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*Knighthood in Le Morte D'Arthur:
Recapitulation of Development of Medieval
Chivalric Literature*

Master's Diploma Thesis

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2013

I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Milada Franková, my supervisor, who assisted me in completion of this paper. Likewise, I am most thankful to my wife for her ceaseless support and torment she committed on my person during my elaboration of this thesis. Without her, this would not be possible.

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Introduction

Undoubtedly chivalry belongs among the most influential phenomena in medieval Europe. Since its emergence in the eleventh century chivalry with its concept of knighthood is adopted by various European countries in the era as one of the principal codes applied not only in military campaigns but also in the sphere of morality as well as the social stratification of the monarchies. However, long before the institutional merits that chivalry delivered, it had been also firmly embodied in art, especially in literature. And it is by the means of literature that chivalry eventually affects the whole society in a variety of other areas such as fashion and leisure. In addition to that, it is believed that the influence of chivalry in particular consequently overlaps into the political field.

Despite the overall impact that chivalry casts on the then society, it is not the goal of this thesis to inform about the fact. Rather it is hoped that this thesis should concentrate on literary works which were completed in the period of knightly dominance and which deal with chivalry, or at least contemplate the general ideas of chivalric values, and investigate them for any connecting fragments present or absent.

The reason for doing so lies in an assumption that due to a constant progression of the European social environment, the meaning of chivalry in the affected societies underwent a significant development since it was first introduced. And so did chivalric literature. After reading a considerable number of major literary texts dating from the beginning of the eleventh century to the end of the fifteenth century, one may observe that certain symbols of chivalry change or disappear entirely from the texts, whereas other distinctive features remain unimpaired. Apart from these alterations, there also

occur many additions to the original aspects of chivalric literature, which fact contributes to even sharpening the difference in the mood of the texts.

For this reason, it is believed that the development of chivalric literature may be clearly identified by following the changing pattern of features characteristic for chivalric literature and as clearly structured by means of grouping the marks bearing correspondence into several general stages. Interestingly, the division, though based on similarities between individual texts, also reflects indirectly the time of the texts being written, for most of the features that have been identified as being similar are present almost exclusively in texts from the same literary period.

There is, however, yet another cause for the above mentioned division, regarding the authors' motives. It has been argued that interconnectedness between the epic incorporated in stories and the zeitgeist of the era existed in medieval times as well as it does today (Jones 7). Hence it is presumable that this reflection of simultaneous historical situation or elements of a certain culture and its society should be also present in the works selected for this thesis as primary sources, which is partly evidenced in Vinaver's commentary to Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, one of the primary sources of this thesis (1971 778). In fact, one may discover that there happen to be many places in the book which bear a resemblance to various actual events from Malory's age (Kocourek 22–35). Yet, proving such an assumption is not the case of this paper, for it is the literary level on which the main part of the thesis is built and therefore the main focus of the thesis is cast not on disclosing likenesses of literary chivalry and the real historical one, but it is the aim of the paper to analyse thoroughly the primary sources so as to establish a firm theory concerning the development of literary chivalry and provide a simple yet precise classification mapping individual stages of development of chivalric literature from its origins to its very end, proving that chivalry and its decline

reflected in the *Morte Darthur* represent the terminal phase of chivalric literary evolution emerging in the Middle Ages.

Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into three individual parts, which, in spite of dealing with different aspects of chivalry, are all interrelated. In the first part, the aim is to cast light on historical chivalry and its formation in Britain as well as other European Great Powers such as were the Holy Roman Empire and France, which is by some scholars (Paterson 34) considered the mother of medieval chivalry and whose influence on chivalry in Britain is unarguable. The formation refers to the establishment of various knightly orders across Europe and their differentiation according to rules and beliefs upheld by their members. Apart from the analysis of knightly societies, the first part also investigates the birth of a knight, the central figure of the phenomenon.

In the middle section of the thesis the attention is turned to literary chivalry and the theme is then searched and analysed in some of the major works of a certain period. For the purposes of this thesis a division into three epochs of medieval literary chivalry has been established, having been based on thematic issue similarities, despite the fact that the time elapsed between completion of some works utilised herein as representatives of one era might be considered too long a time not to comprise more than one period. This actuality is clearly visible in the third and last era of chivalry in medieval literature where Geoffrey Chaucer's and Thomas Malory's works stand side by side, regardless of *The Canterbury Tales* having been written almost a century prior to Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

Ensuing from the findings in the second part, the third section then attempts to deliver an organised summary of all the facts concerning literary chivalry and provide a precise and conclusive statement validating all presumptions introduced in this document including the hypothesis claiming that the *Morte Darthur* contains all types of chivalric literature and thus represents the peak of chivalric literature in the Middle Ages.

1 Chivalry

It is unclear when exactly the phenomenon of chivalry arrived in the European society or by whom it was first introduced. For one thing, there are no historical records of this occurrence; for another, it is more likely that chivalry was rather an outcome of development resulting from merging many desirable talents and separate rules and codes of behaviour once upheld by various individuals in different regions and periods. This assumption is supported by many scholars who suggest that chivalry and its values represent the ideal set of qualities that a noble man could ever possess (e.g. Kennedy 7; Paterson 23). For this reason, it is highly improbable that one man could possibly stand a model to the complexity of chivalry incorporating in itself all possible manner of arts as divergent as falconry and courtesy. On this account Gautier adds:

Religious as it might have been, it had nothing in its origin that reminded one of the foundation of a religious order. One may in fact declare, that every single monastic order has been conceived in the mind of an individual. The grand Benedictine order arose out of the intelligence of Saint Benedict, and the Franciscan order from the heart of Saint Francis. There is no parallel to this in the case of chivalry, and it would be useless to search for the place of its birth or for the name of its founder.(1)

There exists yet another reason for the origins of chivalry being difficult to be positioned in the correct time, which involves the linguistic point of view. According to one definition, "chivalry", which has a French origin and is the traditional name of the phenomenon dominating the medieval European society, with its rather less influential synonym "knighthood", is a "knightly system attending religious, social, and moral codes, usages and practices" (OED). By another definition, the words express the "ideal

character and qualities appropriate to a knight” (OED). Knighthood may also be a name of a social class of a lower level formed by knights (OED). All of these meanings along with many others were acquired in the Middle Ages and were a result of proliferation of the phenomenon. However, the word and its forms had long been introduced into the British society as well as its French equivalent to the French when the phenomenon first occurred in these two neighbouring monarchies. And the difference between the original denotation of *cnihtade* and *chevalerie* and their connotations in the late medieval period is colossal.

1.1 Origins of Chivalry

The earliest recorded mention of the word “knighthood” is dated back in the times of Ælfred the Great (c890), who himself used the word on several occasions, while working on his Old English (hereinafter referred to as OE) translations of ancient Roman texts. In his translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, he employs the word “cnihtade” (Ælfred *Boeth.* xxxviii §5). However, the word is used in a different environment than a medieval or present-day reader would presume, for the term in this as well as in other OE texts from the period in question (cf. Ælfric ix. [Z.] 56, 273) stands for “boyhood” or “youth” or later “vassalage” (OED), which fact is obvious from the textual context, regarding Ælfred's placing the word in a sentence “[...] ða hwile þe hit on cnihtade bið, & swa forð eallne ȝioȝoðhad” (Ælfred *Boeth.* Ibid.) [“...while it is during boyhood and so on all youth” - my trans.] where it co-occurs with the word “ȝioȝoðhad” – “youth” or “adolescence” (OEMED). Therefore, considering the logic of the utterance, it is highly improbable that King Ælfred referred to a military service or a

social rank, meanings added to the expression no sooner than the turn of the twelfth century (see Langland 133; cf. Wycliffe 109).

The stem word of the compound “kighthood” analysed hereinbefore, that is a “knight”, was subjected to a similar alteration of its original meaning. The earliest denotation of the OE variants of the word “knight” written “cniht” or “cnæht” depending on the author was simply a “boy” or a “vassal” – a boy in service (not until 1066), which is manifested in the two following extracts from Ælfred’s translation of *Orosius*, although the manuscript is nowadays considered by a handful of scholars (Bately 433 – 460) not genuinely Ælfred’s personal work due to discrepancies of a stylistic and syntactic manner. Better still, this fact does not concern the case of the meaning of the expression under discussion. While the first one of the excerpts reads that “Philippus þa he cniht wæs, wæs Thebanum to 3isle 3eseald” (Ælfred *Oros.* 110) [“when Philip was a boy, he was sent to Thebes as a hostage” - my trans.], the other, being even more demonstrative in respect to the denotation of the word, says, “Hannibal gecyþde þone niþ þone hete þe he beforan his fæder geswor, þa he nigonwintre cniht wæs þæt he næfre ne wurde Romana freo[n]d” (Ælfred *Oros.* 186) [“Hannibal made known the spite, the hate which he swore in front of his father when he was a nine-year-old boy that he never became a friend of Rome” - my trans.].

Factual texts or translations of Latin works are not the sole place where the word is utilized. One may find it in more artistic pieces of literature such as poems and heroic epics, of which the best known example is *Beowulf* (vv. 372), an alliterative heroic epic poem, which some scholars argue (e.g. Hieatt xi – xiii) was composed in the eighth century, while others (e.g. Kiernan 13-63) believe it happened in the early eleventh century. The passage in which the word occurs, although in a compound, reads, “Hroðgar mapelode, helm Scyldinga: 'Ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende’” (*Beowulf* Ibid.)

[“Hrothgar answered, the lord of Scyldings: ‘I knew him as a youth’” - my trans.]. Eager for a confirmation, one may search only a little further in the text, for there is another mention of the same word “cnihtwesende” when Beowulf explains his boasts made as a youth (*Beowulf* vv. 535). This second occasion of the word is, however, the last one, despite the whole text having a great abundance of deeds of prowess and chivalry (see chap. 2.1). Therefore, it is beyond all doubts that the expression is used here to refer to a boy or a youth, because otherwise, it is believed that there ought to have to be many more occurrences of the word and its variants in the poem.

A similar scenario may be observed in Britain’s neighbouring country, France, where chivalry and its earlier forms – “chevalerie”, “cevalerie” or “chivelerie” – the French equivalent to the English “knighthood” in the medieval sense (see above) underwent analogous development. Originally, chivalry was used as a French translation of the Latin “militia” (EOD), denoting a mere “military expedition” (Godefroy 110) and “designat[ing] a professional, military function of armed service devoid of any strong connotations of value, moral, spiritual or social” (Hunt 5). It did not acquire a new meaning until the beginning of the twelfth century when the first of the so called *chansons de geste* treating the theme of knightly adventures were created.

The evidence to such transformation is amply presented in many contemporary documents of legal as well as ecclesiastical nature when subjected to comparison with fictional works. In *Liber ad Milites Templi: De laude Novae Militae*, a treatise written in the early twelfth century by the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, commenting on the recently formed order of Knights Templar, it is written:

It seems that a new knighthood has recently appeared on the earth, and precisely in that part of it which the Orient from on high visited in the flesh. As he then troubled the princes of darkness in the strength of his

mighty hand, so there he now wipes out their followers, the children of disbelief, scattering them by the hands of his mighty ones. [...] This is, I say, a new kind of knighthood and one unknown to the ages gone by. It ceaselessly wages a twofold war both against flesh and blood and against a spiritual army of evil in the heavens.(chap. 1)

This original denotation of the noun referred to as *expédition militaire* as well as in *Epistle Saint Bernart a Mont Deu* (see Verdun MS 72 fol. 4) put in writing by the same author was altered to *aventure chevaleresque* in works such as *La Chanson de Roland*, the most celebrated romance from the *Chansons de geste* (see chap. 2.1.2).

The difference between the former and the latter meaning concerns their casting the central focus on divergent issues. Despite both works being descriptions of military affairs of the French, Clairvaux's letter is written from the perspective of a nation, whereas in *La Chanson de Roland* as well as in other pieces of literature of fiction, the adventures of individual knights were held in higher esteem. One may therefore enquire when the metamorphosis originated and why. The answer lies in structural changes of the medieval French society.

As Hunt explains in his study, there have existed several opinions supported among scholars on the determination of the form which the transformation took (1). These different ideas may be divided into two major groups, each contradictory to the other. Representing one view, Marc Bloch upholds a theory in his *Feudal Society I* that in the beginning of the eleventh century, often denoted as the beginning of the first feudal age, the communities occupying the geographical region of France and Bavaria were the first ones to witness an essential turning point between the old Carolingian aristocratic system and its replacement by a new élite of knights (125).

Despite its seemingly suggesting that the “aristocracies of birth” (Bloch [B] 11) disappeared entirely in order to surrender their social status to the newly born class, this thesis does not intimate anything more or less than a mere transformation of the ancient customs established in the post-Roman times to a modern legally binding form. In other words, as Bloch describes in his social study on the period, the unspoken power of the privileged families recognised in the community as “dearer than other families” (Bloch [B]12) converted to a power defined by written law (Ibid. 12-13).

However, the opposing party building on Georges Duby’s research is deeply concerned about legitimacy of the view introduced by Bloch, for the theory does not fully explain the coexistence of the two classes in question, that is nobility and knights, which fact has been revealed by a team of scientists from Belgium (Duby 59). Commenting on this issue, Duby points out that “Léopold Gênicot, for instance, has found that in the Namurois region during the twelfth century nobles and knights formed two clearly separate strata, one above the other” (Duby 59).

Supportive of this latter theory, Hunt argues that the transformation of ancient nobility into another high social rank may be explained as an outcome of vassalage between *nobiles* and *milites* (1). The phenomenon of vassalage between people had been known to Germanic and Romanesque peoples since and even before the emergence of Ancient Rome and “applied to persons of all social classes regardless of the precise legal nature of the bond” (Bloch [A]145). This fact also corresponds with the findings above concerning the original meanings of the word knighthood, for one of the meanings denoted vassalage (see p. 8).

Sally Harvey, who has analysed the *Domesday Book*, explains that even among the military followers of William I who assisted him in successfully invading Britain were a number of those whose social rank was comparable with a common peasant,

based on their possessions and rents (27). Regarding this matter, Scammell points out that due to the fact that the society was formed by two classes – the wealthy highborn noblemen and those dependent on them, the questions concerning arms, food, and land were strictly under control of those former ones (591). However, because of divergent nature of the work that the vassals did for their masters in return for their avoiding hunger, this servitude in some cases crystallized into a quite close relationship.

The one that is significant for the emergence of the knightly class is so called homage, which, as Bloch puts it, became – though not legally binding – as hereditary a bond as aristocratic titles due to the fact that the parties of such affiliation usually became united in dealing with military, territorial as well as political questions, matters of the utmost importance ([A] 146). And it was homage that led to even tightening the truly firm reciprocal relationships between the protector and the protected to such an extent that the patron often allowed or even insisted on their daughters' marrying the vassal in order to maintain this form of kinship (Hunt 2).

Knowing all the facts, one may understand Bloch's beliefs and their partial legitimacy. However, the marriages described above were an indirect cause to even a more significant event concerning knighthood. For the legal writs in those times did not recognise inheritance through a female line (Duby 59), the merge of nobility and their vassals most of whom operated as private soldiers gave birth to a new social class – the knights.

1.2 High Order of Chivalry

Certainly the initial naming of this newly arisen social stratum conformed to the Latin environment, hence the title *miles* or *milites*, describing, however, the mere utility

of the caste (Hunt 1). Nonetheless, with the ranks of knights growing in numbers and the majority of population being illiterate, it was essential that a vernacular official title along with some other necessary amendments such as regulatory instructions determining who may become a knight and who may not should be introduced so that recognition of the body by the sovereign and the law be provided throughout all Francophone regions.

Among many possible names, one was of greater esteem than others. It was a *chevalier*. Not only did it capture the true nature of the rank, that is the military purpose, but it referred to “the noblest and most desirable” (Jones 138) military unit – the cavalry for the necessity of possessing a steed and a set of arms and armour made this unit so exclusive that only the rich or the privileged could afford it.

However, a mere name was insufficient for enabling acceptance of knighthood throughout the country. For making it possible in the eleventh century, one was obliged to make alliance with the Church and ask for their support in taking the case successfully before the king who, although the sovereign of the state, was bound to acknowledge and honour the will of the pope, hence the Church and the knights (Bloch [A] 149).

Therefore, a very strong relationship between knights and the Church was formed. This alliance of knighthood and the Roman Catholic Church represented yet another stage of vassalage discussed hereinabove, where a local patron usually represented by a wealthy highborn nobleman was simply replaced with a patron even wealthier established nationwide (Scammell 592). And because the Church – unlike noblemen – preached the Gospel and inculcated the elementary Christian principals, it was inevitable that every institution associating with the Church or rather any vassal to the Church should conform to these principles. This rule also applies to medieval

knighthood, which, as Gautier claims, “is the Christian form of the military profession: the knight is the Christian soldier” (2).

Built on these foundations, regardless of the military purpose of knights, chivalry was introduced to the people not as a mere new classification of a growing group of individuals but rather as a new ideal, new fashion “blessed by the Holy Church” (Jones 17). As a result, the boom of chivalry was enormous.

The constitution was so powerful that when William of Normandy invaded and conquered Britain in 1066 and subsequently attempted to introduce French culture to the Britons by appointing French nobles and knights to state and military offices, it was the phenomenon of chivalry – “cnihtade” as the Britons had begun to denominate it, meaning vassalage (OEMED), which was a custom not unknown to the Britons who had practised a similar form of serfdom since the times of Roman dominion (see chap. 1.1) – that was adopted most easily (Scammell 591).

Soon after the introduction of chivalry to the British society, the Church abounded in numbers of knights willing to spread the glory of Christendom. The Church understood well the power that they possessed, having the newly established social stratum under their patronage, and used it wholly to manage their missionary affairs. Thus the Crusades in the twelfth century and other “holy quests” occurred, not only spreading the Christian religion, the glory and the good name of chivalry across Europe and the Mediterranean, but also providing the knights with a unique chance to gain prowess and wealth, or, as Jones puts it, “to kill heathens and plunder their villages and towns” (120).

As an outcome, knighthood, that is vassalage under a member of gentry or defence of the Holy Church against pagans, became increasingly popular across Europe. And by virtue of the fashionable array of knights and their chivalry, that is their

demeanour and military distinction, but mainly for the vision of accumulating riches, knighthood rooted also in the European courts (Jones 120). Many various knightly orders saw their establishment in this regard.

Among the most renowned orders one has to include *Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Salomonici* commonly known as Knights Templar. According to Malcolm Barber, this French order established as the first monastic order in Europe, directly serving the needs of the pope and hence the Church, belonged among the wealthiest and most powerful military orders of the whole Christendom (1994:1). The introduction of this order to the medieval society initiated establishment of more such orders such as *Ordo domus Sanctæ Mariæ Theutonicorum Hierosolymitanorum* referred to as the Teutonic Order originated in the Holy Roman Empire in 1190, whose knights vowed their allegiance both to the king and the pope (Bloch [A] 172).

As Barber points out in his new book, the popularity of orders, especially the religious military orders, was closely tied with the successes of crusades, "to which they owed their origin and on account of which they had become so famous and powerful" (2006: 1). Therefore, with the loss of territories in the Near East at the end of the thirteenth century, it was natural that their popularity within Europe subsided. Moreover, due to their prominent role of European bankers and their relative independence from monarchs, Knights Templar had become a splinter in the eye of many a royal family, who belonged among their main clients (Barber 1994:280).

The French king Philip IV made advantage of the weakened position of the order at the beginning of the fourteenth century and with the assistance of the Inquisition he initiated a series of processes throughout Europe during which many members of the order were arrested, tortured and executed as heretics (Barber 2006: 202-17). In the end, the pope Clement V issued a bull abolishing the order.

Still, the spirit of chivalry lingered. And due to the fact that not all orders represented or were strictly connected with the Church, although the power of the Church in the medieval period outstretched farther than any kingdom's borders and was occasionally "feared"(Jones 122) even by members of European monarchies, the phenomenon of chivalric orders flourished (Keen 1984 179-80).

So when chivalry recovered from the incident with the Knights Templar, it was the secular order that gained popularity with the aristocracy in the fourteenth century Britain, resulting from a vast promotion of chivalrous consciousness by the means of chivalrous literature (Keen 1984 148-53). The escalation of popularity of chivalrous heroes and the phenomenon of chivalry itself among readers was so rapid mainly due to the fact that authors of all the significant works of fiction written in the Middle Ages had all been using their mother tongue instead of Latin, a language preferred for official governmental or ecclesiastical texts (Holt 35-36).

Even the king of England himself was struck by the *geist* of chivalry. Combined with his personal liking in jousting and tournaments, the phenomenon influenced him to such an extent that he was convinced to awaken sentiments of the Arthurian tradition among the members of aristocracy (Keen 1990141). Accordingly, in 1348 King Edward III conceived the idea to constitute the Order of the Garter, by which act, as Maurice Keen concludes in his treatise on the British society in the Middle Ages, he hoped to "establish an élite chapter of English chivalry" (1990142).

Consequently, owing not only to King Edward III's endeavour, the cult of chivalry struck the European society for the second time. This time, however, the emphasis was cast not on understanding the religious meaning of knights, but on their secular welfare and career (Kennedy 17-19).

2 Chivalry in Literary Works

The literary chivalry as well as historical chivalry underwent an enormous development and thus many a characteristic typical of the first knightly stories was likely to be consigned to oblivion by later authors. Moreover, it is presumed that there existed a certain degree of link, as discussed hereinbefore, between the current fashion in higher social classes and the vogue for courteous heroes and other such elements in secular literature, which further supports the above stated theory.

Better still, the origins of chivalric literature and the entire epoch of literary chivalry must be queried back long before the time the words such as “knight” or “chivalry” were first uttered in such a context, since it is highly probable that the early stories of the chivalric kind featuring the Knights of the Round Table developed from the pre-Norman heroic hymns and poems as well as various chronicles (Kennedy 18-21). Considering this assumption, one may possibly disclose correlations and parallels between signs that are amply utilised in some major works of medieval chivalry and those incorporated in stories dating long before the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066.

Therefore, in order to gain better understanding of this shift in literature it is advisable that the attention should be drawn to some major non-ecclesiastical pre-Norman literary works. By doing so, one may easily discover that certain elements occurring in such texts were likewise embodied in works that were completed as late as the thirteenth century.

2.1 Provenance of Chivalric Literature

To demonstrate how wide a span of time is being contemplated, one of the most influential pieces of Anglo-Saxon heroic literature written in the vernacular, *Beowulf*, is

utilised in this thesis as the one possible source for chivalric literature or even one of the early chivalric works, as it possesses quite a significant number of chivalric traits in itself. Therefore, despite its being a heroic epic about a famous warrior of the Geats and its being assumed to have originated centuries prior to the era of knights (see chap. 1.1), the story of *Beowulf* may be considered a direct predecessor of the first knightly affairs written in the English [Anglo-Saxon] and French languages.

On this account Gummere claims in his commentary on the text that one reason for this idea being conceivable lies in the fact that the originally pagan poem or song was recorded by a Christian scribe, who then embroidered it with many features that were also reflected in the later mood of chivalric writings and are thus considered a representation of the foundation for the emergence of chivalric literature in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries (12).

2.1.1 Symbols of Christianity

These fundamental features include various aspects of the Christian religion, specifically Christian mysticism as defined by Bernard McGinn (xiii-xviii) and symbolism, not to mention God's presence and omnipotence, common devices used by literary authors writing as late as the fifteenth century (see 2.4). In *Beowulf* one may encounter these fragments of Christian belief on many occasions, especially in situations when the hero happens to be in distress (e.g. *Beowulf* vv. 570), as a part of introduction of Beowulf's foes (e.g. *Beowulf* vv. 99-113), or in cases of Godly references concerning God's will or intervention (e.g. *Beowulf* vv. 1262-1268).

According to Klaeber, there is even a strong connection between *Beowulf* and passages from *Genesis A* (cited in Andersson 125). Indeed, one does not have to read far into the story to learn of Grendel's bloodline centred in his introduction at the beginning

of the poem, in which one is presented with a full lineage of the fiend as far as Cain (*Beowulf* vv. 99-113).

Regardless of this fact, it is completely justified to presume that, disregarding the great number of accounts mentioned in the story, Christianity with its doctrines and symbols did not have as great an impact on the plot of the poem as it might have had on the mind and conscience of the audience, who would certainly comprehend all the biblical and historical allusions at the time of production of the *Beowulf* manuscript (Bjork 32, Irving 175).

Still, and precisely for its influence on the audience, it is the incorporation of some elementary Christian ideas and doctrines of morality applied in the epic, which fact is amply discussed in Irving's analysis (175-93), for which Christian mysticism and symbolism are considered the first of several pillars of the major influences on the text and thus have to be taken into consideration because, disregarding their relative insignificance for the plot of the story, similar Christian ideals represent the key-stone of high chivalric literature and its moral even hundreds of years later (see chap. 2.2.1).

Yet, there certainly are other important and in this case even more influential elements which contributed vastly to the creation of this particular poem. One would definitely be the source materials to this Old-English text. There are various theories and explanations concerning the origin of the poem, of which some are regarded by the scholarly society more plausible than others, although none has so far been entirely rejected or approved unanimously (Andersson 130).

2.1.2 Variety of Source Materials

As for all the possible fictional sources, however, only three main categories comprising Teutonic mythology, classical literature, and Irish folktale have so far been

established, based on prevalence of similarities and parallels between the poem and the estimated originals (Thorkelin cited in Andersson 129).

This first stream involves in itself a vast number of Germanic sources, all being songs and hymns narrating more or less similar stories and are thus believed to have been derived from one original story written presumably in the proto-Germanic language (Andersson 130). In all cases, upholders of this theory believe that *Beowulf* was but a little more than a mere translation of a Scandinavian folktale or was built on one for the main part (Thorkelin cited in Andersson 129).

This original Scandinavian folktale which the Anglo-Saxon poem allegedly copies or uses as a model appears to be the same story that gave origin to the Icelandic *Grettis Saga*. The reasoning for this assumption lies in the scholars' belief that both the texts carry too many analogues to be entirely unrelated (Gering cited in Andersson 130). And clearly enough, one may ascertain that several chapters of the *Grettis Saga* bear certain resemblance with the story of *Beowulf*. Namely, it is the story "Of the Haunting at Thorhall-stead; and how Thorhall took a Shepherd by the rede of Skapti the Lawman, and of what befell thereafter" and the following chapters where parallels between the episode with Grendel's haunting of Heorot and his being killed by *Beowulf* are most evident (1869 chap. 33-5).

As far as classical literature is concerned, it is essential to believe that whoever wrote *Beowulf* must have had a sound knowledge of Virgil's *Aeneid*. This, to some scholars highly implausible, idea has so far had only few advocates in the scholarly society who would make effort to disclose and prove all possible analogies and parallels between *Beowulf* and *Aeneid*. Andersson, being one of those who attempt to find connection between the two texts, brings forward the strongest arguments presented by

scholars convinced about or at least admitting a certain form of parallel in his study of this issue (see Andersson 140-42).

The last group of fictional source literature is represented by Irish folktale, namely by the story called "The Hand and the Child" due to its main motif of the "monstrous arm" (Andersson 135). And truly, the text is abundant with references to Grendel's power or strength of grasp (*Beowulf* vv. 121, 158,). But Grendel is not the only character who possesses this special feature of a powerful handgrip. Grendel's mother is presented in a similar manner when, avenging her son's death, visits Heorot and kills a warrior with her own hands (*Beowulf* vv. 1330).

The author puts ever so great emphasis on the handgrip also in other passages of the poem that are not connected with Grendel nor his mother, for instance, as Beowulf's boastfully delivers the story about his juvenile swimming competition with Breca during which he is attacked by a "monster" (*Beowulf* 1910 7). Beowulf says, "Me to grunde teah fah feondscaða, fæste hæfde grim on grape;" (vv. 556), where it is not the size or shape of the monster, but its "grape", an Old-English word for "grip" or "grasp" (Bosworth 87) that tells the reader of its might.

This importance of strength demonstrated by one's grip does not, however, concern only the evil characters. At the beginning of the poem, while being introduced to the thanes, Beowulf himself is presented by Hrothgar as having "þritiges manna mægen-cræft on his mundgripe heaþorof hæbbe" (vv. 379-81), that is "thirty men's heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand" (*Beowulf* 19105). Even earlier in the story it is possible to trace a note on strength concerning one's hand when the ship of Geatish warriors approaches the shore of the land belonging to Danes. Having reached the shore, a henchman of Hrothgar addresses the seamen, waving at them with his spear held in his "hand of might" (*Beowulf* 1910 3). However, despite Gummere's translation, the

original phrase "mægenwudu" (*Beowulf* vv. 236) may if anything be ambiguous, for it might as well be understood as a "spear" or "wood of power" (Bosworth 1848) or even as a "mace" or "emblem of authority" (Bosworth 1838).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the theme of the hand is resounded in all major encounters with the three antagonists of Beowulf. In the first fight, he barehanded tears off Grendel's arm (*Beowulf* vv. 814) that, suspended from the ceiling, later happens to form a part of celebratory decoration of the mead-hall (*Beowulf* vv. 927). Later, during the battle with Grendel's mother in her lair Beowulf nearly falls to his death by means of her strong grasp and her lethal claws on her hands (*Beowulf* vv. 927).

Therefore, one may understand from these implications that the strength of men was measured by the power of one's grip and the grip's might appears to be a standard that was used by the author to explain and demonstrate to the audience or even compare the strength of individual characters. This fact, that is the grip of a hand being a recurring theme in the story, supports Scowcroft's and other scholars' believe (e.g. Puhvel cited in Andersson 136) that the poem was partly if not totally inspired by the above mentioned Irish tale (Scowcroft 22-64).

Yet, there exist other folktales that bear a great deal of resemblance concerning the recurring visits of a fiend, but they are of the Old Norse or Icelandic origin. For instance, one may find an astounding likeness between the haunting of Heorot in *Beowulf* and the tale called "Of the Slaying of King Volsung" comprised in the *Volsunga Saga*, an Icelandic saga dated at the late twelfth century, which, as it is believed by scholars (e.g. Morris 23), was based on much older tales of the oral tradition similarly to the *Poetic Edda* composed by Sturlason in the same period.

In this tale, Sigmund, the offspring of Volsung, and his nine brothers are taken prisoners by Siggeir, their brother-in-law, and sent to the "wild-wood, and there they sit

day-long until night" (1888 33). This setting, although under different circumstances, is quite similar to that of the scene prior to Grendel's assault (*Beowulf* vv. 78 ff.). But the chief correspondence occurs at the coming of the fiend, as the story says:

[A]t midnight, as they sat in the stocks, there
came on them a she-wolf from out the wood; old she was,
and both great and evil of aspect; and the first thing she did
was to bite one of those brethren till he died, and then she ate
him up withal, and went on her way. (1888 34)

The following events include killing all nine brothers of Sigmund in the same fashion, until the tenth night, when the she-wolf returned to murder Sigmund (Ibid.). However, with the assistance of his sister, Sigmund prevails against the fiend and even hurts it severely, as he first anoints his entire face with honey and also puts a little of it into his mouth to lure the she-wolf to lick the honey from his face and mouth, whereupon he catches its tongue between his teeth and in the consequent struggle the she-wolf loses it in despair only to save her from his "ever so fast" a bite (Ibid.).

This scene proves that there must have existed a tale or tales known to the Icelandic scald on which this story is based or from which it borrowed the theme described herein. Therefore, it is impossible to reject entirely the conception of an Old-Norse origin as suggested by Thorkelin (see above). Moreover, building on the findings including other borrowings from the book of *Genesis A* as discovered by him, Klaeber upholds a theory that the source text for the poem must have been of an Old-English origin, inspired by biblical stories, and not a Scandinavian or Irish folktale (cited in Andersson 127).

Due to all these possible source materials and lack of evidence for their elimination or verification, it is quite impossible to determine one source to the *Beowulf*

manuscript. Moreover, it is quite unavoidable to consider the idea that more than one if not all the above mentioned sources were actually used for composing the poem. Therefore, based on these facts, it is safe to say that multiplicity of sources forms the second pillar of the literary realm of medieval Europe.

2.1.3 Rightfulness of Progeny

All these sources, regardless of the variability of their origin, constitute only one branch of source materials that were possibly utilized in the course of construction of the poem, since they are all tales and stories of fiction (Andersson 129). However, the story of *Beowulf* is plentiful of signs of the author's attempt to convince the audience of some historicity of this heroic piece. By the signs it is meant the technique of demonstrating royal kinship by incorporating the lineage of the characters whom the author considers important for the plot of the story in the cases of Hrothgar's and Beowulf's introductions (*Beowulf* vv. 53-60, 372-76).

This form of genealogical entries is typical for a chronicle, which was yet another type of documents written in those times in the vernacular as well as in Latin. To comprehend this similarity, one may observe *Historia Brittonum* where Nennius tells us, among other things, of the history of origins of Britain, in the course of which he traces the complete ancestry of the legendary Brutus(4-17), one of the sons of Aeneas and a character of the foundation myth of Britain.

As far as the historical accuracy is concerned, another and even more convenient piece of evidence is *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* written in the first half of the eighth century. This chronicle may be regarded as a confirmation of the author's effort to associate the *Beowulf* fictitious heroes with historical progenitors such as members of clans and families of Norwegian or Danish origin by means of delineating

their family ties, since the author follows a similar pattern in describing people and places as was common for chroniclers recording the history of their kings (compare *Beowulf* 1910 27; Bede Book II 45-70).

It is believed that this "historicizing" of mythical or legendary figures and affiliating them with historical houses of monarchs or inciting the notion in the audience and readers served a simple propaganda purpose of the then overlord or any party wishing to procure their intentions. Supporting this theory, Richard North claims that the references to Old Norse rulers and tribes in *Beowulf* signify the author's intention to create a story appealing to the Anglo-Saxon dynasty of kings ruling in Britain at the time of the poem's original composition between the reigns of Kings Beornwulf and Wiglaf of Mercia during the first half of the ninth century (3).

He further assumes the poem to be a construct of one Eanmund as a result of a request of Wiglaf, a candidate for the throne of Mercia, who, not favoured by barons nor the legitimate heir, wanted to win their favour in this way and persuade them of his distant royal ancestry(vii-xi). And truly, after observing the last part of the story in the light of the above stated, one may find many allusions referring to King Beornwulf and Wiglaf.

Primarily it is the names themselves that arouse a certain suspicion of resemblance, for Beowulf is spelled with only two missing letters from the estimated model and Wiglaf is an exact copy. On this account, although he recognizes the striking similarity in names and even relationships of the heroes and the historical figures, Sam Newton opposes to the idea of allegory, stating that it is plausible that the two successive kings' names were a product of inspiration by this epic poem and not the other way round (Newton 71).

However, the sudden importance and closeness with Beowulf bestowed on Wiglaf in the episode with the dragon (*Beowulf* vv. 2601-752) suggest Wiglaf's quick rise to prominence only near the very end of Beowulf's life and reign. Despite not having appeared earlier in the story unlike other important characters such as Hrothgar, Wiglaf is now Beowulf's favourite, sitting by the side of his "friend" (*Beowulf* vv. 2907).

This unprecedented rise to significance is also supported by the previously made statement that only important characters in *Beowulf* are properly introduced by means of their respective lineage (see above), which is important, since it informs and assures the audience of the royal forebears of the heroes. This corresponds with Keen's premise that monarchs in the feudal age believed to be "the chosen leaders" not only by recognition of the nobility, but also and mainly by divine selection of their kin (Keen 1984 44-53).

Concerning that Wiglaf's kinship with the Scandinavian dynasty of Scyldings is delivered to us prior to the dragon episode (*Beowulf* vv. 2602-4), it is thus confirmed that Wiglaf becomes one of these prominent characters exactly for the last 580 lines of the poem. One may therefore understand North's supposition, based on the knowledge of these allusions.

And for these allusions or references promoting interests of a certain individual, a group, or inciting beliefs and reshaping one's thoughts appear largely also in many texts of the chivalric character (see chap. 2.2, 2.3, 2.4), it is justifiable to conclude that the tendency of this fictitious heroic literature to succumb to political and cultural influences of the contemporary society represents the third pillar of the foundation of chivalric literature.

2.2 *Heroic Chivalric Literature*

All three pillars described above continue to form the basis of literature even in the eleventh century France. Ensuing from the oral tradition, there emerged a body of literary texts encompassing epic poems, which prevailed in the period to come. Collectively, these manuscripts are denominated as the *Matter of France* due to the fact that they are associated with the history of France or French noble families, especially the time and personality of King Charlemagne and his companions.

The alteration of origins of the central characters did not, however, mean the alteration of the traditional form of writing. It was still verse which was the most common means of delivery of stories. Therefore, regarding the form in which the poems are written and their being the continuation of the oral tradition (Gautier xii), it is presumable that they were intended for a public elocution or musical recital. Jean Rychner believes that these epic poems were sung by *jongleurs* at the king's court or on marches to battles (16).

Rychner's claim ensues mainly from the fact that Wace, a Norman poet and author of the *Roman de Brut*, describes in his later and less popular *Roman de Rou et des Ducs de Normandie*, a poetic chronicle composed in the first decade of the thirteenth century that tells, for the most part, of the events of the Norman conquest of Britain, the manner in which one such poem, the *Chanson de Roland*, is related (17). Wace writes in his epic poem:

Taillefer, qui mult bien chantout,
Sor un cheual qui tost alout,
Deuant le duc alout chantant
De Karlemaigne e de Rollant

E d'Oliuer e des uassals,

Qui morurent en Renceuals. (vv. 8035-40)

["Taillifer, who could sing very well, | On his horse that tossed aloft, | Before the duke sang aloud | Of Charlemagne and of Roland | And of Olivier at Roncevaux" - my trans.]

From these six verses one may determine at least two instances regarding the fact that epic poems were intended for a musical recital. Firstly, it is Wace's explicit statement in regard to Taillifer's attributed ability to "sing very well" ["mult bien chantout"] that tells us of the existence of the singing tradition at the royal court. The second instance concerns the fact that Taillefer decides to sing the story of Roland and that of King Charlemagne, which is the oldest known story from the so called *Chansons de geste* [songs of heroic deeds], a collection encompassing many epic poems describing heroic deeds of historical or legendary French personages (see below). Similarly, Richard Pèlerin, the author of one of the *chansons de geste*, mentions explicitly at the beginning of his *Chanson d'Antioche* that the poem is composed so as to be sung by *jongleurs* (vv. 8-9).

The fact that the manuscripts of these epic poems were not creations of their author regardless of their own inventive additions but constituted the result of the ancient oral tradition is confirmed by a contemporary historian, William of Malmesbury. This English historian of half Norman and half English descent mentions a similar event in his *Chronicle of the Kings of England* first written in the 1120s, where he says that "[t]hen beginning the song of Roland, that the warlike example of that man might stimulate the soldiers" (277). J. A. Giles explains in his commentary on this passage that it must have been an earlier version of the famous poem from the *geste* cycle (277). Ian Short, supportive of Giles's thesis, points to the fact that the oldest

written version of the *Song of Roland* surviving until the present time in the Oxford manuscript was produced during the first half of the twelfth century (16-17).

On this account Léon Gautier, like Giles, basing on the examples of the song being mentioned in histories elaborated prior to the manuscript referred to above, concludes that it is beyond doubt that there existed an older version if not more versions to this legendary story and he dates its origin to the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century (*La Chanson de Roland* ed. Gautier xv).

With these findings alone, one may only deduce that the oral tradition in a form of sung poetic texts continued to dominate in the medieval society at the time of the Norman conquest of Britain and the following years. Concerning the number of these epic poems elaborated in this period, it is presumable that these poems alone form one major branch of the contemporary literature. And in regard to their content, it is save to conclude that *Beowulf*, like *chansons de geste*, or epic poems in general represent one of the two initial genres of the early chivalric literature of the Middle Ages, the other being a metric romance, the two most popular and modern forms of literature in France and later in Britain (Bumke 99).

2.2.1 Locality of Chivalric Heroes

As stated above, disregarding that the form remained unaltered due to the fashion in which the poems were presented, the central figures as well as the setting have changed. The reason for this shift from "distant" heroes to the "local" ones lies in the fact that in Britain the ruling nations at any time during the Early Middle Ages were descended from invaders from various regions of Europe, whose heroes and heroines were their ancestors living in the land of their origin (Bjork 31). In this respect, the

location of stories such as *Beowulf* may be regarded as distant from the place where these stories were presented to the audience.

On the contrary, although the French *chanson de geste* likewise related to the history of their ancestors, these songs may be considered local, for the heroes, their origin, and placement of the stories corresponded with the location of the targeted audience. To verify this assumption, let us confront the main protagonists of the above analysed heroic poem of the Anglo-Saxon origin and the brightest of Old-French poems from the *chansons de geste*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and attempt to delineate the differences as stated herein.

Beowulf, the hero of an epic poem of the same name composed for the Anglo-Saxon audience occupying regions in Britain (see 2.1), is introduced as a Geatish warrior of royal descent by Hrothgar, who says:

Ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende;
Wæs his ealdfæder Ecgþeo haten,
ðæm to ham forgeaf Hreþel Geata
angan dohtor; is his eafora nu
heard her cumen, sohte holdne wine.
ðonne sægdon þæt sæliþende,
þa ðe gifsceattas Geata fyredon
þyder to þance, þæt he þritiges
manna mægencræft on his mundgripe
heþorof hæbbe. (vv. 372-81)

["I knew him when he was a boy; | His father's name was Ecgtheow, | whom
Hrethel the Geat gave | his only daughter; his offspring now | comes boldly here, to visit

a true friend. | More say sailors, | who brought gifts to Geats | there in friendship, that he
thirty | men's strength in his handgrip | famous in battle has." - my trans.]

It is also explicitly stated that Beowulf had to travel on a ship from his birthplace in the land of Geats (vv. 195) to the realm of Danes, as he commands that a "yðlidan godne gegyrwan" (vv. 198-9) ["prepare a good ship" - my trans.]. To conclude the above stated information, one may find a Geatish warrior setting off for Denmark in a poem commonly believed to have originated in Britain for an Anglo-Saxon audience (see 2.1.3). For illustration of the location of the story and of Beowulf's journey, it is convenient to consult a map (see App. I Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

On the other hand, the story of the *Chanson de Roland* being located close to the border between France and Spain is much nearer than the one in *Beowulf*. Moreover, the central plot of the battle of Roncevaux takes place after the military campaign of Charlemagne to Saragossa during his host's return to France (*La Chanson de Roland* 2002vii). And concerning the origin of the hero, it is beyond doubt that he, being related to King Charlemagne, is of French descent. Therefore, one may speak of a "local" hero, since the intended audience is also French.

Another such example may be discovered in the poem called *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* [*The Four Sons of Aymon*], which tells a story of the valiant knight Renaud of Montauban. In this poem, the whole story is situated in regions like Lombardy, Aigremont or Dordogne, all belonging to the realm of King Charlemagne, for which reason it may also be considered of the "local" type. Even the plot dealing with banishment of Renaud and his appeasing with the king does not exceed the borders of the French realm.

The problem concerning locality of the characters is also apparent in heroic songs elaborated in other regions where these poems gained similar popularity as their

French model at the time (Brewer 64). For instance, in Spain exists a similar compilation of musical poems denominated *ascantar de gesta*, a Spanish alteration of the original French series elaborated between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries (*The Poem of the Cid*, Cortest xv).

The best known epic poem from this cycle is the *Cantar de Mio Cid* [*Poema de Mio Cid*], a heroic poem from the first half of the twelfth century about a Spanish knight named Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, who loses favour with the king and his honour only to regain them in battles with the Moors and other heroic deeds, and who may also be considered of being the local type of hero for his undoubted Spanish origin.

But, as Bumke points out, the effect varied from region to region and Germanic audience welcomed the French poems very mildly despite their being translated to the Middle High German with all of the original content (92-3). He further explains that it might have been too great a challenge for the German translators to retain the metrical musical form and that "the national pathos of the French heroic epics was unlikely to meet with an enthusiastic response from the German audience" (Bumke 93).

Taking into account the last statement of Bumke and the above drawn comparison of the Anglo-Saxon and French poems, it may be concluded that the importance of locality is considerably extensive as far as perception of the audience is concerned and thus it may be stated that the presumption relating to distinguishing two types of heroes, that is the "local" and "distant" types, is confirmed.

Based on this finding, it is believed that the emergence of the figure of King Arthur and his cult in Great Britain was an effort of some historians to awake patriotism in the country ruled so long by foreigners. This corresponds with the fact that the Arthurian legend gains ascertainable popularity in the second half of the twelfth century and a later period only after Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle was completed.

However, the locality of heroes is not the only feature unifying the poems. In fact, one may trace even more significant similarities between the poems from the *chansons de geste* related to various aspects of the poems such as the setting, the plot, or the characters. Hence a more specific division of these poems has been established with regard to their central personages and plot.

As a result of this division, irrespective of the fact that a handful of poems have not been classified as belonging anywhere, scholars have determined five groups of poems within the framework of the *chansons de geste* (e.g. Fabre xi-xvi). Depending on their central theme or character, the groups are denoted either *geste*, where the main attention is drawn on heroic deeds of individuals with little or no importance to their location, or *cycle* in cases when locations or events are at the same level of significance as the deeds or even higher.

2.2.2 Feudal Allegiance

Despite the fact that every group deals with a considerably similar theme with consistent traits like betrayal, revenge, or loyalty, the perspective from which the poems in each group are narrated is never the same, as the roles of being a protagonist or antagonist shift remarkably in individual poems. For instance, the poems in the first group including the *Chanson de Roland*, *Pelerinage de Charlemagne*, *Fierabras*, *Aspremont*, *Aiquin*, *Chanson de Saisnes*, *Otuel*, *Hugues Capet*, and several other poems spanning from the twelfth to the fifteenth century represent the *geste de roi* [heroic deeds of king]. As apparent from the name, its main characters are the king as the central character and his loyal knights as heroes of these poems. The plot usually involves conquering lands of heathens, typically Saracens, or defending France from their raids and the ultimate theme in these poems is Christianity and its doctrines.

And truly, one may confirm this classification when concerning the fact that in spite of being the title hero of the *Chanson de Roland*, Roland is only introduced to the audience very briefly during a discussion with Charlemagne in his garden and not directly at the beginning, which is strictly devoted to introducing King Charlemagne's current struggle with the chief antagonist of the story as well as to establishing the plot of the poem (O. MS. trans. O'Hagan st. I-IX). And despite those several instances of his name being uttered prior to this dialogue, it is only then that one may discover anything about Roland, as it is said there, "Li Emperere out sa raisun fenie[,] / [l]i quens Rollanz, ki ne l'otriet mie[,] / [e]n piez se drecet, si li vint cuntredire" (*La Chanson de Roland* 1875 vv. 193-5) "[s]carce his speech did the Emperor close, / [w]hen in high displeasure Count Roland rose, / [f]ronted his uncle upon the spot" (1909 vv. 193-5).

Together with Roland's being killed prior to Saragossa's conquest, it is true to say that, although not present in the climax of the story, that is the Battle of Roncevaux and Roland's consequent death and departing (1875 st. CXCVII-CXCVIX), Charlemagne remains the character whose actions initiate the whole plot, since it is his personal decision to conquer or convert the heathen peninsula that leads to the seven-year mission which brings the Frankish host to Saragossa (1909 st. I, VIII). And it is him who brings the story to its end, as well, by defeating the infidel.

From this point of view, Roland serves as the catalyst of the poem in which Charlemagne stands for the reactant. Without the former, the latter cannot successfully achieve the desired outcome of this experiment. Therefore, it is vital to understand Charlemagne not as the main hero of the epic but as the central figure. On the other hand, Roland, although having the most important part in this story, dies prior to the end of the poem and thus may be considered the true hero of the *chanson*.

Moreover, the brief mention of Count Roland's belonging to the royal family is also of utmost importance, for it functions as a partial confirmation of the hypothesis suggested previously which claims that there are strong resemblances between texts from the Early Middle Ages period and subsequent texts composed during the feudal age (see p. 4).

In this group, then, Charlemagne is concerned the righteous sovereign of the Christian realm of France and all *chansons* belonging into this cycle praise deeds of his vassals or liegemen under his command for the benefit of Charlemagne and through him also for the benefit of the realm. It is therefore possible to assume that allegiance to the feudal lord is the main moral theme of this cycle.

One may locate innumerable accounts of Roland's cordial affiliation to the emperor in the poem, first of which is presented during the king's taking counsel from his favourite barons and counts, as Roland speaks:

[...] Ja mar crerez Marsilie.
Set anz ad pleins qu'en Espagne venimes
« Jo vus cunquis e Noples e Commibles;
Pris ai Valterne e la terre de Pine .
E Balaguet e Tuele e Sebilie.(1875 vv. 196-200)

["I think it is unwise to believe Marsile. | Seven years ago we came to Spain |
For you I conquered Constantinople and Commibles; | Took Valterne and the land of
Pine. | And Balaguet and Tuele and Seville." - my trans.]

It is obvious from this excerpt that all the conquests listed by him have been made for the emperor's sake and not for any other reasons. And for the same loyalty to his lord, Roland hurls himself into the task of going to the heathen king as a messenger of Charlemagne to deliver Charlemagne's conditions of peace (1875 vv. 254).

But the explicitness of demonstrating loyalty to the king does not remain only in the speech of Roland, for Olivier likewise expresses his allegiance to Charlemagne when he, having reproved Roland for his "curages est[ant] mult pesmes e fiers" (1875 vv. 256) ["courage being too strong and fierce" - my trans.], fearlessly proposes that he could go instead "[s]e li rei voelt" (1875 vv. 258) ["if the king would" - my trans.]. In fact, even Turpin de Reins shows the same degree of allegiance and loyalty by offering himself to deliver the message in question, but the king states clearly that none of his twelve peers should think of being the envoy (1875 vv. 260-63).

However, concerning the *Quatre Fils Aymon* also known under the title of *Renaud de Montauban* mentioned above, which is a representative of another set of poems, one may find a significant or even "diametrical" departure from the strong Carolingian cult in the previously discussed group. Regardless of the fact that it is still the king who may be regarded as the central figure of this metric poem, surprisingly, it is also Charlemagne who is portrayed as a proud and evil person. Even the main hero of *Renaud of Montauban* calls his king "Charlemagne the cruel" (38). To exclude any ambiguities and confusion on who is actually the less chivalrous character, the author incorporates a scene in which the king has Renaud's stallion Bayard, the "destrier arrabi" (1909 vv. 14244) ["Arabic warhorse" - my trans.], tied and thrown into a river (1897 267).

The poem, as one may regard in many situations in which all characters are constantly put to a test of strength of their feudal loyalty to their sovereign, is a polemic on the importance of feudal and family loyalty. Right at the commencement of *Renaud of Montauban* one is told that Duke Beuves does not assist Charlemagne in the war with Saracens when he refuses to send his soldiers and is thus condemned by the king as a traitor (1897 2). This initial reproach of the king along with the treason of Ganelon, a

traitor archetype in *Quatre Fils Aymon* (1909 vi), triggers a whole series of unfortunate events in which Charlemagne's son and nephew are slain (1897 12, 37).

Renaud himself refuses to obey Charlemagne's demands several times during their quarrel, as he sequentially denied the king's order that one of his three brothers or cousin Maugis should be surrendered to Charlemagne and treated as he would (1897 46, 183, 204). Even more, Renaud takes Charlemagne the prisoner instead (1897 223).

Finally, Renaud's father, Duke Aymon, deals with a similar struggle between the feudal loyalty and that to his own sons. Although he initially supports his brother Beuves in defence of his castle against the king, he finds himself on the side of his feudal liege when Renaud and his brothers are banished (1897 16, 40-1, 50). He even demonstrates this bond by fighting against his sons in the battle near Montfort, in which he decapitates one of Renaud's followers (1897 51), and by jousting against Renaud and in the following pursuit of his sons, he claims that "if they live they will do us harm" (54).

Later on in the story, however, he aids his sons and brings them food, by which he finally admits that wellbeing of his lineage is superior to his feudal vassalage to the king (1897 126). Also Charlemagne is forced by his twelve peers to abandon his grudge against Renaud, for they threaten him with their ceasing to support him should he not consent (1897 287).

All this conflict between family ties and feudal affiliation may seem confusing not only to a student of medieval literature, but also to contemporary audiences, who, as Castets assumes, were mainly from the ranks of knights and noblemen (1909 38-40). It is therefore believed that the story represents a guidebook to the semantics of the code of chivalry as seen by knights in the twelfth century. When regarded from the educational point of view, this idea finds solid support in the fact that the poem shows

many exemplars of mentor-like questions related to difficult situations which the characters in the poem have to solve. One such example occurs as Duke Aymon asks his knights to advise him in a difficult situation. He says:

Helas, ce dist li dus, con m'ont cistmalbailli!

Se je lais ces glotons, puis que je les voi ci,

Parjuré sui vers Charle, ma foi li sui menti.

Dame Dex me confonde, se il en vont issi.(1909 vv. 2967 ff.)

["Alas, said the duke, what a misfortune! | If I let these pigs go that I can see here, | I shall be a perjurer for Charles, | so give advice to me." - my trans.] He immediately answers, however, for the knights were not certain what sort of counsel they should provide. So he continues: "Ja en iert la bataille, je le sai tot de fi, | Et se mi fil i muerent, molt aurai cuer mari" (1909 vv. 2972-3) ["I will give them battle, that I know | and if my sons die here, I will never be happy" - my trans.].

This form of educative questions concerning difficult matters requiring a wise judgement was very popular in the High Middle Ages when chivalry was a prevailing social phenomenon (Keen 1984 98-9). One of the most famous books dealing with doctrines of chivalry and their application in tournaments and jousts, or indeed in warfare is Geoffroi de Charny's *Demands pour la joute, le tournoi, et laguere*, a fourteenth-century manual regarding knighthood and chivalry, where in one instance, Charny demands, "Chevaliers joustent sanz crie, et porte un chevalier .i. autre jus de cop de lance hors des arçons. Gaaignera il le cheval celui qui le porte jus? Qu'en dictes vous?" (98) ["Knights are jousting without an announcement, and one knight knocks the other down with his lance. Should the knight receive the knocked one's horse?" - my trans.].

Nevertheless, Charny does not provide a quick and decisive answer to his own question in the book. Muhlberger holds that Charny's questions were aimed at raising polemic and a serious discussion among the knight errant who were present at the lecture concerning one or another topic from the book (11).

Therefore, it may easily be concluded that in this cycle, which has been denominated the *geste de Doon de Mayence*, all the poems including *Girart de Roussillon*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Doön de Mayence*, *Gaufrey*, *Tristan de Nanteuil* and a number of others are all connected through the theme of a rebellion against the immature king with manifold foul qualities and a consequent repentance and striving for the king's pardon, as he remains the true liege that every vassal should obey despite his vengeful and impetuous actions.

Similarly, one may find the topic of betrayal and loyalty to one's lord in the *Lorraine cycle*, not a numerous group of poems centred round the figure of Garin le Loherain, which includes poems *Garin le Loherain*, *Hervis de Metz*, *Gerbert de Metz*, and *Anseïs fils de Girbert*, which narrates mainly the folk history of feudal war in the region of Lorraine. Yet, some scholars (e.g. Ludlow 352-4) find the content of these poem suspiciously similar to those of some predating poems like *Ogier le Danois* or *Huon de Bordeaux* or even epics of Norse or German origin, which leaves the originality of these works in question.

The theme of vassalage and the relationship between the lord and his liegemen reflected the efforts of the then rulers and nobles to establish a firm and even cordial bond between them and their vassals as explained by Bloch (see chap. 1.2). In romance, like in epic poems, this topic was similarly important. The reason, as seen by Giles, lies in the fact that the medieval epic poetry and later even metrical romance, particularly the romance of heroic chivalry written in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century,

was an artistic attempt to transform the content of Latin chronicles, the favourite form of the clergy at that time, into a more accessible vernacular legendary tale (Geoffrey of Monmouth 3).

This transition may be easily discovered in Wace's *Roman de Brut*, a Norman chronicle written in verse that served Layamon as the source in creation of his popular *Brut*. The fact that Wace used another chronicle, specifically Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, as mentioned in the preface to this epic poem (Eugene Mason⁸), as a model is apparent when some major incidents are put to comparison. For instance, the beginning of the fifth chapter in Monmouth's *History* edited by Giles is marked with Constantine's arrival in Totness (VI 94). Although there had not been such a specific instance of this event in any other known chronicle such as Gildas's or Bede's ones, this same incident is mentioned in Wace's verse chronicle as he says.

Another great likeness and the most decisive in this matter occurs when considering King Arthur, for it is known that Monmouth's twelfth-century chronicle is the first written account in the documented history of a man named Arthur being the king of Britain (Trans. Thomson IX 149). Before him, only Nennius explicitly mentions the name Arthur, yet his Arthur's occupation was that of a commander chosen by British kings and nobles to lead them against the Saxons, not the king. Nennius writes:

Then it was, that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror. (§50 23)

Such tale would then be embroidered with fabulous incidents incorporating supernatural or magic creatures and the historical storyline thus altered or adjusted so as to emphasize importance of living by the chivalric code and pursuing courtly behaviour,

which is well visible in the cycle based largely on the two compared chronicles dealing with the deeds of the king, however a British one, and his noble knights (see chap. 2.3).

2.2.3 Value of Arms

The supernatural and magic formed an embodied part of chivalric literary works and together with the establishment of feudal vassalage and its immediate importance represented two main features characteristic for later periods of chivalric literature (see chap. 2.2.1, 2.3.2). Still, they are likewise influential regarding another important element of these epic poems. It is true to say that in all the above analyzed chivalric literary works weapons play much too a significant part not to be affected by or better not to affect the development in theme of these poems and romances.

Hatto, supporting this idea, goes even so far as to claim in the commentary to his translation of the *Nibelungenlied* that "[i]n heroic poetry swords are persons" because they, like other characters, bear resounding names, epic qualities and destinies (401). In fact, after reading the poem, one finds out that in various places in the story it is the sword and not its owner that brings about the action, like in the following passage: "Man sach da vor ir handenvil manegen satel bloz, | da von liechten swerten daz velt so lvote erdoz" (1843 st. 232) ["You could see many saddles emptied by their hands | when their bright swords sounded in the fields" - my trans.], where the swords themselves "cut the air" (1904 st. 233).

Siegfried's sword Balmunc [Balmung] itself appears in five adventures of the *Nibelungenlied* (1909 III 42, IV 53, XVI 125, XIX 206, XXIX 254, 259,) in which murder and possession of the coveted treasure are crucially linked with the sword, which is used as the bond and mediator of demands and needs not always clear from characters' motives and actions.

In this regard, it is true to say that the sword becomes the witness of all major events regarding the rise and fall of Siegfried and all other main characters involved in the story and may be considered a character on its own. The first of these individual instances of Balmunc being present on such an occasion occurs when Siegfried is bestowed the sword as the means for dividing the hoard of the Nibelungs between two brothers, Nibelung and Schilbung (1909 41). With this sword Siegfried slew both of them along with their "kith" and their soldiers (1909 42). The following occurrence is during the battle with the Saxon king and his army, an incident that made Siegfried the conqueror of Saxony and earned him praise of all Gunther's men (1908 IV 19). The next scene where the sword plays an important part is Siegfried's murder. However, it is not the presence in the literal meaning, for it is actually the absence of Balmunc that brought on the hero's death or his lost struggle to avenge on Hagen (1908 XVI 74). Later, Balmunc is the reason of vengeance on Hagen and Gunther (1909 259-63).

A similar importance of the hero's sword may be regarded in *Beowulf*, where the main protagonist makes use of two swords of mythical provenance. Although Beowulf preferred to wield no weapon and relied on his powerful grip, he was given Unferth's sword Hrunting (1995 vv. 1457), which was described as the first heirloom of old times (1995 vv. 1458), to arm himself against Grendel's mother. Interestingly, apart from the sword and a breastplate, Beowulf also wore a helmet, which the author inclines was made by Wayland, a legendary "wæpna smið" (1995 vv. 1452) ["weapon-smith" - my trans.], the three items together with a shield the gear of a knight (Keen 1984 69).

Hrunting, however, was not effective whatsoever concerning the destruction of Grendel's mother and Beowulf would surely have perished, had it not been for another mythical sword belonging to a race of giants (1995 vv. 1557 ff.), with the assistance of which he beheaded the fiend (1995 vv. 1566 ff.).

In the *Chanson de Roland* Durendal has a comparable heroic identity. Roland uses the sword to preserve his renown and envisages for it and Olivier's sword Halteclere a poetic fame of their own (O. MS. 1875 vv. 1122, 1464). This is also the reason why his chief concern as he faces death is to destroy Durendal so that it would not fall into pagan hands.

The status of heroic swords owes much to their mythical origins. Balmunc, the sword from the cavern, shares the supernatural aura which attaches to the *tarnkappe* and the treasure. However, before he wins Balmunc in the realm of heroic myth, Siegfried receives another sword of different provenance. At the court of Xanten he undergoes a *Schwertleite*[dubbing to the knightly order] which testifies to the social practice at the end of the twelfth century of marking the occasion of coming to manhood of a young noble by conferring upon him the arms and title of knight.

In the poem, various associated functions of the ceremony are evident. Siegfried is in "der sterke daz er wol wafen truoc" (1843 I st. 26) ["now he was large enough to carry a weapon" - my trans.], he acquires the "ritters namen" (1843 IV st. 31) ["the name of the knight" - my trans.], he assumes the prerogatives of a ruler (1843 I-III st. 39), and it seems that his sword is conferred in church (III). Indeed, Joachim Bumke claims this to be the earliest description of a Christian knighting ceremony in German poetry (cited in Ashcroft 74).

But while the introduction of the ceremony into this late version of the *Nibelungenlied* reinforces and normalizes Siegfried's credentials as a warrior and king for a thirteenth-century public, the courtly and Christian sanction of his chivalry has scant consequences for his role in the story. From his next appearance, in Worms, his sword is the not consecrated Balmunc.

In the *Chanson de Roland* the mythical significance of the warrior's sword has been more consistently modified. Archaic patterns of heroism, in which Durendal, "s'espee sanglente" (1940 vv. 1629) ["his bloodied sword" - my trans.], represents Roland's prowess, remain strong. But at moments of high significance personal renown conjoins with feudal and religious obligations. This is well apparent when Roland justifies his refusal to sound his battle horn, Olifant, before battle as he first cites his warrior reputation (1940 vv. 1054 ff.). Next, he expresses the honour of kith and kin (1940 vv. 1062 ff.). But the feudal vassalage (see chap. 2.2.2) owed to Charlemagne overrides all as Roland is particularly concerned about being guilty of cowardice when he explains to Olivier:

The emperor who left the French with us put ten thousand men on one side amongst whom he knew there was not a single coward. For one's lord one ought to suffer great hardships and be able to endure excessive cold or heat-yea, one ought to be read to lose one's blood and one's flesh" (2002 st. 88).

The origin of the sword, the emperor's gift to his vassal, legitimizes Roland's warrior instincts and refutes Olivier's accusation of "estultie" (1875 vv. 1725). In Roland's death scene a fuller account of Durendal's provenance provides a Christian myth of the origin and sanction of chivalry (1940 vv. 2316 ff.).

With rhetorical insistence, Roland's recital of his conquests of various regions including Normandy, Brittany, England and Ireland, Saxony, and others identifies Durendal as the instrument of Charlemagne's extension of the empire (1875 vv. 2333 ff.). This significance of the sword as an instrument of power appears to coincide with the introduction of the newly arisen stratum of knight in the society and the ceremonial rites of one's dubbing into the state of knighthood, whose characteristic symbol apart from other parts of gear like shield and clothes was a sword (Keen 1984 69).

Like Charlemagne's sword Joyeuse, Durendal is a consecrated sword in the further respect that the holy relics imbedded in its hilt provide talismanic protection and divine blessing for the sword and thus the wielder of it (1875 vv. 2344 ff., 2501 ff.). If the poet of the *Chanson de Roland* conceived this mythical origin and Christian sanction of Durendal in implicit analogy to the ceremonial arming and liturgical consecration of the young knight, it remains an indirect allusion.

However, what the angel does specify is that Durendal should be given to "uncunte cataignie" (1875 vv. 2320), a count and as killed military leader. Moreover, the angel grants Charlemagne the right of nominating its recipient, and Roland accepts stewardship of Durendal as a commitment to serve the emperor and through him God.

Based on the above analyzed excerpts and passages from the poem, one may notice that the *Chanson de Roland* interprets the supernatural origin of the sword as divine endorsement of chivalry, but conceives chivalry primarily as vassalage, in which service of a feudal lord is coextensive with fealty to God.

The gradual transition from feudal vassalage to divine purpose of the knightly stratum in literature via the most important instrument representing vassalage, that is the sword, indicates the ongoing changes in the contemporary society and the growing power of the Church. One may understand this power when considering the poem's altered facts regarding the enemy of Franks. While in history it was the Basques who assaulted the rear guard of Charlemagne, in the poem Roland slaughters Saracens, pagans, the enemy of Christendom (2002 xiv).

And this alteration concerns also the epic weapon in Roland's holding. Historically, the interpretation of Durendal's origin as a Christian validation of military service in the late extant versions of the *Chanson de Roland* reflects the Church's concern in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to regulate feudal warfare and to define a

Christian ethic for the warrior nobility, a concern manifested in the promotion of a liturgical blessing of the sword, in the *pax Dei* and ultimately in the crusades (Ashcroft 55).

The Christianization of feudal society began with the formulation in Carolingian times of a Christian theory of kingship (Bloch [A] 112). With the reconstitution of the western empire, the royal duty to defend the Church came to be equated with the aggressive mission to extend the boundaries of Christendom (see chap. 1.2). The *Chanson de Roland* charges Charlemagne with primary responsibility for the protection and expansion of Christendom, for justice and holy war. His nobles discharge their Christian duty by serving the king (1875 vv. 1127 ff.).

Therefore, taking into account the comparison between the above discussed poems, it is possible to conclude that in the *Chanson de Roland* and other *chansons de geste*, one may discover the transition from heroic chivalric literature of the Early Middle Ages represented chiefly by *Beowulf* or *Poetic Edda*, where strength and glory were the most important features of a warrior, to high chivalric literature influenced by the strongly Christian European society united for the first time in history by the occurrence of Crusades, where the service to God by means of war against heathens and other holy goals was considered more significant.

2.3 Religious Chivalric literature

The transition of the mood in literary works in medieval Europe often happened independently in various regions. Taking into consideration all popular literary works from the period following the composition of the first *chanson*, it is safe to say that the first country to see this shift in literature from heroes seeking glory and wealth through

adventures incorporating mythical characters to knights defending basic Christian doctrines and pursuing life by the code that was first introduced in history by the order of Knights Templar (see chap. 1.2) was most certainly France.

Apparently, some of the *chansons de geste* provide enough material to prove this allegation. As stated above, the whole collection of poems is further divided according to their central theme. So far, it was the idea of vassalage that has been discussed, but the groups encompassing poems promoting feudal vassalage are not the only ones. There is also the group called the *geste de Garin de Monglane* including poems like the *Chanson de Guillaume*, *La Prise d'Orange*, *Aliscans*, and a number of others. This cycle, however, shows only a marginal interest in promoting Christianity, since it primarily deals with Garin de Monglane and his alleged descendents such as Guillaume d'Orange and their striving to achieve fame through combat with infidels.

Quite significant as for the content regarding Christianity and its increasing dominance are *chansons* of another cycle consisting of poems that are all related to the first Crusade and to the following incidents occurring in the Near East. As it is mentioned in the introduction to the *Chanson d'Antioche*, they are largely based on actual events of the Crusade (Pèlerinxi-xix). These stories include *Les Chétifs*, *Le Chevalier au Cigne*, *Chanson de Jérusalem*, or the above-mentioned *Chansond'Antioche*.

However, some incidents as described in the poem may hardly be considered to have any religious traits whatsoever. Susan Edgington believes that the fact that the whole story is based on the narration of an alleged eyewitness of the Crusade aids the poem to appear more as a history or a versed chronicle (52). These events include passages telling of anthropophagia among "ribauds" (Pèlerin198), common Christian mercenaries, committed on dead bodies of Turks (Pèlerin196) or catapulting excavated

corpses of Turks over the high walls of the city of Antioch (Pèlerin198). Moreover, the barons, representing noble Christians pursuing salvation by means of the holy war, did not as much disapprove of these atrocities. One of the noblemen, Duke of Buillon, provides King Tafur, the leader of the mercenaries, with his own wine (Pèlerin199).

Also, the number of features similar to other *chansons de geste* suggest that the historical accounts were altered to comply with the needs of *jongleurs* who performed the recital (Macleod 433). Therefore, despite its being concerned with the first Crusade, it is easily recognizable that the poem is narrated in a strongly heroic mood. Furthermore, it may well be compared with the *Chanson de Roland* regarding its vivid depiction of violence, for even the latter describes explicitly the proceedings of the battle at Roncevaux and its outcome, for instance the death of Olivier (vv. 2221 ff.).

The most significant rise in popularity of this type of chivalric literature was observed in Germany, where Konrad the Priest elaborated the *Rolandslied*, the Middle High German version of the French *Chanson de Roland*, and embroidered it amply with fragments of the medieval sentiment characteristic for the then society (Ashcroft 62). Later, even more distinct literary work dealing with the "true knighthood" (Kennedy 14) was created by Wolfram von Eschenbach, who discusses the merits of being loyal to God in *Parzival*, a "social utopia" (xvi) reflecting the decline in the German society in the times of Eschenbach. This "movement" attempted to restore the knightly order and recall its original ideals that, as Lefevere explains in *Parzival*, were more than forgotten in Eschenbach's time (xii).

Still, it is true to say that it was the *Chanson de Roland* that inspired the authors of the poems and metric romances, for, as stated above (see chap. 2.2.3), this epic poem contains elements representing the characteristic features of religious chivalric

literature. The most resonant of these elements, which may be regarded as common for all works listed herein, shall be the first to be analyzed in this chapter.

2.3.1 Divine Purpose of the Knight

Primarily, these elements concern the Christian modification of the epic theme of Durendal's provenance (see chap. 2.2.3). This fact alone marks a stage in the definition of a distinct chivalric office that is represented by Roland. Not only does he wield a sword endowed by God, though conferred by the emperor, but he also surrenders his glove, the symbol of his feudal responsibilities (Keen 1984 71), directly to God's angel (1875 vv. 2389 ff.). Furthermore, all the warriors comprising the rear guard who die at Roncevaux earn salvation as martyrs in God's service (e.g. 1940 vv. 1130 ff.).

Thus the *Chanson de Roland* gives a significantly more positive Christian endorsement to the warrior's profession than, for example, the ninth-century *Ludwigslied*. According to Ashcroft, this Old-High-German epic song about Frankish King Luis III and his victory over the Vikings at the Battle of Saucourt-en-Vimeusees sees the Franks as God's warriors only in so far as they serve the king, as Ludwig alone receives a divine commission and reward for his defence of Christendom (61). Dennis H. Green explains that "it is only indirectly, via the office of the king, that this poem subjects warfare to the needs of Christian ethics" (214).

However, twelfth-century vernacular literature in Germany shows the same tendency as the *Chanson de Roland* to revise patterns of kingship and warfare inherited from the epic past according to current notions of Christian chivalry. It also seeks mythical historical prototypes for contemporary institutions and ideals. Examples for both the consecration of the warrior's sword and for crusading chivalry are found in

Christian chronicled history. In the *Kaiserchronik*, Constantine's reform of Roman society includes a redefinition of feudal order and warfare in which all levels of military society share a common order of life, as those who bear the sword (vv. 8100 ff., 8106ff.).

Constantine imposes on them a Christian conversion of their military profession. The ceremonial act of girding on their swords as described in Mayers's translation of the chronicle combines allusions to the crusader's badge and to the knighting ceremony, and it involves a chivalric pledge to armed defence of Christendom (210). A formal rite of taking the cross and swearing a crusader's vow is not in fact attested until the last quarter of the twelfth century, and these later liturgical formulae, derived from benedictions of the pilgrim's scrip and staff, emphasize the redemptive goal of the crusader as armed pilgrim rather than active warfare for God (Ashcroft 56). When the *Kaiserchronik* cites the warrior's undertaking to defend the Christendom against the minions of the devil, it echoes rather the pledge that knights-to-be have to take in order to have their sword consecrated by the Church and thus by God and it reads as follows:

Hear, O Lord, our prayers, and bless with the right hand of Your Majesty this sword, with which this man, your servant, wishes to be girt, so that it may be a defense and protection for churches, widows, and orphans, for all servants of God against the fury of the pagans, and that it may strike terror, fear and dread into the enemy. (Bumke 293)

These injunctions in the consecration of the sword derive themselves from the formulary of the German coronation rite (Ashcroft 56), and the Church's extension to the warrior with elements of the earlier redefinition of kingship is illustrated in this passage of the *Kaiserchronik* by the word "bevogeten"(vv. 12298) ["protect" - my trans.]. While the verb occurs only in this instance, the noun "voget" ["protector" - my

trans.] is reserved for Christ (vv. 12300), for Christian rulers including Constantine (vv. 8489), for Vespasian and Titus as models of the just king (vv. 5012, 5370), and for Mercurius as advocate of a monastery (vv. 11050).

One further respect in which Constantine's reform mirrors and authenticates twelfth-century concerns is the granting of royal protection to peasants and merchants (Mayers 219). Later in the work Charlemagne's renovation of the empire entails a renewal of the pact of Constantine, in which he re-enforces them to carry swords (Mayers 341).

This responsibility of the sacral emperor as "voget unt rihtaere" (vv. 14358) ["protector and judge" - my trans.] to maintain social order has analogies in peace legislation of Frederick I contemporary with the compilation of the *Kaiserchronik*. As a guardian of the law and protector of the Church, Frederick Barbarossa reserves the sword as a chivalric weapon and grants royal safeguard to peasants and merchants (Ashcroft 57). By tracing three important features of the Christianization of feudal society, the crusader's badge, the sanctified sword and the royal peace, back to the very foundation of the Christian state and by associating them in one ceremonial act, the *Kaiserchronik* lends authority and appeal to contemporary doctrines for a corporate ethic of chivalry.

The definition of Christian knighthood is the chief concern of Konrad's *Rolandslied*, which recasts the residual heroic values of the *Chanson de Roland* in the mood of twelfth-century crusading ideology. In a new introductory section Konrad merges the Carolingian and Old Testament themes of Charlemagne as a vicar of God, leading his people in a holy war of conversion and conquest, with a crusading conception of the knighthood as "heiligin pilgerime" (vv. 245), accepting martyrdom in battle as the best reward for dual service of emperor and "keiser allir hiemele" (vv. 97).

But Konrad does not strictly suppress all traces of the warrior ethos and heroic diction of his source. The *Rolandslied* is second only to the *Nibelungslied* in its preservation of heroic vocabulary, and the epithets that are not invariably directly qualified by Christianizing modifiers. Combat, as in the duel of Roland and Cornubiles (vv. 5045, 1320), can present itself still as a test of warrior prowess.

According to Thomas, the lion device on Roland's shield conveys a secular notion of heroic ferocity (xxiii), and Konrad allows Durndart [Durendal] to retain its heroic identity, often presenting Roland's feats of arms as if performed by the sword itself (vv. 4046, 5062, 5179, 5250, 5602). His first reference to Durndart adds an explanation of the name in terms of its derivation from Old French "dur", attributing to it a mythical quality consistent with heroic traditions (vv. 3301; see chap. 2.2.3).

Moreover, Konrad alone among many versions of the epic poem existing gives Roland's helmet a name, Venerant, and an inscription boasting its invulnerability (vv. 3297). This epic celebration of the warrior's arms occurs in Konrad's elaboration of the *Chanson de Roland's* brief description of Roland mounted for battle (vv. 1152). He describes in detail Roland's other luxurious pieces of equipment and dressing (vv. 3279), the coat decorated with a golden dragon, the banner depicting heraldic creatures. Ashcroft assumes that the collection of jewels and gold when exhibited by the heathen incurs censorious comment on their pride and vainglory (57). What distinguishes Roland's armour and justifies Konrad's retaining the heroic dimension in his depiction is the badge of his crusading commitment (Thomas xxvii).

The Christian army prepares for battle not only by putting on chivalric armour, but by assuming "gotes degene" (vv. 3429)["armour of God" - my trans.]. Their dual combat requires dual protection. Thomas understands such features of heroic style and ethos that Konrad retains as the external dimension of the crusading *militia Dei*(xxix).

The clerical poet can speak of Roland or Olivir as "der mâre helet" (vv. 6210) ["the legendary hero" - my trans.] or "der degen snel" (vv. 6383) ["the brave warrior" - my trans.] because the cross legitimizes combat with spear and sword as service of God.

Therefore, the warrior's profession no longer conflicts with the Christian ethic but becomes the knight's ordained means of salvation, the new kind of earning in the framework of crusading ideology. Belief and god summons and sanctifies chivalry, gives the crusading obligation a convincing shape which in the *Rolandslied* comes to overrule other responsibilities to secular authority or the institutional Church.

Putting this German epic in contrast with the *Chanson de Roland*, the shift to ideology of Christianity and crusading being more important than loyalty to one's feudal lord is apparent when comparing the swords of the heroes. In the *Chanson de Roland*, which justifies heroic prowess because it serves feudal social order and thereby divine purpose, Durendal pledges Roland to loyalty to Charlemagne because it is "ma bone espee, que li reis me dunat" (vv. 1725) ["my good sword that the king entrusted me" - my trans.].

In the *Rolandslied*, however, Roland explains his refusal to blow the horn by presenting the battle as a God-given opportunity for salvation and as a divine vengeance (vv. 3879). His sword serves God as the direct instrument of divine purpose. Konrad correspondingly modifies the myth of Durndart's origin in Roland's death scene. The catalogue of conquests now precedes the account of its conferment, and the rhetorical structure balances the theme of subjection to Karl with an emphasis on Roland's own martial achievement (vv. 6852). Also, in Konrad's version, the angel specifies Roland as God's designated recipient of Durndart (vv. 6862).

The syntactical insistence on the first-person pronouns stresses that God confers a direct privilege on Roland, that Karl is intermediary, not arbiter (Ashcroft 59). Konrad

develops the myth of Durndart's divine origin, which in the *Chanson de Roland* sanctions Roland's heroism and vassalage, into a validation of the *militia Dei*, the holy war which God institutes as a chivalric office. Hence Roland surrenders his sword, and the glove which symbolizes his vice-regal authority in Spain (Thomas xxxii), in acceptance of the duty laid on him by God. And although Karl is the agent who confers sword and gauntlet on him, Roland needs in the last resort no mediation by the emperor or Church.

Konrad's account of the conferment of Durndart gains added significance as a historical prototype for the knighting ceremony (see Keen 21). The angel lays on Roland the duty which in the liturgical consecration of sword symbolizes the knight's responsibility for social justice and in later literary sources often serves as a summary reminder of the chivalric vow (Bumke 203).

The injunction to help and protect widows and orphans, like the consecration of the sword itself, was extended to the warrior by the Church from the liturgy of the imperial coronation rite (Ashcroft 57). Nominated by God himself as a patron of the defenceless, Roland acquires a function comparable with that of Karl, likewise "voget witwen unde weisen" (2862, 8690) ["protector of widows and orphans" - my trans.]. His investiture with the sanctified sword offers the contemporary audience of the *Rolandslied* an exemplary future view of the knight's induction to his chivalric office. By omitting the *Chanson de Roland's* reference to Roland as a seasoned warrior at the time of his investiture Konrad's text even allows the possibility that the ceremony at Moriana inaugurates his career of knighthood (vv. 6862 ff.).

Within the poem, this modification of the account of Durndart's conferment significantly enhances the autonomous validity of crusading chivalry. By virtue of his direct divine commission Roland acquires a sacral status second to that of the emperor.

This is implicit in the extension of the responsibility to protect the defenceless from ruler to knight. Both Aida and Genelun associate Karl's patronage of the weak with his theocratic kingship(vv.8689;compare vv. 2861 ff.).

The title "voget" refers in six of the remaining nine occurrences in the poem to Karl's status as God's vicar. Not only does Roland's sword pledge him to the same protection of the weak in the name of God, he is twice accorded the title "voget" (vv. 960) ["protector" - my trans.]. His comrades hail Roland for his leadership as "unser guote voget" (vv. 5365) ["our good protector" - my trans.] and at the climax of the battle they salute him with titles which in their sacral resonance resemble Karl's royal titles (vv. 5976 ff.).

As the advocate of the Franks Roland stands in Karl's stead as *vicarius Dei*. In his personal sanctity, as flawless jewel, he further resembles Karl. The rhetorical climax of Roland's acclamation by the crusader army is his embodiment of the chivalric virtue (vv. 5979).He receives the homage of his men as Karl's viceroy. Konrad makes him not merely the leader of the emperor's rear guard (vv. 724) but the crowned king of Spain. He epitomizes the crusaders' self-purification and martyrdom. Pre-eminently, however, this apotheosis of Roland celebrates chivalry as the elect army of God.

The themes of imperial allegiance and *militia Dei* conflict nowhere in the *Rolandslied*. Karl sponsors and summons the war in Spain, he proclaims it a crusade (vv. 87, 181). Konrad develops the epic figure of Charlemagne in the *Rolandslied* into a paradigm of the sacred imperial majesty as the age of Barbarossa conceived it (Ashcroft 58). Even so, in the battle of Runzeual crusading chivalry finds a new autonomy, as the warriors initially characterized as "des keiseres vorevechten" (vv. 72) ["emperor's vassals" - my trans.] become, by virtue of their holy war, "daz heilige ingesinde, mines trechtines helde" (vv. 6223) ["the God's servants, my thirteen heroes" - my trans.].

2.3.2 Christianity Triumphant

This new approach towards knighthood as regarded by the then society and mainly by the knightly stratum itself was further developed by some authors of chivalric romances, versed epic tales. They understood that it was necessary to determine the position of a knight within the framework of the Christian society in regard to the Church, which was currently in command of Crusades to Palestine and required support of Christian kings, hence their vassals (see Bloch [A] 208). Moreover, many of these authors held the title of knighthood and were thus personally involved in their lords' campaigns. For instance, the author of the Middle High German epic romance *Parzival*, Wolfram von Eschenbach was a knight, which he himself points out in the romance (1862 st. 114 vv. 12).

Wolfram von Eschenbach intended to delineate an image of the true knight as he viewed it and he desired to uplift the great reputation of the chivalric code. As André Lefevere explains in the introduction to his translation of the original romance, chivalry in Germany had long been tainted by politicking of fractions of lords who coveted for acquiring dominance in the region and thus the legal rights to the throne (1991 vii-ix). Furthermore, as Bloch claims, the Church took advantage of their position in these feudal struggles, for it was necessary for any candidate's right to the throne to be consecrated by the pope or his appointed representative ([B] 37).

Therefore, in *Parzival*, Eschenbach attempts to imply his personal beliefs by means of allegories used in the romance. He openly claims this at the beginning of the first tale about the knight called Gamuret (1912 I vv. 8 ff.). As he informs the reader, his intention in this story is to demonstrate one man's true "manhood" (1912 I vv. 57). Better still, Eschenbach also tries to include the position of a woman in his romance,

which fact he confirms by saying that, "not to men alone I'd speak, | For fain would I show to women the goal that their heart should seek" (1912 I vv. 31-2).

His *Parzival* depicts the life of a knight who was initially ignorant of chivalry but received a great honour later in his life by becoming one of the Grail Knights. And although heroism plays an important part in the deeds of Parzival, it is his acquired ability to understand piety and his deep reverence for the Christian spirit that make him the greatest knight in all Christendom.

This endeavour of the author to call upon people's returning to purest religious practice is apparent when concerning the role of the Church in the romance, for there is not a single mention about it present there with the exception of priests delivering holy office of the Mass (e.g. 1912 XIV vv. 430, XVI vv. 260). When God or Christianity is discussed with or mentored to Parzival, it is by means of Parzival's mother Herzeleide, who explains the very conception of the Christian God and of the difference of Heaven and Hell (1912 III vv.110-18) or a hermit named Trevrezent, who further broadens Parzival's knowledge and understanding of the Grail (1912 IX vv. 510 ff.).

This fact only reinforces the notion suggested above that vassalage, feudal or ecclesiastic, was being transformed and knights no longer considered themselves compelled to do their lord's bidding unless he also conformed to the chivalrous doctrine and spread the Christian spirit in the land, as opposed to their being directed by God himself to protect the spirit.

In this light, Wolfram von Eschenbach expresses his admiration of the knightly order that best characterized this growing tendency regarding the direct connection between a knight and God, which made a deep impact on his romance as well, for he mentions the Knights Templar therein to be the guardians of the Grail (1912 XVI vv.

92, 107 ff., 157 ff.). Even more, Parzival becomes the king of the Grail Kingdom and the Templars thus his vassals (1912 XVI vv. 158).

Concerning the fact that Parzival was composed during the first two decades of the thirteenth century, it is presumable that the third Crusade of 1191 provided a substantial source to the account of the Templars, who largely operated in the Holy Land. One may realize this influence when taking into account Eschenbach's description of the Templar knights' paying respect to Parzival on his arrival as they "sprang straightway unto the ground, | And from off their head the helmet in the self-same hour unbound, | And Parzival they greeted" (1912 XVI vv. 107-9). Another exemplar of customs related to the order of Knights Templar may be disclosed in the passage describing the feast at Castle Marveil (1912 XIII vv. 147 ff.). These custom, as Weston argues in the notes on his translation of the German original, were common in various knightly orders, especially the Knights Templar (1912 211).

Yet, it is believed that the influence of the Crusade may be traced in another aspect of the work, since throughout the poem, one is presented with a ceaseless confrontation of two adversary worlds, that is the Christian world and the Heathen world. However, it is to one's great surprise that, unlike in heroic chivalric literature, where heathens represented the ultimate enemy of the Christian knight and thus his country (compare the *Chanson de Roland*), Wolfram von Eschenbach portrays quite a different image of the heathen world. The pagans of his description are noble and cherish the same principles like their Christian counterparts, thus may easily be matched with them as far as chivalry is concerned. Even a noble Moorish woman is depicted "with a heart more true and tender ne'er in woman's breast might dwell" (1912 I vv. 437), where "her purity was her baptism" (1912 I vv. 439).

The first instance of this kind occurs as Gamuret, Parzival's father, decides to become the vassal of "the mightiest reckoned of all monarchs that be on earth" (1912 I vv. 200). For these reasons he determines to serve under the lordship and guidance of the Baruch, the king of Bagdad (Ibid.). Later, Gamuret defends a Moorish queen and her city from the host of Christian warriors, whom he defeats and is celebrated by all heathens in the town as a hero (1912 I vv. 655 ff.). The result of this adventure of Gamuret is his being espoused with the queen and his begetting on her a son, Feirefis (1912 I 702, 720, 901). And although he is a heathen and "black and white" (1912 I vv. 902), he is introduced to us as a great jousting and a sword wielder (Ibid.).

Parzival's brother also plays an important part further in the story of the Grail, for it is his heathenness that prevents him from beholding the Grail (XVI vv. 375 ff.). The only possible way for him is then to receive Christianity through baptism, on whose completion he is finally able to regard it (1912 XVI vv. 524). The significance of the ritual of being baptized is apparent from its detailed description in this passage (1912 XVI vv. 495 ff.). It is thus believed that conversion of heathen or their reaching salvation, which the Grail represents, for it is the means of returning life into people who suffer or are dying (1912 XVI vv. 29 ff.), through accepting Christianity is one of the central ideas of the author.

The allegory may also be discovered in the character of the Baruch, to whom Gamuret turns in his search of the mightiest lord (see above). The Baruch, although a heathen, is described as follows:

[...] And they spake of him as the Baruch, and kings did on his bidding wait, |
And crowned heads were his servants; and his office it lasts to-day - | See how
Christian men baptized to Rome wend their pilgrim way, | So there was the

heathen custom. At Bagdad was their papal right, | And the Baruch as seemed
his office purged their sins with his word of might. (1912 I vv. 204-8)

The comparison with the papal office of the Christian Church is more than obvious and so is the position of the Baruch, who therefore represents the pope himself. It is hence possible to claim that Gamuret, in his service to the Baruch, becomes the servant of a religious leader and may also be considered the knight of high spiritual values.

The connection with the Christian religion and Church was further developed by a Burgundian poet Robert de Boron, who originated the Vulgate cycle, a series of romances dealing exclusively with the histories of the Grail and King Arthur, which became the principal source for Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. As Lumiansky asserts, his version of the story of the Grail is partly based on Boron's *Estoire del Saint Graal* [History of the Holy Grail] and a later version dealing with this theme called the *Queste del Saint Graal* [Quest of the Holy Grail] (26). However, in the Vulgate cycle and especially in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the heroes undergo a vast transformation to further comply with the image of the pure knight.

2.3.3 Chastity of the Grail Knights

The most significant development in the *Queste del Saint Graal* concerns the character of the Grail Knight. Previously, it was Perceval alone who was destined to reach the Grail. Here, however, he is accompanied by two other knights, "two of them shall be virgin and the third shall be chaste" (70). But this is not the only instance of virginity being important for achieving the quest for the Grail. Despite the fact that Lancelot is considered the best knight of worship (see chap. 2.4.2), he is restricted from the quest of the Grail by the hermit "because of the life which you have so long lived

ever since you fell into sin, that is ever since you received the order of chivalry" (114). The hermit explains that " if the Holy Grail should appear before you, I do not think you could see it any more than a blind man would see a sword before his eyes" (113). Thus, it is noticeable that the author believes that only through chastity or rather virginity, the symbol of purity, may one become the true Grail Knight.

Another important alteration to Eschenbach's story concerns Perceval's being surpassed in being the best knight by Galahad, one of the three Grail Knights. The reasons for Galahad's supremacy may be disclosed in the text, where the author informs the reader that Galahad is the grandson of the Fisher King (9). This linking to the keeper of the Grail is similar with that in *Parzival*, but not identical. Perceval, as Wolfram von Eschenbach writes, is a nephew of the Fisher King (1912 IX vv. 945 ff.). Therefore, one may argue, his lineage is not that of a direct descent, as opposed to Galahad, whose lineage is direct and is traced all the way back to Joseph of Arimathea and King David (12). In contrast to that, as Comfort explains, Perceval is a nephew of King Arthur, who, as stated below (see chap. 2.4.1), represents the epic type of hero, thus is an embodiment of features that are considered base and not worthy of the Grail Knight (4).

But even other knights are shadowed by Galahad's excellence, as none of them is able to draw the sword from the stone that "no one shall remove [...] from here but the one at whose side I am destined to hang [and] he shall be the best knight in the world" (10-11). Galahad's predestined purpose is also comprehensible from the fact that he as the only knight of the Round Table may be seated on the Perilous Seat (13).

Galahad also excels in the other most important quality of the true knight, which is charity. As he approaches the hermit, Galahad is told:

You had the virtue of charity so highly developed in you that it was a marvel.

For if you had had all the riches of the world in your possession, you would have

dared to surrender them all for love of your Creator. In those days the flame of the Holy Spirit was hot and ardent in you, and your heart and soul were desirous and attentive to hold to what these virtues had granted you. (115)

Surprisingly, these religious influences and interests are not wholly present in the work of the alleged source (see Staines 26) of the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach and of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the *Conte du Graal* [Story of the Grail] written by Chrétien de Troyes. However, many scholars (e.g. Weston in the notes on *Parzival* vol. II 193) argue that Wolfram von Eschenbach's blatant scorning Chrétien for his being incorrect regarding this story (1912 XVI vv. 663 ff.) suggests otherwise.

In this regard, it is also questionable that it was Chrétien de Troyes who first introduced the notion of a knight pursuing the quest for the Holy Grail. One may also demand what motives exactly he had for embarking on elaboration of such a resonant tale. It is believed that the idea was conceived by Chrétien based on his affiliation with Philip, the Count of Flanders, who was his patron, for Philip attended the third Crusade at the end of the twelfth century, the time to which the work is dated (Staines 23).

However, it is difficult to carry out any kind of assessment of Chrétien's final romance, for it remained incomplete, with no definite indication of the ending or its moral conclusion. Still, despite its length exceeding greatly Chrétien's earlier works, one may only find resemblances with Eschenbach's *Parzival* in the central plot, for the whole idea of purity and salvation through baptism is missing.

One may understand this from the contrast between Chrétien's hero's affair with the lady of the besieged town and Wolfram's hero adventure in the besieged Burg. Staines upholds that Perceval becomes the epitome of chivalry in the course of his adventures, the equal of Erec, Cliges, Lancelot, and Yvain (27). He further explains that like them, too, he falls in love with a beautiful woman worthy of his devotion (Ibid.).

Yet, Staines's explanation appears to be incorrect with respect to Perceval's love affair. While Wolfram's Parzival restrains himself from physical contact with the maiden, Chrétien's Perceval does not hold back his passion and spends a whole night kissing with the maiden (compare Wolfram von Eschenbach 1912 IV vv. 230 ff.; Chrétien de Troyes 364). Furthermore, Parzival, even though he marries the maiden, who is Queen Kondwiramur, and thus legitimizes their spending night together, he does not contort her purity for as long as three nights before finally laying with his wife (1912 IV vv. 375 ff.). A similar comparison with the *Queste del Saint Graal* proves to be even more difficult, for in the *Queste*, neither Perceval nor Galahad ever conceives the idea of falling in love with a woman, for their only thinkable target is to achieve the Grail, which fact is supported by their being virgins.

Considering the fact that Wolfram von Eschenbach and Chrétien might have had the same French source, as suggested by Weston in his commentary on the German poem (Wolfram von Eschenbach 1912 194), their different approaches towards courtly love as seen by these authors prove that despite Chrétien's attempt to develop a tale of spiritual significance, he hardly achieved the goal. This is apparent in a series of continuations including that of Gerbert de Montreuil or that written by Manessier, which are based on the unfinished state of Chrétien's romance, for, as David Staines points out, their spiritual tone is present primarily in the continuations, since Chrétien's effort to describe the relationship between knighthood and God remained unclear (Chrétien de Troyes 26). The question remains if that would be different provided that Chrétien had managed to finish his story.

Therefore, contrasting the themes prevailing in their works, it is safe to conclude that Wolfram's Parzival and Galahad of the *Queste del Saint Graal* supersedes Chrétien's heroes utterly and that the saintly knight, which is by authors themselves

referred to as the True Knight (compare Wolfram von Eschenbach XII vv. 447; *Queste* 116), supersedes the previous concept of the Heroic Knight as he also surpasses the Worshipful Knight represented by Lancelot as portrayed in Chrétien's work or *Lancelot* composed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century (see chap. 2.4).

For this reason, one may therefore come to the conclusion that Chrétien's romances including the *Conte du Graal*, the *Cliges*, the *Chevalier de la Charrette* [Knight of the Cart] featuring the above-mentioned Lancelot, and the *Chevalier au Lion* [Knight with the Lion] represent yet another genre of chivalric literature emerging in this period. The genre, which became the most influential of all genres of chivalric literature in the Middle Ages for its being greatly celebrated at the court, especially by women (Painter 171), and which completes the three genres discussed in this thesis, is denominated as courtly chivalric literature and constitutes the topic of the last chapter in this part of the paper devoted to the research of chivalry in medieval literature.

2.4 Courtly Chivalric literature

As stated above, it was courtly love that prevailed in the stories of Chrétien de Troyes, who is rightly considered the "father" of courtly romance (Lumiansky 6). Although Chrétien preceded with his romances the works of Konrad the Priest or Wolfram von Eschenbach and it was his concept of knighthood that served as the basis for late medieval works of the fourteenth but mainly the fifteenth centuries.

The popularity of the stories of Chrétien may be regarded in all following courtly romances, for they all, despite varying in the plot as they may be, treat the same model of setting for their story, which is the time of King Arthur's reign. This tendency is well demonstrated in all major works discussed in this chapter including the Welsh

Mabinogion, a thirteenth-century collection of early medieval chivalric tales, the anonymous *Lancelot* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a chivalric poem from the thirteenth and fourteenth century respectively, as all these works incorporate heroes who belong to the noblest knights of King Arthur's Round Table.

2.4.1 Knights of the Round Table

Disregarding the fact that Chrétien's romances are the first written account known to the scholarly public utilising the subject of King Arthur's court, especially the concept of the Round Table, the title attributed to the body of the best knights from Arthur's ranks (Malory XXI 726), the concept of the Arthurian world was commonly known prior to completion of Chrétien's first romance, the *Erec et Enide*. The assumption is based on Chrétien's suggestion at the beginning of the tale that it is the story which many professional story tellers "mutilate and spoil" (1). Scholars are certain nowadays that Chrétien's romances are on the main part based on Wace's versed chronicle and on many Arthurian tales that were already in circulation by the time of his composition (e.g. Bromwich 324).

Yet, there is one more element that further confirms the assumption regarding the knowledge of the Arthurian concept being much older. As one may notice, Sir Gawain, King Arthur's cousin and the knight of the Round Table, is an embedded figure in all Chrétien's romances. In fact, he holds a similar position to that of King Arthur himself, that is, the concept of the Round Table may not be complete without these two characters. But Chrétien is not the only author who mentions Gawain in their work, for Gawain is presented even in *Kilhwch and Olwen*, the tale comprised in *Mabinogion* which is believed by some scholars to date back to the eleventh century (e.g. Bromwich 367). It is true to say that the character of Gawain is especially popular with Welsh

literature from this period. Despite his being called Gwalchmai, Bromwich lists many occurrences of this hero identified as Gawain in traditional Welsh *Triads* to support this fact (367-8).

Still, regardless of his omnipresence, Gawain is scarcely entrusted with the part of the main hero in Arthurian romances. More often than not he is merely mentioned *à propos* by the author in the course of description or introduction of Arthur's court. A similar position, which Kay, Arthur's Seneschal, occupies in chivalric romances. For instance, in Chrétien's romance the *Chevalier au Lion*, when the author begins the story and the plot starts to unveil, one may read prior to Yvain's introduction that, "[o]utside the door to his chamber were Dodinel and Sagremor, Kay and Sir Gawain" (258). Simply the fact that Gawain was present there is sufficient for the story to commence.

Gawain, however, despite his not having any great influence on the direction of the story, fulfils the function of the wise and gallant knight, serving as the model for other knights. He is courteous with noble maidens like in the case of Lunete, whom he pledges to be her knight "both when you need me and when you don't" (Chrétien 286). He also advises King Arthur, his uncle, in matters concerning king's honour and his wellbeing as in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charette* (173).

The only poem with Gawain as the main hero is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* written in the thirteenth century. Here Gawain himself sets on a journey at the end of which he is expected to prove his honour by taking a blow with an axe on his bare neck. The whole story, as Weston claims therein, is an allegory on courtly manners and the code of chivalry (vi). In this story even Gawain is tried by the Green Knight, for he flinches for fear of death during the first attempt of the Green Knight to deliver the blow (45).

Kay, on the other hand, though he never really enters any adventure himself, functions as the catalyst and triggers the adventure of the heroes. This is well apparent in the *Chevalier de la Charette*, where it is his prudence and misbehaviour towards the king that gives the Knight of the Cart a reason for his adventurous journey (171-2). In the *Conte du Graal*, it is also Kay's impertinence towards Perceval and the maiden who laughs at Perceval that sends the hero on his mission to win back honour for the lady (352).

Nevertheless, Chrétien's romances are concerned with the individual knight rather than Arthur or his best knight Gawain as the centre of his works, though traditionally, as discussed above (see chap. 2.2.2), epic poems and chronicles depict a nation and their characters' ultimate concern is the nation itself. By contrast, the romance depicts an individual. This transformation was achieved by shifting the centre of the Arthurian world from King Arthur to his noble knights and by making the knights members of the order of the Round Table. Thus, Chrétien's Round Table is no longer an allegorical representation of Arthur's order but its living incarnation, with a group of individuals who are able to sustain their own adventures. As Staines comments on this matter, the distance between the Arthur of the chronicles and the Arthur as depicted in Chrétien's romances is the distance between Arthur in a national context and Arthur just overlooking heroism and loves of individual knights portrayed through their adventures (Chrétien de Troyes xx).

Chrétien's romances distance the individual knights from their society. Still, Chrétien's knights are all connected through the theme of courtly love and a maiden's praise. Be it Cliges, Yvain, or Erec, each one of these heroes may be regarded as dealing with an identical conflict. Despite their desire to search honour through a combat, they first find their true love. For their love, however, they jeopardize gaining

honour as knights, since they rather spend time with their love and thus have to prove their honour by setting out on an adventure instead (compare Chrétien de Troyes 32, 150, 286).

The conflict of courtly love complemented with courtly manners and knighthood in Chrétien's stories may be regarded as an intended subject, and serves as the model for noble women and men in the audience. One notices this from dialogues between the heroes and their beloved wives or lovers. Erec, for instance, seems to be attempting to correct his wife Enide, as she exhibits lack of respect for her husband by first telling him lies and restraining her worries from him, and later by informing him of his low honour (Chrétien de Troyes 32). Despite her inappropriate behaviour, however, Erec forgives her beloved wife at the end of the story and gains her complete respect as well as the respect of his fellow knights (Chrétien de Troyes 85).

Sidney Painter is convinced that this concept of ideal of courtesy reflected in Chrétien's work and later chivalric literature of the thirteenth century was the invention of women (95). He builds this assumption on the grounds of the fact that Chrétien's Lancelot was conceived by Marie of Champagne, as Chrétien asserts in his preface to the *Chevalier de la Charette* that he received the idea and the matter of his poem from her, "adding little to it except his effort and his careful attention" (170). However, Chrétien does not write that Marie was the author of the concept, since he simply claims to have been given "the matter and the meaning" (Ibid.), which might simply mean that she presented Chrétien with a manuscript with a story of possibly Welsh origin, where the theme of abduction was a much popular matter, and suggested certain specific alterations or improvements. This idea is the more likely when one concerns similar mentions of authors of some major works in the Middle Ages, for instance Wolfram von Eschenbach's claim that he was given the source material by his patron (1912 XVI vv.

457) or Chrétien himself in the romance about the Grail (339). Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is the story of Lancelot that clearly designates Chrétien's (or Marie's) ambition to portray the champion of the queen as the flower of chivalry and therefore worship of a noble maiden as the primary and most important goal that a knight should pursue at the court.

2.4.2 Loyalty above Fame

To be able to express this idea, Chrétien needed a character who was not known to the public and may thus not have been connected with any other deeds of chivalry. For this reason Chrétien invented Lancelot as one of the knights of Arthur's Round Table. This assumption is based on the fact that prior to Chrétien's introduction of Lancelot to chivalric literature, there exists no account related to Lancelot of any kind. Weston, supporting this claim, says that "Arthurian tradition knew nothing of Lancelot till the latter half of the twelfth [century]; and that no mention of his relations with Guinevere is found till between 1160-1170, that is, a decade after the first mention of his name" (6-7).

The notion of his single purpose is foretold even by Lancelot's character being developed only in the *Story of the Cart*. Although the earliest mention of the knight is the one contained in the *Erec et Enide*, where in a great gathering of the knights of the Round Table Lancelot of the Lake is listed third, the first two being Gawain and Erec (22), there occurs no other mention of him in Chrétien's earliest romance. However, it is far too improbable that Chrétien should name Lancelot as the third best in the world without having any plans with this character. Rather it is believed that Chrétien used this mention as a sign of foreshadowing the newly come hero.

This fact is proved not to be a mere coincidence, since in the *Cliges*, a later poem by Chretien, Lancelot is ascribed the same position, the third place on the roll of heroes (145). But here it is Perceval, and not Erec, who ranks second, Gawain still occupying the position of the best knight. The hero of the poem, Cliges, attends a tournament for four successive days, in different armour, and overthrows three best knights of King Arthur, that is Sagramor, Lancelot, and Perceval, finally fighting an undecided combat with Gawain (145-7). According to Staines, the *Cliges* reference is particularly noticeable, as the motif of the story is the love of the hero for the young wife of his uncle and sovereign, which is often referred to in connection with the love of Tristan and Iseult, but Lancelot and Guinevere never (21). Therefore, it seems clear that Chretien's poems were truly the first ones to mention the name of Lancelot.

Lancelot's position, however, transforms radically in the *Chevalier de la Charette*, where he overcomes Gawain as the best knight, for he is the knight who rescues Queen Guinevere. His supremacy, as apparent from the text, is legitimized by his endless loyalty to the queen, for which reason he endures numerous perilous or disgraceful situations. The first such occurrence appeared as Lancelot decides to travel on the cart of shame (174). Despite his Reason restrained him from doing so, he listened to Love (Ibid.). The theme of a devoted lover is also that of the *Cliges*, the *Erec et Enide* or the *Chevalier au Lion*. However, none of the heroes featured in the other poems willingly undergoes such shame for his beloved. This is where Lancelot surpasses them all.

Still, it is obvious that Lancelot was created by Chrétien merely for introduction of the abduction story and the Tristan and Iseult parallel between him and King Arthur's wife, for Chrétien does not incorporate any introduction of the knight other than that of meeting Gawain in the forest (173). Therefore, it seems that he takes for granted the

familiarity of his audience with the relations between the knight and the queen. Due to this and also Chrétien's use of the name Lancelot with its epithet "of the Lake", some scholars anticipate a previous knowledge of the story of his origin and thus hold that he was actually not the inventor of the character, as he merely borrowed from a popular tale from the oral tradition or texts that are now lost (e.g. Staines in Chrétien de Troyes xx). As a matter of fact, Chrétien himself admits being inspired and supported by Marie of Champagne (170), which confirms the above stated.

The first actual development of the character of Lancelot in terms of his provenance and childhood years occurs in the thirteenth-century French adaptation of Chrétien's romance called aptly *Lancelot*. The author is concerned with description of Lancelot as the best knight in all aspects, so that they even incorporate a detailed characterization of Lancelot including his physique and appearance (29). The thorough description concerned also his fingers (Ibid.). As such, it appears to relate to the contemporary ideal of manhood and it is believed that the author puts ever so great an emphasis on Lancelot's handsomeness to underline his knightly perfection.

A similar fashion may be disclosed in Wolfram's *Parzival*, who is introduced as the most handsome knight (e.g. 1912 III vv. 357, 388). Other similarities regarding the two heroes including authors' mentioning their growing up in separation from the society not aware of their royal provenance, training and hunting animals, and the leave from their mothers in search of chivalry suggest that the French romance might have borrowed some elements from *Parzival* (compare Wolfram von Eschenbach 1912 III vv. 55 ff., 81 ff., 238 ff.; *Lancelot* 33-35, 109).

Another developing feature of the *Lancelot* in comparison with Chrétien's model is the way in which Lancelot undergoes the ordeal in his strive to save the queen. While Chrétien's Lancelot minds using no means in order to locate the queen as soon as

possible, his counterpart in the later romance never abases himself so far as to make it possible for the reader to question his courage. As Beverly Kennedy states, the author of the romance also alleviates the treason committed by Lancelot and Guinevere by making Arthur equally guilty of adultery (89). In her comparison of the two French romances, Fanni Bogdanow points out that Lancelot's love affair with the queen may only be considered admirable because of the author's insistence that all Lancelot's chivalry and his deeds of courtesy, prowess, and generosity originates in love, which the author deems "ennobling" (118).

However, the most distinguishing factor between the *Chevalier de la Charette* and the *Lancelot* is their length, for the latter with over twelve hundred pages of text exceeds the account presented by Chrétien de Troyes. As part of the Vulgate cycle, the *Lancelot* succeeds in firmly embodying the connecting element between the stories of the Grail, the prose *Merlin* about the beginning of King Arthur's reign, and the *Morte Artu*, which tells of Arthur's death and of the end of tradition of the Round Table, by which fact it therefore represents the first complete account of the history of the Arthurian court. The Vulgate cycle comprises in itself the religious tones of chivalry in the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire del Saint Graal* as well as the finest courtly chivalry by means of the above discussed *Lancelot*.

These are the three major types of chivalric literature, each one introducing a different approach to knighthood and chivalric ideals. As described above, they were largely influenced by extra-literary events and phenomena. This is the reason why heroic literature forms its knight on the grounds of national consciousness and is largely influenced by the growing power of the Church. For the same reason, religious chivalric literature builds upon further development of the Christian society and its struggles in

matters concerning courtly life. However, courtly life, especially the relationship between a knight and his lady is the main concern of courtly chivalric literature. And though the division is made only for the purposes of this thesis, the findings regarding similarity of works comprised in individual groups as described herein allow validation of its correctness.

3 Distinctive Chivalric Features in Malory's *Morte Darthur*

The fact that there exists no later type of chivalric literature shall now be discussed in the third part of this thesis, whose aim is to prove an assumption that the fifteenth-century work of Thomas Malory functions as a summary of earlier medieval literary accounts of chivalry, in which the author determines the three types of chivalric literature by means of the knights' adventures. Their stories shall be contrasted with the findings of the second part of the thesis to support the hypothesis.

3.1 *Corresponding Features with Heroic Chivalric literature*

The first epoch of literary chivalry is that of heroic epic poems such as *Beowulf* in Britain, the French *Chanson de Roland* and other *chansons de geste*, and the Icelandic the *Poetic Edda*. Other heroic literature includes chivalric romances like the Layamon's *Brut*, which is largely based on the *Roman de Brut*, a verse French chronicle describing the detailed life of the legendary King Arthur. In Germany this epoch comprises the *Nibelungenlied*, which is a High German translation of *Volsunga Saga*, a Viking poem belonging to the *Poetic Edda*, with necessary alterations for the respective audience, and the *Kaiserchronic*, a verse chronicle of Roman emperors and their successors in the Holy Roman Empire, written in Old German.

Most of these literary works have been submitted to a considerable analysis and comparison (see chap. 2) by means of which it is possible to state that certain marks of similarity regarding their style and contents have been discovered. Based on these likenesses, one may infer beyond doubt that the works depict deeds of valiant heroes and that their prowess is their main characteristic feature. The same element shall now be disclosed in the *Morte Darthur*.

3.1.1 Prowess and Strength

This first feature in terms of similarity between the individual works concerns the main heroes of the stories. Reading about their inspiring deeds and their exceptional behaviour in critical situations which some other characters find impossible to deal with, one may come to the first conclusion claiming that all protagonists of these stories possess an astounding amount of courage, which becomes their characteristic trait. Beowulf in the epic of the same name proves to be brave enough to pursue Grendel's mother to her own lair, while Unferth, one of valiant vassals of king Hrothgar, finds it easier to provide Beowulf with his sword rather than to accompany the hero into the water deep (). Beowulf is also contrasted with his cowardly vassals, who flee all for the exception of one man, Wiglaf, when they were supposed to assist their king in destroying the dragon (vv. 2600 ff.).

Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied* also achieved all his exploits due to an incredible amount of bravery, of which killing the dragon Fafnir with a single strike is evidence. Compared with another hero from this story, Hagen, who murders Siegfried, Siegfried's position towards Hagen is similar to that of Beowulf and Unferth. Hagen is also the favourite knight of the king, like Unferth. Furthermore, Hagen, like Unferth, demonstrates cowardice when he kills Siegfried by striking him with a lance from behind, only after removing Siegfried's sword Balmunc and his shield (1908 74).

Finally, in the *Chanson de Roland*, the hero Roland is exceedingly courageous as he decides to defend France, although his men are heavily outnumbered. He does not even contemplate the idea that he would call for Charlemagne's main body of army to aid him in this heroic act and refuses to blow his horn threefold (32-4). He is therefore in contrast with his companion and brother in arms Olivier, whose bravery does not

overcome his wits and who in this manner advises Roland quite rationally to call for help.

Malory's account of a heroic type of knight and his prowess may be found the battles and wars lead by King Arthur. The first instance of this kind appears right after Arthur's being crowned the King of Britain when several rebellious kings decided not to succumb to him. As Malory writes, "Sir Baudwin, Sir Kay, and Sir Brastias slew on the right hand and on the left hand that it was marvel" (1927 bk. I chap. IX 16). Yet, it was Arthur who excelled in smiting enemies so that "many of the kings had great joy of his deeds and hardiness" (Ibid.). In a similar fashion, the war continues through chapters XI to XVII.

The next account regarding prowess occurs in the story of Balin, who upholds worship and hardiness above all (1927 bk. II chap. II 48). Balin is here similar to Roland, for he does not listen to the advice given to him in terms of his own destruction and rather delivers himself in the hands of God (Ibid.) However, Balin's campaign for vengeance is the strongest symbol of a heroic knight. The motif of vengeance may be also traced in the *Nibelungelied* or in the *Chanson de Roland*. In the end, it is vengeance that drives Gawain and Arthur into war with Lancelot (1927 bk. XX chap. XIX 232).

Still, the strongest evidence of prowess may be regarded in the war with Emperor Lucius described in book V. At first, however, Arthur himself defeats a giant in France, who kills innocent children and women (1927 bk. V chap. V 137). This episode seems to bear likeness with the archetype tale of "The Hand and the Child" (see chap. 2.1.2) that is also a possible source of *Beowulf*. The biggest heroic victory, nonetheless, is won by Arthur against the Saracens (1927 bk. V chap. XI 148).

Prowess of the main heroes or rather their pride, however, brings about their demise. Due to extensive courage and his eagerness to seize the treasure, Beowulf leaps

on the dragon and is mortally wounded in the fight (vv. 2692 ff.). Similarly, Roland is slain together with all his men due to his reluctance to ask for Charlemagne's support, regardless of the fact that Olivier warns him several times of the vast number of the Spanish host and even scorns him for his overrated pride (2002 77). Siegfried, on the other hand, dies by the hand of his fellow knight and hence does not allow to be grouped with the other heroes. It is, though, his valour and pride that causes his being killed, for through his prowess he achieves more heroic deeds than any other knight in Burgundy or Xanten, his greatest success being gaining control over the hoard of the Nibelungs, which coincidentally proves to be his doom.

Malory's knights are similarly consumed by pride. Balin's killing the knight whose damsel commits a suicide on that account is one such example (1927 bk. II chap. VI 52). It is pride that forces Balin pursue the Irish king, for he hopes to win Arthur's favour by gaining prowess and worship in a battle (Ibid.).

The heroes' prowess goes hand in hand with their incredible physical strength. Without it they would not be able to reach such a glory. In Beowulf's case, it is thanks to his handgrip that he defeats Grendel, tearing off his limb. He also wrestles with the two following opponents, Grendel's mother and the dragon, before killing them with a sword, a dagger respectively. Siegfried's strength is even proclaimed by his father when Siegfried comes to the age of being capable of bearing a weapon (1908 6). He is also the only man to defeat a Valkyrie warrior in a competition of strength (1908 35-6).

The best example of strength as depicted in Malory's work is Gawain, who is attributed with a magic power of getting three times stronger with the noon (1927 bk. XX chap. XXII 232). As far as Roland is concerned, his physical ability may only be traced in the poem by means of his trusty sword Durendal, as he is able to smite his opponents with such a force that their bodies along with the horses they ride are cleft in

twain (2002 61). But Roland is not the only one who wields a sword. In fact, all the mentioned heroes use swords. Furthermore, it is obvious that the swords are essential tools in achieving their heroic deeds. And it is the importance of the heroes' weapons that constitutes the next unifying point of the heroic epics.

3.1.2 Heroes' Weapons

A sword is the symbol of a knight along with other pieces of gear, which may also be identified in the poems discussed herein. However, the sword clearly dominates the others as for their use in the poems and their assistance in defeating adversaries of the heroes and may thus be considered the most significant object in the heroes' inventory.

Moreover, their significant position is further consolidated with the fact that swords belonging to these heroes have names and, in all three stories, they obtain a mythical origin. Beowulf's first sword he uses in a battle is Hrunting. It is given to him by Unferth and it is described by the author as an heirloom originated in the forge of Wayland, a mythical blacksmith. Yet, Beowulf is forced to withdraw Hrunting after he realizes that the sword is incapable of penetrating the skin of Grendel's mother. In this perilous situation, he finds in her lair a sword of Eotens that could only be used by giants for its enormity with which he ultimately cuts through her throat (vv. 1557 ff.). Finally, Beowulf acquires the last sword called Naegling, which, nonetheless, also breaks and does not aid the hero in killing the dragon. Siegfried's sword Balmunc's origin may also be considered mythical, as he receives the sword from descendents of semi-gods. As such, the sword has incredible qualities compared to other swords. In addition, in the original poem the *Volsunga Saga* which is part of the *Poetic Edda*, on whose basis the German masterpiece was created, the sword [Gram] is likewise forged

by a blacksmith of mythical origin (58). Nevertheless, it is Durendal that casts shadow over the previous ones regarding their mythical origin, for Roland's sword was conferred on him by God. This is the reason why the sword proves indestructible as Roland attempts to protect it from heathens by braking it (2002 75-6).

The sword also plays an important role in *Morte Darthur*. Firstly, it is by a custom of pulling a sword from a stone that the righteous king of Britain is found (1927 bk. I chap. V 11-13). Balin's sword, which was given to him by Lile of Avelion, on the other hand, brought about the destruction of the knight, who slew many good people with the sword including his own brother (1927 bk. II chap. II 48). Arthur's sword Excalibur is of utmost significance and is ascribed the ability to protect him from harm (1927 bk. I chap. XV 43). And finally, likewise in Roland, Arthur cannot bear the idea of leaving Excalibur behind with no true heir upon whom he might bestow it (1927 bk. XXI chap. VI 240).

It also determines another interesting finding regarding the common features in heroic literature, which is conferment of the heroes' swords, as all heroes are given their blades by royal kings or their relatives. Siegfried is bestowed his sword by the royal princes of the Nibelungs. Beowulf is given a sword by Hrothgar as a gift for killing Grendel. And Roland, as mentioned above, is conferred Durendal by God, yet, he is not given the sword directly but only by way of his uncle Charlemagne.

This custom is not followed in Malory's book entirely, for the swords are not conferred to knights by their relatives but by magic or rather destiny. It is true to say that all knights who are destined a sword receive such a sword that corresponds with their fate. Arthur obtains the sword that may only be gained by the king of Britain, hence becomes the king. Balin desires the sword that cannot be unsheathed and although he is warned of his misfortune in case he keeps it, Balin does not return the

sword and brings the curse on himself. Galahad, like Arthur, also draws a sword stuck in an object, this time, however, it is an anvil. This sword determines that Galahad shall be the knight who will succeed in the Grail quest.

3.1.3 Royal Lineage

The heroes of these epic poems possess one more likeness, since all of them are descended from royal families. Siegfried is the legitimate heir to the throne of Xanten, the kingdom of Sigmund, his father. Beowulf is affiliated with the king of Geats, who weds his daughter, Beowulf's mother, to Ecgtheow (vv. 373). Roland is closely bonded with the emperor of Franks, who is his mother's brother. In the *Morte Darthur*, all heroes, that is knights, come from a royal lineage despite the fact that they may discover their provenance only during an adventure. This is the case for Lancelot, Perceval, and Arthur himself. However, based on a thorough reading of the romances comprised in Malory's work, it is safe to say that there is none among the knights of the Round Table who is not related to royal kin.

Regarding the heroes' families, one other interesting matter may be disclosed. It is true to say that none of the epic heroes are ever mentioned to have an heir, for none of them beget offspring. Only King Arthur is said to have children. However, his sons Borr [Lohot] and Mordred are both illegitimate and die during the war between Mordred and Arthur for the throne of Britain, which eventually falls in the hands of Constantine (1927 bk. XXI chap. XIII 246). Other knights of any importance are met with a similar fate. Lancelot dies knowing that his only son died upon achieving the Holy Grail (1971 bk. XVII 607).

3.2 Corresponding Features with Religious Chivalric literature

Development of the European society towards the end of the eleventh century, which was also marked with the first Crusade saw rise in literature that naturally promoted the overall mood prevailing in Europe. Culture was not left aside and thus the twelfth century witnessed emergence of a new literary format of chivalric romance, while epic poems were sidetracked. Within the boundaries of this fresh literary approach, two major streams appeared. One that was concerned with the relations of knights towards women (see 3.3) and one focusing more on the position of the knight in the hierarchy of the Christian realm.

The primary attempt of those works that were elaborated in this period or rather under the influence of the strong Christian consciousness such as Konrad the Priest's *Rolandslied*, *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, or the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire del Saint Graal* was to draw on this spiritual wave overwhelming the noble society so as to provide an example or guidance for all those concerned, that is knights, noble women and men. This is why these works incorporate many allegories on Christian practices and symbols of divine justice, which are at the same time the two main corresponding features of works classified into this genre of religious chivalric literature.

This mood may also be identified in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, where there are plentiful biblical allegories and symbols of Christianity including the greatest symbol of all, the Holy Grail. Therefore, it is presumable that even religious chivalric literature shall be mirrored in this work, the more, as Malory used some of the religious chivalric works of the thirteenth century as his sources.

3.2.1 Divine Warrior

The chief unifying element in the two German poems as well as the French prose texts are undoubtedly the heroes themselves, although Roland's leading a body of army in defence from an ambush might seem possessing no real likeness with the other stories. Chiefly, no other hero's primary aim is to defeat heathens. Roland, for instance, despite winning many battles or jousts, does not combat against heathens. On the contrary, he serves a heathen lord and defends a heathen queen. One may thus demand on what grounds is the statement based that claims similarity between these two heroes, that is Roland and Parzival.

The reason for such a conclusion lies in the fact that there is a significant similarity between the two knights regarding their cause and motivation. Regardless of the differences between the plots and settings, both poems share one major theme, as described above, which is Christianity. While Roland is trying to defend Charlemagne's kingdom, the symbol of Christendom, from invasion of Spanish pagan force, Parzival, too, promotes the Christian spirit in his adventures. Furthermore, he convinces his brother Feirefis, a heathen, to consent to being baptized, which fact may be understood as a defeat of paganism.

The same conversion of a heathen is located in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, where during a battle against the host of Emperor Lucius of Rome, a body of heathens attack Arthur's troops, which leads to apprehension of one noble heathen called Priamus (1927 bk V chap. X 145-6). He surrenders to Gawain and from him accepts the Christian religion for his own (*Ibid.*). The whole war, then, may be compared to Charlemagne's campaign to conquer Spain and convert its inhabitants to Christianity. This tendency of the authors may be also seen in the case of Parzival's father, who serves under a man who appears to be referred to as the pope of the heathen world, which, in theory, makes

Gamuret a holy warrior as well. Wolfram even suffers the pain to explain that this heathen chief is the best lord in all world, Christian or otherwise, for whom a knight may wish to serve (see chap. 2.3.2). Therefore, in this regard, all heroes represent *militia Dei*, divine soldiers.

The divine purpose of the heroes is also marked by God's intervention. In the case of Roland, it is God who provides him with his sword and thus justifies his war against heathens as a holy war. As far as Parzival is concerned, he is predetermined to become the King of the Grail, for his name appears on the Grail. In this way he also becomes the lord of the Knights Templar, who are the symbol of the Christian army in Crusades (see chap. 1.2). In *Queste del Saint Graal*, it is Galahad who leads the two other knights towards reaching the Holy Grail, as well as in *Morte Darthur*, which copies the former at full. It is Galahad who is destined to heal the Cripple King (*Queste* 242) ["the Maymed Kyng" (1971 bk. XVII chap. IX 601)].

3.2.2 Christian Symbolism

All of the works compared here, as stated above, contain many Christian allusions. In the *Rolandslied*, the war between the Franks and Saracens represents the Crusade. In this regard, Roland and all Franks may be regarded as Templars, the Christian army protecting all Christendom. The allegory with Roland's being conferred the sword of divine origin stands for the ceremony of Knights Templar's vow to God (see chap. 2.3.1). Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival shows a strong emphasis of a significant Christian rite, which is receiving baptism, thus a symbolic struggle between Christianity and paganism.

As far as *Morte Darthur* is concerned, Malory provides a great number of allusions and similes throughout the whole book. The first significant occurs in the

passage where Arthur has all children born on May Day taken from their homes and left to die at sea for the fear losing the kingdom by hands of one of them (1927 bk. I chap. XXVII 45). Here Arthur is the reminiscence of Herod the Great who is likewise responsible for slaughter of innocent children, as he was afraid of being dethroned by Jesus Christ (see Mathew 2:1-23). Furthermore, this incident has a parallel in Malory's work, as Arthur himself later encounters a giant who kills children and is horrified upon seeing their dead bodies (1927 bk. V chap. V 137).

The most religious symbolisms, however, occur in the story of the quest for the Holy Grail. During this quest, all of the Grail heroes, who depict the true soldiers of God, that is priests who in their search for salvation spread charity, have on their journey many visions, for instance, the four lions in the forest (1927 bk. XVII chap. IX 169). Lancelot, too, has a vision when he beholds the Holy Grail (1927 bk. XVII chap. XV 173). Yet the chief allegory may be found at the end of the story, where Galahad, Perceval and Bors meet Josephe, the first bishop, in anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ, who provides the heroes with divine food (1971 bk. XVII chap. IX 603), might be a simile of the Holy Communion.

3.3 Corresponding Features with Courtly Chivalric literature

Finally, the works of Chrétien de Troyes, the anonymous prose *Lancelot*, or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* form the last type of chivalric literature, which concerns itself with courtly love and a worshipful type of knight. Works belonging into this group are characterised with one unifying pattern. At the beginning of the story, a knight strives to gain prowess in adventures, so he rides off, but by chance meets the fairest maiden, with whom he desperately falls in love. However, there appears an obstacle

which hinders the knight from marrying the maiden or one which causes their being separated from each other. This triggers a pursuit, in the course of which the knight encounters many adventures incorporating more or less supernatural elements. Now it shall be demonstrated that even Malory made use of this motif in his work.

3.3.1 Love by Adventure

In terms of courtly love as displayed in this type of chivalric literature, there are two distinguished ways for a knight to fall in love. The first way concerns his desire to deserve praise of King Arthur and deserve the place at the Round Table. In this manner, the knight sets out on an adventure on which he meets his love. The other possibility concerns the adventure occurring at the court, which forces the knight to pursue it.

This simple pattern is used in Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion*, where Yvain stands for such a knight. Having listened to a tale narrated by one of his comrades, he embarks on a journey to avenge a disgrace brought on the narrator (264). In *Erec et Enide*, a similar beginning unveils, as all Arthur's courtiers are hunting a white stag, when an insolent dwarf accompanying an unknown knight injures one of the queen's maids (3). This happens to be just the right reason for Erec to go after the knight to receive his apology (4).

The same pattern may be seen in Malory's tale of Tristram de Lyones, where Tristram is sent to Ireland by his uncle, the king of Cornwall, to accompany his prospective bride, Fair Isode (1927 bk. VIII chap. XII 254). However, other knights, like Urien, found their damsels by means of an adventure. An almost identical pattern is presented in Malory's Knight of the Cart, an adaptation of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charette*. Here the queen is abducted by a villainous king Mellyagaunce and Lancelot

sets off to find and deliver his beloved lady from this perilous adventure (1971 bk. XIX chap. III 652).

3.3.2 Courteous Knights

Courtly love is not the only common feature of this type of chivalric literature. It occurs alongside another one, which concerns the gallantry and gentleness of the worshipful knight towards women. In other words, this kind of knight seems to be a perfect gentleman. This is proved in the prose *Lancelot*, where the author states explicitly that the hero receives a very good lesson on how to behave with a woman from the Lady of the Lake during her teaching him on the behaviour and qualities of a true knight (chap. XXI 112-13). This same kind of advice is shared with Wolfram's Parzival, who receives it from his mother prior to setting out on becoming a knight (1912 III vv. 255 ff.).

In Malory's work, however, such instructions are not explicitly stated and one may only notice allusions of this manner. On the other hand, the instances of these allusions are plentiful. For example, the custom of fulfilling any promise given to a damsel, as in the case of Arthur and the Lady of the Lake, is very common (see 1927 bk. I chap. XXV 43). In the story featuring Sir Gawain, a promise plays a similarly important part if not more, for it is the promise and standing by it that makes Gawain the worthiest knight (47).

Here ends the comparison of all works discussed herein and that of Sir Thomas Malory. The number of examples of similar traits in these works shows that Morte Darthur consists of material comprising both heroic chivalry and religious chivalry as well as courtly romance.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was a thorough analysis of chivalric literature from different periods of the Middle Ages and varied by their central theme so as to enable a final comparison of the unifying elements located in the literary works and the late medieval work of Thomas Malory.

The motivation for endeavouring this research lies in the fact that Malory's *Morte Darthur* is considered the terminal phase of medieval chivalric literature, in which the author summarizes and contrasts all forms of chivalry. It is the fact that he presents the reader chronologically with all forms of chivalry as they developed and draws on the individual tales of singular knights in order to establish his final judgement regarding knighthood, which he presents in the last tale dealing with the death of King Arthur and decomposition of the British kingdom.

Malory's use of different knights for depicting different types of chivalry reflects on the origin of his sources that he used for elaboration of his work. To introduce the heroic type of knight, Malory draws on Layamon's *Brut* as well as the French prose *Merlin*, both dealing with the early history of the Arthurian legend. His Heroic Knight retains the same qualities and features like that of the originals. He is honest, proud, and vengeful. These qualities, however, do not suffice in Malory's view, for he delivers his heroic heroes to such a destiny that is far from being happy.

The second type of knight depicted by Malory is represented by Galahad, Perceval, and Bors. These are the three True Knights at the Arthurian court and thus selected by God to reach the Holy Grail. To some extent, Lancelot is regarded in a similar light, but due to his destiny, he is restricted from achieving salvation, although he is granted a glimpse of the Grail.

Destiny in general has its place in Malory's book. Considering the number of occasions when destiny leads the steps of the heroes towards their end, be it a bitter one or a happy one, it is true to say that fate deserves to be considered a secondary theme of all Malory's stories.

However, the most space is occupied by stories featuring Malory's probably most favourite type of knight, that is the Worshipful Knight. Lancelot of the Lake may be identified the chief hero of this type, for he is referred to as the best knight throughout the whole work, despite the fact that he commits an adultery with Arthur's wife. This proves that Malory does not understand worship as something that comes granted with marriage, but he seems to believe that worship, like love, has to be gained by means of adventures and courtesy. In this respect, Lancelot truly is the best knight.

Final Verdict

Based on the findings and the consequent comparison with the *Morte Darthur*, it is beyond doubt that Malory incorporated all three types of knight and hence of chivalric literature, where such heroes originated. For this reason, it has been established that the statement of this thesis, which argues that the *Morte Darthur* contains all types of chivalric literature and thus represents the peak of chivalric literature in the Middle Ages, may be definitely confirmed.

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Résumé

This thesis explores the phenomenon of chivalry and its manifestations in medieval European literature. Its aim is to undergo a detailed analysis of a selection of works belonging to medieval chivalric literature and to prove existence of similarities in certain elements with respect to the external influences of the era. These results are then used for comparison with *Morte Darthur*, the work of Sir Thomas Malory, in order to confirm the central hypothesis of this study, which claims that the *Morte Darthur* represents the final stage of development of mediaeval chivalric literature. The work is divided into three main parts dealing with chivalry. The first part is concerned with the phenomenon of chivalry itself, its origin, its influence on society, the influence of Christianity on knighthood and significance of this phenomenon in the context of a growing popularity of secular literature written in the vernacular. The second part analyzes several important works from the period from the early Middle Ages to the late Middle Ages of the fifteenth century, which are divided into three groups corresponding to the time of composition or genre similarities. The first group comprises the early works of heroic epic like *Beowulf* or the French *chansons de geste*. The second group reflects the work concentrating on the importance of Christianity and the application of its ideals in chivalry. This group includes *Parzival*, *Rolandslied* or the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the works of German and French authors. The third group deals with courtly literature, such as the complete works of Chrétien de Troyes, dealing with the relationship between a knight and his lady. In the third part of this work, the results of the analysis are compared with the contents of the book of Thomas Malory. Based on this comparison, the hypothesis, which argues that the *Morte Darthur* summarizes all phases of chivalric literature, is confirmed.

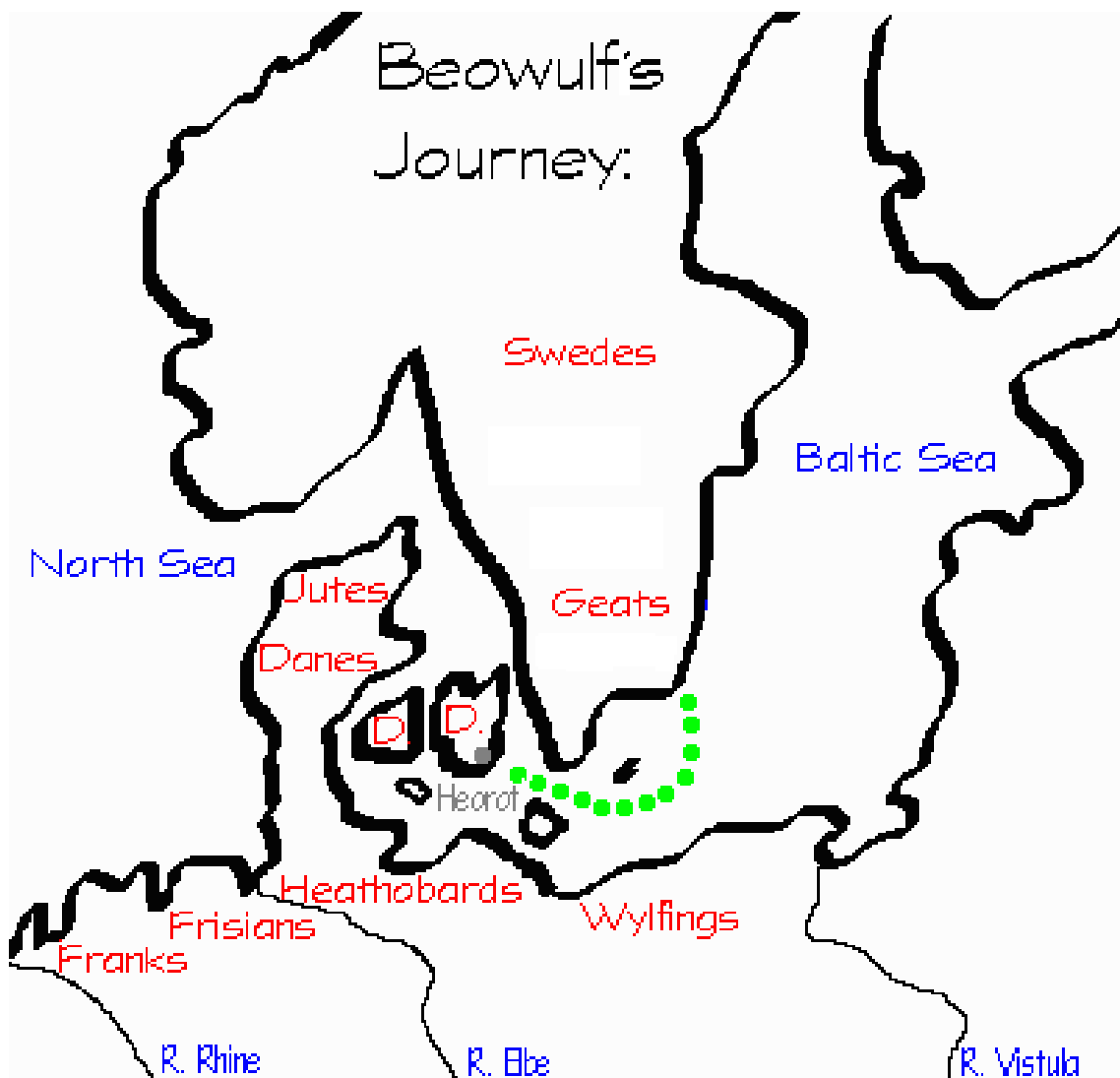
Resumé

Tato magisterská diplomová práce se zabývá fenoménem rytířství a jeho projevu ve středověké evropské literatuře. Jejím cílem je podrobit vybraná díla spadající do středověké rytířské literatury podrobnému rozboru a prokázat, že vykazují známky podobnosti v jistých prvcích s ohledem na vnější vlivy té doby. Tyto výsledky posléze využívá k jejich porovnání s *Morte Darthur*, dílem Sira Thomase Maloryho, aby bylo možné potvrdit ústřední hypotézu této práce, která tvrdí, že *Morte Darthur* představuje závěrečnou etapu vývoje středověké rytířské literatury. Práce je rozdělena do tří základních částí, z nichž každá vypovídá o rytířství odlišným způsobem. První část práce se zabývá samotným fenoménem rytířství, dobou jeho pravděpodobného vzniku, jeho vlivem na společnost, vlivem křesťanství na rytířský stav a významem tohoto fenoménu v souvislosti s rostoucí oblibou světské literatury psané v národních jazycích. Ve druhé části je postupně analyzováno několik významných děl z období od raného středověku až po pozdní středověk patnáctého století, která jsou na základě časového určení nebo žánrové podobnosti rozdělena do tří skupin, jejichž označení reflektuje ústřední zaměření obsahu těchto děl. První skupinou jsou raná díla hrdinských eposů, jako jsou *Beowulf* nebo cyklus francouzských hrdinských písní. Druhá skupina reflektuje díla soustředící se na význam křesťanství a uplatňování jeho ideálů v rytířství. Do této skupiny patří zejména *Parzival*, *Rolandslied* nebo *Queste del Saint Graal*, díla německých a francouzských autorů. Třetí skupina skýtá díla dvorské literatury jako tvorbu Chrétiena de Troyes pojednávající o vztahu mezi rytířem a jeho paní. Ve třetí části této práce jsou výsledky z rozboru děl porovnány s obsahem knihy Thomase Maloryho. Na základě tohoto srovnání je v závěru práce hypotéza, která tvrdí, že *Morte Darthur* v sobě shrnuje všechny fáze rytířské literatury, potvrzena.

Appendices

- I. A Map depicting the location of the story in Beowulf and of Beowulf's journey to Heorot; a map demonstrating the distance between the place of the story and that of the audience

Figure 1



Source: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sll/disciplines/english/beowulf/voyage.htm>.

Figure 2



Source: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sll/disciplines/english/beowulf/map.htm>.