she writes: "Look at the accuracy of M. Lamartine! I had seventy-five of them here at the time he paid me a visit, but I kept them out of his sight (for his sentiment is all in his pen and not in his heart) [...]" (Duchess of Cleveland 228). Her visitor's inability to perceive the truth in this situation, she asserts, points to his broader unreliability.

As for her decision to publicly discredit Lamartine, it is necessary to emphasize the extent to which this episode of *Voyage* contributed to a stereotypical image of the East that offended the English expatriate. Moreover, at a time when she faced increasing "domestic humiliation," due to debts and other financial troubles, foreign and regional disputes, and a decline in health, some evidence suggests that Lady Hester had entertained hopes of some 'global' intervention on her behalf, as a letter to Dr. Meryon, dated August 21st, 1836, reveals (1: 239). Commenting upon popular response to *Voyage*'s publication in England, Lady Hester writes: "many people, who did not personally know me, talked of coming here to investigate my affairs, and to offer their services [...]," among them, the Baroness de Feriat, an English woman

of "high rank and good fortune, [...] nearly of my age," whom, Lady Hester convinced herself, fulfilled a prophetic role in the imminent apocalypse (241). The assistance she hoped for never materialized, just as Lady Hester's disagreement with the English government over a debt, owed for nearly twenty years by her, with accrued interest, reduced her income to one sixth of its original amount.

Furthermore, while Lady Hester considered the Orient her true *patrie*—she maintained a theory that all nations of Europe could be traced back to the East, which no doubt influenced her earlier assessment of the origins of Lamartine. As an English "subject" who "has raised the English name in the East higher than any one has yet done [...]" (3: 279), she had received little thanks from her compatriots. Her gender had prevented her from aspiring to worldly office in the wake of her uncle, just as her capacity for verbal assault incited her exile by powerful enemies. This woman who had painstakingly earned a reputation as a mystic, gained influence among the patriarchal tribes of her region (Day), and had single-handedly defended the weak and defenseless against such despots as the Sheik Emyr Beshyr, also envisioned and, to her credit, carried out to the best of her ability her own mission as a mediator between East and West. Although Dar Djoun remained first and foremost a personal refuge for the expatriate, she intended its use as a refuge for European intellectuals fleeing persecution in the aftermath of the revolutions she expected (and which did in fact occur) in Europe during her lifetime. Ironically, Lamartine most closely fits the description of this kind of visitor, thus tacitly contributing to the fulfillment of her vision.

Lamartine's detailed report of his interaction with the English expatriate is noteworthy, certainly by comparison with Chateaubriand's remote accounts of human relations in *Itinéraire*. The reader of *Voyage* is meant to infer an intimacy of spirit and intellect and to enjoy the

exoticism of the encounter, regardless of the validity of the author's claims. After its publication, *Voyage* quite incontestably contributed to the clichés of eastern exoticism. Through his hostess' collaboration, the poet received the recommendation required for a visit to Pacha Abu Ghosh, "who received him very well." Yet, as Lady Hester comments in retrospect, with the understanding that her words would be repeated by her physician-biographer, "when he talked about himself, and made out that he was a great man, Abu Ghosh said it was for my sake, and not for his own, that he shewed him as much honour as he could" (Meryon 1: 301). Disappointingly, the woman who had made her reputation by standing up to powerful men also relied upon 'lesser', opportunistic men to make her words public.

To underscore by comparison the importance Lamartine placed upon his visit with Lady Stanhope, the author's accounts of his subsequent visits to the Pacha, whom he describes as a "beau jeune homme, revêtu d'un costume militaire très-riche, et ayant des armes superbes dans sa ceinture" (I: 115), and to the Emir Beschir, "prince souverain des Druses et de toutes les montagnes du Liban" (187-8), "un beau vieillard à l'œil vif et penetrant," appear as little more than cursory formalities. Unlike Chateaubriand, this narrator provides enough descriptive information to allow the reader's imagination to construct a physical image of the two men; their portraits remain fairly rote in all other respects. "Nous parlâmes de l'objet de mon voyage, de l'état de la Grèce, des nouvelles limites assignées par la conference de Londres [. . .]," Lamartine writes of his visit with the Pacha, in an entry dated "20 août, 1832" (115). In one of many similar declarations, the author emphasizes his preference for the Turkish over the Greek populace: "La figure de ce Turc avait le caractère que j'ai reconnu depuis dans toutes les figures des musulmans que j'ai eu occasion de voir en Syrie et en Turquie;—noblesse, douceur, et cette résignation calme et sereine [. . .]" (116). His visit with the Emir at his lavish palace both confirms and

surpasses commonly held stereotypical views of the region: “Il me remercia, et me fit sur l’Egyptiens, une foule de demandes qui montraient à la fois tout l’intérêt que cete question avait pour lui, et les connaissances et l’intelligence des affaires, peu communes dans un prince de l’Orient” (195). Even by his own account, the French author’s passage through the region appears rather inconsequential.

Although Lamartine describes his departure from Lady Hester with “un regret sincère de ma part” (187), a subsequent commentary shows a reserve and a detachment absent in his initial account of their meeting. We detect a change of tone at the end of the first volume of *Voyage*, after what can be described as a spiritual catharsis, involving a symbolic death and resurrection in the desert. Here, stopping at a monastery at Antoura, Lamartine reveals an increasingly pragmatic, if not a skeptical attitude towards the mysticism of the Orient, where a tendency “au merveilleux tient à deux causes, à un sentiment religieux très-développé et à un défaut d’équilibre entre l’imagination et la raison. [...] Cette terre arabe,” the poet adds, “est la terre des prodiges; tout y germe, et tout homme crédule ou fanatique peut y devenir prophète à son tour: lady Stanhope en sera une preuve de plus” (475). At the conclusion of their meeting, the author ends this episode of his narrative with a qualified, recommendation on Lady Hester’s behalf, “je sentais qu’aucune corde ne manquait à cette haute et ferme intelligence, [...] excepté peut-être la corde métaphysique, que trop de tension et de solitude avait faussée ou élevée à un diapason trop haut pour l’intelligence mortelle” (187). Among the handful of portrayals of the English eccentric by her various acquaintances, the account of *Voyage*’s author is less parasitic than Kinglake’s, for example, and more empathetic (if also more self-serving) than Pückler Muskau’s.

After his return from the East, Lamartine enjoyed another fifteen years of political life, succumbing to a new decline in popularity in 1848. During this time, he campaigned for the

abolition of slavery and in favor of popular education, neither of which Lady Hester would have supported because of her aristocratic convictions. And, although she posits indifference to the aims of the politician, she provides others with ample slander to circumvent him. If, as the author asserts shortly after his arrival in Beirut, a reputation can be "faite en quinze jours," Lady Hester makes the point that it can be destroyed just as easily. With respect to secondary attacks delivered by Kinglake and Pückler Muskau, Lamartine declines to comment publicly. If we take *Voyage*'s author at his word, his 'Visite avec Lady Hester Stanhope' represents an auspicious encounter, beneficial to both parties, instrumental to his formation and to his understanding of his unique mission in the world.

'Ce Verbe de la Nature': Landscape and Conversion

Mary Ellen Birkett, elaborating upon Mortier's earlier criticism of Lamartine's at times vulgar use of clichés, has suggested that the poet's resort to conventional, indeed codified, descriptions of nature has less to do with a lack of imagination on his behalf than with the response (of his literary persona) to an "impersonalized world" (*Lamartine and the poetics of Landscape* 41).[xxxix] Echoes of literary forerunners, which appear in such descriptive characterizations as "[les] vagues écumantes" (*L'Isolement*, line 5) can be traced to Chateaubriand (*Génie du christianisme*), as well as to Letourneur (who translates Ossian) and to Roucher (*Mois*), all of whom mention 'la vague écumante'. According to Birkett, Lamartine's "[passive] acceptance of conventions" figures the poet's response of indifference to "this world-become-void" (41). In Lamartine's worldview, personal loss—of the beloved, of the status he once enjoyed—is endemic to his perception of "the whole of nature" as "depopulated" (40). This personalizes the

medieval train of thought that equates environmental disaster, whether caused by Nature herself or manmade, with the moral condition of humanity. For the medieval consciousness, nature functions as a mirror of the collective soul and its destiny. Lamartine, conversely, uses nature to speak about the quality and the state of his mind, embittered by earthly trials, and his spirit, conflicted and demoralized. If his language falls short of originality, Birkett argues, disappointed desire, at the core of descriptive apathy, points to Lamartine's vision of nature as a "storyteller" who remembers and recounts "bygone happenings" and, through her telling, retrieves experiences of the past (41). When the subjective landscape, not immune to apathy, opts for silence and refuses to deliver a message, the poet resorts to expressions "that have behind them a history of their own" (42), clichés in other words. He does this not merely for the sake of invoking literary precedents but, more strategically—and, I would assert, we see evidence of this in *Voyage*—in order to extract from the literary landscape its generative uses, which vacillate between the remembrance of abject moral lessons, Christian 'communitas', which occurs through epistemological coherence, and desire, a sentiment as much as a state of being that mediates between past, present, and future realities: that which *is* remembered and that which can be *re*-membered.

The panoramic impression is important to Lamartine's aesthetic as well as to the moral story underway. Although the processes of natural and man-made entropy interest both early Romantic poets, Lamartine tends to survey the global in order to extract the specific, while Chateaubriand contemplates the relationship between the individual structure and its larger implications; e.g. for Lamartine, monuments, by virtue of their reduced conditions, as well as their former grandeur, request a degree of admiration that, rather than inducing a reverie upon the human condition, repells the viewer. The author's response to the Parthenon is characteristic

of his ambivalent (polyvalent) manner of viewing. Following his intial "impression incomparable," his estimation of the monument diminishes incrementally as he contemplates, not its gradual disintegration over centuries, but, more pointedly, a recent litany of assault: "ses majestueux lambeaux mutilés par les bombes vénitiennes, par l'explosion de la poudrière sous Morosini, par le marteau de Théodore,—par les canons des Turcs et des Grecs;—ses colonnes en blocs immenses touchant ses pavés, ses chapiteaux écroulés, ses triglyphes brisés par les agents de lord Elgin, ses statues emportées par des vaisseaux anglais." His final assessment is characteristically ambivalent: "ce qu'il en reste est suffisant pour que je sente que c'est le plus parfait poëme écrit en pierre sur la face de la terre; mais encore, je le sens aussi, c'est trop petit, l'effet est manqué où il est détruit" (I: 108). Unlike Chateaubriand, who stakes value in the tangible objects or fragments of 'souvenir' he collects, Lamartine looks for the 'whole', if not entirely accurate impression, which he achieves through writing: "Je sentais que ce chaos de marbre si sublime, si pittoresque dans mon œil, s'évanouirait de ma mémoire, et je voulais pouvoir le retrouver dans la vulgarité de ma vie future.—Ecrivons donc: ce ne sera pas le Parthénon, mais ce sera du moins une ombre de cette ombre [. . .] (109). Similar to Chateaubriand, Lamartine's predominant experience of Greece is one of claustrophobia and ultimately of relief as he views "le lointain brumeux de l'horizon d'Asie:" "je respire et je sens mon entrée dans une region plus large et plus haute! la Grèce est petite, tourmentée, dépouillée; c'est le squelette d'un nain! voici celui d'un géant!" (118). The author's assessment of Turkish presence in the region proves, once again, ambivalent. While he liberally dismisses "ce caractère d'inaction et d'indolence qu'ils portent partout!" and policies that leave its populace "dans l'inertie et dans une sorte de misère," he allows that "ce peuple qui ne crée rien, qui ne renouvelle rien, ne brise et ne détruit rien non plus: il laisse au moins agir la nature librement

autour de lui" (119). Ultimately, the author's attitude towards the Aegean region: "il n'y reste que trente mille habitants grecs et quelques Turcs. Rien ne serait plus aisé que de s'emparer de cette souveraineté," presupposes his plan for European colonization, "un beau rêve, et huit jours le changerait en réalité" (123), whose larger scope I will return to briefly in the following pages.

In keeping with with his agenda, Lamartine's passage through the Holy Land serves a dual purpose: to restore his spirit, ideally, and to further his public credibility. The author's overriding sentiment, nevertheless, confirms his doubt. In keeping with the paradigm of his century, Romantic experience of the Holy Land, replete with expectations and ambitions, represents, rather than a long-desired homecoming, a resounding failure. The symbol itself becomes problematic. Re-membrance, failing to transform or to resuscitate the psyche, exposes a fundamental conundrum at the heart of nineteenth century pilgrimage: the perverted role of tradition. As Chateaubriand puts it: "Des traditions nous sont restées de la méchanceté des hommes, et des catastrophes terribles qui n'ont jamais manqué de suivre la corruption des mœurs" (*Génie du Christianisme* 1082).[xl] Correspondingly, the cliché, which represents long-held traditions whose moral value has eroded, gradually, yet consistently over time, designates, beyond moral apathy, a loss of direction that, disappointingly, remains uncorrected by contact with the original sites of Christianity.

To cite one such example, Lamartine's affirmative anticipation, apparent in the initial lines of *Voyage*'s first volume, undergoes a gradual process of 'negative awakening', culminating in despair at the start of volume II. Nature, inextricable from the spiritual condition of the narrator, is central to the unfolding of his internal denouement. "Jeune, j'avais entendu ce verbe de la nature, cette parole formée d'images et non de sons, dans les montagnes, dans les forêts, sur les lacs, aux bords des abîmes et des torrents de mon pays et des Alpes [. . .]" (I: 19),

he muses, still a novitiate of his journey. As a traveler who has yet to encounter the geographical and physical reality of his destination, let alone its residual effects, Lamartine offers the reader a perspective trained by the predictable sources, the Bible and a host of engravings and artistic renderings: “Mon imagination était amoureuse de la mer, des déserts, des montagnes, des mœurs, et des traces de Dieu dans l’Orient” (20). Emphasis upon the general rather than the specific evidences the author’s adherence to a standardized idea of European travel to the Orient. The pilgrim hopes at once for transference between the perceived landscape and his interior psyche, and, moreover, for a reunion with the original creator (with whom, we suspect, he identifies closely).

In a similar vein, the poet’s attention to landscape tends to vacillate between, as much as it seeks to merge, a macrocosmic with a miscrocosmic world view. To consider nature is to actively engage with the cosmology from which it is derived. An early example of this appears when the poet’s vessel and crew take refuge from high winds in the gulf of Ciotat, a small village on the coast of Provence:

> L’eau est sans ride et tellement transparente, qu’à vingt pieds de profondeur nous voyons briller les cailloux et les coquillages, ondoyer les longues herbes marines, et courir des milliers de poissons aux écailles chatoyantes, trésors cachés du sein de la mer, aussi riche, aussi inépuisable que la terre en végétation et en habitants. La vie est partout comme l’intelligence! Toute la nature est animée, toute la nature sent et pense! Celui qui ne le voit pas n’a jamais réfléchi à l’intarissable fécondité de la pensée créatrice! [...] En voulez-vous une démonstration physique? regardez une goutte d’eau sous le microscope solaire, vous y verrez graviter des milliers de mondes! (31)

Adjectives such as “inépuisable” and “intarissable” reiterate standard expressions of divinity. Nature, on the other hand, humanized, animated, a thinking and and feeling entity, acquires something of an independent role. Considered globally, nature participates in the harmonious relationship that includes all life. Lamartine’s attention to the minutae of her individual components, however, suggests a potential for disharmony, even for subversion. The author follows the above exhortation, for example, with a more somber reflection upon his own situation: “l’esprit reste écrasé sous le poids de calculs; mais l’âme les supporte, et se glorifie d’avoir sa place dans cette œuvre” (32). Here, the individual, indeed the author, alludes to his relatively humble and uncertain position within the larger scheme.

A decisive deviation from his attitude as a novice occurs between the end of volume I and the beginning of II, marked most specifically by Julia’s untimely death. In a long entry dated ‘Le 28 mars’ (1833), the author records with subdued appreciation the landscape between Beirut and Balbek:

> On monte par des chemins creux, dans un sable rouge, don’t les bords sont festonnés de toutes les fleurs de l’Asie, toutes les formes, tous les parfums du printemps: nopals, arbustes épineux, aux grappes de fleurs jaunes comme l’or, semblables au genêt de nos montagnes; vignes se suspendant d’arbre en arbre, beaux caroubiers, arbres à la feuille d’un vert noir et bronze, aux rameaux entrelacées, au tronc d’une écorce brune, polie, luisante, le plus bel arbre de ces climats. (II: 1)

In spite of the season, springtime, and the apparent beauty of his surroundings, the author’s tone is tainted with the sadness of paternal grief. Nature, who obeys her own processes,

regardless, comforts at best, yet fails to inspire. A subsequent revelation addresses more directly the author's despair over the vacancy in his life. Once again, Lamartine's relationship to nature functions as a primary method of expression: "Je ne vis plus," he writes, "La nature n'est plus animée pour moi par tout ce qui me faisait sentir double dans l'âme de mon enfant:—je la regarde encore; elle ravit toujours mes yeux; mais elle ne soulève plus mon cœur [. . .]" (4). Struggle between the intellect and the 'cœur', which, above and beyond affection, nineteenth century Romantics associate with religious consciousness, is essential to Lamartine's account of his conversion in the desert. By this last admission, the author leads the reader to understand the degree to which he has been tested: the death of Julia extends to nature, the creator, and to faith itself.

To return briefly to the tradition, the premise of Christian pilgrimage, established by Augustine, and observed by a lineage of Christian thinkers thereafter, requires that the journey (to God) be accomplished "'et per intellectum *et per affectum*.'"[xli] Augustine draws a strict line between the "presumptions" of the intellect and Christian conversion. Neoplatonic influences, hereafter, interpreting the flight of Daedalus and the adventures of Ulysses, equate journeying with the "flight of the soul" whose ultimate aim is to regain "sa patrie." Medieval thinkers such as Dante, following Augustine's reasoning, equate mere philosophical journeying, which corresponds to the intellect's desire for recognition, with folly, even madness.[xlii] Even for the Romantic traveler, the dual project of his endeavor poses a problem. When, initially, he speaks of "Ce christianisme de sentiment" as "une douce habitude de ma pensée" (I: 21), Lamartine attempts to reconcile innate separations between his interior and exterior self and between the objectives and practices of private and public life. Whereas he accepts the intellect as an

instrument of modernity, indispensable in the secular world, his faith objects and, eventually, succumbs to the material demands of the period.

Even as we acknowledge his deliberate manipulation of 'la terre des miracles', discussed in the previous section, viewed as an internal dialogue, and "un grand acte de ma vie intérieure" (10), Lamartine's desire to broaden the conceptual boundaries of Catholicism points to his incipient rupture with the monotheistic God. With this in mind, his 'Conversion' in the desert both adheres to and strays from the Christian template. By the ritual standards typical to Christian pilgrimage, Lamartine's physical journey through the Holy Land conforms to a familiar sequence of crisis and repentance—the death of the (old) self is necessary for a true conversion. According to the traditional iconography, the desert, locus of conversion, also figures as a locus of distortion, "'where nothing is in its proper place, nothing proceeds in proper order'" (Freccero 15).[xliii] Whereas the journey, even by modern standards, proceeds in a surprisingly ordered and efficient manner, *Voyage*'s narrative deviates from Christian precedents in that theological clarity remains unresolved for the narrator. An observable conversion occurs, yet, neither as 'regenerescence' nor as transference between theological perspectives. Lamartine's evolution takes place, rather, as Paul Benichou describes it, within the larger context of "une sorte de participation personnelle à la loi divine du changement" (*Les mages romantiques* 59).[xliv] As it happens, the author's journey into the plague-ridden Jerusalem, "Monté à cheval avec dix-huit chevaux de suite [. . .]" (I: 234), on October 8, 1832, is fraught with a tone of disillusionment. The reader who follows him is left to wonder whether the journey is designed to overcome or to confirm despair. If we understand conversion as both a tactic and as a poetic method, the physical terrain of conversion, above and beyond its Biblical associations, becomes relevant.

The chapter, entitled ‘Voyage de Beyruth, à travers la Syrie et la Palestine, à Jérusalem’, offers a particularly detailed, rhythmic exchange between the rather laborious act of moving through challenging, at times inhospitable terrain, narrative viewing, and the interior thoughts of a narrator undergoing doubt, disaffection, and domestic longing.

> Le lendemain, parti à trois heures du matin; traversé à cinq le fleuve Tamour, l’ancien Tamyris; lauriers-roses en fleur sur les bords. – Suivi la grève, où la lame venait laver de son écume les pieds de nos chevaux, jusqu’à Saïde, l’antique Sidon, belle ombre encore de la ville détruite, [. . .] – point de traces de sa grandeur passée. Une jetée circulaire, formée de rochers énormes, enceinte une darse comblée de sable, et quelques pêcheurs avec leurs enfants, les jambes dans l’eau, poussent à la mer une barque sans mâture et sans voiles, seule image maritime de cette seconde reine des mers. A Saïde, nous descendons au Kan français, immense palais de notre ancient commerce en Syrie [. . .]. Il n’y a plus de commerce, plus de Français; il ne reste à Saïde [. . .] qu’un ancient et respectable agent de la France, M. Giraudin, qui y vit depuis cinquante ans au milieu de sa famille tout orientale [. . .] – Dîné et dormi quelques heures dans cette excellente famille; [. . .] – Courses de djérid [. . .] – Marché deux heures encore, et couché sous nos tentes, à une fontaine charmante, au bord de la mer nommée *el-Kantara*. – Arbre gingantesque ombrageant toute la caravane. – Jardin délicieux [. . .] – Nuit sous la tente, hennissement des chevaux, cris des chameaux, fumée des feux du soir, lueur transparente de la lampe à travers la toile rayée du pavillon. – Pensées de la vie tranquille, du foyer, de la famille [. . .].” (I: 234-5)

In addition to references to nature and to lost civilization, the reader recognizes the author's inclusion of scenes of domestic tranquility. As an indication of the personal situation of the narrator, the unhurried, yet still impressive pace of the above passage, noteworthy as a testament to pre-industrial journeying, evidences signs of collective as well as personal strain. More than a picturesque backdrop, Lamartine's distillation of landscape vacillates between bitter fragments of desolation and moments of aesthetic enjoyment. Interchangeably, these vivid passing images transition from mental commentary concerning place and the remote third person, 'ceci, cela, eux', to moments of respite afforded 'nous' and, at their extreme, to near-hallucinatory visions 'ombrageuses' that express the interior struggle of 'moi'. The sight of Tyr, which confirms the traveler's doubt and disillusionment, serves as one such example.

From a recurring thematic of the period, the narrator's 'désenchantement' carries a semi-autobiographical tone: "voilà la Tyr d'aujourd'hui! Elle n'a plus de port sur les mers, plus de chemins sur la terre; les prophéties se sont dès long-temps accomplies sur elle"; "Nous marchions en silence, occupés à contempler ce deuil et cette poussière d'empire que nous foulions" (I: 236). From the broader perspective of the moment-to-moment effects of journeying, the author delivers on his titular premise: thoughts arise, bitter and sweet, overlapping with, yet never entirely overriding the visual narrative underway. Lamartine records simultaneously through both an objective and a subjective lens. The landscape appears from the perspective of heights and depths at consistent intervals of change: "la plaine est nue, jaune, couverte d'arbustes épineux [. . .]. [. . .] Nous suivions un sentier au milieu de la champagne de Tyr, entre la ville et les collines grises et nues que Liban jette au bord de la plaine. [. . .] à la hauteur même nous touchions un monceau de sable qui semble aujourd'hui lui fournir son seul rempart en attendant qu'il l'ensevelisse" (236). Here, the author inserts a rhythmic gentility into an arid landscape

whose lasting impression evokes the inevitable destiny of human civilization. Alternately, the narrator's propensity for interpreting signs—which, beyond its poetic function, points to a genuine desire to receive 'divine' inspiration—is prevalent as he gazes upon "le noir Liban." Lamartine's illusory vision of "cinq statues de pierre noire, posées sur le rocher comme un pedestal," initially mistaken for five Bedouins lurking above, recalls a few lines written shortly after his departure for the East in which he reconstructs the prophetic image: "cinq aigles de la plus grande race que j'aie jamais vue [. . .]. Ils semblaient la posséder de droit divin, instruments d'un ordre qu'ils exécutaient, d'une vengeance prophétique qu'ils avaient mission d'accomplir envers les hommes et malgré les hommes" (237). Echoing the recent words of Lady Stanhope, "vous avez une mission à accomplir," the author involves the reader in an ongoing personal struggle between a 'mortal' and an 'immortal' identity. His equation of 'l'imagination poétique', which, he acknowledges, shapes this last vision, if only to render its subjects "moins vrais, moins beaux et moins surnaturels encore qu'ils n'étaient," with "*le mens divinior* des poêtes," who, as prophetic mediums, speak "la vérité sans la savoir," underscores the conflicting aspects of his dual poetic (visionary) and political (strategic) roles.

To stray momentarily from the personal to the pictorial dimensions of his narrative, Lamartine's resort at intervals to a pastoral explanation of the traversed landscape, whose primary effect detracts from the visual immediacy of the narrative 'en movement', provides an example of the author's awareness of a readership acquainted with the popular images available in museums and in print: "On ne trouvera cet accord du grand et du doux, du fort et du gracieux, du pittoresque et du fertile, que dans les paysages imaginés de ces deux grands hommes [Poussin et Lorrain], ou dans la nature inimitable du beau pays que nous avions devant nous, et que la main du grand peintre suprême avait elle-même dessiné et coloré pour l'habitation d'un people

encore Pasteur et encore innocent" (246). This last reference demonstrates a tendency of Lamartine's to defer to, rather than to reject, as Chateaubriand does, the popular tropes of his period. Whereas Lamartine's visual reportage provides an abundance of descriptive imagery relative to the landscape he traverses (a secondary focus by comparison in *Itinéraire*), subsequent reflections invariably distance both the narrator and reader of *Voyage* from the experiential 'truth' of 'original' impressions. Whereas his predecessor vacillates between nonchalance and dismissiveness concerning the opinions of his prospective readers, the expectations as well as the limitations of Lamartine's prospective French readership remain important to *Voyage*'s narrative. This points less to authorial unreliability than to the politician's understanding of residual influence. In either case, the author intends at all times to serve public as well as private objectives.

As if to counter his earlier attempts to direct the outcome of his personal narrative, Lamartine nears the Holy Land as a sublimated version of 'moi', "sur le précipice, avec tous les accidents variés, sublimes, solennels de la nuit, de la lune, de la mer et des abîmes [. . .]" (239-40). His subsequent, gradual process of self-emptying is characterized by a conflicted relationship with the Holy site, which he views simultaneaously as "ces ruines" and "cette terre des miracles" (240). An additional comment, "toute terre ignorante est miraculeuse" (475), reveals the nature of his skepticism, which opposes cognition and (Biblical) grace.

The author's response to local inhabitants is correspondingly stratified. Bedouin men, for example, "couverts d'une seule pièce d'étoffe rayée noir et blanc, en poîl de chèvre, [étaient] assis en cercle non loin de nous, et nous contemplaient avec un regard de vautour" (249-50), surface intermittently in the text as a chosen figure of alterity. Arab women of Sephora, "vêtues exactement comme les femmes d'Abraham et d'Isaac, [. . .] pas voilées comme toutes celles que

nous avions vues jusque-là en Orient," appeal, conversely, to universal virtues that "les mœurs et les costumes ne peuvent altérer" (250). This thinly disguised Marian image, image of traditional domesticity, initiates a pivotal revelation: "Ce jour-là, commencèrent en moi des impressions nouvelles, et entièrement différentes [...]. J'avais voyagé des yeux, de la pensée et de l'esprit; je n'avais pas voyagé de l'âme et du cœur [. . .]" (250-1). Recalling a lineage of similar motifs, the narrator identifies this initial stage of his conversion with the first stirrings of an alternate consciousness within himself, or, as he puts it, "un changement de cœur." His reference to "une vierge innocente et pure," which recalls the author's early memory of his mother, "une âme aussi pieuse que tendre" (9), contains an element of autobiography. Such adjectives as "[quelque chose de] doux," "de miséricordieux," "de souffrant, de patient, de gémissant comme l'homme, de puissant, de surnaturel, de sage et de fort comme un Dieu," underscore his identification with a pacific Christian model, as opposed to the crusader's sword evoked by Chateaubriand. A subsequent pronouncement: "Je sentis que j'étais homme encore en paraissant devant l'ombre du Dieu de ma jeunesse!" (251), attests to the unaltered spirit of the evangelic project: "de [. . .] guérir [la terre] par ses prodiges et de [la] régénérer par sa mort" (254). At the same time, the author evokes the origins of the term *kata + holos* (Gr.), which refers to an all-inclusive, broadness of sympathies, when he speaks of "le parfum de la charité et de la vérité universelles." Once again, an impression of the domestic landscape, "les maisons blanches et gracieusement groupées de Nazareth," amid a gentle landscape of fig and pomegranate trees, participates in a succeeding stage of his *conversio*:

> Dieu seul sait ce qui se passa alors dans cœur; mais d'un movement spontané, et pour ainsi dire involontaire, je me trouvai aux pieds de mon cheval, à genoux dans la poussière [. . .]. J'y restai quelques minutes dans une contemplation muette, où

> toutes les pensées de ma vie d'homme sceptique et de chrétien se pressaient tellement dans ma tête qu'il m'était impossible d'en discerner une seule. Ces seuls mots s'échappaient de mes lèvres: *Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*. [. . .] je mouillai de quelques larmes de repentir, d'amour et d'espérance, cette terre qui en a vu tant répandre, cette terre qui en a tant séché, en lui demandant un peu de vérité et d'amour. (254-5)

If we contrast the above passage with Chateauriand's unemotional documentation of the physical details of the Stations of the Cross, Lamartine's experience emulates a lineage of penitential epiphanies codified during the Middle Ages. Indeed, Lamartine's emphasis upon "simplicité d'esprit," innocence, purity, and compassion, contrasts with the adversarial tendencies of the former. Beyond this, his tangible relationship with the land itself suggests multiple affinities as much as singular doubt.

Viewed from the larger perspective of his two-volume narrative, this last episode of prostration demonstrates the transformation required of his journey. Although its terms remain ambiguous and, the reader may concede, private, after Lady Stanhope's purported prophecy, confirming his future role in the East, Lamartine's conversion in the desert, at last, bequeaths him with the authority to re-present himself in France. His "Résumé politique," prefaced in *Voyage*'s second volume with such reservations as the following: "Mes ennemis désirent mon humiliation; sort cruel! Mon abaissement fait leur triomphe" ("Fragment du poëme D'Antar" 504), underscore the author's view of challenges awaiting him at home. His personal reservations notwithstanding, "Résumé" formally reintroduces a wiser, more experienced politician to the ongoing political discourses of his time.

> Pendant dix-huit mois de voyages, de vicissitudes et de loisirs, l'esprit pense, même involontairement. [. . .] Les différents aspects sous lesquels les choses humaines se présentent à lui les groupent et les illuminant; en histoire, en philosophie, en religion, l'homme raisonne instinctivement ce qu'il a vu, senti, conclu; des vérités instinctives se forment en lui, et, quand il s'interroge lui-même, il se trouve, sous bien des rapports, un autre homme. [. . .]. Mais l'homme cependant en voyageant ne se quitte pas soi-même [. . .]. La politique étant l'œuvre du jour pour l'Europe, et surtout pour la France, j'ai beaucoup pensé politique en Orient. (507)

The thirty-page treatise, which attempts to reclaim a future for French society after the collective "suicide de juillet," extends the personal dimensions of his journey to broader global issues. Herein, as I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the author proposes a 'solution' to earlier concerns expressed on the eve of his departure: most specifically, in the international sphere, his belief in an imminent escalation of conflict between 'les grandes puissance de l'Europe" (France, Germany, Austria, Russia), and, in the domestic sphere, "l'instruction répandu dans les masses" (513), followed by relocation of the peasant classes to urban centers. Even more comprehensively, Lamartine's concerns extend to an unfolding century "où le passé ne tient plus, où l'avenir se présente aux masses avec toutes les incertitudes, toutes les obscurities de l'inconnu" (508). He treads lightly at first, reminding his reader of his initial intention to impart wisdom to his generation, "à son tour": "dans l'ordre politique quelque chose s'est résumé dans mon esprit, le voici. C'est la seule page de ces notes d'un voyageur que je voudrais jeter à l'Europe, car elle contient une vérité à l'usage du jour, [. . .] elle peut féconder

l'avenir" (507-8). The scope of his prospectus, he allows, is both monumental and urgent: "Si elle est comprise et pratiquée, elle sauvera l'Europe et l'Asie, elle multipliera et améliora la race humaine; elle fera une époque dans l'existence laborieuse et progressive de l'humanité" (508). He directs his next assertion, a warning, to disbelievers: "Si elle est méconnue, repoussée parmi les rèves impracticables, pour quelques légères difficultés d'exécution, les passions bonnes et mauvaises de l'Europe feront explosion sur elle-même." Use of the Middle East, Lamartine posits, is instrumental to the solution of an impending social disaster: "comment répandre l'instruction et refouler les capacities qu'elle multiplie?" (515). The gist of Lamartine's argument is twofold: logistic, having to do with the overcrowding of cities and the tensions invariably produced by such pressures; a second concern, which he expresses soberly in *Sur la politique*, returns to the issue of class and right to govern.

> Il n'y a de vérité dans le pouvoir social moderne ou représentatif qu'autant qu'il y a vérité dans l'élection; et il n'y a de vérité dans l'élection qu'autant qu'elle est universelle. Cependant, si vous donnez l'élection à des classes qui ne la comprennent pas, ou qui ne peuvent pas l'exercer avec indépendance, vous la donnez fictive; c'est-à-dire vous la refusez réellement. (*P.R.* 74-5)

The processes of assimilation and equality, as he understands them, require time as well as supervision. To ignore these facts is to invite the chaos of the previous century.

> [. . .] il faut de nécessité absolue que l'expansion au dehors soit en rapport de l'immense expansion au dedans [. . .]. Sans cette expansion au dehors, [. . .] comment consacrer l'égalité en droit et la nier dans les faits? [. . .] comment enfin

> contenir ces masses de prolétariats qui s'acroissent sans cesse, armées, indisciplinées, ayant à lutter entre la misère et le pillage? (II: 515-6)

According to this formula, France, rapidly overrun with "l'excés de force [humaine]," has a duty to share her resources with "ces contrées où la force est épuisé et endormie" (516). Lamartine calls for the dismantling of Turkey as a power and the distribution of her region to Europe's major powers. Contrary to Chateaubriand, who would not have opposed the forced removal of the Turks in Palestine, Lamartine, an admirer, wishes to leave the population intact. His call for European colonization of Asia and Africa attempts to mitigate internal struggles within Europe: Russia has her eye on the Strait of Gibraltar, England and France vie for Egypt.[xlv] The European mission, as he envisions it, is one of comprehensive regeneration: "de proselytisme civilisateur, de travail industriel et agricole, d'emplois et de retributions de tout genre; [. . .] des religions à approfondir et à rationalizer, des fusions de mœurs et de peuples à consommer, l'Afrique, l'Asie et l'Europe à rapprocher et à unir [. . .]" (532-3). His intention, he asserts, precludes violence: "Il n'y a pas un coup de canon à tirer, pas une violence, pas une expropriation, pas une déplacement de population, pas une violation de religion ou de mœurs à autoriser" (532). Clearly, he leaves out of his consideration the wishes of the Middle-Eastern populations themselves.

Although it goes unmentioned by the author, and as critics of his scheme attest, failed initiative emerges as a tacit current throughout *Voyage*'s pages. Both Chateaubriand and Lamartine understood the challenges of their generations and sought to resolve them with the resources available to their intellects and imaginations. Lamartine's conflicted relationship with the Holy Land underscores the diminished popularity of the Christian topos for travelers and writers of the latter half of the century. The motif of failure persists, nevertheless, for Romantics

such as Nerval for whom ‘l’Orient’ (much as Chateaubriand concludes of the ideas of the eighteenth century) promises potential whose realization ‘en Chair’ sadly disappoints.

[i] See Edward Relph's definition, *Place and Placelessness* 170.
[ii] The letter appears in the preface of "De l'Allemagne." *Œuvres Complètes I*, "Publiés par son fils;" Paris: Chez Treuttel et Würtz, Librairies, 1820.
[iii] Relph, "Preface."
[iv] Douglas Collins. Lecture, November, 2012, University of Washington, Seattle.
[v] Buchez, *Introduction à la Science de l'Histoire*, 26-7; in D. O. Evans.
[vi] Evans 2-7.
[vii] This appears in an article published on April 15, 1834, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes.*
[viii] See Berchet, "Introduction," *Le Voyage en Orient* 3.
[ix] See M. de Tours, *Du Hachisch et de l'aliénation mentale*.
[x] See P. Bénichou's chapter on Lamartine, *Les Mages Romantiques*.
[xi] Guyot and Le Huenen.
[xii] The baron Geoffrey, an ancestor of Chateaubriand's, had participated in the Crusades with Louis IX.
[xiii] The execution of the Duc d'Enghien in 1804 precipitated his decisive break with the Napoleonic Empire.
[xiv] See P. Bénichou, "Chateaubriand et son siècle," *Chateaubriand Visionnaire.*
[xv] These last quotes cited in chapter VIII, "Un virtuose des ruines: Chateaubriand," in R. Mortier 175 and 177, respectively.
[xvi] See the chapter entitled "Chateaubriand en Orient."
[xvii] This would be Latin, Greek, 'Abyssins', Cophte, Armenian, Jacobites, Georgians, Maronites, respectively (274-5).
[xviii] See P. Bénichou, "Lamartine: La double mission," *Les mages romantiques* 21.
[xix] In *Correspondences*, t. I: 313; Bénichou 21-25.
[xx] See S. Moussa, "Lamartine et le rêve de fusion" 86.
[xxi] Mortier's specific reference is to the poem *Première Vision*, "composée selon Henri Guillemin entre janvier et mars 1824" (endnote iv).
[xxii] See Benis, *Romantic Diasporas* 6.
[xxiii] This rhetoric is reproduced in *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, ed. Cite, t. III, Appendice XIX: 750. See Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'Age Romantique*. Paris, Gallimard, 1977.
[xxiv] Tome II: 260-1; Bénichou 113.
[xxv] Bénichou 118.
[xxvi] In Mortier 174.
[xxvii] 1831 is the probable date here. See also the conclusion of *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, Edition du Centenaire, t.IV, 596; in Bénichou 112.
[xxviii] Lamartine, Letter to Mlle. de Canage, 28 January, 1819, *Correspondences* II: 9; *Les Mages Romantiques* 25.
[xxix] According to Meryon, Lady Hester wrote this in a letter to Henry Guys, French Consul at Beirut.
[xxx] Prince Pückler Muskau, quoting Lady Hester, in The Duchess of Cleveland 299.
[xxxi] "Il est question d'un entretien avec Royer-Collard en 1841, au temps où Lamartine était candidat à la présidence de la Chambre: 'Il lui dit de si étranges choses, que M. Royer se faisait scrupule de les répéter. Il a cependant confié à quelques amis dont la discrétion lui inspirait confiance, que M. de Lamartine avait sérieusement prétendu être le Messie revenu sur la terre pour y accomplir la rénovation de l'ordre politique et social'." In a similar incident, Lamartine

explained his reasons for refusing the position of minister or ambassador : "'Je l'ai évité parce que l'heure de ma mission n'était pas venue [...]'" (Bénichou 40).

[xxxii] See Moussa, "Lamartine: la rêve de fusion."

[xxxiii] Moussa points to a discrepancy between the poet's account of his visit to Lady Hester, dated September 30 in *Voyage*, and the actual time of his visit, September 13, a strategy designed to establish a reputation for the author in the region before his visit to Lady Hester: "En retardant, dans le récit, sa visite à Lady Stanhope, l''humble poëte' se transforme peu à peu en 'homme puissant', c'est-à-dire en seigneur dont le statut social est supérieur même à celui des féodeaux locaux" (110).

[xxxiv] Descendant of Lady Hester's, and one of her biographers, Roger Williams Day, asserts that the ceremonial crowning of the "English Queen" was likely orchestrated by Dr. Meryon, a member of her party, a lifetime admirer and detractor (226). Lamartine offers his own summary of this event in I: 166.

[xxxv] See S. Moussa, "Orientalisme et intertextualité," *Quinze études* 80.

[xxxvi] "Mais l'empire ottoman n'existe plus que de nom; sa vie est éteinte, son poids ne pèse plus; ce n'est plus qu'une vaste place vide que votre politique antihumaine veut laisser vide au lieu de l'occuper [...]" (II 524).

[xxxvii] See P. Bénichou and S. Moussa.

[xxxviii] "It is evident that Lady Hester applied the words of St. John to our Saviour" (Meryon I: 198).

[xxxix] See chapter III, "Conventions of Description," *Lamartine and the Poetics of Landscape*.

[xl] This appears in a volume that included "Essai sur les revolutions" and "Génie du Christianisme," Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

[xli] See J. Freccero, "The Prologue Scene," *Dante: the Poetics of Conversion* 19.

[xlii] Dante condemns Ulysses' 'folle volo,' *Inferno* XXVI.

[xliii] Freccero 15. The author quotes William of St. Thierry, *De nat. et dign. amoris* XI: 34 (PL 184, 401); also Courcelle, *Les 'Confessions'* 625.

[xliv] Bénichou, *Les Mages*.

[xlv] Moussa 103.

Nerval: All Roads, No Road, and Nowhere Left to Go

Five

La Route et la Vapeur: Destination and Discourse in *Lorely* and *Notes de Voyage*

In September and October of 1844, eight months after his return from the Orient, seven years before the definitive publication of his *Voyage en Orient*, Gérard de Nerval undertook a voyage to Belgium and Holland with contemporary poet, novelist, and rising critic, Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896) . The trip, contrary to the adventure of camaraderie that his narrative address to "mon cher Houssaye" might indicate, became, in effect, a solitary march for Nerval who complained of not enjoying the same "privilège de célébrité" as this companion, and a third elusive traveler, Théophile Gautier. The North had a practical as well as an imaginary allure for Nerval who had published his 'récits de voyage' as a *feuilletoniste* for *Le Messager*, *La Presse* and *L'Artiste* (Houssaye became editor in 1843), among other journals, beginning in 1838. Nerval's travel beyond French borders began in 1834, to Italy, and proceeded as follows: Belgium, in 1836, Germany's Rhine valley, in 1838 (with Dumas); between 1839-1840, he traveled to Switzerland, Germany, Vienna, Austria, and Belgium; in 1843 he traveled to Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, returning through Italy; in 1844 he returned to Belgium and Les Pays-Bas; followed by London, in 1849, Germany, in 1850, Belgium and Holland, in 1852, and, Germany, his final trip in summer of 1854.[i] *Lorely*, *Souvenirs d'Allemagne*, a compilation of travel articles from Germany, Belgium, and Holland, appeared in 1852 with *Léo Burckart*, a play written in collaboration with Aléxandre Dumas in 1838. *Notes de Voyage*, a compilation of travel notes, letters, and articles from later trips to Belgium, Holland, and England, appeared in 1855, by hasty arrangement of Houssaye and Gautier, months after Nerval's death in January of the same year.

As Hisashi Mizuno emphasizes in *Nerval, L'Écriture du Voyage* (2003), the narrative tones of *Lorely* and *Voyage* differ considerably. In Mizuno's assessment, the distinction is not merely topographical, but, rather, cardinal, between two polarities. Nerval's Northern narratives are noteworthy for their objective restraint. The author's interests, as well as his style, broaden in *Voyage en Orient*; he enjoys the enigma and multidimensional reality of the 'exotic' destination, its opportunity for disguise and metamorphosis, as well as for personal obliteration. For Nerval, unlike predecessors Chateaubriand and Lamartine, whose attachments are predominantly Christian, the Orient functions as a generic "autrefois," beginning with creation and fixed, by-and-large, in the non-Christian Middle Ages, with occasional reminders of Western influence: the Crusades, Napoleon, industrial expansion, and English tourism, to name a few contentious topics. The Orient is never entirely relegated to the East in Nerval's writing, as I will discuss, and, in the same vein as its less exotic counterpart, the North, functions as an ongoing discourse in relationship to Paris. This said, *Lorely* and *Notes*, although similar in structure and topography, are dissimilar enough in content and tone to merit attention in this discussion. The first text represents earlier articles for the most part; the second, correspondingly, represents later travels to the North. Nerval began to publish early fragments and parts of *Voyage* in various journals in 1844.

Beyond its financial motivations, Nerval's travel literature, "L'Orient de la quête" and "l'Allemagne de la ballade," is sympathetic at many levels with the grail tradition. Henri Bonnet attributes Nerval's attachment to the spirit and the aesthetics of the Middle Ages to a common trope of artists and writers of his time. The motif appears in three distinct areas that Bonnet identifies with "le style troubadour, le goût cathédrale, la passion du livre." Movement itself, I would add, and the rite of passage, are key components of Nerval's 'quête initiatique', both

textually and *in corpus*, particularly in *Voyage*, as Sarga Moussa discusses in his chapter entitled "Nerval Ethnologue," in *La Relation Orientale* (1995). The closed structure of the œuvre initiatique can be opposed to the open structure of such a work as *Sylvie*, for example, where the reintegration takes place between the Self and multiple facets of the divided self, rather than between the individual and the society to which the narrator returns. Adrienne, descendant of a family tied to ancient French royalty provides a model of transfiguration comparable to Dante's Beatrice. Virgil, Dante, and Goethe are important western models for trials of descent. The ultimate example is *Aurélia* where, contrary to the *Comedy*'s hero, the narrator of Nerval's last work descends into a torturous state of subjective illusion, where he remains, unable to thoroughly examine or to restructure the contents of his soul, his relationship to the world left in virtual limbo.[ii]

Personal quest, related to the journey of resuscitation, is evident in *Lorely*, which liberally indulges medieval associations with the Black Forest and the Rhine as topoi of magic and fatality. *Lorelei*, "la fée du Rhin," is the iconic figure of the quest in peril of going awfully wrong; "une chape de plomb qui pèse sur le destin des hommes" (Bonnet 23), an emotional trope for Nerval, coincides with his application of the literature of the Middle Ages to Romanticism. *Notes*, contrarily, relegates the personal quest to a predominantly mid-nineteenth century train of thought, tainted with narrative insinuation and ambiguity, which I will discuss further. *Voyage* translates the quest (I hesitate to use 'Crusade') into a personal metaphysic. For Nerval, "L'âge féodal" represents oppressive influences, such as the author's father, the military, and the police, "ses institutions immobiles comme la pierre du donjon qui les a gardées" (*V.O.* II: 134).[iii] At another level, the Middle Ages represent the quest for human contact, albeit through mystical encounters, wherein one's true princely nature (and destiny) might be unveiled (apocalypse). The

author's fusion of Christian martyrdom with Oriental 'altérité' is particularly evident in *Les Chimères* and in *Voyage*'s adaptation of the medieval Druse prince Caliphe Hakem, wherein the cross is aptly reconstituted as a 'symbole de la liberté'.[iv] The quest, which figures to varying degrees in all of the author's œuvre, comprises a personal vision, as well as an aesthetic and moral desire for the world.

As a recurring motif, the North, Germany in particular, maintains the aura of exile famously described by Mme. de Staël: "Les premières impressions qu'on reçoit en arrivant dans le nord de l'Allemagne, surtout au milieu de l'hiver, sont extrêmement tristes [...]. Cette frontière du Rhin est solennelle; on craint, en la passant, de s'entendre prononcer ce mot terrible: *Vous êtes hors de France*" (*De l'Allemagne* I: 126). Germany and the Valois region outside Paris have close associations for the author. The autobiographical component of Nerval's work is difficult to ignore. His mother, born in Ermenonville, died in Germany "à vingt-cinq ans des fatigues de la guerre," where she had followed Gérard's father, a military doctor during the Prussian War. The boy spent many of his childhood years in the Valois with maternal relatives until, at the age of seven, Dr. Labrunie, a 'méridional' from Périgord, returned to claim him. The author's view of his parents is fairly diametrical. In *Promenades et Souvenirs* he writes: "Je n'ai jamais vu ma mère, ses portraits ont été perdus ou volés; je sais seulement qu'elle ressemblait à une gravure du temps, d'après Prud'hon ou Fragonard, qu'on appelait *La Modestie*" (*Œuvres* III: 680). He describes his childhood impression of his father thus: "je jouais, insoucieux, sur la porte de mon oncle, quand trois officiers parurent devant la maison; l'or noirci de leurs uniformes brillait à peine sous leurs capotes de soldat. Le premier m'embrassa avec une telle effusion que je m'écriai: 'Mon père!... tu me fais mal!' De ce jour mon destin changea" (681).[v] Labrunie had

lost his dead wife's letters, hence all traces of her memory, while fording a German stream, as if to add, albeit at a personal level, to the oppositional relationship Midi-Nord introduced by Montesquieu and elaborated by Mme. de Staël.

The 'humble' origins of his mother's birthplace, his childhood home, near the forests of Compiègne, are rife with traces of the Romans, the legacy of the Carolingian dynasty, and the pre-revolutionary sentiment by which both his grandmother and his mother were given the names Marie-Antoinette and Laurence. The author attributes her letters "des bords de la Baltique ou des rives de la Sprée ou du Danube," as well as her birthplace, "dans une campagne isolée au milieu des bois," to an early aesthetic: "Le sentiment du merveilleux, le goût des voyages lointains ont été sans doute pour moi le résultat de ces impressions premières [...]." Similarly, "La fièvre dont elle est morte" surfaces in Nerval's adult life with "des images de deuil et de désolation qui ont entouré mon berceau," a reference to his recurring bouts of depression and madness. Place, always at least summarily related to the real, tends to evoke different versions of this traumatic paradigm in Nerval's texts, which is not to say that he doesn't explore alternatives. Nerval's writing, his travel narratives in particular, contain an ethnographic component relative both to the cultures under scrutiny and to French post-1830 (and, in the larger scheme, European) anxieties concerning the effects of industrial expansion on rural and urban societies. He gives us, interchangeably, the photographic impression and, in Denis Cosgrove's words "the external world mediated through human subjective experience" (qtd. in Lippard 7).

According to Françoise Chenet-Faugeras, the nineteenth-century literary landscape, contrary to landscape painting, is less a genre unto itself than a form of writing that defines a particular relationship between humans and the world, most specifically, a vision of the world.[vi] Nerval's Germany, like the French Valois, Paris, and Cairo, for instance, is an unmistakable

place of self-encounter and mediation of personal and historical loss. Post-Revolutionary and Napoleonic anxieties contributed to what became the general spirit of revolt of his generation, particularly after the collapse of 1830, which spawned such sentiments as "Tu demandes pourquoi j'ai tant de rage au cœur/ Et sur un col flexible une tête indomptée" ("Anteros," *Chimères*, 1841). Older Romantic contemporaries, such as Lamartine, looked to spiritual and political resolutions. Nerval's twenty-something (at the time) contemporaries responded with anger and disappointment. "La France n'est plus qu'une maison de fous," Arsène Houssaye lamented in retrospect, in 1885, "aux journées de Juillet [1830], on dévalait en plein Charenton; aux journées de Février [1848], on passait de Charenton à Bicêtre" (*Les Confessions* II: 159).[vii] Throughout his lifetime, Nerval tried, with limited success, to convice his father of his literary career. The difficulty of this assignment is characterized by periodic altercations with the authorities and, particularly after 1840, by recurring bouts of madness. Likewise, letters beginning with "Mon cher papa" reveal equal amounts of dependency and defiance concerning a father whose approval and financial assistance remained important.

For Nerval, the impetus north ranges from literary and cultural fascination to frustration over paternal, i.e. Parisian pressures, and personal disasters in need of re-imagination. After the failure, in 1836, of his *Monde Dramatique*, tied to his romantic attachment to actress Jenny Colon, Nerval traveled to Belgium with Gautier, with whom he collaborated unsuccessfully. In the same year, his *Piquillo*, written in collaboration with Aléxandre Dumas, was accepted at L'Opéra Comique. Anxiety over the postponed performance is the likely prototype for the author's representation of his first trip to Germany (1837-8) in *Sylvie*. German literary influences include Hoffman, Schiller, Goethe, and Heine, to name the most important. Nerval had translated Hoffman. His first translation of *Faust*, published in 1828, was well received by its author; he

published a second translation in 1840. He had formed friendships and received advice from Loèvre-Veimars, Eugène de Stadler (whose family origins were German), and Heinrich (Henri) Heine, who had come to Paris after the 1830 revolution, and for whom he translated excerpts of *Nordsee*, *Intermezzo*, and a biographical work, in collaboration with Théophile Gautier, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1848.[viii] Heine (a bed-ridden paralytic after an illness in 1848), with whom Nerval identified more keenly because of his own psychological trials, became one of several alter egos, a *double*, and the eventual prototype for the heroine's possessive paralytic husband in *Octavie*. As a 'berceau' within a larger rubric known as 'le Nord', Germany, for Nerval, is the land of loss, death, persecution, and otherworldly shadows, aesthetic as well as psychological tropes ubiquitously associated with the author's œuvre.

La Route

Nerval's 1844 trip to Belgium, purportedly *with* Houssaye, is tainted with neediness and a sense of social displacement, particularly in light of the public embarrassment of "Ma première crise" (1841), which, in spite of his assurances to his father before his departure, travels to the Orient had as yet failed to erase. "Tu ne saurais croire combien j'ai été affecté de te quitter surtout en voyant que cela te faisait de la peine," the author writes to his father from Lyon, in a letter dated "25 Décembre, 1842," "Mais avec le caractère que j'ai je me trouve souvent si malheureux de la vie de Paris que les personnes qui m'aiment ne doivent pas être fachées que j'y échappe parfois. [...] L'hiver dernier a été pour moi déplorable [...]." Nerval had hoped for some resuscitation, if not reinvention *en Orient*: "il fallait sortir de là par une grande entreprise qui effaçât le souvenir de tout cela et me donnât aux yeux des gens une physionomie nouvelle. Tâche donc de considérer la réalisation de ce projet comme un grand bonheur qui m'attive et le gage d'une

position à venir" (*Œuvres Complètes* I: 1387). For some additional perspective, *Lorely* begins with the author's dedication, read complaint, to Jules Janin, ten years after the critic had published a sarcastic obituary of him in the *Journal des Débats*, in March of 1841: "Ceux qui l'ont connu pourraient dire au besoin toute la grâce et toute l'innocence de ce gentil esprit qui tenait si bien sa place parmi les beaux esprits contemporains" ("A Jules Janin"). Nerval's relationship to Paris was disappointingly unaltered after his "projet" abroad. In an 1846 article, entitled "Angleterre et Flandre," eventually part of the compilation that became *Notes de Voyage* (1855),[ix] Nerval addresses Houssaye:

> Il faut vous figurer, mon ami, que je suis étranger à tout journal français depuis un mois, que je vous écris d'un bateau voguant sur la Moselle, et, si mes idées sont arrièrées, excusez-moi, j'ai trois jours à vivre ainsi d'une existence purement mécanique en remontant de Coblenz jusqu'à Metz; je vous ennuie pour me désennuyer.
>
> Maintenant, il faut bien l'avouer, la courbe parabolique que j'ai tracée pour éviter ce malencontreux chemin du Nord m'a promené déjà sur deux mers et sur plusieurs fleuves; l'Océan a eu pour moi des tempêtes et des sourires; le Rhin m'a reconnu comme un vieil ami de ses vignes et de ses bords. (*Œvres* II: 851-2)

The author's tone shows some evidence of cultural readjustment after his return from the Orient, his concern with being out of touch with the issues of the moment. The pressures of Paris are characteristically present. Travel north, always a mixed blessing, amounts to little more than a stopgap. The reader, along with the author, begins to question his purpose. In *Notes*, Nerval refers more than once to his inferior status vis-à-vis Houssaye: "Je dis mon compagnon de voyage sans savoir encore seulement si je le rejoindrai ailleurs qu'au bout du monde, ou, pour

mieux dire, à Paris. Jusqu'ici, nous avançons parallèlement vers l'Allemagne, à cinquante lieues l'un de l'autre, et les journaux seulement des villes qu'il traverse m'apportent tous les matins de ses nouvelles [...]" (886). The writer's's marginal status with regard to Houssaye reflects a period of *désœvrement* after the Orient, as well as his reputed reliance upon the connections and successes of his literary friends. Nerval had roomed in Paris with both Houssaye and Gautier for some years, beginning in 1835. In contrast with the body of scholarship that has depicted Nerval's literary counterpart as the carefree traveler, tirelessly pursuing "une surface toujours recommencée" (Richard 16), *Notes* depicts a slow mover, encumbered by the uncertainty of his status, his dearth of funds, and the inconveniences of the road. The lack of initiative of this traveler, rather than creating an impression of the spirited individualist (often associated with the author), draws attention to Nerval's fear of lagging behind, literally, and in a career whose sparse successes have left him in the shadow of more illustrious contemporaries.

Janin had accused Nerval, a borrower of styles as well as texts (*Gemmy*, *Angélique*) of being impassioned with "les livres d'autrui bien plus que pour ses propres livres" (the author quotes Janin: "A Jules Janin," *Lorely* 17). The persistence of the author's concerns are evident ten years later, in a letter to his father from Baden-Baden, dated May 31, 1854, less than a year before his death: "Ma longue maladie m'a fait contracter des engagements qu'il faut remplir. [...] Enfin chacun place sa devoir et son idéal où il peut. Aujourd'hui je dois à la confiance des personnes qui m'ont soutenu de faire quelque chose de bon, peut-être d'utile" (in Bony, *L'Esthétique de Nerval*, SEDES, Liège, 1997). Similarly, in his dedication to Janin, Nerval complains belatedly of the social stigma resulting from the critic's condemnation. "On m'avait cru mort de ce naufrage, et l'amitié, d'abord inquiète, m'a conféré d'avance des honneurs que je ne rappelle qu'en rougissant, mais dont plus tard peut-être je me croirai plus digne" ("A Jules

Janin"). In Nerval's exaggerated, albeit tragi-comic account, of his poor reception in Germany, the country, much like the critic, acquires the function of "ami perfide."

The respective narratives of his trips to the North, to Germany, before his departure for the Orient, the latter, with Houssaye, less than one year after his return, point to Nerval's grappling, not only with a perceived marginal status as an author and among his friends, but also with the limiting discourses of his day. Paris, much as the looming shadow of his father, naggingly reminds him of a series of failures whose solution he persistently seeks in the northern escape: "Pourquoi ne pouvais-je travailler à Paris, c'est que je n'écris que de fantaisie ou d'entousiasme, et il me faut pour cela le grand air et la liberté" ("Lettre à son père" (31 mai 1854), de Baden-Baden; in Bony 162). By his own account, "la vielle Allemagne," homeland of Goethe, of Schiller, of Hoffman, as well as Lorely, "fée radieuse des brouillards," becomes a "grace trompeuse." Behind the enchanted gates, Nerval writes, "il n'y a souvent qu'une prosaïque nature, un horizon décoloré" (*Lorely*). The poet's entry into the Black Forest reveals a poor emotional and financial state, as he remarks, quoting Rabelais, "*Faute d'argent, c'est douleur sans pareille*" ("Lorely," *Œuvres Complètes* 974).

In Germany, notably, the marginality, even the shame of the voyager, increasingly influences the tenor of the voyage, a paradigm that Nerval associates less with his recent crisis than with the premature obituary of Janin. The infamy of *"un défunt,*" which resurfaces later in relationship to Aléxandre Dumas, another mentor and fickle friend whose premature obituary the author responds to in his 1853 publication of *Les Filles du Feu*, is sadly evident in his relationship with Houssaye. Nerval complains to Janin that his marginality does not end at Parisian (nor at French) borders, it follows him abroad:

> Quand j'ai traversé de nouveau les vielles forêts de pins de chênes et les cités bienveillantes où m'attendaient des amis inconnus, je ne pouvais parvenir à leur persuader que j'étais moi-même. On disait: 'Il est mort, quel dommage! une vive intelligence, bonne surtout, sympathique à notre Allemagne, comme à une seconde mère, - que nous apprécions seulement depuis son dernier instant illustré par Jules Janin... Et vous qui passez parmi nous, pourquoi dérobez-vous la seule chose qu'il ait laissée après lui, un peu de gloire autour du nom. Nous les connaissons trop ces aventuriers de France, qui se font passer pour des poètes vivants ou morts, et s'introduisent ainsi dans nos cercles et dans nos salons!' Voilà ce que m'avaient valu les douzes colonnes du *Journal des Débats,* seul toléré par les chancelleries; -- et dans les villes où j'étais connu personnellement, on ne m'accueillait pas sans quelque crainte en songeant aux vielles légendes germaniques de vampires et de morts-fiancés. Vous jugez s'il était possible que, là même, quelque *bourgeois* m'accordât sa fille *borgne* ou *bossue*. C'est la conviction de cette impossibilité qui m'a poussé vers l'Orient. (*Lorely* 23)

Sarcasm notwithstanding, the author's lament of his post-crisis status pushes at the margins of prevalent medical as well as popular thought concerning mental illness. Ineluctably, Janin's shadow in Germany reinvigorates the loss of the mother and annihilation by the father. If his reception "en mort" in Germany troubles the traveler, he is that much more troubled by the apparent irrevocability of his situation in 'real time'. Janin becomes, in effect, the assassin of "ce gentil esprit" (Janin, qtd. in *Lorely* 14-5).[x] Nerval's alienation provides unwitting impetus for his recourse to the Orient, a 'lieu commun' in 19th century discourses on madness and 'altérité', as well as for experiments in self-regeneration.[xi]

Much like his reputation as a 'fabulist', Nerval's reputation as an opportunistic follower of more renowned contemporaries is an incomplete perspective. As Hisashi Mizuno affirms in his argument, mentioned above, evidence suggests that the author's tendency to resort to the "clichés de son époque" in his travel narratives is less a sign of his convenient acquiescence to stronger voices than a tactic of subversion[xii] as he invariably finds ways to devalue or to overturn overwrought standards "pour affirmer sa propre création" (Mizuno 11). Chateaubriand had provided a model for the oppositional stance after the appearance of his *Voyage au Mont-Vésuve* and *Voyage au Mont-Blanc*, dated January 1804 and August 1805, respectively: he defied the dangers of the volcano, climbing into its cavity, and denied the aesthetic merits of the latter.[xiii] For this matter, we observe signs of "déception" much earlier in Pertrach's seminal *L'Ascension de Mont Ventoux*. Opposition between the 'Midi' and 'le Nord', which I discussed briefly above, extends beyond the topographical boundaries of the 19th century. The Romantic question becomes one of psychological as well as of geographical polarities, "de telle manière que l'itinéraire dans l'Allemagne du midi est intégré aux pérégrinations en Orient" (Mizuno 16).

For Nerval, the psychological distinction becomes increasingly relevant after 1841, following his first mental crisis and eight-month internment at the clinic of Dr. Esprit Blanche, which spawned Janin's public disparagement and, in a later episode, an embarassing article by Dumas. Concomitant with (if not entirely contrary to) attributions of a host of Nervalian scholars, contemporary critics, and ambivalent friends, such as 'Henri' Heine, who designated him "plutôt une âme qu'un homme" (qtd. in Dédéyan 82), Nerval's travel narratives, resulting from his trips to Northern European countries: Germany, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and Austria, particularly in their earliest permutations as "articles de feuilleton," are noteworthy for

their journalistic, at times dry ethnographic style. Because of his familial and literary affiliation with Germany, mentioned earlier in this chapter, and post-*crise*, German landscape elicits imaginary wanderings into ecological and mythological lore suggested by the country's famous river and the Black Forest. The roads of Germany and the Netherlands, on the other hand, much like the French "route," designate a discursive terrain encompassing technological, linguistic, cultural, and religious concerns unique to post-1830 French discourse and psychology. Not least among these concerns is a vacillation between nostalgia for the "ancien" and anxiety over futurist perspectives and endeavors of the period, for which the locomotive, or "la machine à vapeur" have become common metaphors, both within and beyond French borders. In this matter, Nerval's affinities prove as technologically biased as they are culturally ambivalent:

> Les locomotives allemandes ne sont pas douées de la puissance nerveuse que possèdent celles d'Angleterre et de Belgique... (Je craindrais de faire de la réclame en parlant des nôtre.) Le spirituel écrivain viennois Saphir prétendait que les locomotives allemandes avaient des *motifs* pour rester *in loco*; – cela tient, je pense, au désir de garder les voyageurs le plus longtemps possible dans cette multitude de petits États souverains qui ont chacun leur douane, leurs hôtels, ou même leurs simple buffets de station dans lesquels le vin, la bière et la nourriture se combinent pour vous donner une idée avantageuse des productions du pays. Dans les voitures on fume, dans les stations on boit et on mange. C'est toujours par ces deux points essentiels qu'il a été possible de dompter les velléités libérales de ce bon peuple allemand. (Lorely 84)

These scheduled stops, rather ironically, bring to the fore the value attributed to the preservation of the local. Reference to "de petits États souverains" recalls Lamartine's preoccupation with the balance of European powers in his "Résumé Politique," a conclusion to his *Voyage en Orient* (1833). For Nerval, the motif is more closely associated with the infringements upon personal liberties that borders represent. The author remains conspicuously non-committal concerning the aesthetic infractions of the machine, a topic of divided discourse among many of his contemporaries. "Flânerie," both a textual device epitomized by the words "Et puis..." (*Angélique*) and a method of travel (Nerval was a renowned 'noctambule'), becomes a metaphor for the author's spiritual affinity, as well as his discomfort, with the machine of the age. Methods of reportage and of travel differ from country to country. The traveler uses "les voitures" in Switzerland and the 'chemin de fer' in Belgium. In Germany and in Holland, he becomes a 'piéton.' Prior to his definitive publication of *Lorely* and *Voyage*, Nerval's articles as a 'feuilletoniste' targeted readers interested in the minutia of day-to-day impressions concerning foreign customs, methods of transportation, food, lodging, passing sights and sensations, particularly from the close proximity of the flâneur's perspective. The intention of *La Presse* was to deliver the immediacy of movement and foreign news to sedentary Parisians who, with the traveler, can enjoy moderate demystification of the foreign at their mutual expense: "Quoi! le Rhin ne baigne pas les murs de Strasbourg, le pied de sa vielle cathédrale?... Hélas! non. Le Rhin à Strasbourg et la mer à Bordeaux sont deux grandes erreurs du Parisien sédentaire" (*Lorely* 28). Like other tourists, Nerval obtains most of his information from travel guides and defers to contemporaries such as Dumas (*Impressions de Voyages*, 1833), whom he mentions only as "un de nos célèbres écrivains touristes" (*La Presse*, 1840; Mizuno 68); "Mon illustre compagnon de voyage put emporter de ce spectacle une *impression* assez complète pour que je doive me

dispenser d'en rendre compte au public avant ou après lui" (*Lorely* 61). Concerning the history of Carl Sand, assassin and prototype for the poorly received *Léo Burkart* (1838),[xiv] initially in collaboration with Dumas, he writes: "Je ne prétends pas raconter cette histoire si connue, que d'ailleurs l'autre plume, plus sûre et plus dramatique, anouvellement retracée dans tous ses détails; je glane seulement quelques souvenirs échappés ou négligés comme de peu d'importance [...]" (63).

Beyond the most obvious function of orienting the tourist and correcting the vague impressions and misconceptions of the uninitiated, the guides absolve the traveler/feuilletoniste from any inclination to further comment upon "les richesses artitstiques," unless to modify or add to the enigma of earlier impressions as he does in Manheim: "Je n'oserais affirmer que le portail [de l'église des Jésuites] ne soit pas orné de divinités mythologiques; peut-être aussi sont-ce de simples allégories chrétiennes; mais alors la *Foi* ressemblerait bien à Minerve, et la *Charité* à Vénus."[xv] By the time of the publication of his *Voyage en Orient*, Nerval masters the irony of the bemused traveler: "il semble partout à Munich que la peinture ne coûte rien; mais le marbre, la pierre et l'or sont épargnés davantage. Ainsi ce palais superbe est construit en briques [...]; ces murailles éclatantes, ces colonnes de portore et de marbre de Sienne, approchez-vous, frappez-les du doigt, c'est du stuc" (*V.O.* I: 80). By comparison, the fantastic, largely relegated to the title reference in *Lorely*—La Forêt-Noire evokes "ces livres véridiques ressemblent aux romans de chevalerie, qui n'oserait nous apprendre quel a été tel jour le gîte et le souper de leur héros" (37)—is virtually non-existent in *Notes*.

Both *Notes* and *Lorely* combine the retrospective first person narrative and the travel letter, written in the present tense and addressed to a specified recipient. The author maintains yet considerably amplifies this approach in *Voyage* whose narrative perspective combines the

quotidian view of the "flâneur au hasard" with detailed, often sober descriptions of people, conditions, and place. The author pays circumspect attention to natural "attractions," such as the Mont Blanc and the Lac de Léman, already assimilated within the "encyclopédie virtuelle" (Mizuno 66) of the Romantic consciousness. First favorable impressions from Lausanne, "Le lac s'étend à droite à perte de vue, étincelant des feux du soleil [...]. Les cimes de neige couronnent cette perspective d'Opéra, et, sous la terrasse, à nos pieds, les vignes jaunissantes se déroulent en tapis jusqu'au bord du lac" (*V.O.*I: 67), are quickly mitigated with dismissive irony: "Voilà, comme dirait un artiste, le *ponsif* de la nature suisse; depuis la décoration jusqu'à l'aquarelle, nous avons vu cela partout [...]." A cliché of the period is to abhor the clichés of the period.

The psychological trope of Nerval's wanderings, or "le vrai Nerval," "celui qui voyage pour se guérir" (Richard 71-2), evident in *Lorely*, particularly as prefaced by his dedication to Jules Janin, is not fully developed until his definitive publication of *Voyage*, becoming, ultimately, an all-consuming metaphysic in *Aurélia*. Ross Chambers (paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari) has associated Nerval's perpetual roaming with melancholia, a condition characterized by the lack of one's 'own' space (an affliction of the industrial age that we might as easily equate with parental inequity, excesses and deficiencies), and by the identification of the 'self' with the (frequently misconceived) 'other' (Chambers, 1991), whether sympathetic (albeit problematic), such as Heine, or otherwise, Faust, for example, and the German *Doppelgänger*, a sign of imminent death.

We recognize similar grappling with opposites as equals in the author's treatment of France and Prussia, "les petits" vs. "les grands puissances," a literary legacy of his aristocratic predecessors, among them Lamartine, as earlier mentioned. Nerval's opposition of the French-speaking 'Midi' and the Germanic 'Nord' tends to focus on economic disparity and religious

incompatibility: “Du reste, Genève, comme toutes les villes du Midi, n’est pavée que de cailloux” (*V.O.*I: 66). The cathedrals of Lausanne (le Midi) and Francfort (le Nord) are “catholique dehors et protestante dedans;” “Ne va pas croire maintenant que Lausanne soit la plus riante ville du monde. Il n’est rien.” Lausanne’s cathedral, “une fort belle église gothique, [est] gâtée et dépouillée aujourd’hui par sa destination protestante, comme tout les cathédrales de la Suisse, magnifiques au-dehors, froides et nues à l’intérieur:” Protestantism “tue l’esprit” (67). Calvin, Nerval reminds us, “fit rôtir Michel Servet *avec du bois vert*, afin que le supplice durât plus long-temps” (1840; *Pléiades* II: 1408; Mizuno 55). Elsewhere, Nerval treats such national and linguistic distinctions as those offered by Mme. de Staël, “C’est l’imagination, plus que l’esprit, qui caractérise les Allemands” (*De l’Allemagne* I: 34), with characteristic irony.

> N’imagine-t-on pas, quand on va passer la frontière d’un pays, qu’il va tout à coup éclater devant vous dans toute la splendeur de son sol, de ses arts et de son genie?... Il n’en est pas ainsi, et chaque nation ne se découvre à l’étranger qu’avec lenteur et réserve [...].
>
> Tout en songeant cela, nous avons traversé le Rhin; nous voici sur le rivage et sur la frontière germanique. Rien ne change encore; nous avons laissé des douaniers là-bas, et nous en retrouvons ici; seulement ceux de France parlaient allemand, ceux de Bade parlent français; c’est naturel. Kehl est aussi une petite ville toute française, comme toutes les villes étrangères qu’avoisinent nos frontières. Si nous voulons observer une ville allemande, retournons à Strasbourg.” (*Lorely* 29)

Aesthetically speaking, Nerval shows ubiquitous affinity for hybrids (*Les Chimères*); the effects of locomotion and industrial expansion only contribute to this subtext, as to the above reflections. In a similar vein, Cassel, "cette petite ville [à] l'aspect morne et paisible," resembles "Paris l'avant-veille de la révolution de Juillet" (86).[xvi] Temporal moods as well as cultural distinctions comingle in increasingly blurry fusion. Paris "absorbe tout" (136), just as "une ville en bois dans une ville en briques" in Holland evokes "des plus belles rues de Stamboul pendant les nuits de Ramazan" (145). The North establishes Paris as a hub in relationship to an ever-expanding web of peripheries that begin to include the idea of that other 'ailleurs', the Orient.

Germany, "cette ondine fatale [...] [qui] m'attire encore une fois" (*Lorely* 14), would seem a paradoxical choice for Nerval as a place to rid himself of the stigma of premature interment, as he self-mockingly complains to Janin: "Je serais toutefois plus allemand encore que vous ne pensez si j'avais intitulé la présente épître: Lettre d'un mort, ou Extraits des papiers d'un défunt [...]" (23). His quandary, nevertheless, introduces an interesting prospect for resolution in the figure of Prince Pückler-Muskau, another alter-ego, and a traveler in his own right (*Lettres d'un Trépassé*, 1830).[xvii] Nerval is concerned with a detail in particular concerning the prince.

> C'est pourtant ce prince fantasque et désormais *médiatisé*, qui m'avait donné l'idée de parcourir l'Afrique et l'Asie. Je l'ai vu un jour passer à Vienne, dans une calèche que le monde suivait. Lui, aussi, avait été cru mort, ce qui donna sujet à une foule de panégyriques et commença sa reputation;—par le fait, il avait traversé deux fois le lac funeste de *Karon*, dans la province égyptienne du Fayoum. [...] Depuis ce jour je ne fis que rêver à l'Orient. (*Lorely* 23)

Pückler-Muskau's persona, although largely fantastic, establishes a new kind of peer/authority figure for the marginalized author, both redemptive and exotic, a rhetorical

response *in vitus* to Janin's widespread condemnation. The prince allowed Nerval to translate the Orient not only as a locus of resuscitation but also as a platform for his own defense. The patient never entirely accepted his diagnosis from Dr. Blanche in 1841: 'Théomanie' (also mégalomanie).

As to the full extent of the Prince's influence, Nerval gives us a similar figure of alterity/resurrection in *Voyage*'s "Histoire du Calife Hakem," inspired by the 10th century Druse prince: "je voulus connaître enfin la vie de cet illustre Hakem, que les historiens ont peint comme un fou furieux, mi-parti de Néron et d'Héliogabale" (*V.O.* II: 62). As Juan Rigoli establishes in his article "Les Orient de la Folie," Cairo's Moristan prison and asylum, where Hakem is committed against his will, "Seul maître de sa raison au milieu de ces intelligences égarées" (88), functions as a thinly disguised argument against the medical discourses of the period.[xviii] The "incognito" the author chooses over the black suit in Cairo remains the "habit de choix" even after his return from the Orient.

Nerval had written the "Roi de Bicêtre" (*Les Illuminés*) in 1839, two years before his first crisis. He had boasted (to Aléxandre Weill) descendency from Napoléon, signed a letter to Jules Janin "G. Nap[oléon] della Torre Brunya," and invented a genealogical association between Labrunie and Imperial Germany dating back to the chivalric period. None of this is surprising, given Nerval's fertile imagination and his propensity for spirited exaggeration. At the same time, the psychology of crucifixion exacerbated by Janin's article was hard to ignore. Nerval's shadow existence after his return from the Orient, such as it appears in *Notes*, reestablishes the North as a marginal, if intermediary realm for a traveler whose reception proves as inhospitable as his earlier release from the clinic of Dr. Blanche: "Vous croyez donc que l'hiver vient du nord? c'est un conte; ici même on vous dira qu'il vient de Paris" (*Œuvres* II: 868). If *Lorely*'s Germany,

failing as a first resort for personal and professional resuscitation, elicits a "soif d'Égypte," the North, post-Orient, forces the traveler to contend with the ambiguity of his personal and professional situation for which the general indifference of his friends is indicative. Houssaye at least provides a discursive, if somewhat ambivalent, distraction via a popular discourse of his day, "le cri contre l'industrie." The argument, already a movement among artists across the channel, develops roughly as follows in France.

Vapeur

Houssaye's article, "De la Poésie, de la Vapeur et du Paysage," a banner of Romantic angst, appeared in *L'Artiste*, in February of 1842. Its author laments the period's surge of industrial development and its effect on poetry: "Vous dites que la poésie s'en va; [...] que le monde s'en va. Le monde vieillit, le monde est vieux. [...] La vapeur et l'industrie vous suivent, vous touchent, vous dévorent, vous dépassent [...]." The gist of Houssaye's message is eschatological—the author evokes both the Golden Age and the Deluge—adopting what we might refer to as a *complex* version of the *pastoral* narrative, which, at its core, is concerned with human susceptibility to cataclysm, environmental and/or manmade. His association of technological progress with the anxieties of aging connotes something of a latter-day version of youthful disappointment and anxiety after the collapse of 1830. In this case, the French countryside becomes the barometric indicator.

> Je reviens à mon paradoxe: le monde viellit. N'assistons-nous pas au déclin de la jeunesse? Voyez comme il est dévoré par les vanités, le doute et le désenchantement [...]. Ainsi, grâce à la vapeur qui promène l'industrie sur ses

> ailes flambantes, le paysage solitaire, le refuge des âmes pieuses et fleuries, ne sera plus en France dans un demi-siècle. (99)

Houssaye's concerns coincide with French post-Revolutionary anxieties and general public discomfort with a surge in industrial and railway expansion in France, which contributed not only to French peasant migration away from agricultural regions to the city, but also to a proliferation of 'new' travelers from various stations of society. According to Marc Desportes, in *Paysages en Mouvement: Transport et Perception de l'Espace, XVIIIe-XXe Siècle* (2005), everything begins with British mines of the eighteenth century, where the steam engine found its first usage. The success of Britain's Liverpool-Manchester railway in 1830 altered standards of human labor and opened up travel to a larger public. The debate, which developed more slowly in France, began by 1833; the Paris-Saint-Germain line was inaugurated in 1837. After the financial crisis of 1838-1839, the French "loi ferroviaire" of 1842 designated the construction of seven major roads, radiating from the capital to important French cities, with two transverse lines, followed in 1843 by the construction of smaller rail lines such as Rouen-Le Havre, Paris-Rouen, Avignon-Marseille, and so on.

For observers, the French countryside began to communicate a new set of cultural values, related to economic interests and competition. Preoccupation with the countryside reflected concerns over the seemingly uncontrollable direction of society symbolized by both aesthetic and monetary sacrifices, particularly among the aristocracy who associate the given characteristics of the landscape with moral character. For travelers, the railroad is a mixed blessing, as Desportes relates:

> Pour tous les voyageurs, le premier trajet en chemin de fer est précédé de sentiments très mêlés. Pour certains, c'est une aventure merveilleuses, pour d'autres, une véritable épreuve. [...] D'un côté, le train est glorifié; c'est l'instrument du progrès, certes matériel, mais aussi spirituel, puisque, reliant tous les peuples du monde, il est un facteur de paix. De l'autre, on redoute cette innovation, considérée comme dangereuse, voire inhumaine. (123)

Tensions result between the intellectual formation of the individual, associated with "les voyages difficiles de la vielle France," and the practical and experimental objectives of the "voyageur moderne" (Mizuno 63). Not all of public response was negative. Alexandre Dumas preferred "un mécanicien, à deux rails et à une trentaine de sacs de charbon" to "un cocher ivre et à deux chevaux bien repus." From other quarters, commentary ran anti-English, depicting the "*rail-wail*" as nothing more than "un cheval anglais du plus pur sang et et du plus pur acier." Nerval noted the sentiment in Belgium, in 1844, in a song: "Guerre aux tyrans! dans la Belgique,/ Jamais l'Angleterre ne régnera" (in Mizuono 77).[xix] Houssaye addresses an artistic, rather than an aristocratic, elite. Conditions inside factories do not enter the discussion. The relationship remains between an exterior landscape, which by definition is 'viewed' and not lived in, and the receptivity of the artist for whom the environmental concern is aesthetic, rather than ecological.

The above discourse, in conjunction with the nineteenth century trope of rewriting Virgil,[xx] favors one of two prevalent positions I've alluded to above, which is to say, reactionary: Romantic at its core, rooted in nostalgia and fear of the future. For Houssaye, the emblem of bucolic disruption is steam, "la vapeur," product of the steam engine, and smoke, "la fumée des

fabriques," obscuring the horizon. Not only the presence of smoke and steam, but also their conduits, the chimneys and smoke stacks that litter the countryside, as well as large fields of potatoes and beets, deprived of trees, become transgressive elements in the nineteenth century landscape, interfering with the stuff of poetry. Compatible with the Virgilian motif, urban chaos is seen by Houssaye, and many of his contemporaries, to be spilling out and infecting the rural zones, killing the muse.

From a more contemporary social perspective, Houssaye's complaint articulates what Edward Relph defines as the phenomenon of placelessness, "the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that result from an insensitivity to the significance of place" (Relph, 1976). We observe this phenomenon in the virtual sterilization of mythologically 'sanctified' places such as the Black Forest, via tourism, and with the assumption of southern Germany, for example, as well as the Orient at large, under the rubric of the Midi. The experience of Placelessness suggests that landscapes are perceived as lost, rather than transformed.

An alternative view to the nostalgic, or reactionary perspective, as Françoise Chenet-Faugeras underscores in her article "Le Moment Hugo du paysage littéraire," is most evident in Victor Hugo's letters from *Le Rhin* (1842), noteworthy for the author's unproblematic inclusion of peasants working the land, church towers that he compares to pots of water and salad bowls, chickens and ducks, into the literary countryside, much to the dismay and disapproval of many of his readers. An article appearing in *Le Constitutionnel*, in February of 1842, criticized Hugo's countryside not only for its banality, but also for its low moral standards, associated with the bickering behavior of domestic birds. Simon Schama reminds us that Virgil's ideal rustic creatures are the cow (placidly dutiful) and the bee (industrious paragon of social and political

virtue), a polar shift from the original Arcadia, where men looked and behaved like 'beasts'. Virgil, Schama asserts, wrote the wild out of Arcadia. In Virgil's Arcadia, the animals themselves behave as citizens of a perfect political economy, though the *Eclogues* underscore the frailty of this situation where the shepherd is concerned. The *wild* is the natural counterpart to that other unmentionable force of destruction, urban government (Rome and Paris, respectively).

Counter to the trend championed by Houssaye, Hugo's response to the idyllic landscape, and to the reactionary position of *Le Constiutionnel*, is intentionally iconoclastic: "Et j'ai l'esprit fait ainsi, qu'à de certains moments un étang de village, clair comme un miroir d'acier, entouré de chaumières et traversé par une flottile de canards, me régale autant que le lac de Genève" (*Le Rhin* III, lettre XXXV: 76). Instead of lamenting the smoke, Hugo sets the countryside on fire, establishing an intimate relationship between the hideous and the beautiful.

> Le Rhin, les villages, les montagnes, les ruines, tout le spectre sanglant du paysage reparaissant à cette lueur, se mêlaient à la fumée, aux flammes, au glas continuel du tocsin, [...] aux coups sourds de la hache, au tumulte de l'orage et à la rumeur de la ville. Vraiment c'était hideux mais c'était beau. (I: lettre XIX)

Unlike Houssaye, Hugo does not differentiate between the prosaic and the poetic landscape, (as a traveler, he was also an inveterate sketcher, often sketching while in motion). At one level, Hugo obliterates the pictorial landscape of the academy; at another level, he elevates the vulgar, destructive element, symbolized by the smoke, to a status of divine sacrifice; underscoring the link between the sky, into which the smoke rises, and the terrain reduced purely to its material properties. What Hugo perceives, and finds more compelling than the loss of the idyll, is the drama of human casualty resulting from the monumental upheavals at its core.

Hugo's departure from Houssaye, and from other Romantics, is to understand landscape as existing not through its motifs, natural or otherwise, but in their relationships to one another, through which physical reality becomes a metaphor and a symbol for another reality. While Houssaye mourns the landscape in terms of its lost aesthetic value, Hugo reclaims the landscape, by adapting his aesthetic values to its changing form, and through analogy between the profane and the sacred. In other words, he restores place to placelessness, while retaining the distance between the observer and the observed.

Concerning the above arguments, Nerval remains ambivalent, if noncommittal. Confronted with a series of personal and economic setbacks, he approaches the changing nineteenth century landscape both as an ethnographer and as a subject prey to the scrutiny of others. He personalizes Hugo's perspective by inserting himself into the landscape, merging his own mobility and, eventually, his textual style, with the mechanical trope. He replaces the peasant with the ouvrier, joining the class of the *flâneur*, the dispossessed of unspecified rank, profession, and origin. If Hugo works primarily within a framework of Christian symbolism, Nerval exercises a form of spiritual and spatial hybridism.[xxi] He is equally as capable of infusing a space with symbolism as of rendering it placeless. As a wanderer to and from places, Nerval is both the prodigal returning and the unsuspecting *indigène*. In *Sylvie* (1854), for example, the narrator leads the reader through a nostalgic temporal maze which deconstructs not only his character, but also the idyllic memories of his childhood home; like his relationships with women, place becomes altered beyond recognition and, in the final assessment, without hope.

Paysage

Both *Lorely* and *Notes* (which, we'll remember, are compilations of articles and letters written over close to two decades, roughly pre- and post-1843, respectively) document the viewer's relationship to the changing landscape around him as much as they combine elements of practical reportage, ethnography, and autobiography. *Lorely*'s narrative tone reflects the curiosity of the younger traveler in a chosen ancestral lair (de Staël's influence is prevalent). *Notes'* narrative, on the other hand, gives us a notably road-weary traveler, emotionally distant, although immersed in the landscapes he describes. Regional stratifications are, by this time, a standard cliché. The younger traveler's cautious yet anticipatory attitude towards the Orient, evident in such declarations as "La conquête d'Alger a développé chez beaucoup de nos ouvriers le désir de connaître l'Orient" (*Lorely* 45), is replaced by such banal observations as: "Le pays de Liège est à la fois le midi et l'orient de la Belgique; l'air y est sensiblement plus pur qu'ailleurs, dégagé de l'épaisse brume des coteaux et de la mer [...]" ("Notes," *Œuvres* II: 880). The 'Midi-fication' of geographical polarities begins to create an aura of traitless homogeneity in the experience of both the traveler and the reader for which the "épaisse brume" is an appropriate metaphor. Travel, much like the Orient, both a place and an idea, is available to a variety of social classes at an increasing variety of locations. The French traveler, for instance, is baffled to see "pour la première fois des Anglais de classe moyenne" on an English *steamer*; "À Paris nous ne connaissons que l'ouvrier ou le *milord*" (856).

Notes' narrative, though impersonal by and large (the author avoids the use of the first person), is laced with dependency on distant friends and resignation over missed connections; everyone he knows is somewhere else; paquebots have become "véritables villes." The "Océan irrité" that once inspired Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Chateaubriand only adds to the general

anonymity of travel. At Le Havre, "La mer n'était pas trop belle, et je ne sais si je ne m'applaudissais pas au fond d'être venu trop tard pour accompagner mon ami Alphonse [Karr] sur la *Guêpe* de Sainte Adresse;" "'Monsieur est en mer,' me dit la servante. . . ;" "Il est peut-être imprudent, me disais-je, de cultiver l'amitié d'un patron de barque à voile" (854). Consistent with the trope, the aesthetic value of the countryside loses something to accessibility: "Hâtons-nous de gagner le magnifique embarcadère *du south-western rail-way,* qui ne mettra guère que six heures pour nous transporter tout près du Vauxhall-bridge de Londres, à travers des campagnes aussi peu pittoresques qu'admirablement cultivées.—Du reste, on sait qu'il n'y a point de paysage pour le voyageur des chemins de fer" (859). Movement is a drug, a cultural irritant, and a source of increasing alienation. As Nerval and Houssaye advance towards Germany, their paths parallel, fifty miles from one another. Mention of the third traveler, "Théophile, parti le jour de l'inauguration" (851-2), only reinforces the solitary apprenticeship of *Notes*' author who increasingly identifies himself with "la foule altérée, qui se composait en grande partie d'Allemands, d'Anglais et d'Américains" (853), and yet remains an outsider among them.

The first chapters of *Voyage* adhere to a similar theme yet, with reinvigorated musicality and confidence, the narrator enjoys the movement and perspectives offered by the "voiture" and the "bateau à vapeur." His point of view and aesthetics are stimulated, even if at times overwhelmed, by his surroundings, combining image, action, and thought: the "pyroscaphe" at Mâcon "se remplit de gros marchands, d'Anglais, de commis-voyageurs et des joyeux ouvriers de la Berline"; "On m'a montré la maison de M. Lamartine, grand et sombre" (*V.O.* I: 57). In *Notes,* the author contends rather laboriously with anonymity, discursive trends, and such monumental predecessors as Scott, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Byron, and Lamartine. "Il y a dans tout

grand poète un voyageur sublime," he writes. Far from addressing himself to the working class, he addresses the "*paysagistes* littéraires," from whom he distances himself at the same time. Scott, Chateaubriand, and Hugo, he writes, "ne se servent des impressions qu'ils ont recueillies, recomposées ou devinées à l'aspect des villes et des pays, que pour poser la scène de leurs vastes compositions." Byron and Lamartine "font des poésies et des poèmes avec la partie idéale et majestueuse de leur voyage; ceux-là parcourent la terre comme les anges de Thomas Moore, en la frôlant à peine du pied" (*Œuvres* II: 885). Concerning this last remark, J.-P. Richard has made similar statements about Nerval's travel writing (cited above). Nevertheless, a counteraristocratic position is underway. These earlier travelers have "passed through" landscapes, extracting their imagery for their own purposes, never having lived within them. Nerval, "faute d'argent" and by personal preference, becomes a "voyageur à pied," a role he enjoys more in the earlier text than in the latter, where he walks after dark "de porte en porte d'un côté de la rue à l'autre, et toutes ces portes fermées constamment [...]" (908).

In *Lorely*, the road, "droite comme un chemin de fer," surrounded by monotonous countryside, "montagne ou plat pays; point de collines ou d'accident de terrain" (47), contributes to the disempowerment of the Black Forest, ritual territory of legendary robbers, which now exhibits "rien de bien terrible au premier abord" (42). Dumas's role in this text is a precursor to Houssaye's role in *Notes*. Funds are a problem for Nerval, his projected meeting with Dumas in Francfort delayed, "comme sa tournée était plus longue que la mienne, vu qu'on lui faisait fête partout, que *les rois le voulaient voir*, et qu'on avait besoin de sa présence au *jubilé de Malines* [...]" (38). The traveler looks forward to a solitary pilgrimage at sunset but encounters a road populated with other travelers, "piétons comme moi" (43). What follows amounts to a parody of

the would-be initiate, now traveler en masse, in unexpected solidarity with other travelers "du même ordre."

> Je laissai mon compagnon s'arrêter à Schoendorf, et je continuai à marcher; mais, à mesure que j'avançais, la nuit devenait plus noire, et une pluie fine ne tarda pas à tomber. Dans la crainte qu'elle ne devînt plus grosse, et, malgré tout mon courage, je n'avais pas prévu ce désagrément, je résolus de m'arrêter au premier village, et de réclamer pour moi le tarif des compagnons, étudiants et autres piétons. (45)

Prince Pückler-Muskau, once again, functions as a prototype: "lui-même nous avoue qu'il vendit un jour sa voiture, congédia son valet de chambre, et daigna traverser deux ou trois principautés allemandes pédestrement, en costume d'artiste" (38). Consistent with this attitude, the traveler resigns himself to a lodging "d'une apparence fort médiocre;" he refuses the chicken "bien frais" offered him, taking soup and a piece of roast "comme ce garçon qui est là;" instead of wine, he contents himself with beer, "comme à tous ces messieurs;" he'll sleep "où vous voudrez" (45). Under similar influences, he indulges in the romanesque-burlesque: "mon extérieur était assez soigné pour annoncer... que je ne voyageais à pied que parce que ma voiture était brisée, ou qu'habitant quelque château, je me promenais dans les environs, cherchant des végétaux ou des minéreaux [...]" (43); the diminished 'fantastic' associated with place is recovered in compensation in the narrator's excessive imagination. Later, the traveler worries that his tailored shirt may betray his pedestrian "disguise," an inauspicious sign. (Goethe indulged a similar excentricity in his travel notes from Rome.) The author's attention to *vêtements*, clothing exchange and disguise, a trope of chivalric literature, becomes a real

experiment in altered image/identity in *Voyage*, which I will discuss in the next chapter. While the narrator of *Lorely* finds some consolation in mingling with the lost wanderers along the route, he is not satisfied with anonymity, or even with the pleasure of disguise, as a permanent condition. His assumption into the multitude of foreign travelers in Germany is, in its way, an oppositional stance on the author's part to the Parisian individuality and celebrity enjoyed by his colleagues. The incipient butterfly fantasy of "un prince d'opéra-comique, qui se découvrait plus tard, montrerait son cordon, et les couvrirait de bienfaits" (46), is not unique to this text.

As a precursor to *Voyage*, *Lorely* broaches personal loss and the trials of initiation. *Notes*, a literary stopgap, functions as a discursive trial. Concerning the complex mentioned above, Houssaye functions as a perfect foil. The strained relationship between the two in *Notes* exacerbates both the *toxicity* of the road and Nerval's perception of his "chape de plomb." It bears mentioning that, while the road, industry and new methods of transportation figure abundantly in *Notes*' narrative, its author stops short of indulging in Houssaye's anti-industrial lament. Nerval adopts a distinctly moderate approach, bypassing the dogmatic poetics of Houssaye's article for practical, matter-of-fact observations: "Dans une ville industrielle, il ne faut point compter sur le pittoresque; chaque mètre de terrain doit produire un revenu; chaque goutteau d'eau courante doit faire tourner une roue" (*Œuvres* II: 917). In this last assessment, Nerval demonstrates familiarity, if not entire solidarity, with the important discourses of his contemporaries. If he adopts a position, he chooses the anti-doctrinal stance of the traveler ethnographer, never entirely absent (with the exception of *Aurélia*) from his œuvre.

Nerval's (by-all-appearances) compensatory participation in the anti-industrial position of his Romantic contemporaries, corresponds with a general rejection of "les Idées extérieures a soi," as well as a period of malaise and cultural readjustment, post-Orient, in which the author

experiences, in Michel Jeanneret's words, "la vaporisation du moi" (*V.O.*I, "Introduction") in relationship to the effects of travel and both old and new contexts at home. Mental incubation, as opposed to stagnation, is the more likely scenario for this author. Nerval had sincerely hoped for transformation in the Orient, through magic or death, two possibilities he flirts with in Germany, spurred by Janin's publication and an otherwise unsatisfactory relationship to the Parisian public, among whom we find friends such as Dumas.[xxii]

What at first appears to be a pitiful deference to Houssaye's advantage in *Notes* proves somewhat more tactical as the traveler/narrator progresses. Houssaye's pastoral complaint, "Où le poète n'a rien à chanter, le peintre n'a rien à voir," as I've mentioned earlier, is not unique to his generation. His reactionary position, however justified, privileges the poet over the 'joug commun': "il se détourna sans regret de ce paysage devenu célèbre par ses cheminées. Quel tableau voulez-vous qu'il fasse dans un immense champ de betteraves et de pommes de terre que n'ombrage pas un seul arbre?" (*L'Artiste* 101). The 'tableau paysagiste' can hardly be taken for granted, as I mentioned earlier. The pristine features of natural topography troubled Romantics such as Chateaubriand who saw them as deceptive, rather than beautiful. Nerval, as nostalgic for lost people, places, and things as any of his contemporaries, nevertheless sees the potential of 'assemblage'. All place suggests lost eras and affords opportunity for brief commentary, both ironic and nostalgic: "Au milieu de la place, à l'endroit où mourut le comte d'Egmont, on a élevé recemment un candélabre de mauvais goût, comme tous les candélabres de fonte, qui porte un énorme foyer de gaz et nous rappelle tristement que nous vivons dans le siècle des lumières et du progrès" (*Œuvres* II: 872). Rather than adopting Houssaye's separatist attitude, man (read poet) against industry, Nerval, much like Hugo, makes use of the "foule compacte" among the "betteraves." Progress is, after all, an equalizer.

From a journalistic standpoint, Nerval addresses the practical concerns of the "average" traveler: "Au point du jour, la locomotive, reposée, nous traîna en trois heures à Bruxelles. Avant cette époque de progrès, l'on mettait toute la nuit pour faire le même chemin. [...] Le chemin de fer nous fait donc perdre les trois heures qu'il nous prend, en nous communiquant de plus un étourdissement et un mal de tête pour tout le jour" (871). He neither exalts nor entirely denigrates the locomotive. What he begins to document are the effects of movement on both the traveler and the landscape.

> C'est encore là un des grands ennuis du chemin de fer: toute section a un omnibus à chacun de ses bouts; de sorte qu'il faut changer trois fois de voiture pour le moindre trajet. J'avouerai qu'ayant à partir le soir de Liège, je préférai la diligence pour me rendre à Louvain. Du moins, je n'eus à souffrir ni l'odeur du charbon de terre, ni de ce mouvement fébrile, ni de ce bruit étourdissant de la locomotive, ni de ces sourbresauts, de ces coups de sifflets dans l'ombre des tunnels, plus incommodes que jamais dans un long voyage. Ajoutez à celà, pour le jour, la mobilité fatigante de l'horizon, qui oblige bien des voyageurs à se munir d'une sorte de *garde-vue* spécialement inventé pour les chemins de fer. Il faut dire aussi que je n'arriverai à Louvain par les voitures oridnaires qu'après un voyage de dix heures. (881)

The "mobilité fatigante de l'horizon" becomes part of a larger, more personalized repertoire of mnemonic fragments in *Voyage* and later work. In contrast with Houssaye's apocalyptic rhetoric, "Dieu, voyant que le monde n'a plus ni sève, ni force, ni ardeur, [...] lui a fait aumône de la vapeur qui va ménager ses bras et ses jambes, mais qui lui ravira son dernier

souffle de poésie" (*L'Artiste* 99), Nerval's narrative insists less upon the disastrous potential of progress than on the banality of the voyage. The author doesn't ignore the negative effects of industrial development on the human body and the external environment, but senses, rather, the potential of altered states. Experience of the mystical is no longer dependent on the reliable clichés; the mystical, in fact, enters into the public domain, provoked in the traveler through a strange combination of interior and exterior sensations.

In the final assessment, Nerval's participation in popular rhetoric does not merely reflect, as Janin and other critics have observed, that "[celui-ci] s'enivrait du génie de ses amis comme on s'enivre de la beauté de sa maîtresse!" (Janin, *Lorely*). The author is hardly unaware of his own limitations, less a traveling companion than a resentful apprentice to Houssaye. Halfway through his trip in Flanders, he allows himself to admit as much. While Janin's accusation is not without substance, Nerval's peer-envy and hard luck serve a larger impetus for self-reinvention. Marginality, or the "liminal" condition, often perceived as weakness and passivity, and closely associated with initiation and artistic innovation, as well as with regressive emotional and psychological states, contains a ritualistic power that Nerval recognized.[xxiii] For this author, northern travel tends to excacerbate the Midi-Nord dichotomy, whose result is discursive liminality, bordering at times on paralysis, that the Orient is intended to correct. If the author vacillates somewhat awkwardly between the didacticism of his period and his emerging, if incongruous, vision, he manages to glean a useful perspective.

Towards the end of their mutually separate journey, a brief, noticeably terse meeting occurs between Houssaye and *Notes*' narrator at a 'burlesque' production in Flanders. The play, entitled *Pantaloon Stoomwerktuigmaker*, adapts Houssaye's anti-industrial stance, making a parody of the "honnête industriel, un bourgeois honorable [...] selon les idées du siècle," whose

ignorance threatens the future livelihood of Arlequin, a naive *postillion*: "Tu ne t'aperçois pas que ce vieillard, avec ses machines fumeuses, détruit ton état, dévore ton pain, et que ta force et ton adresse à conduire des cheveaux fringants, ne servent de rien contre ses inventions damnées" (931). Nerval's response to the piece is as notably circumspect as it is gratuitous.

> N'y aurait-il pas là une satire agréable de l'esprit industriel du siècle [...].
>
> Pourquoi vous me direz que ce n'était pas la peine d'aller loin pour voir jouer solennellement dans un grand théâtre la même pièce qui, avec peu de variations, [se compose] sous différents titres tout le répertoire des Funambules.
>
> Je répondrai premièrement – que nous n'allons pas [...] aux Funambules; Ensuite que ce théâtre est trop petit, trop enfumé et trop indigne d'un grand people,—et que la parade n'a pas chez nous la place qu'elle devrait avoir. (933)

The narrator has entered 'through the back door' so to speak. Significantly, he mentions his friend only as, "Un critique que je rencontre en sortant, M. Arsène Houssaye," unmoved by the other's assertion that "je viens d'assister à une représentation du Grand-Théâtre d'Amsterdam." There is a passive-aggressive tone to the narrator's lack of enthusiasm consistent with his oppositional stance towards both the Critic and the critical voice. In real terms, this doesn't get him very far. Paris remains as indispensable as it is imminent. Both *Notes* and *Lorely* show us, however, that, journalistic aptitudes and competitive irritations notwithstanding, Nerval has begun to own the trope. "Vapeur," for the most part, remains under the industrial rubric; "brouillard," on the other hand, becomes a metaphor for a condition of being which, after Egypt, encompasses the word "poussière," and which we might describe as a kind of transference between interior and exterior truths relevant to him.

Pourtant, si ces dunes de sable que mon pied foule sont vraiment le fond de la mer, tout me porte à croire que c'est encore de l'air que je respire et que l'eau n'y réside qu'à l'état de brouillard. (*Œuvres* II: 867)

[i] H. Mizuno credits Claude Pichois and Michel Brix for his citation of these dates, which correspond with the author's personal letters and publications in *La presse* and *L'Artiste* between 1838 and 1845, prior to the publications his *Voyage en Orient* (1851) and *Lorely, Souvenirs d'Allemagne* (1852): 15.

[ii] Henri Bonnet, "Gérard de Nerval, émule de l'esthétique medieval," *Quinze Études.*

[iii] A longer portion of this excerpt from *Voyage* II appears in Bonnet 24-5.

[iv] Bonnet quotes Nerval (25): "Laissons Damas, la ville arabe, s'épanouir au bord du désert et saluer le soleil levant du haut des minarets; mais le Liban et le Carmel sont l'héritage des croisades: il faut qu'ils appartiennent, sinon à la croix seule, du moins à ce que la croix symbolise, à la liberté," *Pléiade* II, "Correspondance (fragments)," ed. 1851 of *Voyage*, note 25: 32.

[v] Dr. Labrunie became a model for all patriarchal authority, real and imaginary, characterized in more than one instance (*Angélique, Octavie*, "L'Historie du Calife Hakem") as an implacable jailer.

[vi] "Le moment Hugo du paysage littéraire," *Les Enjeux du Paysage* 174.

[vii] Charenton and Bicêtre refer to two hospitals/lunatic asylums on the outskirts of Paris whose construction began in the first half of the 17th century.

[viii] Charles Dédéyan provides much of this information in *Gérard de Nerval et l'Allemagne*, vol. 1, 1957. See also related work of Jacques Bony.

[ix] Nerval's original article appeared in *L'Artiste*, in August, 1846, under the title "Un Tour dans le Nord: Angleterre et Flandre." A series of letters, old and new, dedicated to Belgium and England followed. See "Notice générale: *Lorely: Souvenirs d'Allemagne*," *Œuvres complètes* 933. *Notes de Voyage* was published in 1855, after Nerval's death, by arrangement of Arsène Houssaye and Théophile Gautier.

[x] Janin, *Journal des Débats*, dated the 1st of March, 1841; "A Jules Janin," *Lorely*.

[xi] See in particular Moreau de Tours, *Du Hachisch et de l'Aliénation Mentale.*

[xii] See R. Chambers' "Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative" and "The Suicide Tactic: Writing in the Language of the Other," *Room for Maneuver*.

[xiii] See J. Rigoli, *Le Voyageur à l'Envers*.

[xiv] The play was received with a general lack of public enthusiasm. It had been postponed until 1939, with only twenty-six performances. An entire act had been removed. Nerval's disappointment spawned a new episode of wanderlust in Germany; see Dédéyan I.

[xv] "Idée chère à Nerval que toutes les religions ne sont que des traductions d'une seule et même vérité," Dédayan, note 1: 64.

[xvi] Mme. de Staël commented thus in 1810: "Si l'on se mettoit à comparer, sous ce rapport, les provinces de France avec l'Allemagne, on croiroit que les deux pays sont à trois siècles de distance l'un de l'autre. Paris, réunissant dans son sein l'élite de l'empire, ôte tout intérêt à tout le reste" (*De L'Allemagne* I: 133).

[xvii] Also mentioned in the section entitled "Ambivalent Relations" in chapter four.

[xviii] J. Rigoli.

[xix] See notes 17 and 18, Mizuno 77.

[xx] See F. Chenet-Faugeras "Le Moment Hugo du paysage littéraire," *Les Enjeux du Paysage*.

[xxi] Lucy Lippard suggests that "Each time we enter a new place, we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity. By entering that hybrid, we change it; and in each situation we may play a different role" (*The Lure of the Local* 6).

[xxii] See S. Moussa "Nerval Ethnologue," *La Relation Orientale*.
[xxiii] I use Victor Turner's explanation of "marginality" and "liminality" in *The Ritual Process.*

Six

'La Nature Pourrie': Bipolarity and Environmental Conscience in *Voyage en Orient* and *Aurélia*

Voyage en Orient, which appeared in serial fragments (*feuilleton*) beginning in 1844 and in its definitive version in 1851, has been associated with a strain of writing reflective of the optimistic mood of France in the 1840s.[i] More precisely, the text's 'optimistic' outlook—most prevalent, if sporadic, in its first volume, in the accounts entitled "Vers l'Orient"—is never entirely free of conditionality. Nerval's two-volume travel narrative, "already the account of a failure" (Chambers), prefaces a series of notably pessimistic, or distress-induced autobiographical writings produced between 1849 and 1854, shortly after the revolution of 1848 and prior to his death in 1855. The author refers to the political trauma of 1848 in his association of the Valois with the wars of religion and the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day and, thereafter, revisits them in *Aurélia*'s reference to the aftermath of the Crimean War and the apocalyptic struggle between the forces of good and evil.

Although flight, or respite from Paris qualifies as the initial premise for his year-long trip, resuscitation is Nerval's primary objective. Particularly in the latter half of the text, the author, through his narrator, devises elaborate means to transcend the limitations of European identity, of Frenchness, and of the categories of 'madness' and social ostracism. Not incidentally, the bulk of Nerval's œuvre, which includes *Lorely*, *Les Filles du Feu*, *Les Nuits D'Octobre*, *Les Chimères*, and *Aurélia*, among other works, realized publication during the final years of his life, during which he struggled with chronic financial and emotional instability. At a pragmatic level, distancing himself from the critical scrutiny of Parisian society and from internment in the ward of Doctor Emile Blanche bought the author valuable time to produce a popular literary work with

the potential return of much needed cash; moreover, as his letter to his father (December 25, 1842) attests, Nerval counted on the journey 'au Levant' to allow him to transition from an emotional state and status, as burdensome to him as to others, to a state of mental equilibrium: "Lequel vaut-il mieux de garder près de soi son fils ou son ami malade ou triste ou bien de le savoir au loin bien portant, gagnant des forces et du savoir et satisfait au moins d'un désir accompli" (*Œuvres* I: 1387).[ii] Needless to say, he intended to accomplish his ambitions on his own terms.

As a platform, Nerval uses his text to grapple with the social and professional opinions of his period, attempting at intervals to overturn or to discredit his discreditors. The status of 'l'Orient' as 'berceau du monde'remains unchanged for this author; his relocation of its center, from Christian Jerusalem, to Egypt and to pre-Christian origins— "un monde qui est la parfaite antithèse du nôtre" (*V.O.* I: 193)—points to a fairly drastic shift away from the standard pilgrimages of his period. Although the author never entirely abandons hope of reconciliation between himself and the authoritarian, middle-class society epitomized by his father, Dr. Etienne Labrunie, a medic in Napoléon's Imperial Army (1808), attaché and medic in the Rhineland (1810-14) and, thereafter, a general practitioner in Paris, the actual prospect of personal renewal begins to look fairly unlikely by the end of *Voyage*'s second volume. The beacon for Nerval—*Aurélia*'s apocalyptic message attests to this—remains the hope of reconciliation, between the imperfect reality of his personal life, afflicted with genius, madness, artistic failures, and unstable relationships with others, and the imaginary 'ideal', which the author locates in a luminous past of human 'origins',[iii] namely a set of pre-Adamite civilizations and mythologies.[iv] Relevant to this last point, Nerval's landscapes, whether domestic, rural, foreign, or the product

of hallucination, acquire a symbolic function whose eschatological themes ultimately permeate the playful iconography of his urban topographies.

To place the environmental dimension of Nerval's narratives within the context of the period, anxieties concerning the changing spatial dynamics of Haussmanian Paris and the surrounding landscape provide an impetus for both melancholic reminiscence and oppositional experimentation. Antagonism between the "small, dirty, and stinking streets" (Jordan 13)[v] of medieval Paris and the underwhelming impression of the city undergoing processes of modernization is already a legacy of the eighteenth century (*Lettres persanes*, *Julie*, for example). Environmental sensitivity, which, in Nerval's case, indulges the melancholic and, at intervals, the eschatological leanings of the author, functions at both social and symbolic levels, the symbolic (however tactically molded by the individual imagination) being always intrinsically tied to society.

Symbolic thinking, which scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Le Goff, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, to name only a few, have associated with children, with tribalism, with the medieval mindset, with madness, and a particularly prevalent trait of Nerval's (See J.-P. Richard, S. Felman, R. Chambers), is not entirely alien to the post-Revolutionary Romantic who seeks through travel, a form of self-imposed exile, a way to transcend both the volatile and conformist trends of his day. Romantics, misundersting the nature of medieval subjectivity, whose primary value is collective as opposed to introspective, had perceived an affinity between the 19th-century *Bildungsroman* and the symbolic journeys undertaken by heroes of the late medieval romance in which a change of character, equal to Conversion, occurs.[vi] For our purposes, and specific to Nerval, the symbolic functions first and foremost as an ongoing method of translating contexts, with the ultimate goal of transcendence. To invoke a broader context,

geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan (*Topophilia*, 1974) has elaborated upon the highly developed capacity of humans for symbolic behavior as a method of mediating between themselves and external reality. Such achievements as myths, legends, taxonomies and science, Tuan posits, represent mental worlds, or "cocoons," which enable us to feel at home in nature and, particularly with respect to the technological advancements of the industrial age, and in relationship to the diminishing natural environment at the outskirts of the urban environments wherein we reside (13). Human tendency to segment our environments, by color, season, and binary oppositions, such as north-south, mountain-valley, center-periphery, we-they, and the expressions of the cardinal directions, sets up fundamental contradictions that *we* invariably try to resolve in narration.

More specific to the nineteenth century narrative, Romantic relationship to natural spaces, or, more aptly, to the rural countryside, exists against the mental backdrop of the city, seen either as a place of freedom, "City air sets man free" (103), or as a place of inextricable confusion and oppression (Rousseau, Nerval). Romantic ambivalence towards nature, as I've indicated in the earlier section of this chapter, encompasses an array of sentiments concerning the encroachment of industry and urban development upon the surrounding landscape; commentary of the period vacillates between indifference (even disgust) vis-à-vis the pristine (Chateaubriand), nostalgic reactionism (Houssaye), transcendant symbolism (Hugo), and a tendency towards eschatological thinking (Nerval). Emerging awareness of the environment "at the moment of its endangerment" (Hiltner 16) is noteworthy, not only as a prevalent indicator of changing trends and moods of the period, but also as a testament to individual processes of adjustment or contention concerning these trends. Chateaubriand's aesthetic ambivalence with regard to mountains, the Alps, or Vesuvius, for example, his refusal to be inspired or humbled by

'natural' monumentality,[vii] can be interpreted not merely as an eccentric posture, privileging man-made monuments, but also as a rebuttal, 'à rebours', against the clichéd observations of aristocratic travelers. His point: a mountain cannot be thought of as "magnifique" by virtue of its category of belonging, to mountain, to monumental, to 'unspoiled' nature. Both nature and civilization have the potential to offend; one cannot be sought as an antidote to the other.

For younger Romantics, such as Nerval and many of his contemporaries, although they grapple with both the trends and countertrends of their predecessors, Nature and natural settings tend to appear as untenable sources of instability, always in relationship to the proliferation of media, new technologies, and urban encroachment upon rural communities. Despair (Ross Chambers prefers the term melancholy), constitutes both a collective symptom and an individual response to the conditions of modernity. To borrow from Brian Stock, change equals modernity; modernity equals change (34). The average individual, then as now, experiences unsought change as a discomfiting inconvenience. For the more experimental, the mind-altering potential of uncertain cultural processes underway holds a certain alluring appeal. What the nineteenth century imagination noticeably contributes to the binary relationship between the city and its rural counterpart is contextualization, through internalization, of the increasingly liberal, widespread, and rapid, or, in Nerval's case, obstructed movement between the polarities of urban, e.g. Modern, progressive, and rural, e.g. traditional, unsophistocated life. A third element of foreign travel, whose dual objective encompasses the traditions of pilgrimage and the journey of formation, becomes instrumental to this process. The 'mission civilisatrice', a premise for travelers to the Levant, such as Lamartine (see chapter four), was by-and-large a means of mediating between the polarities of Frenchness and all that was not French.

On the domestic side of things, Haussmann's influence had something to do with the binary orientation of the French Romantic traveler, beginning in 1830 and particularly in 1850 when the Haussmannian project was implemented in full. Rather than destroying the labyrinthine structure of medieval Paris, the Haussmannian plan succeeded in shifting its axis. Replacement of the narrow, unhygienic streets with wide boulevards contributed to the shift from vertical to horizontal spatial orientation which privileged mobility, complexity, and accelerated velocity of movement.[viii] For the Parisian individual, the long-held experience of cognitive (if also condensed) continuity could look forward to a future of cognitive fragmentation. A similar phenomenon surfaces after 1830 with regard to the 19th century landscape, observably altered beyond recognition by a geometric infrastructure of roads and railways newly accessible to average citizens for whom not only travel but, moreover, relocation becomes a possibility. Simply stated, tensions arise between progress, physical geography, and human geography. For those undergoing the process, technology can be seen as "gobbling up" and compacting "previously expansive space" (Abler et. al 68), ushering in the unforeseen problem of 'freedom' of movement, not least of which is the demystification, or, more to the point, the banalization of journeying: "Moi, Monsieur, qui vous parle, j'étais ce matin à X, je suis parti par le train de X, là-bas j'ai fait mes affaires, etc. et à X heures j'étais revenus" (Desportes 123).[ix] As scholars of human geography point out, humans are unique in that *we* externalize consciousness and are capable of generating realities from our imaginations.[x] Among nineteenth century writers, adjustments, which take place at both logistic and somatic levels, are addressed, if not resolved, through a combination of literary reactionism to the destabilizing effects of progress and poetic innovation, inspired by these effects.[xi]

In Nerval's case, 'la machine a vapeur', which begins as a fairly superficial, if also an enjoyable experiment, serves as one such example. The 'real' limitations of mechanized transportation find their counterparts in the author's insurmountable rift with Parisian society. Incessant movement, an innate impulse, whether undertaken as a passenger or as a 'piéton', and important to the fragmentary and rhythmic nature of this author's prose, acquires an increasingly compensatory function, similar to an intoxicant, and, particularly in the latter years of his life, an anesthetic. This said, much like many of his contemporaries, Nerval is also concerned with national identities and with the potentiality of fusion between adverse or dissimilar cultures, and past and present realities. Both Nerval and Lamartine hoped the diplomatic component of their journeys would restore them to better public opinion. Unlike his predecessor, who planned his spiritual itinerary around meetings with influential dignitaries and charismatic expatriates, such as Lady Hester Stanhope, Nerval took the path of least resistance: "j'aime dépendre au chance," allowing the vagaries of technology and of human character to use him, rather than the reverse.

In terms of its national status, uniformity or even consensus of thought concerning the pros and cons of technological advancement is difficult to locate among the post-1830 generation of French writers. Whereas we can identify a fairly concise anti-industrial sentiment among English Romantics, above and beyond the general trend of blaming the English for having started the great railway project, interest among the French varies. Two results of progress, with far-reaching implications, appear fairly consistently in the thematic of post-1830 French writers: a.) the ambivalently perceived mixing of social classes and b.) perceptual and psychological fragmentation. Nerval's preoccupation with the vulgar effects of industrialization upon the charm and innocence of the Valois region, which he opposes to Paris, is indicative of one of many individual processes of adjustment between 1830 and 1850. For Nerval in particular, allusions to

impending environmental disaster tend to coincide with renewed bouts of paranoia and conviction of personal failure. However, environmentally speaking, his exteriorization of the internal predicament, and vice versa, does not entirely repudiate an objective message.

From the perspective of English Romanticism, Jonathan Bate defines the "ecological viewpoint" as "a respect for the earth and a skepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society" (*Romantic Ecology* 9). Romantic ideology is less a theory of imagination and symbol, associated with such "self-consciously idealist and elitist" texts as Coleridge's *Statesman's Manual* than a "Theory of ecosystems and unalienated labour" embodied (10). Bate makes the important distinction between 'Romantic Ideology' and Romantic ecology: the latter, rather than seeking to flee from the material world, from history and society, attempts to enable a symbiotic, harmonious relationship between the modern world and the natural environment (40).

In France, nostalgia for the harmonious life of the unspoiled rural countryside is fraught with post-Revolutionary ambivalence. By the thirteenth century, most of what we define as wilderness (primeval forests) had been obliterated in Northern Europe. For writers of the period, the potential uses to which the rapidly changing landscape can be put tend to vary according to individual inclination: Houssaye's reactionary ideology vs. Hugo's integral symbolism, for example.[xii] Both Flaubert and George Sand identify as problematic the discrepancy between upward mobility (a by-product of industrialization) and (particularly feminine) education. For Nerval, a social traditionalist in many respects, industrial encroachment upon the rural landscape functions primarily at the mnemonic level, which looks backward to multiple histories of loss—he maintained a personal empathy for the aristocracy—and forward to artistic innovation.

Once again, from a broader cultural perspective, perceptual and experiential differences occurring between individual persons, and between the classes, feed into communicative disjuncture between the individual, or groups of individuals, and society; ultimately, this becomes a problem of national identity as well. In 1829, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* identified its objective "de bien connaître ce qui se passe ou ce qui s'est passé chez les autres peuples, afin de n'adopter de leurs institutions que ce qui pourrait s'appliquer à nos mœurs, à notre caractère, aux progrés de nos lumières, à la position géographique de notre territoire" (in Rigoli, "Les Orient de la Folie," *Clartés d'Orient* 50). The inclusivity implied by this proposal, to explore "*tous* les mondes," according to Juan Rigoli, reverted fairly quickly, to a dualistic confrontation "entre la France et ce qui n'est pas elle." Above and beyond the Old and New World dichotomy, the tension between 'l'Orient' and 'l'Occident' features as a prominent dialogue, evidenced by a series of articles published by the journal between 1845 and 1847, a period in which several of Nerval's articles also appeared. As we might expect, polarities don't stop at geo-political borders; they begin to articulate modes of being and states of consciousness collectively perceived as 'étrange' and 'autre'.[xiii]

A case in point, both the emerging nineteenth century medical profession and the general population had begun to equate mental 'aliénation', *dépaysement*, with *être à l'étranger*. Madness, movement, and the altered state of consciousness hereby surface as sympathetic, if not altogether compatible discourses in nineteenth century narratives. The concept of bipolarity, both psychological and geographic, is fundamental to Nerval's articulation of the Paris-Valois dichotomy, a mnemonic wound, and to his recourse to the Orient, "le 'territoire' de la folie" (51). By the time of Nerval's first mental crisis, in 1841, the 'ailleurs' elicited by the notion of travel has fairly close association with the term used to describe the mentally ill: 'les aliénés', as do

foreign ‘substances’, such as hashish,[xiv] and their mind-altering effects. In the interest of furthering their projects, individuals within the medical profession developed an influential, if somewhat parasitic rapport with Parisian artists and writers and members of the upper classes.

In 1845, French physician Joseph Moreau de Tours published his study entitled *Du Hachisch et de l’Aliénation Mentale*, with the advisory stipulation: “A ceux qui, après m’avoir lu, conserveraient quelques doutes, [. . .] je ne puis vous donner qu’un conseil, et vous serez convaincus si vous le suives; faites comme moi, prenez du hachisch, expérimentez sur vous-mêmes, voyez par vous-mêmes” (146). Moreau de Tours, who organized elite circles of experimentees, Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, and Gérard de Nerval among them, observed a similarity between the effects of hashish and the symptoms of madness.[xv] When ingested by the average European, the ‘pâte verdâtre’ (blended with pistachios, spices, and honey) produced ‘Oriental’ visions. Through close observation of his subjects, the physician observed the following phenomena in association with the stages and mental and physiological effects of intoxication: a feeling of happiness and extreme well being; excitation and dissociation of ideas; confusion concerning time and space; increased sensitivity of sensory faculties; ‘idées fixes’, delusional convictions (which he distinguished from illusions); disturbance of affective feelings; irresistible impulses; illusions and hallucinations. Physiologically, the drug could be observed to produce a rapid pulse, perspiration, and a reddening of the face, accompanied by aggressive behavior.

Although not the first to study the drug from a scientific perspective, Moreau de Tours was something of a pioneer in applying its uses to nineteenth century developments and concepts of human psychology. A few years earlier, in his publication *De la Peste, ou Typhus d’Orient* (1840), M. Aubert-Roche proposed the use of hashish as a therapeutic measure for deadly

diseases such as typhus and the plague, which he had observed as a military physician in Alexandria, Egypt. Aubert-Roche saw a possibility not only for the cure of physiological ailments, but for psychological ailments as well. Opposing the scientific approach, spiritualists, such as L.-A. Cahagnet, *Sanctuaire du Spiritualisme; Étude de l'âme humaine, et de ses rapports avec l'univers* (1850), began to promote the idea that the effects of hashish provided a process through which the individual could experience his/her innate divinity. Reliability of effects, both experiential and observed, became a topic of debate.

Despite the claims of Moreau de Tours, "L'expérience personnelle est ici le *criterium* de la vérité" (4), a chasm developed between the demonstrated effects of the drug, as observed by medical professionals and members of the elite circle, and the reported experience of the individual. Relationships of power between the medical organizer and his experimentees put the latter at a disadvantage. In relationship to the medical professional, the subject had no authority and was often suspected of denying or exaggerating his/her true experience. The substance, capable of eliciting innate or latent characteristics, such as arrogance, insanity, or (delusions of) divinity, corresponds with the scientific definition of 'Théomanie': "L'aliéné atteint de théomanie s'imagine être Dieu, ou il croit avoir des relations et des entretients avec le saint-esprit, avec les anges ou les saints, ou bien comme un inspiré ou comme un prophète [. . .]" (in Rigoli, *Clartés d'Orient*),[xvi] Cahagnet, contrary to Moreau de Tours, took issue with the strict categorizations used to distinguish pathology from normal behavior. The near-diametric opposition between the two theorists is underscored by Moreau de Tours' placement of the self, 'moi', as the subject; for Cahagnet, 'moi' is nothing, God is everything. As the latter asserts in his "proposition métaphysiques:" "3. Spirituellement parlant, il n'y a pas d'anéantissement possible, ni de succession dans les formes [. . .]. 8. La *naissance* et la mort ne sont que l'entrée

de l'homme dans deux états différents. 9. La vie n'est qu'une pensée qui *observe* une autre" (4-5). Although it is unlikely that Nerval had much acquaintance with Cahagnet, we observe a sympathetic propensity in the narrator's dissolution of boundaries between thought and the material world in *Aurélia*: "Quoi qu'il en soit, je crois que l'imagination humaine n'a rien inventé qui ne soit vrai, dans ce monde ou dans les autres, et je ne pouvais douter de ce que j'avais *vu* si distinctement" (47). The contrast between Moreau de Tours' absolutism and Cahagnet's spiritualism—the former tended to report what he observed; the latter sought to 'understand' through observation and interpretation—is reflected in Nerval's opposition to the authoritarian voices of his day and in his conviction "de l'ignorance des hommes qui croyaient pouvoir guérir avec la science seule" (*Aurélia* 73). In a letter to Madame Alexandre Dumas, dated November 9, 1841, Nerval complained that "la science a le droit d'escamoter ou réduire au silence tous les prophètes ou voyants prédits par l'Apocalypse, dont je me flattais d'être l'un!" (*Œuvres complètes* I: 1383).[xvii] Whether they catered to or opposed the standards of the current medical profession, the experiments of the *haschishins* added to extant and emerging ideas concerning the boundaries of selfhood, between self, community, and elsewhere, and the state of alienation, for which the Orient functions as a symbolic terrain: "chacun ayant sa manière d'arriver à cet état d'enthousiasme qui leur procure des visions et des extases" (*V.O.* I: 231). Just as the medical profession adapted the Oriental topos to their ideas about madness, Nerval hoped to use the real place to deconstruct the absolutist terms applied to his psyche. One of the things he hoped to rid himself of was French identity, which he associated with the alienating language of the nineteenth century medical profession, specifically of the psychiatric sector.

The author's 1841 diagnosis of 'théomanie', a construct of 'cyclothymie', corresponds with twentieth century understanding of manic depression, or, in more current usage, bipolarity.

At a symbolic level, the author's aversion to the French language, representative of the bourgeoisie, of professional patriarchy, and the critical voice of the Parisian literary establishment, much as his aversion to the 'habits noirs', a sign of French conformity, provides a conceptual means of shedding the parts of his identity over which patriachal authorities could exert their powers.[xviii] In Nerval's codified terms, itineracy is a form of rebellion, as well as a topic of bemusement for his literary companions. Transferred to Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian terrain, Nerval's itineracy acquires transformative potential, in the tradition of the mythic quest. In ritualistic terms, through the acquisition of non-European clothing, habits, and systems of thought, the author/traveler seeks to transform the marginal status that symbolizes his rupture with European culture.

Even as he delights in the pleasurable aspects of compulsive itineracy, Nerval's obsession aims at a specific objective. Both Deleuze and Bateson have established the relationship between patterns and crisis.[xix] Cognitive starvation is key. Foucault has defined madness as the manifestation—i.e. that which can be perceived externally by others—of enforced silence. Once deprived of the ability to discuss the messages of others, the individual, "like any self-correcting system which has lost its governor [. . .] spirals into never-ending, but always systematic, distortions" (211-2). We can thereby think of repetitive movement and movement patterning (the labyrinth is a recurring motif for this author/traveler), often equated with psychological fragmentation in the individual, as an outward manifestation of the psyche's attempt to re-establish cognitive coherency.[xx] Paranoia, catatonia, and 'symbolic' thinking (medieval mind), in which 'signs' are taken for wonders or, more commonly, as disasters, regardless of their actual efficacy, manifest as corrective measures. Within Bateson's definition of 'double bind' we begin to locate Nerval's cognitive dilemma: the experience of being punished (by the authority figure)

"precisely for being right in one's own view of the context" (236). Nerval held fast to the conviction that *his* madness delivered insights unavailable through other avenues. Yet, the mad suffer social ostracism. *His* madness had therefore to be different in some fundamental way. Regardless of the episodic proof of *some* condition, Nerval remained convinced of the limited accuracy of the categorizations that had been applied to him by Dr. Blanche and such public detractors as Alexandre Dumas and Jules Janin. The author saw the use of travel and travel writing not merely as a tactic of escape, as his father believed, but as a viable method of self-healing. Through travel and writing, Nerval attempts to reconcile the discrepancy between his own experience of 'otherness' with his marginal represention by others.

As the cautiously optimistic letter (*Lyon, 25 décembre, 1842*) to Dr. Etienne Labrunie attests,[xxi] the writer presages his trip to the Orient as a form of convalescence, or, to invoke a theme closer to the his heart, as a means of legitimizing his 'folie' through its recontextualization and through the re-education of his readers. This is where movement and pattern come in. The condition of madness, which connotes an incapacity for cognitive coherency, "'Rien d'autre sans doute que l*'absence d'œuvre*'" (Foucault, in Felman 67), struggles to adhere to a collective understanding of reason. Communication, whether through speech, *écriture*, or non-verbal (visual or kinetic) forms of expression, provides the only possible link between the polarities of cognitive order and disorder. Nerval, who refuses to renounce the poetic and spiritual benefits of his 'folie', nevertheless undertakes a mission of discursive opposition, adopting a 'rational' discourse to undermine the reductive terms by which he is clinically defined: "se tenir hors de l'opposition santé-maladie, pour atteindre une vérité qui dépasse leur contradiction" (Felman 66).[xxii] Ultimately, he wants to "escape from the field" (Bateson) through transcendence of his

oppressive paradigm. From a strategic perspective, he understood the improbability of his endeavor.

To return to both the physical and contextual processes of the journey, Ross Chambers's identification of the nineteenth century impetus for travel, particularly after 1830, as an attempt to renew contact with 'reality' is indicative of a broader discomfiture with a multitude of social innovations too rapidly thrust upon the population. The speed of movement (nineteenth century methods of transportation play an important role) and accelerated narrative rhythm, evident in both Nerval's and in Flaubert's travel writing, interchangeably evoke liberation, slowed, lethargic movement, and finally immobility (whose psychological equivalent is catatonia), opposing, but also mutually dependent bookends of the technological project. Beyond its enjoyable, mildly intoxicating effects, speed signifies a reality always in the process of transition; for Nerval, it signifies both limitless, unfolding possibility and flight from reality. The logistics of travel on the other hand, such as problems in engineering, mechanical failures, the coordination of routes and timetables, as I've discussed in the first section of this chapter, represent the inevitable encroachment of reality upon the idealized experience. Obstructed progress, and not delight in movement, as some have suggested, is central to Nerval's relationship to movement.

> La vitesse idéale étant hors de portée, tout mouvement, quelque rapide qu'il soit, n'est donc plus que lenteur, et c'est en effet beaucoup plus sous l'aspect de la lenteur que sous celui de la vitesse que Nerval envisage en fin de compte le mouvement. La lenteur, c'est-à-dire un retard exaspérant, un obstacle qui n'est pas simplement une source d'irritation mais un rappel de la temporalité d'où l'on

> n'échappe pas, de la mortalité inévitable. (R. Chambers, *La Poétique du Voyage* 35)

An underlying theme of self-sabotage, whether as a result of compulsion or of innate pessimism, appears hard to avoid. At a symbolic level, obstruction is proof of the inevitable failure; obstruction forces an awakening from the delirium of movement to the reality—not so much of having lost the way as—of having missed important opportunities along the way: the chance encounter, the transformative potential offered by one destination versus another. To the extent that narrative reality is provisional, the altered state of consciousness produced by travel retains a transformative potential slowly eroded by the day-to-day obstructions of residence abroad.

His preference for chance occurences notwithstanding, Nerval frames the symbolic premise of his journey in a variety of ways. Initiation, a necessary component of social evolution, is an inescapable stepping stone to the altered reality he seeks. In both *Lorely* and *Voyage en Orient*, the author flirts with precedents: he distinguishes himself from the heroes of the Grail and the Homeric epic, echoing Dante's sentiment, "Non Enea, non Paolo sono" (*Inferno II*). Emphasis upon his simplicity as a traveler, distinguishable from both the working classes and the 'voyageur bourgeois', conforms to a pattern of lost status ultimately restored and elevated by the unveiling of a heretofore unrecognized identity as a 'prince déguisé'.

In spite of his capacity for strategic lucidity, the failure to make a predominant personal reality stick (from which to construct an alternative reality) stems, on one hand, from the author's inability to stay in one place, literally and metaphorically: "il ne savait, ne pouvait se fixer" (Chambers 13) and, on the other, from a variety of unfamiliar choices abroad, about which

he must be summarily educated, or otherwise misled. The companions of Nerval's youth reminisce correspondingly: "Comme les hirondelles, quand on laisse une fenêtre ouverte, il entrait, faisait deux ou trois tours, trouvait tout bien et charmant, et s'envolait pour continuer son rêve dans la rue" (T. Gautier, *Souvenirs Romantiques* 217); "je l'ai connu pendant vingt ans, je ne l'ai jamais vu prendre pied [. . .]; s'il couchait quelquefois, c'était entre minuit et le point du jour" (A. Houssaye, *Histoire du 41e fauteuil de l'Académie française* 328-9).[xxiii] However much the author professes his dependency upon travel, as both an intentional method of self-healing (and perhaps a less intentional means of self-medication) and as a means of supplying proof of 'guérison', inevitably, and with increasing compulsion, he abandons the prescriptive channels through which these goals might be achieved: he desires marriage but rejects or sabotages all viable possibilities of its occurrence; he shows intolerance towards the inalterably French expatriot community of Cairo and, simultaneously, dismisses the symbolic value he himself places upon his own exterior, *déguisement*, thus also his interior state.

The idealized image of the Orient, prevalent among Nerval's contempories, proves instrumental to the thematic of failure. After his acquaintance with the real place, the traveler's disillusionment produces a chasm between reality and the dream: "En somme, l'Orient n'approche pas de ce rêve éveillé que j'en avais fait il y a deux ans, ou bien cet Orient-là est encore plus loin ou plus haut [. . .]" (Letter to J. Janin, dated Nov. 16, 1843, *Œuvres* I: 943; Chambers 19). Not only can the author *not* fix himself in one place, his conceptual hold on desires becomes increasingly evasive, equated with insurmountable distances and the "peur du retard" (36); desires themselves, indeed their articulation, become more effusive and intangible. Physical space can be traversed as always, temporal realities superimposed, but the desired change, along with its objective, the return 'as one renewed' to Paris, remains elusive.

Movement Iconography

As a means through which an objective or a destination is reached, movement tends to imply a binary relationship, whether or not the trip is one way or return. All movement involves patterns—for Pythagoras 'the essence of life'—a web of relevant relationships that, etymologically speaking, lead us from the concept of generative origin, the Latin *pater*, to one of example, *patron* (OF-F), which, in the 14th century, acquired the secondary meaning of 'a model', to this latter term's association with repetition,[xxiv] which, taken to its maximum potential, both multiplies (ad infinitum) and obliterates the original intention: the goal, the production of something unique. Nerval's contradiction, according to Shoshana Felman, resides in his simultaneous belief in *ressemblance* and in *unicité*: that which is *unique* cannot be repeated: uniformity vs. *unicité* vs. union.[xxv] Felman associates repetition with a rhythmic form of delirium, ritualistic in its essence but without objective. To put this yet another way, in the absence of an underlying (ritualistic) structure and context, repetitive movement, whether physical or at the textual level, has an obliterating, rather than a transformative effect; in other words, it fails to communicate; it cancels its subject.

Although delirium is clearly an aspect of Nerval's movement patterning, of his itineracy, his 'noctambulisme', in the Orient in particular it becomes hard to ignore the underlying symbolic context he applies to traversed spaces such as the urban labyrinth, the pastoral landscape of the Valois, the plains and 'dead' landscapes of Egypt, and so on. Nerval's propensity for the mythic is ubiquitously evident in his narratives, at both aesthetic and ethnographic levels. Sarga Moussa defines Nerval's "goût du déguisement" in Egypt as "une volonté de régénérescence" after his first crisis: "A l'intérieur du récit de voyage, le

travestissement de Gérard a une fonction précise: il marque le début d'une *initiation* consciente et systématique, dont témoignent une série de 'rites de passages' (A. van Gennep)" (*La Relation Orientale* 167). Moussa derives his understanding of initiation from Mircea Eliade's definition:

> Par initiation on comprend généralement un ensemble de rites et d'enseignements oraux, au moyen desquels on obtient une modification radicale du statut réligieux ou social du sujet à initier. Philosophiquement parlant, l'initiation équivaut à une mutation ontologique du régime existentiel. A la fin de ses épreuves, le néophyte jouit d'une tout autre existence qu'avant l'initiation: *il est devenu autre*. (*La Nostalgie des Origines*, in Moussa 167- my italics)[xxvi]

Despite his frequent parody of the role, the allure of formal initiation and its potential for failure, never far from the author's imagination, is evident in Nerval's detailed account of a young initiate's quest for Isis in the episode entitled "les pyramides" (*Voyage* II). "L'histoire du Calife Hakem" (in the same volume), a heuristic for oppositional discourse as well as a multicursal ritual template, employs a mixture of 'rite' iconography from both Christian and non-Christian traditions. The author alludes more than once to the chivalric tradition in both *Lorely* and in *Voyage*. Concerning this last text, Moussa insists justly upon the importance of Cairo as the official territory of 'rite de passage'. As an intermediary zone between the polarities of eastern and western civilization, particularly in the territory of the French quarter, where Christians (mostly Greek and Armenian) reside, and where Nerval takes up temporary residence, Cairo functions as a liminal domain wherein identities remain 'incertaines'. Although he makes fun of himself, the obsession of *Voyage*'s narrator with the alteration of his exterior appearance—"je sortis enfin de chez le barbier, transfigure, ravi, fier" (I: 223)—cannot be

dismissed entirely as a superficial fancy; the stakes, by his author's admission, are unavoidable. From the ritual perspective (both chivalric and tribal), 'travestissement', much like tatouage, has indelible, permeating powers; exterior and interior identities are mutually dependent: "mais assurément je ne veux pas tarder à prendre l'habit oriental. Avant tout, il faut songer encore à constituer mon intérieur" (202). For *Aurélia*'s narrator, disrobing—"je quittais mes habits terrestres et je les dispersais autour de moi"— symbolizes a rite of passage between earthly consciousness and "quelque autre existence" (26). Befitting the recurring thematic, donning the 'costume' retains the potential of a negative counter effect: the possibility of entrapment between two indistinct identities.

To cite an example of this last complex, in the chapter entitled "Druses et maronites," the narrator, asked to appear before the Pacha of Acre in European costume, regrets the need to retain his tarbouch, "à cause de mes cheveux rasés à l'orientale." The problem of merged identities obstructs contact on both sides. As the narrator quips, "et toutefois, je l'avouerai, je n'aime pas ces coutumes de l'Europe envahissant peu à peu l'Orient; je me plaignis au pacha d'être traité par lui en touriste vulgaire" (II: 132). For Nerval, the task of transference from one identity to another is obstructed by the unwillingness of others to conform to a singular standard set by him: the one that would be the other thus gets caught midway between the two-in-one; such is the author's predicament (*dédoublement*). Bipolar identity, *être en dehors de soi, le moi* and *l'autre*, proves instrumental to the obstacle. French socialization abroad and the civilizing influence, not to mention the author's profound identification with *autrui* continually surface to interfere as well.

To invoke once again the etiological perspective, Ross Chambers has noted a series of mythic iterations in *Aurélia* consistent with his reading of the analysis of Lévi-Strauss in *Le Cru*

et le Cuit (313). It consists of cutting up, of superimposing, and otherwise disrupting the 'syntagmatic' chains of association, e.g. the 'lateral' as opposed to the 'vertical' structures in which signs are placed, and, ultimately, the mythologizing of madness by its author and subject.[xxvii] *Aurélia*'s point of departure begins with an acquiescence, *faute-de-mieux*, to the common understanding of a personal affliction whose substantive premises the author will try to deconstruct: "Je vais essayer [...] de transcrire les impressions d'une longue *maladie* qui s'est passée tout entière dans les mystères de mon esprit [...]" (my italics). Transcription, *post-facto*, is a rational act which the narrator uses hereafter to undermine collective assumptions concerning his state of mind: "et *je* ne sais pourquoi je me sers de ce terme maladie, car jamais, quant à ce qui est de *moi-même*, je ne me suis senti mieux portant" (20—my italics). In this last passage, 'je' adopts the role of public representative, mediator as well as translator and interpreter on behalf of 'moi-même'. To this end, the author establishes a temporal duality between the hero and the narrator of *Aurélia*: the hero lives his 'folie' in the present tense, the narrator has recovered his sanity and reflects upon its effects; the former is the captive of both a tormenting and a tantalizing dream-state for which the latter provides reflective testimonial; the former is deluded by illusions of superhuman potential, the latter is impotent. Duality notwithstanding, the conciliatory position of *Aurélia*'s narrator does not entirely renounce the hero's aspirations; an oppositional stance, under the guise of compromise, can be observed in the narrator's closing remark: "Toutefois, je me sens heureux des convictions que j'ai acquises [...]" (89). A primary function of Nervalian memory is its role as a re-ordering device whose objective is the re-contextualization and re-articulation of lived experience. It wants to surpass the confines of diagnosis; it wants to express that which cannot be categorized, the boundless, l'*indicible*.

In support of these seemingly impossible objectives, the cognitive and kinesthetic revival of the young patient, whom *Aurélia*'s narrator/hero assists from the depths of psychological internment—"j'ai été enterré dans tel cimetière, à telle place. . ."—to the mutually shared domain of "purgatoire," aims at interpersonal as well as intertextual transference. Emotional and communicative impotence, expressed by the psycho-physiological repudiation of all faculties of perception and nourishment of "Le pauvre garçon de qui la vie intelligente s'était si singulièrement retirée" provides a tangible metaphor for "l'idée d'une descente aux enfers," whose ultimate objective is, if not re-ascension, comprehension. Hope resides in the reversal of the static paradigm, initiated through a synesthetic re-awakening of the auditory and tactile communicative processes of the catatonic youth:

> Ayant appris qu'il était né à la campagne, je passais des heures entières à lui chanter d'anciennes chansons de village, auxquels je cherchais à donner l'expression la plus touchante. J'eus le bonheur de voir qu'il les entendait et qu'il répétait certaines parties de ces chants. Un jour, enfin, il ouvrit les yeux un seul instant [...]. Un matin, à quelques jours de là, il tint ses yeux grands ouverts et ne les ferma plus. Il se mît aussitôt à parler [...]. Cependant il ne voulait pas davantage se résoudre à manger. Un jour, revenant du jardin, il me dît: 'J'ai soif'. (89)

Herein, the youth's incremental recovery of his 'senses' can be localized within his recovery of the lost 'local' preserved in the traditional song. Thus the afflicted hero begins his own healing process through his revival of the other. In the manner of symbiotic transference, the glass of baptismal water reverses both the physiological and the communicative death-state

of the youth, healing by degrees the rupture between the internal and the external world experienced by both parties. Neither the respective circumstances nor the cognitive states of the youth and his recovering mentor return as they once were, however; 'purgatoire' remains the common ground for both, a mediating territory where each, respectively, undergoes the interminable trials of "mon expiation." In Nerval's final work, unlike in facets attempted in earlier works, a parenthetical completion and integration of trials undergone *is* achieved within the narrator's psyche. As far as society is concerned, the author's transcendence of his interior impasse remains inconsequential; no process of re-integration occurs. As Nerval saw it—and this coincides with *Aurélia*'s objective as a social project—the dissolution of the 'limited' boundaries of perception, not mere hallucination, provide a gateway through which the value of madness may be gleaned, on the terms of the individual at least, if not also on society's terms.

Center and Periphery

As a perpetual proving ground, *Voyage en Orient*'s itinerant march, "pour ainsi dire au-devant de mon destin," establishes an ample subtext for *Aurélia*'s eschatological motifs. Nerval's codification of space is not unique to Cairo. The author applies symbolic value of some sort to all of the European cities that make up his itinerary 'vers l'Orient'. Vienna's mirror-like quality, for example, its social impenetrability, its motifs of water and ice, its circular byways and peripheries, establish a repetitive pattern of defeat that, in spite of his initial optimism, the author is destined to translate to the warmer prospects of his central destination. The emblematic design for the 19th century European city, "territoire privilégié du labyrinthe," finds its ancient counterpart in the twisted, claustrophobic streets and alleys of Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. In Nerval's œuvre, the motif of lost direction, spatial as well as psychological, applies

interchangeably, and yet differently, to urban and rural spaces: the Valois' overgrown paths, "autrefois connus," as-yet untrammeled terrains, "A droite et à gauche, des lisières de forêts sans routes tracées [...]" ("Sylvie," *Les Filles du Feu* 183), for example, as opposed to the barren desert and insidiously lush cultivated spaces of Egypt.

For more than one Romantic traveler, human 'tracklessness' superimposes itself upon the Middle Eastern landscape whose contours and shapes are as inconstant as infinite; the "poussière du désert" intermingles with the "poussière d'hommes." Lamartine, who, unlike Nerval, actually crossed the desert by caravan described it thus: "A peine a-t-on marché quelque temps dans ces labyrinthes ondoyantes, qu'il est impossible de savoir où l'on se trouve; les collines de sable vous cachent l'horizon de toutes parts; aucun sentier ne subsiste sur la surface de ces vagues [...]" (Lamartine, *Voyage* II: 449). This last traveler stakes the life of his family and traveling companions upon the dependability of local guides who skillfully navigate their way through the predictably unpredictable savageries of climate, Bedouin tribes, and the desert's ever-shifting terrain.

Interestingly, tracklessness becomes a metaphor for the progressive extinction of culture (and cultural memory) in *Sylvie*'s familiar territory as well. As a by-product of encroaching modernity, the once natural, unpretentious environment experiences overgrowth and decay: "Où sont les buissons de roses qui entouraient la colline? L'églantier et le framboisier en cachent les derniers plants, qui retournent à l'état sauvage. […] la nature indifférente reprendra le terrain que l'art lui disputait"(195). Nature herself pushes back against culture, even at the edges of extinction. Whereas the vagaries of the Oriental landscape can be mitigated by local intercession (for a price), for *Sylvie*'s narrator, progress, with its hoards of unwitting disciples, such as the story's heroine, sets an irreversible direction without recourse. One must simply adjust.

The organic imagery of losing one's way in the desert underscores the comparatively antagonistic relationship between the gently cultivated topography of the French countryside and the industrial grid. As Marc Desportes explains, the landscape does not necessarily conform to the designs imposed upon it.

> Idéalement, le chemin de fer correspond à une voie rectiligne, horizontale, minimisant tout frottement et offrant ainsi toutes les conditions pour que le déplacement puisse s'opérer selon les lois du mouvement uniforme données par la physique newtonienne. [...] Pour obtenir une voie horizontale, le terrain est, selon le cas, déblayé ou remblayé. [...] Pour obtenir une voie rectiligne, le terrain doit être traversé en ligne droite. Lorsque cela s'avère impossible, le tracé est infléchi, mais selon des courbes de grand canyon. (*Paysages en Mouvement* 117-23)

The inefficacy of direct travel thus becomes an essential component of the psychology of the voyager: detours, switchbacks, regressions, and subterranean passages whose objective, 'that which lies before one', appears untenable. Gains must be obtained by losses accrued: "J'avais bien étudié mon chemin sur la carte. Au point de vue des messageries, des voitures Laffitte, de la poste, en un mot, selon la route officielle, *j'aurais pu* me laisser transporter à Lyon et prendre la diligence pour Genève; *mais* la route dans cette direction formait un coude énorme. [...] J'ai pris, comme on dit, le chemin de traverse . . ." (I: 58). Thus, the traveler is relegated to the seemingly perpetual domain of *neither here nor there*.

To invoke another comparison, Flaubert's grittily sensual vision of the Egyptian landscape and people (1849-50) comments unabashedly on the carnal aesthetics of the writer. Nerval, whose exterior reality is always mediated through the lens of interior subjectivity,

maintains a dual objective. Even in the most objective nomadic observations of this author we find cameos of personal discourse. Nerval's Egypt in many ways can be viewed as a hopeful experiment whose incipient failure sets the stage for the total rupture of "Aurélia." Threads of this process can be traced to Germany as well as to the Valois. *Voyage*, which follows much of the formula of the quest of initiation, allots a respectable portion of its pages to what Lamartine had earlier taken up as the question of intervention in the Middle East, although the role of Nerval's narrator remains largely that of observer. Even his comparatively modest hopes of passing as a local prove more complex than anticipated. It is important to note that the 'brouillard' of the post-Orient Valois, a site of melancholic stagnation for the author, is not evaded in Egypt; at best, it is postponed; more accurate to the respective environments of the countries in question, the fog-induced melancholy of the Valois is merely transfered to drier ecology of the desert: "J'avouerai meme qu'à défaut de brouillard, la poussière est un triste voile aux clartés d'Orient." Moreover, unlike "nos brouillards," this "poudre épaisse qui charge l'horizon ne se découpe jamais en frais nuages." The overarching message of "la vielle Egypte," is its unremitting association with the author's "preoccupation fréquente de la souffrance" (194). Once returned to the homeland, the author's petrified desert scape of the East is replaced by the shaded forest paths of the Valois' waterlogged terrain: woods, ponds, and streams, all visibly undergo the irremediable processes of entropy. *Sylvie*'s delusional narrator pursues an erratic and ill-fated exploration of childhood topography informed by crumbling relics of the past and inhabited by spectral visions of the lost aristocracy. The narrator's initial aspiration to resurrect the remembered simplicity and charm of his childhood after a tumultuous personal history in Paris progressively succumbs to Sylvie's ongoing narrative of social advancement, first as a lacemaker, an occupation associated with the traditions of the region, then as a glove-maker—

Sylvie uses "un instrument en fer qui ressemblait à une longue pince" (197), a tool of mass-production—and finally, as the wife of a successful, uneducated baker, whom the narrator mistakenly judges "peu dangereux" (193).

If the traveler to the Orient seeks some confirmation of continuity between the present and the *idealized* past of human origins, the latter day Valois emerges as a place of discontinuity premised upon an "elusive spatial center" where the sun is subsumed under veils of mist and the past of tradition, personal memory, and the fall of empire at once ubiquitously suggested and irretrievable. The geographical proximity of Paris and the Valois (less than 40 km) represents a "propinquity in consciousness" between the itinerant self in the present tense and the nostalgically remembered, locally situated self of the narrator's past.[xxviii] The rather arduous, lengthy travel between one place and the other required of the nineteenth century traveler who must take circuitous, indirect routes by coach to the heartland of Ermenonville underscores the opposition between Paris, place of history and modernity, the oppressive domain of madness (*Aurélia*), and the traditional ways of the Valois, a private domain of personal memory (*Sylvie*, *Angélique*), whose hamlets, one by one, succumb to the influences of industry and of capitalism.

Whereas the author's recourse to Germany, post-crise 1841, represents his initial attempt to heal the wounds of stigma, particularly through his address to Jules Janin, each leg of the journey to the Orient seeks not only to heal, but to overturn the underlying discourses that produce the stigma. To this end, the Greek archipelago acts not only as a gateway to the Orient, but, more emphatically, as a discursive entryway into the bipolar context. Much as Chateaubriand before him, Nerval describes the archipelago as a desolate, hostile territory. For the latter in particular, the arid condition of the islands reflects the death of paganism and the cults of antiquity, "ces Dieux que tu pleures toujours" (*Vers dorés*),[xxix] by Christianity.[xxx] The

bipolar cultural impasse most evident in the juxtaposion of Cairo and Paris is both introduced and contextualized in this transitional leg of the narrator's journey. The author's unreliability notwithstanding—much of this section amounts to a fictionalized account[xxxi]—this passage produces the real effects of a rude awakening, prefaced by the narrator's stultifying, vaguely psychotic, autumn-lapsed-into-winter sojourn in Vienna, an experience he recollects with "la pudeur de la souffrance" (I: 145). As a precursor to his ultimate destination, the Austrian city induces a narcotic form of inertia as well as isolation: "Je me sentis tout à coup attristé au moment où j'entrais dans cette capitale" (90); "Dans ma pensée, je comptais finir l'hiver à Vienne et ne repartir qu'au printemps. . . peut-être jamais" (116). In fact, the author's stay in this city surpasses a period of three months, from mid-November to early March, until Fate, i.e. a series of amorous disappointments, ultimately intervenes to spur onward the traveler for whom "les glaces" *extérieures* of the Austrian capital correspond all too readily to "mes sentiments *intérieurs*" (116—my italics). Due to his tardy departure, and the loss of "le dernier bateau à vapeur qui descend vers Belgrade et Semlin," the itinerary is rerouted to the Adriatic, "par un temps épouvantable." The narrator's limited vision: "impossible de voir autre chose que les côtes brumeuses de l'Illyrie à notre gauche et les îles nombreuses de l'archipel dalmate," underscores both the visual and factual ambiguity characteristic of this author's archipelagic narrative.

With the exception of the traveler's brief stopover at Syra, most of the topographic and cultural information provided in Nerval's travel articles, and their later adaptation in *Voyage en Orient*'s first volume, is overwhelmingly derived from the texts of earlier travelers.[xxxii] Nerval never actually debarked at Cérigo (Cythère), which, invoking Homer, he implicitly designates as the symbolic portal into the 'other' world of the East: "C'était vraiment l'Aurore aux doigts de rose qui m'ouvrait les portes de l'Orient!" (119). His reference to "les bergers et les bergères de

Watteau" is cross-referenced in *Sylvie*'s fourth chapter, entitled "un voyage à Cythère." Greece herself elicits a desultory comparison between the magnificent past and the desolate present: "Voilà mon rêve. . . et voici mon réveil!" God's disappearance from the ancient world is a cliché of the period, after the 'Songe' of Jean-Paul Richter:[xxxiii] "Le ciel et la mer sont toujours là; [...] mais la terre est morte, morte sous la main de l'homme; et les dieux sont envolés!" Cythère, a wasteland of the author's imagination, "ses rocs de porphyre, aussi tristes à voir que de simples rochers de grès," evokes (pre-facto) *Aurélia*'s obsession with deserted landscapes and "la décimation des peuples." In this desolate terrain—"poudreuse et stérile," "Pas un arbre sur la côte que nous avons suivie, pas une rose, hélas! pas un coquillage le long de ce bord où les Néréides avaient choisi la conque de Cypris"—few traces remain of the ancient gods, who, like their marble statues, "drapée à l'antique, et très mutilée," have vanished, "peu à peu comme la vie d'un corps glacé" (139). Narrative observation, i.e. imagination, noticeably directs the reader's attention to a potentially symbiotic relationship between the past and the present. From an environmental perspective, as if by design, the rubble of ancient monuments incorporates its material resources into the fragile ecosystem of a deserted landscape: "Ce reste des fondations du temple sert de plus à former une sorte de terrasse qui retient la terre végétale nécessaire aux cultures et si rare dans l'île depuis la destruction des forêts sacrées" (130). Vegetal growth and fecundity ("Cette éternelle Nature") have dual connotations, both alluring and antagonistic, according to Nervalian semiotics.[xxxiv]

Implicit herein, the author points to the tenacious if also tentative resilience of a ruined landscape whose impulse is to reorder itself for ecological continuance amidst the surrounding "débris mythologiques" (128). From a bi-cultural perspective, on the other hand, the lament of defunct deities—"frappé[s] au cœur comme un père par l'ingratitude et l'oubli!"—appears to

concern only the western tourist. Periodic mention of the survival, or, conversely, the destruction of civilizations (whether ancient or indigenous), ubiquitous in *Aurélia*, but also prominent in *Sylvie* and in *Octavie*, for example, is indicative of a state of consciousness vacillating as it were between self-annihilation and the re-constitution of a bi-polar self beset and further divided by the multiplying antagonisms of archaism and modernity.

Proximity with the ancient terrain of "le dédale" elicits more than one additional trope relevant to the traveler and to Nerval's generation. For Parisian poets, the Hellenic topos becomes a metaphor for urban wandering as well as for 'eastern' methods of inebriation. As interpreted by J.-P. Richard, the question becomes less one of pleasurable distraction than of directed introspection: "Le dédale est l'instrument d'une méditation douloureuse et nécessaire, le lieu double d'un châtiment et d'une traversée" (*Poésie et Profondeur* 26). As part of an ongoing cultural discourse, the largely fictional Cérigo in particular elicits a remorseful reminiscence of national embarrassment that will continually resurface as an antagonistic relationship with the English tourist.

> En mettant le pied sur le sol de Cérigo, je n'ai pu songer sans peine que cette île, dans les premières années de notre siècle, avait appartenu à la France. Hérritière des possessions de Venise, notre patrie s'est vue dépouillée à son tour par l'Angleterre, qui là, comme à Malte, annonce en latin aux passants sur une tablette de marbre, que 'l'accord de l'Europe et l'*amour* de ces îles lui en ont, depuis 1814, assuré la souveraineté'. (126)

England, introduced as a latter-day Roman usurper, re-establishes early antipathy and competition between the classical cultures of antiquity. For the rest, the narrative tone is fairly

ambiguous. One senses that the author revisits his youthful nostalgia for Napoleon as a formality required of his role as 'voyageur français', *en dépit de soi*. . . . Between 1826 and 1829, the young poet had expressed nostalgia for empire and sympathy for the fallen emperor: "Adieu, France, [. . .] Qui dévores ton bienfaiteur!" ("Adieux de Napoléon, A la France," *Œuvres* I). That the association persists to some degree is evidenced by the declaration of *Aurélia*'s narrator: "Il me semble que ce soir j'ai en moi l'âme de Napoléon qui m'inspire et me commande de grandes choses" (72). His identification with the symbol, as with the persecution of the unique and the (formerly great), remains a substratum of Nerval's discourse, notably in works such as "Le Christ aux oliviers:" "le Seigneur, levant au ciel ses maigres bras, [. . .] se jugea trahi par ses amis ingrats" (1-4),[xxxv] and something of an anthem in "L'histoire du calife Hakem": "je déplorais ce destin qui condamne les prophètes, les réformateurs, les Messies, quells qu'ils soient, à la mort violente, et plus tard à l'ingratitude humaine" (II: 104).

As for relations with the English, the observations of the traveler contribute somewhat predictably to a disparaging sentiment of the period: "L'Angleterre ne fait pas des Anglais des peuples qu'elle conquiert, je veux dire qu'elle acquiert, elle en fait des ilotes, quelquefois des domestiques; tel est le sort des Maltais, tel serait celui des Grecs de Cérigo, si l'aristocratie anglaise ne dédaignait comme séjour cette île poudreuse et stérile" (I: 129). Just as the narrator compares the alleged separatist tendencies of the English unfavorably to the French 'tendance unificatrice' modeled by Napoleon, the narrator's mention of "un bas-relief enlevé aussi par les Anglais" assigns a national (in addition to a temporal) character to the fragmentation of history and of mythology. He seems to have forgotten that his predecessor, Chateaubriand, no more favorably inclined towards the English, adhered unapologetically to a policy of 'lifting' relics during his encounter with antiquity: "Je pris en descendant de la citadelle, un morceau de marbre

du Parthénon; j'avais aussi recueilli un fragment de la pierre du tombeau d'Agamemnon; et depuis j'ai toujours dérobé quelque chose aux monuments par lesquels j'ai passé" (*Itinéraire* 187). Chateaubriand goes as far as to identify an ethical versus an unethical manner of pillaging; yet further, he differentiates between the symbolic value of "des monuments" and "les beaux-arts."

> On prétend que lord Elgin a dit pour excuse, qu'il n'avait fait que nous imiter. Il est vrai que les Français ont enlevé à l'Italie ses statues et ses tableaux; mais ils n'ont point mutilé les temples pour en arracher les bas-reliefs, ils ont seulement suivi l'exemple des Romains qui dépouillèrent la Grèce des chefs-d'œvre de la peinture et de la statuaire. Les monuments d'Athènes arrachés aux lieux pour lesquels ils étaient faits, perdront non seulement une partie de leur beauté relative, mais ils diminueront matériellement de beauté. [...] Au reste, j'avouerai que l'intérêt de la France, la gloire de notre patrie, et milles autres raisons pouvaient demander la transplantation des monuments conquis par nos armes; mais les beaux-arts eux-mêmes, comme étant du partie des vaincus et au nombre des captifs, ont peut-être le droit de s'en affliger. (145)

The liberal acquisition of 'found' objects, along with a sense of personal entitlement, are traits Chateaubriand shares with his English predecessors, albeit modestly by comparison: **"**Ce ne sont pas d'aussi beaux souvenirs de mes voyages que ceux qu'ont emportés M. de Choiseul et lord Elgin; mais il me suffisent" (147). By all appearances, the traveler remains untroubled by the relative sanctity of the native landscape he *now* enjoys, with its "bouquets d'oliviers," its "sillons de vignes," "des colonnes du fumée bleue et légère," "des bouts de ruines anciennes et

modernes," and the implications of cumulative acts of appropriation. In a similar vein to graffiti left at the historical site, ancient fragments, reduced to the status of a souvenir, serve as proof of passage as well as a mnemonic devices for the traveler returned to the homeland: "Quand je revois ces bagatelles, je me retrace sur-le-champ mes courses et mes aventures; je me dis: 'J'étais là, telle chose m'advint'" (187); thus, he infuses personal experience with the sequential processes of history.

Like Nerval, Chateaubriand juxtaposes the debris of a once mighty civilization and the debris of an impoverished, multicultural citizenry living within its ruins: "des paysans qui vont et viennent," "des Albanaises qui tirent de l'eau ou qui lavent à des puits les robes des Turcs." In Chateaubriand's case, the human dimension provides the required degree of local color with little editorial commentary on the socio-economic discrepancies between this 'modern' populace and the aristocratic traveler. The real traveler can be distinguished from the mere tourist by the quality of his transgression. For Chateaubriand, 'getting away with' local goods represents a signature method of transgression for his generation. This last traveler's request to have his name written on the great tombs of the pyramids in Cairo is a mere formality, "selon l'usage" (385).

In a somewhat more progressive vein, for Nerval, relationship with the other mitigates the desire for serial pilfering; the traveler's new challenge turns to 'passing' in disguise as well as to warding off the cunning contrivances of locals upon whom he must depend. Once again, this last traveler makes only fleeting allusion to his glamorous predecessor, "ce poétique voyageur, 'qui s'inquiétait tant de la blancheur des marbres'" (I : 133).[xxxvi] After his ascension of the pyramids in Egypt, the narrator of *Voyage* makes evident his distaste for English predecessors "qui ont naturellement inscrit leurs noms sur les pierres" (284). Nerval himself an avid collector: "Dans ma chamber . . . à l'extrémité d'un corridor habité d'un côté par les fous, et

de l'autre par les domestiques . . . ," *Aurélia*'s narrator contemplates "le debris de mes diverses fortunes." The author makes the qualitative distinction between objects as such: "un narguilé rapporté de Constantinople," "mes vêtements arabes," and the broader semiology of "mon existence errante": "des lettres arabes, des reliques du Caire et de Stamboul […], ces brouillons effacés, ces lettres à demi froissées […], le trésor de mon seul amour" (80). Nerval's 'lifting' of textual artifacts remains, ironically, indebted to the manuscripts of British travelers, such as Burton, Lane and Olney.

Concomitant with the bipolar thematic, Syra provides the context for the author's theatricized elaboration upon French 'otherness' *en Orient*. Both antagonism and (contrary to Chateaubriand) resigned cohabitation become central to the relational dynamic. In accordance with the Nervalian thematic, within a few paragraphs, the otherness of the other is cross-referenced with literary archetypes before being redirected to 'moi'. First disputes occur over money. The narrator spars with a local ferryman whom he likens to 'Caron en Ménippe'—"il veut une drachme (90 cent.): il n'aura pas même une obole"—who, forced to settle for the lesser amount, "se retire en grommelant des jurons d'Aristophane" (136). What follows echoes the author's theatrical portrait of Munich earlier in the narrative. This "jolie ville" produces "l'effet d'une décoration impossible;" "Il me semble que je marche au milieu d'une comédie." The local population is attired "en veste brodée, en jupon plissé à gros tuyaux (fustanelle), coiffé de bonnets rouges," an idea derived from "le costume exacte de l'Ile des Pirates ou du Siège de Missolonghi." The situation is soon reversed when the narrator, reassesing the impression made by his "hideux vêtement de Paris," perceives himself as "un barbare, un grossier fils du Nord," an impression he does his best to shed in Cairo by going 'local'.

The rusticity, poverty, and suspicion of the village women of Saint-Georges who veil themselves and hide their children at the stranger's approach, echo, albeit less stridently, Chateaubriand's distaste for the impoverished masses: "tel est le spectacle assez vulgaire qui frappe partout l'étranger" (138-9). The invention of a church "qui domine la ville et la montagne" introduces a point of communal accord, "Catholique! Vous êtes bien et bons, mes amis" (139); much as is the case with the traveler's European threads, Catholic identity becomes an ambivalent token of status in Cairo.

Unlike Lamartine who professes to reclaim the images and aspirations of his childhood in his *Voyage en Orient*, Nerval frames his approach to the Orient as one of incremental loss, "ville à ville et pays à pays . . . [de] tout ce bel univers qu'on s'est créé jeune." Seen with the naked eye, the Egyptian pyramids, already symbols of death, do little to inspire the imagination; their purpose appears to be to remind the traveler of the effects of tourism on ancient civilizations. Egypt is summarily dismissed as "un vaste tombeaux" and a "terre de cendres" (146); Cairo recontextualizes the perceived threats and unspoken disappointments "qui m'a fait quitter Vienne." Ironically, the narrator approaches his desired hub "comme l'animal blessé qui se retire dans la solitude pour y souffrir longtemps ou pour y succomber sans plainte" (145). In keeping with this last theme, Cairo's women, in contrast to the relative 'availability' of Viennese women, are "hermétiquement voilées" (149). At first glance, the traveler contemplates, not a series of delightful adventures but, rather, the prospect of passing "les six mois les plus ennuyeux de ma vie" (153). Enjoyable aspects of the city, much of it undertaken "en déguise," are soberingly interspersed with melancholic reflections from a state of mind, "mortellement triste et découragé." Both the internal and external trajectories revolve around the fundamental question of "où se poser!"[xxxvii] A series of symbolic spaces within and around the modern city, some

magical, others broaching the horrific, function as discursive and literary outlets much closer to the author. If Paris represents the circumstantial terrain of the labyrinth, Cairo is indisputably its mythic terrain.

"La où l'on voulait être"

As a psychological trope, the labyrinth designates the nightmarish scenario of alluring entrapment, an awakening to one's own fatal lapse of consciousness. Terrain, traveler, and context, the iconography tells us, are symbiotically altered through the process of journeying. The road first taken is never the same as the road upon which one returns. For Romantics such as Chateaubriand and Lamartine, the 'voie tortueuse' tends to function primarily at the pragmatic level; it signifies the urban backwardness of middle eastern cities such as Damas, noteworthy also for the impoverished conditions of its populace: "Nous errâmes quelque temps dans un labyrinthe obscur de ruelles sales et étroites [. . .]" (II: 56); "Nous avons circulé d'abord pendant assez longtemps dans les rues sombres, sales et tortueuses du quartier arménien" (59). Elsewhere, such as in a conciliatory reference to his esteemed predecessor, the 'voie' invokes the ancient and repetitive motif of pilgrimage: "Au sortir de l'église du Saint-Sépulcre," Lamartine writes, "nous suivîmes la Voie douloureuse, dont M. de Chateaubriand a donné un si poétique itinéraire" (I: 365). For Nerval, as for many of his contemporaries, Gautier and Baudelaire among them, the motif evokes a rather more pleasurable experience than the above, with all of its classical potentiality and little reference to the iconography of Christian pilgrimage.

As I've indicated, Nerval's Cairo, alter ego of Paris, becomes the central hub of the labyrinthine trajectory; "les rues n'ont point d'écriteaux, les maisons pas de numéros, et chaque quartier, ceint de murs, est en lui-même un labyrinthe des plus complets" (I : 177); "Et je me

plongeais dans l'inextricable réseau des rues étroites et poudreuses, à travers la foule en haillons, l'encombrement des chiens, des chameaux et des ânes, aux approches du soir dont l'ombre descend vite, grâce à la poussière qui ternit le ciel et à la hauteur des maisons" (151). As the narrator relates, the city is divided into fifty-three districts comprised of Copt, Greek, Turkish, Jewish, and French populations, and surrounded by crumbling walls fortified with rotting wood, the 'plan carré' infinitely repeating itself in this "labyrinthe des rues et des impasses" (153).

> Qu'espérer de ce labyrinthe confus, grand peut-être comme Paris ou Rome, de ces palais et de ces mosquées que l'on compte par milliers?
>
> [. . .] Chaque quartier entouré de murs à crénaux, fermé de lourdes portes comme au Moyen Age [. . .]; de long passages voûtés conduisent ça et là d'une rue à l'autre, plus souvent on s'engage dans une voie sans issue; il faut revenir. (151)

The aridity and dustiness of the place become a metaphor for the traveler's 'brouillard émotionnel', "un triste voile aux clartés d'un jour d'Orient" (194). Daybreak, filled with morning chants and the looming 'soleil noire' over the urban horizon, elicits an "indicible mélancolie" (164); by nightfall, a mystical transmutation occurs as the obscurity of the city streets, simultaneously illuminated by "nombreuses torches" and "pyramides de bougies," resound with "une vive clarté" (153). Unlike daytime, encumbered with the quotidian annoyances of cross-cultural communication, the *malentendu*, and the sober visitations of the personal life, the night is the terrain of magical visions and trans-cultural experiments, enjoyed in the moment but ultimately destined for failure.

In one of its more pleasant incarnations, spatial complexity elicits an occasion for self-abandonment, where polarities of thought and of cultural orientation miraculously dissolve and

disband: “Rien n’est plus amusant à parcourir que ces longues allées d’étalages protégés par les tentures de diverses couleurs, qui n’empêchent pas quelques rayons de soleil de se jouer sur les fruits et sur la verdure aux teintes éclatantes [. . .]” (373). Consistent with the iconography, the labyrinth designates three distinct temporal spheres: memory, lost memory, and a desirable center, *là où l’on voudrait être*. A caveat applies of course. Once achieved, this idyllic space is very likely to transform into a prison.[xxxviii] The pattern repeats itself in a continuous cycle of remembered and forgotten identity, of submerged consciousness and elusive moments of clarity. At first glance, entrapment, whether it connotes a space, a relationship, or an obsession, may be hidden by alluring distractions, becoming “une prison négation d’elle même, [. . .] d’où pour rien au monde on ne voudrait sortir” (Borgeaud 37). In Nerval’s case, the impetus towards distraction provides him with elusive moments of wonder, reoccurring frustration, and, ultimately, with a sense of awakening to the purposelessness of lost time.

At a formal level, Nerval’s Cairo reproduces both the experiential and the structural elements of the classical labyrinth, as viewed from an aerial perspective. The reader observes the narrator’s incessant wandering and limited perspective; virtually blind, literally and metaphorically, his awareness extends no further than the distance between the nearest wall and the next alleyway. His experience, in other words, vacillates between sensory constriction and unexpected spatial openings culminating in warranted and unwarranted cultural interaction, diurnal and nocturnal.

During the day, the narrator divides his time between attempts at cultural immersion and ambivalent moments of respite amidst the expatriate community commingling in European boutiques and cafés; arriving “au point plus embrouillé de la ville,” the narrator abandons his temporary guide “ennuyeux,” a French painter “de l’hôtel français,” “même il ne connaît point sa

ville," for the more alluring prospect "d'errer à l'aventure, sans interprète et sans compagnon" (I: 172-3). The prospect of delightful meandering "à droite, puis à gauche" along convoluted and inextricable streets produces a moment of cultural intimacy rudely tempered by the sudden reawakening to his foreignness:

> Puis, après mille détours, la voie devient plus silencieuse, plus poudreuse, plus déserte; les mosquées tombent en ruine, les maisons s'écroulent ça et là, le bruit et le tumulte ne se reproduisent plus que sous la forme d'une bande de chiens criards, acharnés après nos ânes, et poursuivant surtout nos affreux vêtements noirs d'Europe. (173-4)

The acquisition of a series of guides, Europeans and other foreigners as well as locals, is as necessary to the narrator's infiltration into the rhythms and habits of daily life as his need to be rid of them at the appropriate time. The experience of cultural fusion is achieved intermittently between moments of lost and (reluctantly) recovered memory occurring within the labyrinthine journey of Cairo streets.

As Sarga Moussa points out, the narrator's acquisition of 'une maison orientale' outside the French quarter is a key symbol "d'accès à une intériorité orientale" (*La Relation Orientale* 164-5). Concomitant with the trope of the labyrinth is the attainment of a nucleus, a desired or at times not-so-desirable locus, where an abundance of sensory and visual input erases the temporality of the exterior world and the traveler undergoes a solitary communion with place. The seduction of place is never innocuous in that it promotes self-forgetting that often leads to deception, or menace, which the multitude of stray dogs represents. For Nerval, the Oriental dog is something of an alter ego, a guide, street-wise, unlike the traveler, a body-guard who could

switch loyalties at a moment's notice: "les chiens eux-mêmes, qui pullulent en paix dans la ville sans appartenir à personne, reconnaissent ces divisions, et ne hasarderaient pas au-delà sans danger" (174). These stray escorts, one as good, as problematic, or as inevitable as the next, appear as ever-present reminders of the narrator's reduced circumstances. A hermetic figure, the dog negotiates between the novice traveler and his intuitive encounter with the *ideal* 'Orient':

> Une nouvelle escorte canine remplace bientôt celle qui nous a quittés, et nous conduit jusqu'aux *casins* situés sur le bord d'un canal qui traverse le Caire [. . .]. L'eau du canal est verte et quelque peu stagnante; mais une longue suite de berceaux et de treillage festonnés de vignes et de lianes, servant d'arrière-salle aux cafés, présente un coup d'œil des plus riants, tandis que l'eau plate qui les cerne reflète avec amour les costumes bigarrés des fumeurs. Les flacons d'huiles des lustres s'allument aux seuls feux du jour, les narghilés de cristal jettent des éclairs, et la liqueur ambrée nage dans les tasses légères que des noirs distribuent avec leurs coquetiers de filigrane doré. (174)

These elusive canine guides lead the narrator from the solitary, deserted nucleus of Cairo's humble quarters, allowing him to find the circuitous path to his chance, fleeting encounter with 'l'Orient idéal'. Ultimately, unmitigated instinct is fundamental to the narrator's liberating moment of fusion with place. Self-remembering, conversely, renews the meddlesome quandary of distorted perception, a formula for frustration that characterizes much of the narrator's interactions with other human beings.

The deceptive inaccessibility of Cairo's veiled women functions as a case in point: above and beyond creating illusion, the veil's chief metaphor is obstructed communication. In this

instance, the problem of communication revolves around exterior appearances; here, as elsewhere, the self-conscious narrator flirts with the impressions cast by his foreignness: "On se disait: Il a perdu son drogman, il manque peut-être d'argent pour prendre un âne. . . ; on plaignait l'étranger fourvoyé dans l'immense cohue des bazars, dans le labyrinthe des rues" (176). Echoing the amorous, paranoiac escapades of Vienna, the would-be resident undergoes an ironic and lengthy pursuit "dans le doute" of two veiled women, whose social status he describes as above that of "[les] marchandes d'oranges du Mousky." The pursuit conforms to a parody of the classical model: "chaque quartier, ceint du murs, est en lui-même un labyrinthe des plus complets. [. . .] Il y a dix impasses pour une rue qui aboutit" (177). Upon arrival at the dwelling place of the two women, which promises all of the comforts and intrigue one can expect from the "luxe arabe," illusions dissolve one by one: the veiled women are not 'arabe' but French; the master of the house is not a Turk with the demeanor of "un bon diable" but another "Français comme moi" (179). As for the initial enticement of enjoying "certaines chances dangereuses"—actual conquest is nearly always thwarted for this author—its appeal quickly transforms into the less agreeable prospect of a binding social contract between men. The bashful *harem* girls are in fact young daughters of the couple, "à marier." The narrator can only be too grateful to escape with "le plus gracieux souvenir" (180-1). The very prospect of the accomplishment of his goal abroad, amorous or otherwise, presents a quandary that the narrator (and his author) would prefer to avoid in that it places him squarely in the position of having chosen a direction, of having established a verifiable role with regard to the future: as his current self.

As I have discussed in the first chapters of this dissertation, medieval associations with the labyrinth designate a place of 'errance', wandering astray, as well as a process of self-correcting through the pursuit of 'la bonne voie'. Most commonly, the motif represents a

complex and increasingly restrictive structure or paradigm. The labyrinth may also indicate an open space or a virgin territory, yet to be traversed. For the nineteenth-century traveler, as for early Christian pilgrims, this last motif is emblematic of the unpredictable topography of the middle-eastern desert. The horizontal (yet not linear) motif implies dual characteristics and potentialities: order and chaos, artistic mastery and confusion, the product as well as its processes. Collision between opposing forces is always a potential. In a more positive scenario, the maze walker emerges from confusion into clarity and, ultimately, desirable transmutation. Nerval, who truly desires a personal metamorphosis,[xxxix] repeatedly deflects transmutation upon the external world. His individual *self* never quite manages to codify experience in a constructive or tangible manner. The cumulative residue of this obstructive paradigm can be gleaned in accounts of designated enclaves within the city, particularly the urban garden, where the narrator, purportedly on a mission to find a suitable bride, experiences the dissolution of boundaries between the imaginary and the real.

One such episode, the narrator's visit to the "Jardin de la Rosette," mimics the allegorical context of Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*, where desire produces near-hallucinatory visions or, conversely, stalks the desirer himself. As a departure from the desert landscape of most of Egypt, the garden, a lush (albeit artificial) oasis and refuge from the dusty surfaces of Cairo, is a place of both illusion and artifice. In this instance, the narrator, on an unforgiving and ultimately regrettable search for a 'local' bride, traverses "la plus charmante promenade du Caire":

> Il n'est pas facile de trouver le chemin de cet Éden mystérieux, qui n'a point de porte publique. On traverse la maison du consul de Sardaigne

> [. . .] et l'on se trouve au milieu de vergers et de parterres dépendant des maisons voisines. Un sentier qui les divise aboutit à une sorte de petite ferme entourée de grillages [. . .]. Un bois d'orangers fort épais s'étend plus loin à gauche de la route; à droite sont plantés des mûriers entre lesquels on cultive du maïs. Ensuite le chemin tourne, et le vaste espace qu'on aperçoit de ce côté se termine par un rideau de palmiers entremêlés de bananiers, avec leurs longues feuilles d'un vert éclatant. (188-9)

Both the portal and the path are obscure, even irrelevant. The vertical palm trees and bushes serve as walls that also offer the possibility of passage. In many respects, the author devises a natural version of the theatrical backdrop of Munich. Here, a meeting occurs between the narrator and the brother of the young prospective bride from whose house he has just come. The boy becomes an ambivalent sort of intermediary, an interpreter and guide between the public and private worlds, as well as between the feminine and masculine domains. The interaction unfolds around an exchange of gestures, a foreign sign language the traveler is obliged to interpret: "J'étais seul. Il me fait quelques signes que je ne comprends pas, et finit par m'engager, au moyen d'un pantomime plus claire, à l'attendre dans le pavillon. Dix minutes après, la porte de l'un des petits jardins bordant les maisons s'ouvre et donne au passage à deux femmes" (189). The garden respite and the appealing aspect of the two women, the young intended and her mother, once again become the enticing pretext for an economic transaction between men.

Once unveiled, the girl and her mother appear interchangeable, the first "la miniature de l'autre," neither entirely an individual but rather an ideal creature undergoing the process of

chimeric fusion: “Les traits vagues encores se dessinaient mieux chez la mère; on pouvait prévoir entre ces deux âges une saison charmante qu’il serait doux de voir fleurir” (190). The narrator’s observation, which, even by nineteenth century European standards broaches the pedophilic, provides one of several brief commentaries concerning the marketing of pubescent brides. At their first meeting a day earlier, the narrator reflects that the girl is “si petite et si mignone, que je ne pouvais concevoir qu’on songeât à la marier” (188). He nevertheless contemplates the prospect of her incipient transformation: “Ses traits n’étaient pas encore bien formés; mais elle ressemblait tellement à sa mère, qu’on pouvait se rendre compte, d’après la figure de cette dernière, du caractère futur de sa beauté.” The dual motif of illusion and emergence is reminiscent of Guillaume’s adaptation of Ovid’s archetypal tale of fatality: the young Narcissus, captivated by “les traits d’un enfant d’une beauté exceptionnelle” (1483-8), plunges to his death, unaware that the object of his desire is his own reflected image. Hermaphrodism is a fairly prominent secondary motif of the classical myth (narcissism being the first). In Nerval’s reimagining, the relationship becomes triangular. The narrator gleans not only a potential bride in the blended images of mother and daughter; the hybrid image of the two women amounts to an external transference of Nerval’s own envisioned metamorphosis, engendered by his identification with the feminine. Importantly for Nerval, messages of deliverance come predominantly from a female source: “‘Je suis la même que Marie, la même que ta mere, la même aussi que sous toutes les formes tu as toujours aimée’” (*Aurélia* 72); the overtly sexual female, more often than not, represents a castrating influence: “Pandora”’s title character, “Octavie”’s *brodeuse italienne.*

In the above vignette, both narrator and author vacillate between the domains of the ‘real’ and the symbolic and between the polarities of the ‘moi impuissant’ and the ‘Tout-Puissant’, the

latter invariably a masculine construct. As we might expect, pragmatism, i.e. the patriarchal establishment, steps in to remind the narrator of the dubious potential of his attraction. After his fleeting contemplation, where gender, age, and nationality are subsumed under a fusion of identities, practical concerns resurface. The respectability of her family, as well as the girl's modest accomplishments (she attends a school in the French quarter and knows a few words of Italian), appeal to the tender feelings of the narrator who regrets having represented intentions "pas tout à fait sérieuses." The charming prospect "de remplacer quelque temps le père avant d'être l'amant!" is tempered by the cumbersome prospect of "une grave responsabilité morale" (190). A final blow to this "line illusoire" is delivered when the dragoman Abdallah informs him that the groom pays the dowry, not the bride: "On parle de vingt mille piastres (cinq mille francs).'" For the same price "on pouvait acquérir tout un serial au Bazar des esclaves" (191). The episode emphasizes the distinction between the garden, domain of possibility (good and evil), and the city, domain of contracts and social obligations, both potential places of entrapment.

In a later, revealing episode at "Le jardin des plantes du Caire" the author constructs a variation on the thematic of the Fall. The artificial Eden, which overlooks a view of the pyramids, pits the Lost origins of Christianity against the remains of pre-Christian antiquity. Initially, the narrator expresses delight at this "horizon magique."

> Nous nous promenâmes avec ravissement sous l'ombrage des tamarins et des baobabs; des cocotiers à la tige élancée secouaient ça et là leur feuillage découpé comme la fougère; [. . .] une petite rivière serpentait parmi les gazons, où les paons et des flamants roses brillaient au milieu d'une foule d'oiseaux privés [. . .].

> [M]ais, en marchant au nord de l'île, nous ne tardîmes pas à rencontrer toute une nature différente [. . .]. Au milieu d'un bois composé de ces arbres à fleurs qui semblent des bouquets gigantesques, par des chemins étroits, cachés sous des voûtes de lianes, on arrive à une sorte de labyrinthe qui gravit des rochers factices, surmontés d'un belvédère. Entre les pierres, au bord des sentiers, sur votre tête, à vos pieds, se tordent, s'enlacent, se hérissent et grimacent les plus étranges reptiles du mond végétal. (259-60)

The mythic potential of the garden is always its ability to transform from its original, alluring state to a state of decay, predation, and monstrous visitations. These reptilian and grotesque forms, "ces végétations presque vivantes, dont quelques-unes parodient les membres humains et rappellent la monstrueuse conformation des dieux-polypes de l'Inde" (260), echo *Aurélia*'s chimeric visions, a blending of mythological imagery of architectural reliefs and parasitic hallucinations after the Fall: "de guirlandes de fleurs si bien représentées et coloriées, qu'elles semblaient naturelles;" "un animal énorme de la forme d'un lama, mais qui parassait devoir être muni de grandes ailes […] qui se revêtait d'une vegetation instantanée d'appendices fibreux d'ailerons et de touffes laineuses […], le feu primitif qui anima les premiers êtres" (49-50). Cairo's unnatural garden, located upon a bluff that overlooks the pyramids, "découpées dans l'azure du ciel" (260), juxtaposes two opposing domains, one a degenerate, manmade landscape, the other an archaic ruin, both representative of lost civilization. In this instance, the author's propensity for amplification returns to eschatological themes that coincide with his impending departure from Cairo. The narrator, who carefully avoids commentary of a personal nature, remembers his role as a travel guide; alluding briefly to Voltaire, for whom "les

pyramides de l'Égypte sont loin de valoir ses fours à poulets," he offers instead the circumspect observation that "il ne m'était pas indifférent d'être contemplés [sic] par quarante siècles; mais c'est au point de vue des souvenirs du Caire et des idées arabes qu'un tel spectacle m'intéressait dans ce moment-là […]." Beyond their formidable presence as an obligatory tourist destination, the narrator hopes to dispel a misconception among Europeans: "que ces monstrueuses constructions auraient été seulement des tombeaux" (261). Once again, the pyramids function as an afterthought, a last view of Cairo on the eve of his departure.

Initially, the narrator exhibits an ambivalence that, at first glance, appears to adhere to the romantic trend of 'ennuie', "Plus on approche, plus ces colosses diminuent," only to reverse the sentiment, "pourtant, lors qu'on arrive au pied, dans l'ombre même de ces montagnes faites de main d'homme, on admire et l'on s'épouvante" (282). Unlike Chateaubriand, who abandoned his plans to ascend the monuments because of seasonal floods, the narrator undertakes the humbling task of ascending the pyramids with the usual guides. Napoleon, he remarks, had observed the pyramids "que de la plaine;" "Il n'aurait pas, certes, compromis sa dignité jusqu'à se laisser enlever dans les bras de quatre Arabes [. . .]" (284). After his summit, with "les quatre points de l'horizon" in view, the enthusiasm of the moment is inalterably tempered by the inevitable inscriptions, graffiti and calling cards of English travelers "qui ont risqué cette ascension" and various "excentricités transplantées par nos artistes voyageurs."

From the traveler's perspective, exploration of the interior regions of the pyramid, which he undertakes in the company of a Prussian traveler he encounters at the summit, is an experience "assez peu satisfaisante" (288). A marble block "de seize pieds de largeur" over the entryway marks the arrival of Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. The gullible nineteenth century visitor is correspondingly humbled by a forced payment of 5 fr. 50 centimes, purportedly for the

protection of twenty bearded Arabs in the event of an attack by tribal bands "là-bas, derrière les montagnes" (287).

Both Jean Richer and G. Rouger designate the pyramids as the hub of initiation for Nerval who magnifies the awkwardness of his novice narrator by placing him in the company of the more knowledgeable and physically agile counterpart. I would qualify somewhat this last assessment. As I've stated, the narrator's decision to visit the pyramids prefaces his departure from Cairo, a result of his failure to 'connect' at both interpersonal and cultural levels. Beyond his parody of the situation, Nerval's meticulous attention to the details of the initiate's mythic trials points to his recourse to the text, and away from his own person, as an alternative transitional terrain. He further distances himself by relegating the task of recounting the ancient hazing ritual to the Prussian. The ritual process, which requires the completion of four elementary feats, unfolds as follows.

From the center of the pyramid, the initiate descends into a shaft that soon transforms into a forest "sombre et touffue," after which he passes through fire, a torrential river whose currents obstruct all viable means of escape; a violent wind agitates a ladder whose rungs disappear under the initiate's steps, and, last, as his forces nearly fail him, he grabs two iron rings transport that him to safety. As we've observed, the preliminary initiation involves descent, re-ascension, with two tortuous trials, after which he once again emerges into the light of day, to be proclaimed "pareil aux dieux." Each trial takes place at the center of the designated space where the initiate receives recognition from his examiners.

The narrative, purportedly related by the Prussian, becomes increasingly dreamlike, particularly with the invocation of Isis as the idealized, diaphanous female who evaporates within the initiate's embrace. The entire initiation involves a thirty-day trial of fasting, silence,

and self-contemplation. This story acts as something of a composite prologue to the story of Calife Hakem in the second volume. Nerval's initiate echoes interchangeably the young fisherman, Youssuf, and the renegade mystic, the calife. In a blurring of contexts, revisited (albeit reversed) in the story of Hakem, the initiate's Egyptian ritual of ascent finishes as a Christian fall. Awakening in an otherworldly space, "la perfection même de la nature créée," the initiate, tempted with the seductive enticements of forbidden fruit (complete with serpent), normally fails this last task, earning exclusion from earthly paradise and a lifetime penance: "d'errer dans le monde, et de répandre chez les nations étrangères les instructions qu'il avait reçues des prêtes" (293). A similar fate awaits the renegade Hakem who, liberated from his internment at the Moristan (Bicêtre), and having been declared a deity by a blind mendicant (echoing the medieval trope), flees into the mountains, thereafter to develop a legendary, if select following. Both narratives point to the underlying Nervalian themes of 'échec' and 'errance', psychological, social, and topographical; both ultimately lead to the hero's restoration to a higher status as a pseudo-Christian martyr under the auspices of esoteric traditions.

As a third symbolic phase, the pyramidal narrative evokes the trinity of Moses, Orpheus, and Pythagoras, revisited, as we have seen, in the Christian Fall. The underlying message of ancient Cairo is defeat.

> [Je] reconstruisais mon Caire d'autrefois au milieu des quartiers déserts ou des mosquées croulantes! Il me semblait que j'imprimais les pieds dans la trace de mes anciens; j'allais, je me disais: En détournant ce mur, en passant cette porte, je verrai telle chose. . . et la chose était là, ruinée, mais réelle. [. . .] N'y pensons plus. Ce Caire-là gît sous la cendre et la poussière; l'esprit et les progrès modernes en ont triomphé comme la mort. (296)

If modern Cairo offers an alternate series of experiments in personal transformation, ranging from the labyrinthine wanderings of the narrator, to passing 'en oriental', to the search for 'la femme ideal', all of which prove less than satisfactory, ancient Cairo revisits the theme of ruins as a failed experiment, a casualty of conquest, of modernity, and of the progressive erosion caused by the European traveler, or simply by time itself.

Wasteland and Barren Spaces

A relationship exists between the narrator's serial failures (by his own admission) and the author's at turns dour tone of reportage interfaced with the eschatological fictional tales of the text's second volume. To cite a relevant example of encoded subtext within Nerval's observational narrative, an episode at the outskirts of Cairo points to the author's grappling with both ecological and personal cataclysm. "La forêt de pierre" is one of several ambiguous dead spaces (both ecologically and in terms of 'rite de passage') visited by the narrator before his return to Paris. In actuality, the narrator's interest in the visit is secondary to his wish to keep a promise to an acquaintance who has requested "quelques fragments" of petrified flora. For his part, "je tenais à voir cette forêt dont je ne m'expliquais pas la structure" (I: 309). The terrain in fact is a spectral wasteland left by "la mer du déluge, ou peut-être seulement la Méditerrannée": "La vallée s'ouvre; un immense horizon s'étend à perte de vue. Plus de traces, plus de chemins; le sol est rayé partout de longues colonnes rugueuses et grisâtres. O prodige! ceci est la forêt pétrifiée" (314). Here, the narrator contemplates, if not an ecological disaster, a geological mystery, a record of preservation as well as of annihilation. The vegetation, "glacée et durcie" with its fibers and conduits exposed and intact, once again evokes reptilian imagery: "Chaque

vertèbre s'est brisée par un décollement; mais toutes sont restées à bout comme les anneaux d'un reptile. [. . .] Est-ce un cataclysme subit, un courant des eaux du déluge?" From the perspective of origins, the natural monument, representative of geologic upheaval dating back over thirty million years, diminishes by comparison the "quarantes siècles" of the pyramids: "L'esprit s'y perd; il vaut mieux n'y plus songer!" At a narrative level, the author offers us a discursive limbo.

Beyond its unfathomable structure, the site departs from the narrow, winding labyrinthine patterns of Cairo's streets, with their dominating thematic of urban adventure and chance. This brief episode introduces one of several open rural spaces where the personal quest appears all-but-abandoned and the narrative focus shifts primarily to that of the observer and ethnographer. In episodes such as this, the narrator adopts a drier narrative tone. Nothing remains to be tried or proven. The symbolic potential of antiquity is fundamentally neutralized. If the narrator is reinvented at all after this point, he becomes a mediator, i.e. as witness, to factional conflict and, not unlike Lamartine, an ambassador and educator to a European readership. His role as 'objective' witness provides more than one opportunity for personal reflection upon the homeland and the questionable, yet inevitable, prospects of rejoining Parisian society.

The traveler's fatigue, or ennui, begins to show in Bayreuth, where enthusiasm for the city lessens, much as his amorous adventures, "plus rares qu'au Caire" (378). He expresses a desire to distance himself from "ce bagage de souvenirs antiques," turning his sights to "ces étranges contrastes" of the mountains, far from "des idées modernes." In contrast with the repetitive and sudden "montées et descentes" of Switzerland, the Lebanese landscape is horizontal by comparison, vast, gently undulating, with fertile valleys and an expansive horizon: "un des plus vastes panoramas du monde, un de ces lieux où l'âme s'élargit, comme pour atteindre aux proportions d'un tel spectacle" (II: 12). Just as Munich, Constance, and Vienna

evoke their oriental counterparts, the narrator describes Lebanon as “une petite Europe industrieuse” (20) and compares the surrounding countryside and villages with “la physionomie des Apennins ou des Basses-Alpes.” Similar to Lamartine, the author dedicates several pages to concerns over the conflict between the Druse and Maronite populations, which surface in periodic episodes of violence and retaliation (the Druse are accused of nighttime raids and arson), adopting at certain points the role of a cultural mediator.

Coinciding with the self-consciousness of this new role, obsession with ‘le déguisement’ and passing as ‘un oriental’, which characterizes the narrator’s relationship with Cairo, appears all but discarded in these chapters; the narrator makes only fleeting allusion to his local attire and otherwise fails to comment upon his appearance or its reception by the exterior world. The impression left by French pilgrims to the holy land, on the other hand, becomes more central to his interest: “et l’on conçoit combien d’idées contradictoires se trouvent ainsi répandues, sur l’état de la France, parmi les chrétiens du Liban. On peut dire seulement que nos dissentiments politiques n’ont que peu d’influence sur des peuples dont la constitution sociale diffère beaucoup de la notre” (22). If French influence figures imperceptibly in the social structures of these feudal populations, European expansion, as well as modernization, has instilled itself into the oriental imagination. The narrator comments to this effect at the expense of a young Turkish soldier who questions him “en mauvais italien, avec toutes les banalités d’usage, sur la vapeur, sur Napoléon et sur la découverte prochaine d’un moyen pour traverser les airs” (17) and appears proportionally less willing to discuss the ancient quarrels.

Voyage’s second volume opens in the Lebanese mountains, an environment the narrator designates as “un repos pour les longs mois passés sous les ardeurs du soleil d’Égypte;” he is the guest of a Maronite leader. Here, the traveler appears resigned to his status as a foreigner, self-

conscious in his awkward attempts to comprehend and follow local customs. Moderation is the key discursive tactic. Relations as well as thoughts are reported at half-mast: the friendship one can expect of Muslims "n'est jamais entire;" local morals, on the other hand, resemble "celles que nous voyons dans nos provinces du Midi." The polarizing discourse of Nord-Sud turns to areas of cultural commonality:

> Je retrouvais dans la lecture, dans la conversation, dans les idées, ces choses de l'Europe que nous fuyons par ennui, par fatigue, mais que nous rêvons de nouveau après un certain temps, comme nous avons rêvé l'inattendu, l'étrange, pour ne pas dire l'inconnu. Ce n'est pas avouer que notre monde vaille mieux que celui-là, c'est seulement retomber insensiblement dans les impressions d'enfance, c'est accepter le joug commun. (30)

Or, as Heinrich Heine (1799-1856) puts it, the unspoken facet of the north-south dichotomy is a relationship of mutual longing (*Intermezzo*).[xl] For Nerval, this stage of the journey establishes a period of integration where the question of marginality becomes secondary and the "je" is integrated into the larger identity of a "nous" that is no longer entirely French. Whereas Lamartine's efforts at cultural fusion are tactical, even premeditated, Nerval's empathic objectivity at this stage of his journey indicates a level of naturalness in this environment, a period of genuine cultural identification, an accomplishment unremarkable enough, because unsought, to go unnoticed even by him.

Another notable transition, as I've alluded above, is the ethnographic focus of the narrative which occasions commentary concerning tribal and modern civilizations. The narrator observes the effects upon "la vie de tribu" by "cette erre de la civilisation moderne qui gagne et

transforme déjà les cités industrieuses de la côte" (26). Lebanese geography begins to evoke memories of the north, provoking a discomfiting sense of familiarity and a renewed desire for the 'south': "je songeais déjà à retourner dans la plaine, me disant, après tout, que je n'étais pas venu en Orient pour passer mon temps dans un paysage des Alpes" (30). The lack of sufficient stratification between European and Eastern realities and identities provides a basis for periodic episodic invention which points to the author's nostalgia for the Orient "d'autre fois."

The chapter entitled "Un combat," pure fiction by critical consensus, is a case in point.[xli] In this instance, the narrator laments his misfortune "de naître dans une époque peu guerrière," expressing his wish "d'assister, dans ma vie, à une lutte un peu grandiose, à une guerre religieuse" (31). Humor notwithstanding, the author's invocation of Christian martyrdom marks a transitional impasse, discursively as well as symbolically. Ritual transformation, as we know, revolves around what the initiate must undergo: an arduous process associated with graduated status, not merely psychological contrition. For Nerval, who can never entirely choose the terms through which he will allow himself to be transformed, martyrdom connotes a failure to transcend the oppressive paradigm; it equals an admission of defeat, whose ultimate solution, suicide, doubles as a means of 'getting back' at the world.[xlii]

Jean-Paul Richard has articulated Nerval's complex as an amplified version of the predicament of the nineteenth-century traveler: "Tel est le malheur du tourisme intégral: tout y devient comique ou insignifiant" and, by consequence, symbolically "sans force" (*Poésie et Profondeur* 18). As if caught between Lamartine (diplomat) and Chateaubriand (Roland), Nerval as ethnographer, in the 'real' world, transforms himself into a comical version of the French warrior. The store of weaponry transported by his predecessors (circa 1830), unnecessary (and unaffordable) at the time of Nerval's voyage, served as a testament to the prestige as well as the

risks of aristocratic travel to the Holy Land. For Nerval, daily annoyances, both logistical and communicative, replace the sort of formative spiritual challenges recorded by Lamartine. Another side of this of course is that, as Richard indicates, the latter-day Romantic traveler vacillates between the gravity and the comicity of his predicament, an attitude he maintains with more facility abroad than after his return to Paris.

Nerval's shift of focus from the personal quest to the largely imaginary role of ambassador in the second volume of *Voyage* points to an alternative vision of his identity abroad. At first glance, the prospect of finding oneself in the middle of Druse and Maronite conflict is a real source of concern. For the narrator, the issue of environmental vulnerability, related to personal vulnerability, surfaces in two fundamental ways: through his aversion to the senseless destruction perpetrated by one warring faction against another, and through his heightened sensitivity to the manipulation of biological hierarchies by men.

In a relevant episode, the narrator relates the aftereffects of factional conflict between the Druse and Maronite populations. Bent on revenge for an act of arson visited upon their village, an affair that, little by little, as word travels, takes on "les proportions d'une croisade," the Maronites, "avec une rage extraordinaire," use their machetes to hack at the olive trees and bushes of their enemies. Hardly an impartial witness, the narrator comments accordingly: "les spatules épineuses roulaient à terre comme des têtes coupées;" "ce spectacle de destruction me révoltait" (32). The chief protagonist in this matter appears to be the surrounding landscape; neither the narrator nor his author takes an affirmative position concerning one side or the other of the human conflict. Later, during his Lebanese visit, the narrator accepts hospitality from both the Maronite prince and the Druse sheik, the latter a prisoner and dissenter, whose young daughter becomes a tentative, and ultimately an abandoned love interest.

Whether Nerval actually observed episodes of environmental destruction such as the above or, rather, borrowed from hearsay at the time of his visit remains a matter for speculation. Narrative embellishment is unavoidable here. The Druse-Maronite conflict and its destructive potential did nevertheless captivate the author's imagination. According the author's assessment, the Druse and Maronite populations, whose practices embody a combination of Arab tribal traditions and feudal influences dating back to the Crusades, exist at the edges of extinction and at the threshold of impending modernity. "C'est la transition de la vie tribu, comme on la voit établie encore au pied de ces montagnes, à cette ère de civilisation moderne qui gagne et transforme déjà les cités industrieuses de la côte. Il semble que l'on vive au milieu du treizième siècle [. . .]" (26). Like Lamartine, Nerval correctly predicted an impending war between the two factions.

To make a relevant analogy, the author's close attention to the cultural and environmental consequences of the above conflict adds context to his later obsession with "le désordre de la nature" (41) and the apocalyptic visions of *Aurélia*: "Bientôt les peuples furent décimés par les maladies, les bêtes et les plantes moururent, et les immortels, eux-mêmes, dépérissaient sous leurs habits pompeux" (43). To further contextualize the anxiety evident in both of these last texts, we recognize similar themes in *Sylvie* (1853) with with respect to the Valois' fragile ecosystem: "Je me trouvais dans *un lieu désert*, une âpre montée semée de roches, au milieu des forêts. Une maison, *qu'il me semblait reconnaître*, dominait *ce pays désolé* [. . .]" (60—my italics); in this last instance, the narrator's growing awareness of the desolated landscape coincides with the gradual erosion of his childhood memory and with his inability to mediate between his past and his future existence. *Aurélia*'s eschatalogical imagery, much of which pre-dates Chrisitianity, elevates to a degree of crisis the author's perception of what has been lost, i.e.

the ideal civilization: “Il me semblait que toute une race fatale se fût déchaînée au milieu du monde idéal . . .” (*Aurélia* 46); eschaton points not only to an innate skepticism but, moreover, to the author’s rupture with the future. A parallel theme (evident in the above citation from *Sylvie*) develops between the desolated landscape and the existential eclipse: Cairo’s “soleil noir de la mélancolie” (I: 193); *Aurélia*’s “vue d’une vaste plage montueuse et toute couverte d’une espèce de de roseaux de teinte verdâtre, jaunis aux extrémités comme si les feux du soleil les eussent en partie desséchés—mais je n’ai pas vu de soleil plus que les autres fois” (49); “Je me dis: ‘La nuit éternelle commence, et elle va être terrible. Que va-t-il arriver quand les hommes s’apercevront qu’il n’y a plus de soleil?’” (68). Above and beyond his resort to environmental de-racination as a metaphor for the parasitic legacy of modern civilization, the author aims at some sort of resolution. In keeping with the original iconography, apocalypse connotes ‘unveiling’, and thus, at the very least, mnemonic recovery of the now irretrievable past. As a testament to (thwarted) relationships, between the environment, modes of communication, community and self, *Aurélia* can be seen as a timely, if not also a progressive, and not an entirely unhopeful text.

“Une chasse”: ‘Lœil et l’estomac’

A final episode in Lebanon, a falcon hunt, affords one further glimpse into the author’s sober reckoning with the accomplishments of his ‘formative’ journey. The primary focus of this brief narrative involves a codified personal commentary embedded within a cultural impasse, indicative, I believe, of the general tenor of his return to Paris. Initially, the narrator revisits his self-conscious role as the reluctant foreigner, concerned that his ineptitude might compromise “la dignité européenne.” The episode opens with a terse explanation of the practice of falconry, native to the region; “A la suite des croisades, la mode s’en répandit chez nous” (II: 24). In

accordance with an ancient taboo that forbids the killing of animals, with the exception of "des animaux nuisibles," specially trained raptors, "sur lesquels retombe la faute du sang répandu," perform "l'acte cruel" (23) on behalf of their trainers.

On the comical side, the author flirts fleetingly once again with the chivalric tradition, lamenting the absence of women, "les princesses," "[qui] aurait donné à ce divertissement un caractère tout chevaleresque" (24). As for the hunt, he scarcely disguises his sympathy for the doomed prey. The tactic consists of driving a flock of herons into the sky with the sound of gunshot, after which, the unfortunate birds, soaring to heights beyond human visibility, and beyond the reach of their predators, become the victims of a cruel waiting game: "Alors commença l'intérêt réel de la chasse" (25). The narrator underscores with some distaste the untroubled complicity of the socialized birds of prey with their trainers: "où nos yeux ne pouvaient plus le voir, les faucons le voyaient pour nous." The laws of natural selection take care of the rest. "Au bout de dix minutes, le héron, fatigué ou peut-être ne pouvant plus respirer l'air trop rarefié de la zone qu'il parcourait, reparut à peu de distance des faucons, qui fondirent sur lui." As both the victim and its predators fall to the ground, the former is promptly descended upon and torn by talons until, mercifully, its throat is cut by human intercessors. The raptors, duly rewarded with a piece of the bird's stomach, fare better than the heron, "victime triomphale de l'expédition," who appears shortly after as a centerpiece of the courtly table, "décorait avec son col dressé au moyen de fil de fer et ses ailes en éventail." The image bears a striking counter-resemblance to the wild swan that liberates itself from captivity in *Sylvie*.[xliii] In *Voyage*'s use of the motif, the question turns from the dichotomy of captivity and liberation to one of ethics concerning the inequalities produced by biology and genetics. Human usage of natural predation, rather than natural predation itself, appears to be the bone of contention for this author. The

tactical element of the ‘sport’, particularly from the heron’s perspective, forces the poignant issue of the initial premise of the author’s Oriental journey: escape from public humiliation and victimization; it forces him to contemplate the prospects awaiting him upon his inevitable return to Paris.

The narrator’s commentary concerning yet another eastern hunting custom supports this last reading. As the prince informs his European guest, the falcon, used to hunt gazelle, is trained to light upon the head of its victim, thereby disabling the larger animal by piercing its eyes: “il y a quelque chose de plus cruel dans cette chasse que l’emploi même des armes.” Again, the gist of the narrator’s complaint has to do with his objection to forcing the issues of biological inequity, wherein the strengths of one species are tactically pitted against the vulnerabilities of another, the latter having as yet no one to take up their cause. If we turn for a moment to the inherent symbolism within Nerval’s discourse, the heron’s stomach, organ of *assimilation*—this is particularly relevant as a necessary process of ‘rite de passage’—becomes the spoils for his attackers, just as its mutilated body becomes a trophy for observers. To return briefly to the motif of duality, the double-bind, the process of assimilation cannot occur for the individual who faces punishment for being right in terms of his own view of the context. The primary cultural impasse for Nerval is with his own culture. In Cairo in particular, the problem of assimilation, and thus a transference of contexts, surfaces as a problem of nourishment: where and how to get food (eating congealed meat and peas at the French hotel is unthinkable), how food is killed (the narrator loses his appetite after he sees the ambling, decapitated body of a chicken, killed by his cook Mustafa for his evening meal), how much it costs to keep a cook, whether or not the food will be poisoned by a disgruntled servant, and so on. The raptor’s predatory eye, along with beak and talons, represent the author’s fear of renewed scrutiny by the medical profession and, in

particular, Parisian critics, among whom he counts both the press and fair weather friends. In the final assessment, the author, if not also his narrator, uses the episode to articulate his disappointing conclusion that, in spite of high hopes set for his journey, the Parisian subtext looms, unchanged. The "série d'épreuves" he hoped to master in the Orient have yet to be undertaken, in *Aurélia*, a text whose context transcends the dimensions of physical geography as well as fixed notions of time and space.

[i] The reference here is to the utopian and early-socialist enthusiasms that gripped the Parisian intelligentsia in the 1840s and were swept away—after having been celebrated in February—in the divisive bloodshed of June 1848. See R. Chambers, "The suicide Tactic," *Room for Maneuver*.

[ii] See also the earlier section of this chapter, "La route et la vapeur," 8, and note xiv.

[iii] Chambers 109-10.

[iv] Michel Jeanneret provides Nerval's explanation: "'La terre, avant d'appartenir à l'homme, avait été habitée pendant soixante-dix mille ans par quatre grandes races créées primitivement, selon le Coran, 'd'une matière *élevée*, *subtile* et *lumineuse*'. C'étaient les Dives, les Djinns, les Afrites et les Péris, appartenant d'origine aux quatre elements, comme les ondins, les gnomes, les sylphes et les salamandres des legends du Nord," note 26, *V.O.* II: 372. See also Jean Richer, *Nerval et les Doctrines Esotériques*.

[v] Rousseau's observation, *les Confessions*, 146-7. See D. P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris* 13.

[vi] See D. Delcourt, *L'éthique du Changement* 5-8. Also passim in my first and second chapters.

[viivii] The etymology of 'monument' can be traced to 'mind'; *monēre*: (*admonēre*, to remind or to warn), as well as *monimentum*, anything that recalls the mind, especially the memory, to people, a tomb or a statue; in Partridge.

[viii] "La ville haussmannienne privilège la mobilité: elle lance donc les sujets dans l'horizontalité de ses rues et les contraint à un parcours plus rapide encore, plus heurté, et plus intense dans un espace qui devient plus étendu et plus complexe" (P. Loubier)18.

[ix] Desportes records a generic exchange of the post-1830 rail traveler.

[x] Y. F. Tuan, Paul Shephard.

[xi] See Loubier.

[xii] See the earlier section of this chapter, entitled "La Route et la Vapeur."

[xiii] Rigoli cites a series of titles, variously altered according to country and region of publication: "Scènes de la Vie Egyptienne," "Scènes de la Vie Orientale," among others, and, in two separate articles by Alphonse Esquiros, under the shared title of "Maladies de l'Esprit." Esquiros' first article, published in 1845, treated the topic "De l'Hallucination et des Hallucinés;" a second article appeared in 1847 under the title of "Des Idiots et des Travaux Contemporains sur l'Idiotie." See "Les Orients de la Folie" 50-1.

[xiv] I've used the standard English spelling. The French spelling is variously altered in texts of the period: *haschisch*, *haschich*, *hachich*.

[xv] Gautier published *Le Hachich*, 1843, and *Le club des hachichins*, 1846; Baudelaire's *Le poème du haschisch* analyzed the different stages of the induced dream-state under the influence.

[xvi] J.D. [Delpech? Delpit?], "Théomanie," in *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales, par une société de médecins et de chirurgiens*, Paris, C.L.F. Panckoucke, t. VIII (1814), 295; see Rigoli "Les Orients de la folie."

[xvii] See also Rigoli 47.

[xviii] See Chambers, "The Suicide Tactic."

[xix] G. Bateson describes the double-bind, a bipolar trap as well as a form of cognitive crisis, as a trauma involving a 'formal structure' in which multiple logical types are "played against each other" (196).

[xx] Deleuze has linked problems of communication and of geographic patterning to what he identifies as "a crisis of signs."

[xxi] *Œuvres complètes I*: 1386.

[xxii] Felman writes: "Le propos de Nerval est dès lors d'abolir – par l'écriture – ce verdict d'exclusion, de se faire reconnaître par l'autre, sans pour autant rejeter une partie de lui-même. C'est pourquoi, sans *renier* sa folie, il entend cependant la *nier*: contester sa définition réductrice par le discours raisonnable" (65).
[xxiii] In Chambers 13-4.
[xxiv] Partridge.
[xxv] "Telle est la contradiction de Nerval qui, de dramatiser la folie du lyrisme, transforme la vie elle-même en une sorte de délire rythmique. [...] L'unique est dès lors, précisément, ce qui ne cesse de se répéter. L'unique en d'autres termes, n'existe pas" (Felman 90).
[xxvi] See note 62 in Moussa; also Eliade, "L'initiation et le monde moderne," *La Nostalgie des Origines*, Paris, Idées/Gallimard, 1971 (206-7).
[xxvii] See Chambers *Poétique* 366; also, T. Eagleton's chapter on "Structuralism and Semiotics" 102.
[xxviii] "[I]n short, it stands for the dividedness of a melancholic consciousness" (Chambers 114).
[xxix] *L'Artiste*, December 28, 1845, and *Les Chimères*, 1854.
[xxx] Guy Riegert observes that Nerval's ritual terminology points to the Dionyssian cult (la coupe, la lierre et les cymbales); references to both Pan and Isis lead him to conclude that Nerval's implicit designation is 'all gods' existing before Christ. See H. Mizuno 114.
[xxxi] "La seule escale de Nerval en Grèce a été Syra. Il ne s'est jamais arrêté à Cérigo."
[xxxii] Chapters XIV to XXI borrow from the *Voyage de Dimo et Nicolo Stephanopoli en Grèce*, attributed to A. Serieys, and *Lettres sur la Morée, of A.-L. Castellan* (1808). Michel Jeanneret credits G. Rouger for this information, *Voyage* I, note 62: 397.
[xxxiii] Mizuno, note 53: 117.
[xxxiv] The author's somewhat interchangeable equation of Vénus with Isis in chapters XII-XXI of *V.O. I*, as well as chapter IV of "Isis," in *Les Filles du Feu*, can be traced to his reading of Lucrèce, Julien, Uranie, Plotin, and Apulée, among others. See note 63: 397.
[xxxv] *Les Filles du Feu* 323.
[xxxvi] The question appears to have something to do with entropy as well as with attribution: "Pourquoi veut-on faire entrer dans la question primitive une question étrangère à l'objet dont il s'agit ? Les ruines de marbre blanc, dont on se plait à faire une difficulté, ne peuvent-elles pas avoir appartenu à un sépulcre tout différent de celui de Thémistocle?" (151).
[xxxvii] Fragment of a poem signed 'M. Personne', first attributed to Théophile Gautier and later to Nerval (ca. 1831): "Mon âme autour de moi s'attachât quelque part ;/ Mais comme la colombe hors de l'arche envoyée,/ Elle m'est revenue à chaque fois mouillée,/ Traînant l'aile, sentant ses forces s'épuiser,/ Et n'ayant pu trouver au monde où se poser !" See Bénichou, *L'École du Désenchantement* 225.
[xxxviii] "Entre oubli et prison, il y a l'éveil – conscience de l'oubli – signifiant que quelque chose s'est passé, que soudain le monde où l'on se trouvait jusqu'alors sans problème est devenu le lieu d'où l'on doit s'échapper" (P. Borgeaud 37).
[xxxix] See Moussa, "Nerval Ethnologue."
[xl] Nerval relates Heine's fable: "l'apologue d'un sapin du Nord couvert de neige, qui demande le sable aride et le ciel de feu du désert, tandis qu'à la même heure un palmier brûlé par l'atmosphère aride des plaines d'Égypte demande à respirer dans les brumes du Nord, à se baigner dans la neige fondue, à plonger ses racines dans le sol glacé" (*V.O.* II: 30).

[xli] Nerval's letters to his father on the corresponding dates of July 25 and August 19, 1843, make no reference to the episodes related in this chapter (Gilbert Rouger, note 6, *V.O.* II: 370).
[xlii] See Chambers.
[xliii] A corresponding image appears in *Sylvie*'s fourth chapter, "Un voyage à Cythère;" in this instance, "un cygne sauvage," centerpiece of the young arnchers' festive table, "jusque-là captive sous les fleurs," affects an escape, scattering the festive bouquets and crowns "de tous côtés" (*Les filles du feu* 182).

Concluding Thoughts

As I conclude this dissertation, I would like to point briefly to some ways in which the medieval and 19th-century texts noted herein anticipate and contribute to contemporary (21st-century) eco-critical dialogues which have moved away from earlier interests in restoring contact between modern humans and the natural world to an indictment of "white, affluent, Eurocentric nostalgia" for the now obsolete natural world (Buell, "Forward," *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-Frist Century*, 2011). Recent inquiries as to the origin of "posthuman" existence, which can be defined as the "mechanization and materialization of human identity" (P. Outka, "Posthuman/ Postnatural," in above), identify the 19th-century and developments in evolutionary theory, in organic chemistry, and in technology as pivotal loci. The notion that ecological consciousness can be traced to the same period, largely as a result of these last developments, can be relativized by the prevalence of the wasteland scenario in the Arthurian narrative as well as by evidence of mass deforestation and the existence of smog in urban centers throughout northern Europe during the 12th-century. As both the medieval and 19th-century texts examined in these last chapters attest, the perceived consequences of both human-induced and random modifications to the environment produce reflections, both collective and within the individual psyche, we can associate with ecological thinking.

As I mentioned in my introduction, the loss of integrality in the eco-human relationship and prospective evidence of a conceptual post-human condition appear as tangible concerns of the Arthurian diegesis. A final scene in Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*, in which, one armor-

clad knight after another falls dead onto a metallic, post-utilitarian rubbish heap, homes in on *La Mort*'s vision of the end of at least one order of humanity. The individual identity of each knight is all but erased, and ironically preserved in isolation, by the metallic sarcophagus that encases him. Armor, a failed technology, litters and, indeed, along with many arrows and swords, becomes comingled with the denuded forest landscape, presumably (as we have seen with subsequent implements of warfare) to decompose slowly over several centuries. Bresson's close, astute visual reading of the text tells us that the 13th-century has its own version of the 21st-century cyborg—the *golem*, derived from Jewish folklore, was adopted in medieval writing to refer to inanimate, amorphous being—and indeed attempts to come to terms with the "unstable mesh" of emergent nature-culture (T. Morton, "The Mesh," above).

Let's consider for a moment some factors contributing to pervasive feelings of eco-social instability respective to each period. The attempt of 19th-century English poets to do away with the disjunction between humans and nature has been attributed to developments in science (Darwin in particular) and to both the psychological and environmental effects of industrialization. From the French perspective, Victor Hugo, Arsène Houssaye, and Gérard de Nerval adopt attitudes unique to their individual poetic dispositions as a result of technological and industrial developments in France after 1830. Unlike Houssaye, who rejects the effects of industrialization altogether, Hugo and Nerval use industrial debris and accelerated movement to stake out new literary terrain. We will remember that the 19th-century poet, unlike his medieval counterpart, is established in his sense of self; this does not, however, make him immune to external influences. As he experiences himself rudely awakened from a sublime moment of communion with self, body, and nature by the unpleasant noises and waste-products of industry,

his Romantic sensibility both loses and gains relationship with an environment that is already to a large extent artificially engineered.

From the earlier medieval perspective, as we have seen, social and environmental flux, viewed then largely as regressive rather than as progressive developments, can be observed in such contexts as: the loss of symbolic value and the decadent environmental condition of the forest, in the replacement of greenery with barren landscapes, emphasis upon the materials of power and warfare, the emergence of outsider classes (moneychangers for example) and in univocal designations (with respect to gender and sexuality), a breakdown of courtly relating and social unity, and so forth. An additional point to consider, important to the perspectives of the 12th- and 13th-centuries, is the emergent concept of self. As I discussed in the introduction, the 12th-century marks a period in which the individual begins to perceive herself as both part of and separate from a collective that includes a related understanding of community and the natural environment; individuals must contend with unique selves and corresponding responsibilities to a larger collective. Once again, this relativizes the idea put forth by both Gurevich and Bakhtin that places medieval humans in a fixed state of dependency upon the natural environment, from which they are also incapable of differentiating themselves. Medieval man, Gurevich tells us, is yet unable to conceive of nature as an "object" upon which one might "act from outside" (32). I would simply point out (with Darwin) that 'acting upon' is unavoidable where all forms of species and nature are concerned. Agricultural practices, the erection of towers, and the conception of the courtly garden, a locus of artifice, evidence progressive degrees of sophistication regarding 'acting upon' the natural environment. This said, the operative word for the 12th-century self is *emergent*, and therefore unstable. By its very incipient nature, and as we have seen articulated in Chrétien's romances as well as in the prose narratives of the 12th- and

13th-centuries, the emergence of an awareness of individual identity imposes internal as well as external pressures upon collective notions of identity and must thereby be understood as producing a significant source of disruption.

This invariably influences human-environmental relations during the period as well. Compounded by external pressures, such as gradual advancements in technology, largely for the purposes of warfare, fears concerning the comingling of disparate social classes, trade, and so forth, not to overlook the use and abuse of natural resources, the gradual and yet incomplete individuation of self from the surrounding environment causes a crisis of identification concerning what to understand as *self* and what to *understand* as other. The 12th-century human, who begins to glean his separateness from other humans and from the entity he knows as the natural world, experiences the initial crisis of aloneness. Moreover, he begins to consider the consequences of acting upon an 'object', nature, which conveys messages of the cosmic body to which he still belongs. As we have discussed, uncertainty concerning the potential and magnitude of repercussion within the environment or from the cosmos informs the wasteland scenario; incest myths echo this in their perception of the monstrous, the very worst that can be imagined as a consequence of "deracinated" human actions. What is also indicated here, I believe, is an incipient environmental ethos[i] which, rather than setting as an objective medieval man's ability to "stand up for himself against the natural environment" (Gurevich 32), constellates his conflicted sense of stewardship: conflicted because neither the environment nor humans represent exclusively benevolent entities. By disappearing from the cultural status quo of Arthur's kingdom, for instance, Perceval makes a nascent environmentally ethical choice, at the expense of social belonging. The pessimistic outlook of *La Mort* would indicate a sense of fatality concerning the "undefined spaces"[ii] of the future brought about by deviations from

accepted standards of relating (adultery, incest) and the rupture of pacific bonds of fealty and kinship.

With respect to the above, I'll turn to a relevant observation Jill Casid makes in her analysis of hybridity, i.e. concepts of the monstrous reflect transitional periods within and between species; they occur "at the edges" of merging and emerging identities (*Environmental Criticism*). To put this in ecological terms, environmental transformation and destruction are "predicated on the separation of biobodies from ecologies that support them" (63). As we might apply this to the cultural phenomenon of the late Middle Ages, burgeoning distinctions between self and the anthropocosmic universe carry unforeseen consequences; similarly, the problem of vertical power relations addressed by adultery in literature garners reactionary imaginings of the consequences of deviating from the 'norm'—engineering as it were a more desirable alternative to extant patriarchal genealogy.

Much in the same way, narratives of quest (and quotidian travel for that matter) both perform and contend with the unpredictable results of the ongoing 'piecing together' of familiar and unfamiliar cultural and environmental entities. They construct and articulate concepts of self with relationship to lived spaces—a space becomes lived and inevitably defined by its traversal, whether or not one inhabits it. Both the evolution and the articulation of personhood are defined "for better or for worse by environmental entanglement" (Buell 23); "Where the hand of man is not, nature is barren" (Blake).[iii] Travelers risk something as well by moving through space; they subject themselves to extant laws of place, of climate, of unfamiliar cultures. As interlopers and transgressors, they become porous, susceptible to grafted notions of identity that often prove ephemeral: Perceval locates a *self* apart from existing models; Nerval disperses a never-found self within multiple, ever-expanding loci of cosmo-human identity; fictional characters, such as

Galehaut, and intentional quêteurs, such as Lamartine, can be undone (deconstructed literally and figuratively) both by their operations within space and by the objects of their self-determination.

Casid's observation also applies with respect to 19th-century efforts to re-integrate human existence with a notion, however misplaced, of the 'megacosmos'. For French Romantics, the loss of nature is never as significant as the loss of culture: both humans and the environments in which they operate belong to social categories.[iv] Experiencing the utter desolation of cultures of proximity, 19th-century France seeks an antidote in the expansive territories of primordial cultures whose daily realm of operations remains within the 'quartier'. Nerval's insistence upon the devastation of early cultures appears not incidentally as a residual counter-effect of accelerated movement; the fact of machinery in mid-19th-century France purposefully generates the experience of breaking though barriers of time and place, with both exhilarating and disorienting results. Individuals tune into processes and, losing sight of the tangible, transplant themselves to 'foreign environments' in an effort to reacquaint themselves with the *real*.[v] Romantics such as Lamartine and Nerval do not prescribe or carry out doctrines of restoration as much as they attempt chimerical transfigurations. Ultimately, and in spite of their respective privileged positions, they confirm that, at least in the tangible world between the agro-centered vs. the machine-centered universe, average, and even exceptional humans are not altogether at the helm of emergent outcomes. As pre-post-humans, Romantics awake to the shock of an ongoing condition which is the crisis of disenfranchised situation, believing (as is the case with their 12th- and 13th-century predecessors as well as with subsequent generations) that their experiences are unique to them.

[i] I'll use Aldo Leopold's understanding of land ethic as an ethos of "place" and ethical behavior, "calling for the land itself as having rights." In A. K. Siewers' essay, "Ecopoetics and the Origins of English Literature," Hiltner, et. al., *Ecocriticism* 109.

[ii] See J. Casid "Chimerical Figurations at the Monstrous Edges of Species," in Hiltner, et. al.

[iii] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

[iv] This would correspond with the understanding of what Buell terms "second-wave" environmental thinking: "According to the former [first-wave] way of thinking, the prototypical human figure is a solitary human and the experience in question activates a primordial link between human and nonhuman. According to the latter [second-wave], the prototypical human figure is defined by social category and the 'environment' is artificially constructed" (*Environmental Criticism*).

[v] Timothy Morton sees a similar effect in Darwin's evolutionary world view: "Suddenly, things that you think of as real [. . .] become the abstraction, an approximation of flowing metaphoric processes [. . .]" (Hiltner, et. al. 19-20).

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