

Fall 10-15-1984

Uncouth Innocence: Some Links Between Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach and J.R.R. Tolkien

J. S. Ryan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ryan, J. S. (1984) "Uncouth Innocence: Some Links Between Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach and J.R.R. Tolkien," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 11: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol11/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



Uncouth Innocence: Some Links Between Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach and J.R.R. Tolkien

Abstract

Sees a subtle but pervasive similarity between von Eschenbach and Tolkien in “tone and central philosophies.” Sees “the whole medieval treatment of the Percival/Parzival theme” as “a general source for the various aspects of the hobbit character.” Also sees structural parallels between Chrétien de Troyes, von Eschenbach, and *Lord of the Rings*.

Additional Keywords

Chrétien de Troyes—Characters—Perceval; Parzifal (character); Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Sources; Wolfram, von Eschenbach—Characters—Parzival

Uncouth Innocence

Some Links Between Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach and J.R.R. Tolkien

J.S. Ryan

The main theme -- of *The Lord of the Rings* -- is the ineluctable conversion of hobbit into hero. (C.S. Lewis, 'The Dethronement of Power', *Time and Tide*, 22 October, 1955, p.13 73)

The hobbits have the universal appeal of little things -- they are self-indulgent, childlike, but self-sufficient. Their power lies in an unexpected ability to withstand evil (Ruth Woel, *The Mythology of Middle-earth* (1977), p. 59.)

(of Wolfram von Eschenbach). No other mediaeval author, indeed, perhaps no author before the nineteenth century, has shown such keen and sympathetic insight into the mind of a child. (Introduction, p.9 of Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage, Translation of the *Parzival* (1961).)

* * *

PREAMBLE:

It is a commonplace of Tolkien criticism that it should be observed of the hobbits that they possess 'a Parzival-like innocence'. It is also noted from time to time that there are in the Tolkien canon various parallels to older German continental literature¹ as opposed to Old English (West Germanic) or to old Norse (North Germanic) influences. Both types of passing remark are not further expanded upon, because of the looseness of association of the content of the two forms of story. The following paragraphs are intended to probe the 'Parzival' link with Tolkien, an important literary nexus not least because of the central place which this writer's invented race of hobbits comes to assume in the affairs of Middle-earth.

* * *

Perceval is an important hero in Arthurian romance and the Grail winner in the oldest extant account of the Quest for the Holy Grail, *Le Conte del Graal* or *Roman de Perceval*, written between 1179 and 1191 by Chrétien de Troyes. He is not mentioned as one of Arthur's knights in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, or in Wace's poetic version of it, although the name Peredur, which in medieval Welsh literature is equated with Perceval, is to be found in an early Welsh poem *y Gododdin* ('The Gododdin', after the name² of the tribe and the country which furnish its theme).

Perceval first appears as one of Arthur's knights in a list of names at the opening of *Ærec*, the 12th century romance by Chrétien de Troyes, and he is promoted to the position of the hero in Chrétien's last unfinished romance, *Le Conte del*

Graal or *Perceval*³ a fragmentary romance of 9234 lines. Here his chief characteristic is an awkward and blundering naïveté, a variant of the theme of the 'Great Fool'. This maladroitness -- usually perceived sooner than his moral goodness -- remains throughout all Arthurian romance, although he is later seen to be the most perfect Knight in search of the Holy Grail. In this survey, the emphasis will be largely upon the two most important Perceval stories, the French and the German, both by knights of lower status who, like Tolkien also, saw that moral qualities rather than courtly prestige were the true determinants of the religious seeking (finally associated with the talismanic Grail).

Though the various questions of Chrétien's originality of plot and detail are hotly debated, it is possible to show that he drew largely on traditional materials which came to him indirectly from minstrels and which ultimately went back to Welsh⁴ and even to Irish story patterns. For if we may anticipate, Perceval's riding on horseback into Arthur's hall and his reception there bear a marked resemblance to Kihwch's arrival in the same court as described in the Welsh *Mabinogion*. Scholars have also pointed out that the early history of Perceval presents a marked parallelism to the Irish stories of the boyhood of Cuchulain and Finn.

In Chrétien's poem, since his father and brothers have been killed in the pursuit of chivalry, the boy is brought up by his mother in a lonely forest in isolation from the world and in complete ignorance of the order of knighthood. Thus at the opening of the poem he is on his way to see his mother's labourers⁵ who are harrowing her oats with twelve oxen and six harrows. There is a charming and even idyllic tone to this account --

It was in the season when trees bloom,
bushes put forth leaves, meadows turn
green, birds sing sweetly in their
language at dawn, and all things are
afire with joy -- he entered the
forest, and at once his heart rejoiced
at the sweet season, and at hearing the
warbling of the birds. All these
things pleased him, and, filled with
the sweetness of the calm weather, he
took the bridle from his horse and let
him graze the fresh, greening grass⁶.

Then he meets some Knights by chance and plies them with naïve questions, after hearing their noisy approach and assuming them firstly to be devils--

Are they angels?
Is one of them God⁷ Himself? (He

adores the Lord).
 What is that which you hold (of a lance)?
 What is this and what is it for (of a shield)?
 Can one be born with armour on him?

He then determines to become a Knight and seems not to hear the remarks⁸ about himself

Lord: 'He knows nothing of manners, so God help me, for he never answer's properly any question I ask, but instead he asks the name of everything he sees and what it is good for'.⁹

Knight: 'Sir, be assured that the Welsh are all by nature more stupid than beasts at pasture, and this one too is like a beast. It is a foolish man who stops to deal with him unless he wishes to trifle away his time.' (Loomis, op.cit., p.12)

His further ignorance is manifested as he journeys, by his strange treatment of a maiden whom he meets, by his forcible taking of her ring, by his ravenous eating of venison pasties and by his indifference to information proffered him as to the political situation ahead. When he reaches Arthur's court, at a castle beside the sea near Carlisle, he rides into the hall, fails to recognize the King, and when the latter sits silent, Perceval

turned the head of his horse, but like an idiot, he had brought him so close to the King that the horse knocked the cap off his head onto the table. (Loomis, p.23).

Finally the King, aroused from his introspection, welcomes the young man and promises him knighthood. Despite his being mocked by the seneschal, Sir Kay, Perceval has a great destiny prophesied for him by both a fool and a damsel at the court --

'Young sir, if you live long enough, I believe in my heart that in all the world there will not be, nor will there be acknowledged, a better knight than you.' (Loomis, p.25).

He visits the Grail Castle where is received by the Fisher King and sees a damsel holding a *graal*¹⁰ which gives forth light. It is only after leaving the Grail Castle that he learns of the disastrous consequences of his silence¹¹.

He sets out to find the Grail and in the rest of the romance this quest for the mysterious vessel is associated with Perceval's education in chivalry. Although he has a lady, his chivalry is not inspired by human love but is given a more spiritual foundation and is associated rather with the teachings of the Church. Chrétien did not complete the romance, but, had he done so, Perceval

would almost certainly have returned to the Grail Castle and broken the spell.

* * *

Various other works¹² appear to be based upon this poem, although there remains uncertainty as to their exact relationship to it. The next and for us most important of these is the *Parzival*,¹³ probably composed between 1200 and 1216 by the knight of the petty Bavarian nobility, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and it is of a very different character to other works treating the same topic. It is deemed to be one of the greatest works of the middle ages, both for its high purpose and moral tone and for its poetic quality. It is in short rhyming couplets, more than 12,000 in all, divided into 30-line sections by modern editors who also separate the text into sixteen books. Books I-II and XIII to XVI do not derive from Chrétien but from other romance sources. It is also clear that there is much material either invented or at least completely transformed by Wolfram. 17 complete manuscripts and more than 50 surviving fragmentary ones attest its considerable popularity.

In his hands, it is a tale of spiritual education and growth, being largely concerned with other-worldly values and leading from the empirical and temporal (as espoused by Gawain, Arthur's nephew, in Books VIII to XIII) to the ideal and to the divine. It is also an allegory of man's life on earth, from his innocent happiness as a child in God, through enticement by the world,¹⁴ more than four years spent by *Parzival* ignoring God, and his final contrition, forgiveness, and return to all spiritual values. Many of the involved details of personal relationships and steps towards self-knowledge are dependent on early hints, and the organizational qualities displayed in the text are remarkable, and another similarity to *The Lord of the Rings*.

Parzival is not only a model of chivalry but also an Everyman who learns to overcome his weaknesses and faults and he is not confined within the inhibiting codes of martial prowess and knightly good form but is ever embarrassing humble. Thus the process of acquiring even the minimal social skills is seen to be both extremely difficult and spiritually painful. As in Chrétien, *Parzival* goes into the world in the garb of a fool, his mother's device to cause him to be laughed out of his knightly ambitions. He is literal minded and unbelievably willing to follow the advice of an 'old grey man', one of whose precepts is against asking too many questions. He is also unaware of his own name until told of his identity -- a symbolic way of presenting the process of initial self-knowledge.

* * *

While the *Parzival* is a difficult poem, the approach of scholars to occupy themselves rather with problems of language and of style has diverted attention from the profundity of the work itself. Of the sixteen books into which Wolfram's work is divided, Books III to XIII correspond to Chrétien's narrative, and two signal additions affect *Parzival*, namely (a) a conclusion which gave the *Medieval*

German poem coherence as a significant and artistically valid whole; and (b) a vast expansion of the scene¹⁶ of Parzival's visit to the hermit (whom Wolfram calls Trevizent). Thus although we may not doubt that Chrétien's intentions were any other than didactic and entertaining, Wolfram's tone is deeply religious and often the 'atmosphere is charged with liturgical associations',¹⁷ and the two heroes are respectively secular and amorous on the one hand, and immature and burdened by guilt on the other, yet able to avoid the mortal sin of *zivel* (*desperatio*) - that despair of God's grace which makes salvation impossible. Then, too, the Parzival

is a combination of the religious epic and the romance of adventure, which are fused into a higher synthesis by the white-hot magic of Wolfram's genius. (Walshe, *op.cit.*, p.164).

* * *

If a comparison is to be reached about these several romantic texts, it could be phrased in various ways. Jessie L. Weston compared Chrétien to Tennyson and Wolfram to Browning. There is merit in this analogy, if only because the French writer is concerned with mood, while the German -- and the English modern -- is concerned with 'positive romanticism', and with the phenomenology of hope.

While the 'parallels' or analogous motifs as between Tolkien and Wolfram are not so obvious as are such sources as Old Norse dwarf name lists, or the various echoes of Othin in the appearance of Gandalf the Grey, they operate at a much deeper level. And it must be stressed that the parallelism is not all between Parzival and Frodo. Thus the passionate devotion to his wife by Parzival is to be equated rather with Aragorn's service for Arwen. The fact that God is Lord of the little birds, as his mother tells Parzival, is more an attitude of *Radagast's*. And the renunciation of God by Parzival is not found in that form in *The Lord of the Rings*, although Saruman loses Numenor forever.

Rather is one's conclusion that the tone and central philosophies of Wolfram and of Tolkien have much in common. The core of 'Classical Court Epic'¹⁸ is the long discourse by Trevizent, the burden of which is that compassion¹⁹ is the heart of the spiritually good life, and pride, thinking or unthinking, is the greatest sin. While this great moral flaw does not afflict the hobbits, they observe it working in others, as in poor Boromir, or in the distraught Denethor. And much as Cundrie the Loathly Damsel tells Parzival that he will be the Lord of the Grail, so Saruman wonders at the strength and forgiveness which Frodo acquires before the end. Since the role of a King is to cure, and Perceval does that for the Fisher King, it is only right that similar healing of the sick, and so of the land, fall to Aragorn who is a 'King who had been Lost'.

While Chrétien was concerned with the wonders and rituals of the Grail,²⁰ Wolfram turned his attention to the fact that Parzival had failed to be moved by his host Anfortas's suffering to show the sympathy which would have cured him (315, 26 -

316,3). Thus Parzival's shyness and lack of feeling for others, that is a lack of *triuwe* or *caritas*, is to be explained as an excessive concern for oneself and with outer form (*zuht*), at the expense of inner feeling. After he had been denounced by Cundrie, Parzival was determined not to rest until he had made good his failure (329, 25-30). Although these great sins are scarcely appropriate for hobbits generally -- since they seem largely unfallen -- one may argue that Tolkien has explored very thoroughly in the leaders of the Rohirrim, of Gondor, of Orthanc, and of the Rangers, the moral issues of shame, injustice, disgrace, despair, apathy, persistence in the attempt to recover what was lost, refusal to accept discouragement, the practice of courage and the true meaning of chivalry.

Although Chrétien de Troyes is a vehicle for the story, and so an intermediary in the cultural relation, it is clear that many details of the *gaucherie* of the hobbits can be equated more closely with Wolfram's text. But in the separate central relationships of *The Return of the King* Tolkien has underscored what may also be seen to be Wolfram's central tenets. -

Warm human relationships and the love of man and woman join with knightly perfection and the spiritual maturity of the love of God to achieve a sane and happy balance of the claims of this world and the next (C. de Houghton, 'Persival', *Man, Myth and Magic*, No. 76 (1971), p. 2143.)

The great difference from Chrétien in the modern text is the democratic and yet truly Christian concept that sheer moral goodness has little to do with rank and even those of the most noble rank must respect total sacrifice, magnanimity, humility and compassion of the sort which Frodo attains to. Also, by an artistic decision of the highest order the various inherited attitudes were transferred - *gauche* wonder to Sam, continual chatter to Merry, foolish and dangerous questioning to Pippin, while spontaneous generosity was made the characteristic of all normal hobbits.

* * *

The significance of Chrétien's work for the study of Tolkien is that it was a known text and mediaeval model as an extended treatment of the theme of the naïve or ill-made knight, the artistic effect of which was to provide many occasions of ironic juxtaposition of conflicting values. Clearly the German treatment by Wolfram is closer to the Tolkien recession and it affords us more matters for fruitful comparison. Yet the whole mediaeval treatment of the Perceval/Parzival theme is one which is a general source for the various aspects of the hobbit character, both collective and individual.

* * *

Areas of close parallelism
between Wolfram and Tolkien

Both texts have many parallels of structure

and of symbol:

the quest adventure;
the many renunciations by the central figure;
the loneliness of the path to be followed (cp. Tolkien's 'Keep to the path');
the evocation of the mood of the forest;
the background of nature used as a means of emphasizing the mood of the hero;
the feeling that he is guided towards his goal;
the concept of a dedicated group - the Grail servers in *Perzival*, and the Fellowship of the Ring in the modern text;
the range of places visited and personalities met, - individuals in the earlier text, strange new races and orders of being in the later;
the intermingling of the worldly and the spiritual aspects of human existence;
the stress on love and marriage - as opposed to the courtly in Chrétien and generally in the middle ages;
the affirmation of the goodness and meaningfulness of life in this world;
the seeming eastern direction of the hero's quest;
the mode of immediate reporting of battle pieces;
or the western rural region²¹ from whence the action springs.

Other important aspects of structure include the use of contrast between events in the seeming foreground and the importance of those out of the reader's gaze, and the strong sense of place. Peculiarly similar are the long sequences when the struggling central figure disappears from our view - although he is there in the background, be he *Perzival* or *Frdo*²², and our attention is almost more on him because of that absence. Wolfram's balance between the Grail characters and those of the Arthurian circle reminds us of Fellowship, versus Mordor, in Tolkien's work. And it is also the case that the central positive symbols of the two texts are not unrelated - the Grail in the one, with its guardians who are both knights and monks - and in the other, the renunciation of power and the practice of service and of pity.

Both texts have similar elaborately worked-out geographical backgrounds, so that maps could easily be produced from the data supplied (although, in the case of Tolkien, the maps were provided by the maker himself). Consider the following--

Not the least puzzling factor in *Perzival* is its geography, which confronts the reader at every step with an astonishing mixture of known²³ or unknown names. 'Where in the world are we?' one may well ask. (Mustard and Passage, op. cit., p. xlv.)

For here are what may loosely be called: the Orient; echoes of Africa; the Spanish language territory; the Welsh; and the allegorical. The total landscape seems to be bisected by the River Plinazol, on one side of which extend diversified lands which may be designated loosely as Arthur's, while on the other

side lie those under the control of the Grail. Thus the one side corresponds loosely to Mordor, the other to the moral forces of Tolkien's western parts of Middle-earth.

* * *

Then there are parallels of literary mode. Both works are romances (one verse, the other prose), both of which are underpinned by a religious epic tone, and concerned with a naive young hero who is tardily wise but aided by an innate stability of character and generosity and compassion towards others. Both in the *Perzival* and in *The Lord of the Rings* we are presented with the workings of chance or divine providence, and in both the ultimate success of the protagonist is to be seen as a single act of grace, dependent though it is on a process of maturation by both errors and earlier choices. Also, in the course of the long and agonizing questing there are moments of fair reception (at the Round Table in Book VI, or at Elrond's and in Lothlorien).

Tolkien, in the best mediaeval manner, made many 'appeals to authority', particularly to the Red Book of Westmarch. There is little doubt that this is an elaborate cover for his own inventions. It is possible to argue that the appeals to source by Wolfram - to the Provençal Kyot or his investigations into Toledo - are deliberately tantalizing, and

the name is now generally taken to be a cover by Wolfram to excuse his more elaborate flights of fancy, (Paul B. Salmon, *Literature in Mediaeval Germany*, (1967), p.80).

And finally, at the very end, Wolfram refers to his use of 'Master Chrétien de Troyes' and of Kyot 'who sent us the true Story' -

From Provence to German lands the true story has been sent to us, and the final conclusion of these adventures'.

All of this elaborate 'appeal to source authority' cannot but remind us of Tolkien's citations of the Red Book and of similar Shire records as his authentication of genealogy, chronology, and the like. Both writers make much of the 'correctness' or 'preciseness' of source quotation,²⁴ as a proof of their care as transmitters of the true story.

Other parallels and analogues need much more teasing out than space here would warrant, but an actual example will prove illustrative. The name of Wolfram's Grail castle, *Munsalvaetsche* which may be interpreted in various ways -- as *mons silvaticus* ('the wooded hill') may also be interpreted as 'thoughts of salvation', and both concepts may be held to be contained in Tolkien's *Mundburg* which looks like the Old English for 'thought fortress' but could be translated a 'sheltering hill'.

Further details of similarity might well relate to the time analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* and of *Perzival*.²⁵ Yet others are metaphysical and theological. Thus the crushing burden of error and responsibility upon *Perzival*

cannot but remind us of the terrible weight of the Ring upon Frodo, particularly in his last struggle up Mount Doom. While despair and grace are not formally used in the Tolkien text in the way in which they are in Wolfram's poem, there is little doubt that both states are continually investigated in *The Lord of the Rings*, despair being particularly manifested by Boromir and Saruman, whereas grace - be it Gandalf's help, or the allowed practice of hope - recurs continually for so many other characters.

There are many details of the evil side of Parzival's world that parallel those in Frodo's. Certain aspects of Clinschor, the named adversary of Arthur, must suggest the similar lack of wholeness in Sauron, while the former's knights who are black shapes of fear are a very potent source for Tolkien's Nine Black Riders. Clinschor himself is a magician, and owner of the Castle of Wonders. "For the shame done to his body he never again bore good will towards anyone, man or woman, and when he can rob them of any joy, especially those who are honored and respected, that does his heart good." (658, 1-8). The source of Clinschor's power is magic, to which he turned after his disgrace. As Sacker puts it, referring to 658, 26-30 -

In him is embodied that aspect of diabolic activity which presents a direct threat to Arthurian society. Without the aid of God, neither man nor spirit can prevail against him.²⁶

This passage makes it abundantly clear that his power is that of fear, and so he becomes a supernatural adversary against whom all are powerless without God's help. And there are many other parallels between the metaphysics of the two fictional worlds which could be teased out like the comments on *Munsalvaetsche* or on Clinschor, and their similarity to Tolkien's on Gandalf or on Sauron.

* * *

If we may return to the initial premises of this article, it should now be clear that there is much in the Parzival story -- both in its own text, and in its rebuttal of the values enshrined in Chrétien's work -- which make it a most fruitful source and analogue for further interpretation of the prose romance created by J.R.R. Tolkien. Both the German and the English writers challenge the worlds of chivalry and of social honor by their stress on simple things, on human weakness and on faults. Much of the greatness of both Parzival and of Frodo lies in their frailty and in their overcoming faults. Yet they attain their objectives, not within the codes of martial prowess like Gawain or Boromir, but by mastery of themselves and by the operation of divine grace. Both go out humbly in symbolic realization of the spiritual inadequacy of mere force of arms and of martial panoply.

As with Parzival, so with all the hobbits who leave the Shire, their simplicity shows how unsatisfactory is the mere martial code of Rohan or of Gondor. Unskilled though they are in matters of chivalry and formal courtesy, their modesty, loyalty

and kindness cause wonder and win them respect among the great ones of Middle-earth. And in both works it is one of the greatest achievements of their authors that it is not at all clear how the protagonist is to achieve his objective, so that the reader participates very intimately in the development of the hero, since information is presented fragmentarily, just as it is presented to Parzival or to Frodo.

Both texts are concerned with the operation of 'chance' which is divine providence. Both heroes seek only to serve, from which acts come all true strength. Both experience single moments of grace which transcend the forms of penitence expressed in dialogue with their aged advisers. The staying of his hand when raised by Frodo against Gollum cannot but remind us of the moment when Parzival was saved from the sin of killing his half-brother by the direct intervention of God (744, 10-16). Both central figures are accorded God's grace, although that terminology is not used formally by Tolkien but rather such phrases as 'the gift of the One to the many'.

Both works have metaphysical cores concerned with: absolute compassion; sorrow for evil (or contrition); religious education; suffering as part of the divine order; the practice of reverential wonder; continual testing by situations demanding choice; exploration of essential innocence; the hidden working of divine purpose; and the many divergent grades of existence encountered²⁷ (as creation seeks perfection in many divergent ways).

Yet the true center of each is the exploration of the relationship between grace and free will, and there is a sense in which both seekers win salvation in defiance of the seeming conditions. Then, too, both works are concerned with the paradox that only those who do not seek it are accorded the greatest spiritual privilege - total service of the Grail or of the One. And both works are concerned with a world of work where not merely grace but in part a degree of conscious endeavor must effect the outcome of a simple man's quest. As one of the most helpful Parzival critics puts it

One may say that pre-destination (*erben*), free-will (*erstritten*) and grace (*benennen*) all play a part in Parzival's success. The story at different times emphasizes the necessity of being the right person in the first place, the impossibility of succeeding in spite of God, and the glory of persisting no matter what the cost. (Hugh Sacker *An Introduction to Wolfram's Parzival*, p. 170).

Clearly not only the theme of innocence but also the greater metaphysical construction of Tolkien's world are illumined at many points by careful consideration of Wolfram's greatest work.

* * *

It will also be of interest that both Wolfram and Tolkien had dubious initial critical responses to their work, because of problems of genre and tone. Thus Wolfram was attacked by

contemporary critics in a manner not unfamiliar from such onslaughts as those by Edmund Wilson on Tolkien. So the 13th century poet scornfully refers to his enemy without even naming him, comparing him to a swindler who claims to make gold from worthless objects to impress children. (*Willehalm*, 237, 11-14.) The rebuttal by Wolfram indicates that he was concerned to stress the differences of his own work from his contemporaries. Thus he stressed in *Parzival* the quest for innocence and the struggle against evil, while in his *Willehalm* he gave us an unusually humane crusading epic. His deep spiritual meaning accorded traditional themes and genres made him a radical morally and an advocate, not of the usual ideal of ascetic celibacy and retirement from the world, but an upholder of chaste marriage and of the fulfillment of worldly duty.

* * *

CONCLUSION

This survey of the *Parzival* romance is intended to do little more than introduce readers of Tolkien's work to the most luminous of its spiritual antecedents, and to suggest that whether one accepts a specific or indirect influence or no, there is here a world of vast illumination for Tolkien's conception of modern heroism, as well as of his explanation of the spiritual strength of innocence, however seemingly uncouth or naive this may appear at first sight.

While this survey may be held to have departed somewhat from the concept of the career of Perceval/Parzival as a source for the moral character of hobbits in general, and of Frodo in particular, it will be seen that it is not merely the growth of awareness and responsibility in a rustic personality that Tolkien may be seen to owe to this source. Apart from possible origins for Sauron, for Middle-earth's geography, and for many details of the plot, *Parzival* stands beside *The Lord of the Rings* by reason of its similar presentation of the most important aspects of human existence, worldly and spiritual, set against a great panorama of wars, battles and of theclipse of nations. Loyalties, human endeavor and the operation of compassion are opposed to the cruelty and suffering of life. Both writers affirm continually the inherent unity between man's temporal condition and his (necessary) quest or the lack of it.

The parallels between the two writers are endless -- stress on kinship; highly individual style; brilliant architectonic skill, binding together the wide-ranging action by a series of links and associations; heroic acts of renunciation in women; the deepest mystical feelings for nature; and the stress on the need for innate and fundamental stability of character. If this paper is successful in arousing a desire to explore this remarkable mediaeval work, it will have achieved its purpose. For it will soon be obvious that, for elevated purpose, moral tone and power of inspiration, Wolfram's work, like Tolkien's was written for the edification of good men, setting before them an example of the most meaningful spiritual humility and of the attaining of real honor in the world of men, salvation as the consequence of one's acts of service and substitution for others.

FOOTNOTES

1. See, for example, references to the Nibelungs in Edmund Fuller's 'The Lord of the Hobbits' in *Books with Men Behind Them* (1962), reprinted in N.D. Isaacs and Rose Zimbardo, *Tolkien and the Critics* (1968).
2. The oldest literature of Wales belongs not to Wales itself but to districts which today form part of southern Scotland and northern England. Gododdin was the name of the inland country between the rivers now called Forth and Tyne, and that was also the name of the tribe which inhabited it. No attempt is made here to explore the various associations and loose links between 'Gododdin' and 'Gondolin'.
3. Very famous early studies in this area were the two volumes by Jessie L. Weston, *The Legend of Sir Perceval*. Studies upon its Origin, Development and Position in the Arthurian Cycle (1906). The volumes were reprinted by AMS as a single work in 1972. Some of her theories are now outdated, although they would have been taken very seriously in the earlier career of Tolkien. A more standard work is that edited by R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*. Professor Loomis of Columbia University was a fairly regular visitor to the English Faculty at Oxford in the years after the second World War and Tolkien talked of him to the present writer.
4. For a succinct statement of Welsh influence on Chrétien, and on the latter's general influence on later Welsh romances, see Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 86-87.
5. More is made of this simple environment in the modern recension Richard Monaco's *Parzival or a Knight's Tale* (1977). The publishers, Messrs. Macmillan [p. 1] liken this recension to *The Lord of the Rings*, because it is 'about the quest for innocence and the struggle against evil'.
6. These lines are taken from the summarized story (p. 9) in *Mediaeval Romances* (1957), edited by R.S. and L.H. Loomis.
7. In the Loomis summary (p.11), Perceval says to the Lord -- 'I have never known a Knight, nor have I seen one -- But you are more beautiful than God.'
8. There are here obvious parallels to the comments of the court when the Green Knight arrives at Arthur's palace in *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight*.
9. There is an echo of this in the hobbit habit of collecting mathos or discarded objects for their possible later usefulness.
10. Defined soon after Chrétien as *scutella lata et ... profunda*, 'a wide and ... deep dish,' like the Welsh festal platter.
11. Caused by his too literal heeding of the knightly instruction that chattering was sinful -- 'Qui trop parole péché fait'.
12. E.g. the Welsh *Peredur* in the *Mabinogion*, and the 14th century Middle-English rhymed romance, *Sir Perceval of Galles*. Perceval is also present in the Vulgate-cycle *Quest* and in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, in both of which he preserves that quality of childlike innocence to be found in Chrétien's Perceval.
13. Translations into English are those by E.M. Zeydel in 1951 and by H.M. Mustard and C.E.

Continued on page 27

lies in the way in which Covenant is not allowed to flee the circumstances and problems of either world, the way in which his human failings and guilt become his weakness and strength. The conditions within the primary world which deprive Covenant of his health, creativity, and social responsibility are exactly those that limit him in the secondary world. And only when he can live with these weaknesses in both worlds, drawing disease and death to him like cherished lovers, will he function as a genuine human being - with social commitment and human involvement despite a knowledge of weakness, shame, and guilt.

Unlike Tolkien's fiction where the hero can move from his home environment into a new and wonderful world where his senses and spirit are reinvigorated, neither Thomas Covenant nor the reader is allowed that respite. What is paralyzing in the "real" world is doubly paralyzing in the secondary world, and from that paralysis arises the foolish desire to escape. Although there is no exit, paradoxically there is recovery through an awareness and acceptance of the victimization at the heart of the human condition, the acceptance of the fact of mortality.

Notes

¹ Stephen R. Donaldson, Lord Foul's Bane (New York: Ballantine Books [Del Ray], 1978), pp. 258-259. Henceforth, references to this edition as well as the other Chronicles will be cited with the text. Lord Foul's Bane will be cited as volume I; The Ilsearth War (New York: Ballantine Books [Del Ray], 1978) will be cited as volume II; The Power That Preserves (New York: Ballantine Books [Del Ray], 1978) will be cited as volume III; The Wounded Land (New York: Ballantine Books [Del Ray], 1980) will be cited as volume IV; The One Tree (New York: Ballantine Books [Del Ray], 1982) will be cited as volume V; and White Gold Wielder (New York: Ballantine Books [Del Ray], 1983) will be cited as volume VI. Since most readers will have access to the paperback editions, rather than the hardcover, I have chosen to use them. The only exception is White Gold Wielder which is available only in hardcover.

² Tree and Leaf (London, Boston, Sydney: Unwin Paperbacks, 1975), p. 61.

³ For a summary of the important characteristics of the hero see Lord Raglan, The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama, Intro. Walter Kaufmann (New York, London and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1979), p. xii.

⁴ Linden Avery, of course, is as much victim and victimizer as Covenant. Her father has committed suicide at an early age, an act for which her mother blames her; when her mother is hospitalized in the last stages of cancer, Linden kills her, both to end her suffering as well as to prevent her recrimination against Linden for not stopping

the father's act of suicide. As long as Linden flees from her guilt, she is enmeshed in a loveless life. When she acknowledges the guilt, she is further along on the road to self-awareness and human love; but not until she goes beyond both escape and guilt can she love Covenant fully and carry on the quest.



Continued from page 13

- Passage in 1961. There is also one in the Penguin Classics series by A.T. Hatto.
14. Much as the greater world of Middle-earth lures various hobbits out of the Shire
 15. Such behaviour is 'true of both Bilbo and Frodo. Peregrin Took or Pippin found it vastly more difficult to refrain from asking questions, and so, being extremely curious by nature, he looked into a palantir and was thus questioned by Sauron.
 16. 300 lines in Chretien become 2100 in the German poem.
 17. M.O.C. Walshe, Mediaeval German Literature (1962), p. 161.
 18. M.O.C. Walshe's term for the Parzival (op. cit.).
 19. Compare Tolkien's continual stress on pity, as in the remarks about Faramir
He read the hearts of men ... but what he read moved him sooner to pity than to scorn. (*The Return of the King*, 337)
 20. The Inklings were brought into consideration of the Grail through Charles Williams' work. His novel, *War in Heaven* (1930 and, in a new edition, 1947) is on this theme, as are many of his Taliesin poems edited by C.S. Lewis in their joint work, *Arthurian Torso* (1948).
 21. In Chretien's text in the H manuscript there are references to Snowdonia in Wales which must remind us of Tolkien's Caradhras, the peak north of Moria.
 22. See C.S. Lewis, 'The Dethronement of Power', *Time and Tide*, October 22, 1955, pp. 1373-74.
 23. E.g. Seville, Frull, Drave (a tributary of the Danube), as places, or Chretien de Troyes, Guinther or Siegfried as people.
 24. For Kyot, see particularly Sacker, (op. cit.), pp. 112ff, and Mustard and Passage (op. cit.), pp. xxii - xxv.
 25. See, for example, 'The Time Analysis of the Poem', in Mustard and Passage (op. cit.), pp. 1 - liii.
 26. Sacker, *An Introduction to Wolfram's Parzival*, p. 142.
 27. This Thomist concept is usually termed "gradualism." Cp. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum ad hoc, quod in creaturis esset perfecta Dei imitatio, quod diversi gradus in creaturis invenirentur*.
See J.F. Poag, "Hinc" and "Gradualismus" in the works of Wolfram von Eschenbach (Diss. Abst. Int., 1961).