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### ENLT 430.02: The Grail Quest - Studies in Comparative Literature

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**The Grail Quest**  
*Studies in Comparative Literature*  
(LS 455.02/ FLLG 440.02/ ENLT 430.02)

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Hours: MWF 10-11  
& by appointment

Fall, 2003  
TR 2:10-3:30  
LA 303  
3 credits

An introduction to the major medieval English, French, Welsh and German romances of the grail.

One group focuses on the hero/ knight/ fool who undertakes the quest, e.g., Chrétien of Troyes' *Perceval*, the Welsh *Peredur*, the French *Perlesvaus*, and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

A second group emphasizes the object of the quest, the grail and other talismans, and contextualizes the quest within universal history, or the wider Arthurian world; e.g., Robert de Boron's *Joseph of Arimathea*, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

The grail romances form part of the body of Arthurian literature traditionally known as the 'matiere de Bretagne' ("the matter of Britain"). Centered around the figure of Arthur and his court (Guinevere, Merlin, Lancelot, Gawain, Mordred, et alia) the Arthurian tales constitute the largest body of interrelated imaginative literature in the West, encompassing works from the early Middle Ages to the twentieth century in virtually all of the European vernaculars. The grail narratives represent a complex and interlocking subset of Arthuriana; we will attend to filiations and connections between these works. We will pursue a close reading of these works in translation, although provision will be made for those interested in working in the original languages.

Critical studies of the grail based on solid philological and hermeneutical principles are in constant danger of being drowned out by a vast literature of subcritical studies advancing dubious interpretations. I have supplemented the Mansfield Library's small collection of solid secondary works with titles from my library which will be available to students.

If much that has been written about the grail qualifies as "nonsense on stilts" in the words of Dr. Johnson, it is undeniable that the story of the grail continues to exert a significant influence in popular culture. Depending on student interest we may pay attention to selected aspects of "medievalism" – the survival of grail legends in 19c and 20c popular literature, art, and film.

### Syllabus

Sept. 2,4	Introduction. Texts & Contexts; History of Research
9,11,16,18	Chrétien de Troyes, "Perceval" from <u>Arthurian Romances</u>
23,25,30	Robert de Boron, "Joseph of Arimathea"

Oct.2,7,9,14	Wolfram von Eschenbach, <u>Parzival</u>
16	Midterm
21,23	“Perlesvaus” (or “The High Book of the Grail”)
28,30	“Peredur” from <u>The Mabinogion</u>
Nov.4,6,13,18	<u>The Quest of the Holy Grail</u>
Nov.11	Veterans’ Day Holiday
20,25, Dec.2,4	Thomas Malory, <u>Le Morte D’Arthur</u>
27	Thanksgiving Holiday
9,11	The Legacy of the Grail
15	Final Exam, Monday, 3:20-5:20

### Required Reading

Chrétien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances, W. Kibler, trans.,(Penguin:London)  
 \* Robert de Boron, “Joseph of Arimathea”, Nigel Bryant, trans., Facpac  
 Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival, A.T.Hatto,trans. (Penguin: London)  
 \* “Perlesvaus”, Sebastian Evans, trans., Facpac  
 \* “Peredur”, from The Mabinogion, J. Gantz, trans., Facpac  
The Quest of the Holy Grail, P.M.Matarasso, trans.,(Penguin: London)  
 Thomas Malory, Le Morte D’Arthur, (Modern Library: New York)

(\*=available in Facpac)

### Course Requirements

1. Class attendance and participation are crucial to a productive seminar.
2. Prompt completion of assigned readings and preparation are equally necessary.
3. Term paper or research project to be arranged in consultation with instructor. (10-15 pages.) Optional class presentation on same. (Topic may be textual, thematic, critical.) Alternatively, students may write three brief responses (3-5 pages) to three of the assigned texts.
4. Brief introduction (group) to class discussion of specific text.
5. Midterm and Final exams. (Quizzes as needed.)

No extensions on written assignments. Evidence of plagiarism will result in failure of the course.

Sept. 22 Last day to add/drop by Cyberbear & to pay fees  
 Dec. 5 Last day to withdraw from course  
 Dec. 12 Last day to drop/grade option petitions

## Grail romances and related works

The grail romances form part of the body of Arthurian literature traditionally known as the “*matiere de Bretagne*” (“the matter of Britain”). Centered around the figure of Arthur and his court (Guinevere, Merlin, Lancelot, Gawain, Mordred, et alia), the Arthurian tales constitute the largest body of interrelated imaginative literature in the West, encompassing literature from the early Middle Ages to the twentieth century in virtually all of the European vernaculars: Latin, Celtic, French, German, Scandinavian, Dutch, Hispanic, Italian, English, Greek, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Slavic. The worlds of Arthuriana embrace medieval notions of chivalry, courtly love, heroism, and the grail quest as well as the operas of Richard Wagner and the poetry of Tennyson, T.S. Eliot and C.S. Lewis and myriad aspects of contemporary popular culture.

### Perceval

Chrétien de Troyes wrote (1180-1190) “Perceval” or “Le Conte du Graal” (‘The Story of the Grail’) in Old French verse. Last (and unfinished) of his “Arthurian Romances”, which also include “Erec et Enide”, “Cligès”, “Lancelot” (or “The Knight of the Cart”) and “Yvain” (or “The Knight with the Lion”). Chrétien may be said to have inaugurated the world of Arthurian romance; he introduced the love story of Lancelot and Guinevere and the story of the Grail.

Between c.1200 and c.1230 four continuations of “Perceval” were composed known as the “First or Gawain Continuation” (aka the “Pseudo-Wauchier Continuation”), the “Second or Perceval Continuation”, the “Third Continuation” by Manessier, and a fourth “Continuation” by Gerbert de Montreuil.

### Joseph d’Arimathie

(‘Joseph of Arimathea’ aka “Le Roman de l’Estoire dou Graal”, ‘The Romance of the History of the Grail’) was written by Robert of Boron (1192-1202) in Old French verse. Associated with “Joseph” are two unfinished works by Robert, his “Merlin” and “Perceval”. Robert composed the first of the grail romances and recast the story of the Grail within the context of universal history, the Christian economy of salvation, beginning with the creation and continuing through the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ and into the (medieval) present and the imminent end of history.

An early 13c OF prose translation known as “Le Petit Saint Graal” (including “Joseph”, “Huth Merlin” and “Didot-Perceval”) became the source of “L’Estoire del Saint Graal” (‘The History of the Holy Grail’) which is the *first* branch of the OF “Lancelot-Graal” or “Vulgate Cycle.” The “L’Estoire” is, in turn, the source of two Middle English translations, the early 14c alliterative “Joseph of Arimathie” and Henry Lovelich’s early 15c “History of the Holy Grail”.

### Parzival

Wolfram von Eschenbach (1200-1210) in Middle High German verse. Although Wolfram is influenced by Chretien and intends his work as a continuation of sorts, “Parzival” is a radical departure from the French Arthurian tradition in several respects.

Perhaps the greatest work of medieval literature after Dante's "Commedia", Wolfram's text describes the spiritual development of Parzival, the world of the guardians of the Grail, the "templars"; curiously, the Grail itself as depicted as a stone. Wolfram stands in contrast to his more learned counterpart in medieval German literature, Gottfried von Strassburg, author of another Arthurian work, "Tristan".

### **Perlesvaus**

(Aka "Li Hauz Livres du Graal" ("The High History (Book) of the Holy Grail") (c.1200-1210/c.1230) in Old French prose. A sequel to Chrétien but not a continuation, the anonymous "Perlesvaus" combines a deeply religious emphasis, a fascination with the mysteries of the grail, the knights of Arthur's kingdom as proponents of the New Law, and frequent depictions of bloody warfare.

### **Peredur**

Late 13c romance in Middle Welsh prose influenced by Chrétien as well as Celtic oral traditions and texts; included in the collection of eleven tales translated by Lady Charlotte Guest (1837-1849) titled the "Mabinogion". "Peredur" remains the crucial text for advocates of the Celtic origins of the grail myth.

### **La Queste del Saint Graal**

("The Quest of the Holy Grail") presumably by a Cistercian (monastic) author c. 1215-1235/c.1220 in Old French prose. The *fourth* branch of the "Lancelot-Graal" or "Vulgate Cycle" (aka "Prose Lancelot" or the "Pseudo-Map Cycle"), the "Queste" sums up the themes of both Chrétien and Robert de Boron and will be the primary influence on Malory.

The *second* branch of the Vulgate Cycle is the "L'Estoire de Merlin" ('The Story of Merlin'). Post-Vulgate continuations of the second branch include "Le Roman du Graal" ('Romance of the Grail'). Cf. also the "Suite du Merlin" OF c.1230-1240.

The *third* branch is the "Lancelot en prose". The *fifth* branch is "La Mort Artu" ('The Death of Arthur').

### **Morte Darthur**

(or "Le Morte D'Arthur") Thomas Malory, an English knight, wrote in 1469-1470, a work in Middle English prose edited and published in 1485 by William Caxton in 21 books. Books XIII-XVII describe "the noble tale of the Sangreal". In 1934 the Winchester MS was discovered; in which Malory's tale is divided into 8 books or tales – "the noble tale of the Sangrail" is book 6. Malory's work represents a culmination of the medieval legends and the greatest single source of inspiration for later students of the world of Camelot.

## Grail Romances

### I. Perceval

1. Chrétien de Troyes (1180-1190), **Perceval** or Le Conte du Graal ('The Story of the Grail') (Old French)

Continuations:

- a. First or Gawain Continuation (1200) (aka Pseudo-Wachier Continuation)
  - b. Second or Perceval Continuation (c.1200)
  - c. Third Continuation by Manessier (c.1230)
  - d. Continuation by Gerbert de Montreuil (c.1230)
2. Wolfram von Eschenbach (1200-1210), **Parzival** (MHG)
  3. **Perlesvaus** or 'The High History (Book) of the Grail' (c.1200-1210/1230) (OF)
  4. **Peredur** (mid-to late 13c) (Medieval Welsh), part of 19c collection called **The Mabinogion**

### II. Joseph of Arimathea

1. Robert de Boron (1191-1202), **Joseph d'Armathie** or Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal ('The Romance of the History of the Grail') (OF)  
(De Boron also wrote two unfinished works: Merlin and Perceval )

- a. Le Petit Saint Graal is an early 13c prose trans.(OF) of **Joseph**; it includes Joseph, Huth Merlin, and the Didot-Perceval. This work is the source of the first branch of the **Lancelot-Graal** or the **Vulgate Cycle**,(1215-1235) aka the Pseudo-Map Cycle:

2. First branch: L'Estoire del Saint Graal ('The History of the Holy Grail')
  - a. Source of 2 Middle English translations:
    - i. alliterative Joseph of Armathie (early 14c)
    - ii. Henry of Lovelich's History of the Holy Grail (early 15c)
3. Second branch: L'Estoire de Merlin ('The Story of Merlin')
4. Third branch: Lancelot en prose ('The Prose Lancelot')
2. Fourth branch: **La Queste del Saint Graal** ('The Quest of the Holy Grail')
3. Fifth branch: La Mort Artu ('The Death of Arthur')

### III. The Queste

1. **La Queste del Saint Graal** – fourth branch of Vulgate Cycle, c.1220 (OF)
2. **Morte D'Arthur** ('The Death of Arthur') by Thomas Malory (ME) (1469-1470). Books XIII-XVII on "Tale of the Sankgreal". Ed. by William Caxton, 1485, in 21 books. In 1934 the Winchester MS was discovered; divided into 8 books or tales; book 6 "The Noble Tale of the Sangrail".
3. Le Roman du Graal ('Romance of the Grail'). Post-Vulgate continuation of second branch
4. Suite de Merlin (OF) (1230-1240). Post-Vulgate continuation  
(cf. Dhira B. Mahoney)