

**Allusive *Fontaines*, *Sicamors*, and *Pins*:
Figurative Prophecies of Grail Piety in the Prose *Lancelot***

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At the conclusion of Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century verse Chevalier de la charrete, a spring and sycamore allude to concupiscence and betrayal in Scripture, evoking the hero's and the queen's adulterous liaison. The author of the thirteenth-century French Prose Lancelot translates this allusion from a moment of joy for the queen to one of terror; foreshadowing a change in fortune for the hero and his prowess. Every subsequent adventure where the hero encounters a spring and sycamore points to his love for the queen as a source of corruption. Springs shaded by a pine tree hint at the sanctity of marriage and the need to protect it against intruders. Amidst these adventures, stags, lions, and a pious vagabond reference hagiography and Scripture, underscoring a thirst for the divine. As a consequence, readers may understand the romance as promoting the austere values of La Queste del Saint Graal, even apart from episodes prophesying the Grail quest.

In the second half of *Lancelot*, a thirteenth-century prose work, prophecies of the Grail quest appear with increasing frequency.¹ Tombs, inscriptions, and premonitory dreams speak of a future where Lancelot will cede his supremacy among knights to his virginal son, Galahad. Away from the prophetic adventures, however, Lancelot continues to triumph over all opponents. His success in battle gives the impression that “[f]in amor . . . remains an ennobling force in this world and does not cause a degradation on the purely chivalric plane,”² or that despite Lancelot's “échec imminent” (imminent failure), the hero's love “est exalté par dessus tout” (is exalted above all else).³ No doubt the very explicitness of the prophecies also contributes to this understanding of the romance's *double esprit* in

1 Combes, *Les voies de l'aventure*, 366, and Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, 257, 264-76, identify the middle of the romance as the moral turning point.

2 Bogdanow, “The *double esprit*,” 4.

3 Hult, “Esquisses,” 62. The translation is mine.

leading readers to expect moral clarity in all adventures pertinent to the pious future. Figurative elements of the hero's later adventures require a closer look, among them, a spring and sycamore that the romancer translates from his source material, Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century verse romance, the *Chevalier de la charrete*. With the motif, the prose author hints at the hero's moral degradation in the otherworldly realm of Corbenic and in the secular domain of Camelot.

At the end of Chrétien's poem, where Lancelot dispatches Meleagant, the motif alludes to a spring and sycamores in the Old and New Testaments, evoking Lancelot's and Guenevere's sin and their betrayal of King Arthur. The author displaces the spring and sycamore from a scene of "grant joie" (great joy) to one of horror for the queen, portending trouble for the hero (7094).⁴ The prose narrative also identifies the spring with the queen herself, reinforcing a simile that likens her beauty to that of a spring on Lancelot's first meeting with her. Episodes following the queen's distress, where Lancelot happens upon springs and sycamores, invite the reader to understand his carnal attachment to her as a moral failing. Other springs, shaded by a pine tree or pine trees, allude to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the myth of Attis and Cybele, underscoring the sanctity of marriage and the need to defend it against intruders. In conjunction with these springs, stags, lions and a vagabond king--referencing hagiography and Scripture--conjure a thirst for the divine in harmony with the values of the next installment of the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle, *La Queste del Saint-Graal*. In short, even before Galahad replaces his father as the finest knight in the world, the allusive springs, trees, and fauna of the Prose *Lancelot* begin celebrating the values promoted during the Grail quest, if much more subtly than in adventures featuring the Holy Vessel.

In Chrétien's poem, when the hero prepares for his final combat with Meleagant, "as fenestres revont maint--/ la reïne, dames, puceles, / por Lancelot, gentes et beles" (6980-81) (many returned

4 All citations of the romance are from Kibler's edition. All translations are his, unless otherwise noted. Here I alter Kibler's translation to better fit the syntax of the abbreviated verse.

to the windows--/ the queen, the ladies, and the maidens, / fair and beautiful to watch Lancelot), whereas the king sits on a heath “[s]oz le sagremor gent et bel, / qui fu plantez del tans Abel” (beneath the beautiful sycamore, / which had been planted in the time of Abel) and beside “une clere fontenele” (6989-91) (a sparkling spring). With Abel’s name, the poet turns the reader’s thoughts to Genesis 4 and the murder of one brother at the hands of another. Genesis 4, however, mentions no tree or spring. The spring and sycamore, rather, recall Abel’s parents. The description of the Garden of Eden begins: “fons ascendebat e terra inrigans universam superficiem terrae” (a spring went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground) (2.6).⁵ Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* identifies the sycamore as a *ficus sycomorus*: “sycomorus, sicut et morus, Graeca nomina sunt. Dictus autem sycomorus eo quod sit folia similis moro. Hanc Latini celsam appellant ab altitudine” (the ‘sycamore fig,’ along with the mulberry, have Greek names. It is called *sycomorus* (cf. σῦκον, “fig”) because its leaves are like the *morus*. Latin speakers call this the ‘lofty’ (celsus) fig because of its height).⁶ Petrus Comestor, in his widely copied twelfth-century gloss of the Bible, *Historia Scholastica*, makes the same identification: “[s]ycomorus ficus fatua dicitur, in foliis moro similis” (it is called a sycamore, a tall fig tree whose leaves resemble those of a mulberry).⁷ In the garden, Adam and Eve live without sin or cause for embarrassment until, having eaten fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in Saint Augustine’s words, “gratia remota, est poena reciproca inoboedientia plecteretur” (this grace was lost and punishment in kind for their disobedience was inflicted).⁸ Adam and Eve then cover their shameful parts with “folia ficus” (3:7) (fig leaves), leaves

5 The Revised Standard Version indicates “mist” rather than “spring.”

6 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 17.20. The translation is from Barney, Lewis, Beach, Berghof’s edition, 344.

7 Petrus Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, 198:1596.

8 See Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, vol. 4, book 14.17.

representing not original sin but the first sin that follows from it, that of concupiscence.⁹ The leaves in Genesis no doubt represent those from a *figus carica* rather than from a *figus sycomorous*.¹⁰ The former species would not grow in Arthur's kingdom, but the sycamore, or a tree resembling it, offers the poet a close substitute and one that has the advantage of alluding to sin elsewhere in Scripture.

In the Gospel of Luke, the apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith, and he responds “si haberetis fidem sicut granum sinapis diceretis huic arbori moro eradicare et transplantare in mare et oboediret vobis” (17:6) (if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say to this sycamine tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you). In the words of Saint Ambrose, the tree represents the “spiritum . . . inmundum” (foul spirit) that faith will banish.¹¹ Similarly, in the parable of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who, “ascendit in arborem sycomorum ut videret illum” (19:4) (climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus), the tree represents a moral burden that the sinner must surmount. Saint Ambrose likens Zacchaeus's ascent to “errata . . . corrigens superioris aetatis” (correcting the errors of his past life).¹² As a consequence, readers of Chrétien's poem may understand the sycamore casting a shadow over King Arthur as evoking the sin not yet overcome, Lancelot's and Guenevere's hidden shame.

The thirteenth-century author adheres closely to the narrative of his model, *Chevalier de la charrete*; however, Lancelot's final combat with Meleagant represents an exception to that faithfulness. The prose author offers a more sober version of events, reducing 301 octosyllabic verses to 325 words. The narrator neither praises

9 All citations are from the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. Translations are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

10 On the types of fig trees in the Bible, the common fig (*Ficus carica*) and the sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*), see Hepper, *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Plants*, 110-14. On the presence of the sycamore or plane tree (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) in Europe, see Jordan and Kirkham, *The Beauty of Trees*, 21.

11 Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii*, book 8, 1477 E. The translation is mine.

12 Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii*, book 8, 1492 A.

the hero nor vilifies Meleagant. The description of the battle makes no mention of a wound to Meleagant's gut, the breaking of his teeth, or the loss of his right arm. Elided also is any indication of where the spectators sit, so gone are the spring and sycamore. So that readers may recognize the poet's motif in a different context, the prose narrative prefaces the translation with reminders of the dead villain and his perfidies. First, King Bademagu discovers his son Meleagant's remains and holds the severed head in his hands. The narrator indicates that "si en fist le jor si grant duel que je ne le vos savroie deviser" (2:266) (he grieved so deeply that day that I could not describe it to you, 4:323)--evoking pity for the father, if not for the son.¹³ The narrative then turns to a knight attempting to abduct Guenevere as she and others ride through the forest. Readers recognize the would-be abductor as Lancelot's cousin, Bors, carrying out an ill-considered oath. As in both the poem and the prose romance when Meleagant abducts the queen, Sir Kay comes to her rescue without success, and Lancelot defeats the would-be kidnapper. When another obligation tears Lancelot from her company, the elided natural elements reappear. The queen stops to rest by "une fontaine desos un sicamor" (2:276) (a fountain under a sycamore, 4:328).¹⁴ From that vantage point, she sees a knight ride by wearing Lancelot's armor carrying what she believes to be Lancelot's severed head. The gruesome spectacle obliges her to envisage a duel unlike the one she and her husband witness. Rather than see her new abuser lose his head as Meleagant lost his, she imagines her lover losing his own. Readers know the queen's impression to be false, but her illusion nonetheless invites them to contemplate a change in fortune for the hero, a future where his virtues shine less bright. That this invitation occurs in conjunction with the displaced motif, itself an allusion to Genesis and Luke, suggests concupiscence as the source

13 All citations of the romance are from Micha's edition, indicated by volume and page. All translations are from Lacy's edition, indicated by volume and page.

14 The narrative thread featuring Guenevere at the Fairies' Fountain mentions the spring twelve times, beginning at 2:276 (4:328) and ending at 2:317 (4:348).

of the hero's fall from grace.

Because Guenevere takes the spot that Arthur assumes in the poem, one of the deceivers replaces the deceived, so the prose text makes no call on Abel. No doubt to compensate for this absence, the author amplifies the other elements of the motif. Although Marie Luce Chênerie tells us that springs in romance convey "les dangers de la séduction féminine" (the dangers of feminine seduction) and most often manifest themselves in "une demoiselle" (a maiden), the name of this spring encourages readers to think of more mature women: "Cele fontaine estoit apelee la Fontaine as Fees, por ce que les gens qui en la forest habitoient i avoient veu pluisors fois trop beles dames et ne pooient rien savoir de lor estre, si disoient qu'eles estoient fees" (2:276) (The fountain was called the Fairies' Fountain, because the people who inhabited the forest had seen some very lovely ladies there several times. Since they were unable to discover anything about them they said that they were fairies, 4:328).¹⁵ By indicating that the fairies are ladies rather than maidens, the author encourages the reader to recall a much earlier figurative spring associated with a particular lady, Guenevere.

The romancer evokes that spring when Lancelot first arrives at Camelot: "Li rois vient encontre et la roine, si le prenent andoi par les .II. mains et s'en vont aseoir en une couche et li vallés s'asiet devant els sor l'erbe vert dont la sale estoit jonchie" (7:273-74) (The king and queen came toward him, took him by the hands, and led him toward a couch, where they sat down. He sat down on the green rushes that covered the floor, 3:123). The seating arrangement and the gazes exchanged hint at the love triangle that readers, familiar with the poem, know will take shape. Both Arthur and Guenevere admire the newcomer's beauty, but Lancelot has eyes only for the queen, stealing glances at her "toutes les fois qu'il puet vers li mener ses iex covertement" (every time he could do so without being noticed), to which the narrator adds: "il ne prisoit envers la roine nule autre dame, car che fu la dame des dames et la fontaine de biauté" (7:274) (he admired no other woman as he did the queen,

15 Chênerie, *Le chevalier errant*, 189.

for she was the sovereign of all women and the very fountain of beauty, 3:123). At this earlier moment, the narrator seems to applaud the youth's infatuation with the queen, saying "s'il seust la grant valor qui en li estoit, encore l'esgardast il plus volentiers, car nule n'estoit, ne povre ne riche, de sa valor" (7:274) (if he had known all the great worthiness that was hers, he would have gazed at her even more gladly, for it surpassed that of every other woman, rich or poor, 3:123).

When Guenevere sits "desos un sicamor," the romancer draws further attention to the tree with a member of the queen's escort in a way that puts her "grant valor" into question. While still anticipating Lancelot's return, she says: "Saigremor, ci feist molt buen mengier" (2:277) (Sagremor, it would be good to eat, 4:328). The knight's name reflects that of the tree, as evidenced by the verse, "le sagremor gent et bel" (6989), rendered in other manuscripts of the poem as "le saigremor" or "le sicamor" (7011).¹⁶ During his search to satisfy the queen's appetite, Sagremor is taken prisoner, and his captors place him in a jail "delez un vergier" (next to an orchard), a space representing an ironic turn on his name (2:297; 4:338). Taking pity on the prisoner, a young lady brings him food. The satisfaction of his appetite contrasts with the disappointment of Guenevere's. Her Sagremor/*sagremor* bears no fruit, so she and what remains of her retinue go hungry. To color our understanding of that hunger, the author adds a further wrinkle. Gawain frees Sagremor from prison, and from that success, the liberator goes on to the Grail Castle where he admires both the Holy Vessel and the beautiful maiden he sees carrying it. However, "[a]prés regarde la pucele, si se merveille plus assés de sa bialté que del vaissel" (2:377) ([t]hen he gazed at the maiden, marveling more at her beauty than at the vessel's, 4:377). All witnesses to the procession then sit for a meal, and the Grail fills everyone else's plate, but leaves Gawain's empty. With the denial of sustenance, the text evidently condemns his greater appetite for the

16 Kibler's edition closely follows Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 794 (C). Bibliothèque Nationale, 1450 (F), indicates "le saigremor" (7011), and Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana, 1725 (V), indicates "le sicamor" (7011). See "The Traditional Charrette Viewer," <http://www.princeton.edu/~lancelot/new-traditional/>.

flesh than for the sacred. Given the linking of this adventure to the one at the Fairies' Fountain, we may read the queen's hunger there as an implied reproach of her carnal appetites.

The narrator's earlier endorsement of the queen's inner virtue continues to wither when the narrative returns our attention to Lancelot. A preface for the adventure assures us of this intent. Guenevere has a dream wherein she, Arthur, and Lancelot meet ".I. damoisele, la plus bele qu'ele eust onques veu" (4:119) (a maiden, the most beautiful woman she had ever seen, 5:60). The queen subsequently discovers the maiden in bed with Lancelot and, in a rage, bans Lancelot from court. The vision foreshadows a much later episode where King Pelles's daughter, the mother of Galahad, once again dupes Lancelot into sleeping with her. The resulting banishment sets the hero on a path to the romance's final spring and sycamore (6:177; 5:403).

Beside ".I. fontaine bele et clere" (a beautiful, clear spring), Lancelot encounters a knight and two young women "sor l'erbe" (on the grass) picnicking "desouz l'ombre de .II. sicamors" (beneath the shade of two sycamores) (4:133; 5:67). One of the maidens, who has never before loved a man, becomes infatuated with Lancelot's beauty. She admires him much as the young Lancelot admired Guenevere on their first meeting. Then Lancelot takes a drink from the fountain in the meadow, unaware that ".II. culuevres granz et hideuses" (two huge and ugly snakes) have poisoned it (4:135; 5:68). He falls ill, and his body "devint ausi gros com .I. tonnel" (4:136) (became as wide as a barrel, 5:68). The maiden begins caring for his health, until unrequited love incapacitates her. He would prefer they both perish from their respective illnesses rather than break faith with the lady who represents for him "la fontaine de biauté" (7:274) (the very fountain of beauty, 3:123). But the maiden offers a compromise wherein he agrees to act as her *ami* when they are together, and she pledges to remain a virgin forever out of devotion to him.¹⁷ Her chaste love finally provides the antidote to the hero's illness, and in doing so, anticipates once again the romance's other salubrious

17 Richard, *Amour et passe amour*, reads Lancelot's admiration of the beauty of the maiden of the spring and of Pelles's daughter as unchaste and as an infidelity to the queen that the romancer implicitly condemns, 277-83.

love, the union between Lancelot and King Pellès's daughter. In that sexual congress, he acts out of lust, believing that he sleeps with the queen, whereas the daughter takes part for the benefit of others: "ele ne le fait mie tant por la biauté de celui ne por luxure ne por eschaufement de char come ele fait por le fruit recevoir dont toz li païs doit venir a sa premiere biauté" (4:210) (she did it not so much for his beauty or from lust or desire, but so as to receive the fruit that would restore that entire land to its original beauty, 5:103). The coupling destroys her virginity, yet in the eyes of God, the son she bears justifies the sacrifice: "se virginitez fu empirie en ce qu'il fu conceuz, bien en fu li mesfaiz amandez en sa vie par sa virginité qu'il randi saine et antiere a son Sauveor" (4:211) (if virginity was harmed as he was conceived, the wrong was made right in his life through his own virginity, which he returned whole and entire to his Savior, 5:104). The setting for the platonic friendship between Lancelot and the maiden, recalling the Fairies' Fountain and its sycamore, and in turn "la fontaine de biauté," invites the reader to understand the poisoned water as representative of libidinous desire. The serpents' role, evoking the tempter of Eve, further identifies the poison as a moral corruption, sin inciting divine anger. The presence of two serpents, like the two sycamores, is perhaps meant to cast the blame not just on the temptress, Guenevere, but to recognize the lovers' mutual responsibility for the sin they commit. The description of Lancelot's recovery contributes to this impression, for after the swelling subsides, the narrator indicates that "il ne li remés cuir sor lui" (4:139) (skin had flaked off him all over, 5:69). In shedding his skin, Lancelot takes on one of the qualities of a serpent. Pierre de Beauvais's *Bestiaire* compares the snake's shedding of skin to a man's confession and the new skin to the reform of the penitent's body and soul.¹⁸

Figurative elements of the narrative offer praise not just for the restorative power of chaste love but also for the value of love within marriage. The praise comes with the inclusion of a pine tree in

18 Pierre de Beauvais, *Bestiaire*, 36: 5-20.

the spring and sycamore motif and with a devout custom established at a nearby abbey. When Lancelot arrives at the religious house, the narrative recounts how in the time of Joseph of Arimathea, Eliezer, the king of the Scottish Borderlands dubbed the abbey “la Petite Aumosne” (5:82) (Small Charity, 5:224).¹⁹ The king’s life—his conversion to Christianity, self-imposed poverty, pious wanderings, and reunion with wealth and family at God’s command—reproduces nearly all the major elements a saint’s life popular in thirteenth-century France, that of Saint Eustace.²⁰ The romance later introduces the omitted element, the stag inducing Eustace’s conversion, in a narrative thread involving one of Eliezer’s successors.

Within the abbey, a friar tells Lancelot about the custom of the “Tertre Deveé” (5:93) (Forbidden Hill, 5:229). A young woman promised to love her suitor, in her words “par couvenant que vos me garantissiez contre toz homes et me prenez a fame par la loi de Sainte Eglise” (5:94) (on condition that you protect me against all men and take me as your wife according to the law of Holy Church, 5:229). In accordance with the pledge, the knight builds a fortress on the hill and kills or imprisons all knights who dare approach, sending the bodies and shields of the vanquished to the abbey. Lancelot climbs the hill, attaching his horse to a “pin ou il sordoit une des plus beles fontainnes dou païs” (a pine where one of the finest springs in the land gushed forth), and sees the horse of the hill’s defender tied to “.I. des plus biaux sicamors qu’il eust onques mes veu” (5:98) (one of the most beautiful sycamores he had ever seen, 5:231). Though getting the upper hand, Lancelot suddenly interrupts the fight on recognizing his adversary’s sword as that of the late Galehaut and his adversary as Bors, to whom the hero sent the sword on Galehaut’s

19 The romance also attributes the name Eliezer to the “fiz al Riche Roi Pescheor” (2:339) (son the rich Fisher King, 4:359), in an episode arising shortly after Guenevere’s stay at the Fairies’ Fountain.

20 Boureau, “Placido Tramite, La légende d’Eustache,” 683, identifies twelve manuscript versions in Old French prose and eleven in verse, in addition to the “place d’honneur” afforded to Eustace’s vita in the thirteenth-century legendries of Jean de Mailly, Vincent de Beauvais, and Jacques de Voragine.

death (2:218-19; 4:300). Bors has already killed the hill's guardian after pledging to continue the defense until defeated by another knight. On the face of it, the adventure resembles many others earlier in the romance in that Lancelot's victory liberates several knights of the Round Table held prisoner in the fortress, re-establishing his supremacy among knights. But in this instance, that supremacy casts him as an enemy of marriage.

The adventure makes no explicit reference to Guenevere, yet the sword's original owner highlights the hero's status as an interloper within another's marriage, for the reader knows Galehaut as the go-between who transformed Lancelot from timorous admirer of the queen into her lover. That Lancelot's cousin defends the Forbidden Hill rather than the husband adds to the episode's figurative power, because Bors and his horse tied to the sycamore return the reader's thoughts to the Fairies' Fountain where he attempts to abduct the queen. Although in that moment, his behavior recalls Meleagant's, Bors acts without libidinous desire and in removing her from Lancelot's presence would in fact protect King Arthur's wife from another man's lust. In that earlier moment, not recognizing Bors, Lancelot at least fights to protect Guenevere from another man, if not from himself. Yet at the Forbidden Hill, he puts an end to a wife's protection against "*la loi de Sainte Eglise*" (5:94) (the law of Holy Church, 5:229).

With this fountain adventure's emphasis on spousal protection, the prose romancer invites readers to recall springs in the Old Testament, other than in Genesis, such as Proverbs 5, where Solomon warns his son to avoid adulterous women, encouraging the young man to remain faithful to his wife and to watch over her in the following terms: "*deriventur fontes tui foras et in plateis aquas tuas divide. / habeto eas solus nec sint alieni participes tui / sit vena tua benedicta et laetare cum muliere adolescentiae tuae*" (5.16-18) (Should your fountains be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? / Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth). In the Song of Songs, the singer, in addressing his bride,

emphasizes the same notion of water and wife as a private resource: “hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa hortus conclusus fons signatus” (4.12) (A garden enclosed, my sister, my bride, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed).

In this context, the hill and the pine contribute to the celebration of marriage, referencing Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. This ancient poem, in the words of James G. Clark, served “as a stimulus for moral, ethical, and philosophical reflections” in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²¹ In the poem, mourning the loss of his young wife, “refugerat Orpheus / femineam Venerem, seu quod male cesserat illi, / sive fidem dederat; multas tamen ardor habebat / jungere se vati: multae doluere repulsae” (10:79-82) (Orpheus had shunned all love of womenkind, whether because of his ill success in love, or whether he had given his troth once for all. Still many women felt a passion for the bard; many grieved for their love repulsed).²² He pours out his sorrows in music on a “collis” (hill) (10:86), drawing in trees, among them, “et succincta comas hirsutaque vertice pinus, / grata deum matri, siquidem Cybeleius Attis / exuit hac hominem truncoque induruit illo” (10:103-05) (the bare-trunked pine with broad, leafy top, pleasing to the mother of gods, since Attis, dear to Cybele, exchanged for this his human form and stiffened in its trunk). Although Ovid does not explain the reason for Attis’s transformation in the *Metamorphoses*, in another poem, *Fasti*, he indicates that Attis “casto vinxit amore” (4:224) (bound himself by a chaste passion) to the goddess Cybele, promising “semper fac puer esse” (4:226) (to be a boy forever) and guard her temple.²³ But Attis breaks his pledge with a wood nymph, and, in revenge, Cybele “Naida vulneribus succidit in arbore factis, / illa perit” (4:231-32) (by wounds inflicted on the tree she cut down the Naiad, who perished thus). Attis then goes mad, reproaching himself

21 Clark, Introduction, *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, 13.

22 All citations and translations of the poem, indicated by book and verse, are from Miller’s edition, vol. 4.

23 All citations and translations of the poem, indicated by book and verse, are from Frazer’s edition.

for breaking faith, and “onus inguinis aufert” (4:241) (removed the burden of his groin). Out of pity, the goddess affects the transformation of her former lover, preserving him in an enduring arboreal form, joining him figuratively with the nymph. The widowed Orpheus’s voluntary forbearance, Attis’s pledge and self-mutilation, his fusion with the pine, all paint monogamy as an enduring bond. We can thus understand the pine replacing the sycamore as the tree shading the spring at the Forbidden Hill as the addition of another pious dimension to the motif. The intention becomes clearer in the hero’s next adventure. It makes explicit reference to the Grail quest and associates pines with a pious, monogamous knight. The episode, focused on chastity and continence, features no sycamore at all and alludes to Scriptural springs representing otherworldly appetites.

A coda to the adventure just finished prepares the reader for the devout nature of the next one. Lancelot dreams that his late grandfather, also named Lancelot and king of the White Land, tells him to go to the Perilous Forest where: “tu trouveras une aventure merveilleuse qui ne puet estre menee a chief fors par toi, et encor ne l’acheveroies tu pas, se ne fust la roine Heleinne, ta bonne mere, qui prie Nostre Signor por toi et nuit et jor” (5:114) (you will find a marvelous adventure that can be achieved only by you, and even you could not achieve it, were it not for your good mother, Queen Elaine, who prays to Our Lord for you night and day, 5:238). In that forest, Lancelot finds the gravesite of his grandfather whose head lies in a boiling spring “qui sordoit par .I. tuel et chaoit en un vessel de plonc” (that flowed from a pipe and fell into a leaden basin) and whose body lies in “.I. tombe de marbre qui est entre .II. granz pins” (a marble tomb between two tall pines), guarded by two lions (5:118; 5:240). After slaying the lions, Lancelot gathers the head, “ausi vermel com se ce fust li plus biaux hom del monde” (as ruddy as that of the handsomest man in the world) and the body, “ausi biaux com s’il fust orandroit desviez” (as handsome as if the man had just passed away) (5:120-21; 5:241). He and a hermit rebury the grandfather alongside the equally well-preserved remains of the grandmother in a nearby chapel, “ainsi le requist ele, quant ele

trespassa de cest siecle” (5:122) (for such was her request when she passed from this world, 5:242).

The hermit then explains the cause of the grandfather’s misfortune, and in so doing, differentiates the meaning of this spring from that of its predecessors. The king and the wife of a cousin spent considerable time together. Although the king loved the wife “por la grant bonté que il savoit en lui” (5:124) (for the great goodness he recognized in her, 5:243), and she admired him for the same reason, the cousin wrongly suspected the king of betraying him. To exact his revenge, the cousin stalked the elder Lancelot. On Good Friday, the king “nuz piez et an langes o povres vestemenz . . . se fu faiz confès au prodome qui çaienz menoit, et quant il ot oï le servise del jor, si issi fors de la chapele et ot si grant talant de boivre qu’il torna a cele fontaine ci devant” (5:125) (barefoot and in poor woolen clothing . . . had himself confessed by the holy man who dwelt here, and when he had heard the service of the day, he went out of the chapel, and was so thirsty that he turned to that spring out front, 5:243). Although the king seeks to slake his mortal thirst, his attitude, dress, and behavior encourage the reader to understand his thirst in a figurative sense. In addition to the uncorrupt quality of his flesh, other elements of the grandfather’s vita hallow his memory. Blood dripping from his tomb heals the wounds of passing knights, the lions begin guarding the tomb after the blood heals their wounds, and the king “chaça de cest païs les mescreuz et les Sarrazins dont ceste terre estoit toute pueplee, et fist tant que la loi crestienne fu esandue par cel païs” (5:123) (drove out the unbelievers and the Saracens who peopled the land, and took measures so that Christianity was spread throughout the country, 5:242).²⁴ The romancer would have us understand the king as thirsting for the divine, much like the metaphorical stag in the Book of Psalms: “quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus. / sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem: vivum” (41.2-3) (As the stag longs for flowing springs, so my soul longs for thee, O God. / My soul thirsts for God, for the

24 On the incorruptibility of saints’ bodies, see Vauchez, *La sainteté*, 499-500.

living God, 42.2-3). When the jealous husband strikes off the king's head, it lands in the spring, but not satisfied with his vengeance, the husband tries to remove the head to mutilate it further. A miracle then reinforces the spring's connection to the divine, for the water begins to boil, and the husband "sot que Diex s'estoit correciez a lui, por ce qu'il avoit occis le prodome" (5:126) (knew that God was angry with him because he had slain the good man, 5:244).²⁵ Such is the killer's understanding of God's fury; however, the enduring quality of the miracle implies that divine anger extends beyond the homicide because the boiling persists long after the murderer has died--killed when a castle wall falls on him (5:127; 5:244)--and after the grandfather's head has been removed from the spring. Apparently, God regrets not only the loss of a virtuous man, one who loved both his wife and his Lord, but also the loss of virtue in the younger Lancelot.

The reason for the persistence of God's anger becomes clearer thanks to the hermit and an inscription on the lead basin indicating that "cil par cui virginitez ne sera corrupue ne malmise" (the one by whom virginity is neither corrupted or harmed) will succeed in returning the spring to its original state (5:120; 5:241).²⁶ The words refer to the as yet unborn Galahad who will live a sinless life, yet it is important to note that unlike the premonitory dream that tells Lancelot of the adventure "qui ne puet estre menee a chief fors par toi" (5:114) (that can be achieved only by you, 5:238), the inscription indicates no such exclusivity. The virginal great grandson will extinguish the heat, but the role does not require Galahad's moral perfection. The boiling water, after all, honors the memory of the married grandfather who was merely continent rather than virginal.

25 I have altered the syntax of Carleton W. Carroll's translation to better match that of the Old French citation.

26 The inscription implicitly condemns Lancelot's luxuriousness, yet according to Sturges, "Epistemology of the Bedchamber," the romance's "prophecies, interpretations, and inscriptions . . . referring backwards and forwards to past and future events, exist outside of normal narrative time and hence embody or incarnate an eternal reality" (56). As a consequence, the romance incarnates "for the reader . . . the eternally present adultery of Lancelot and Guenever" (58).

The qualities of his remains and blood, nonetheless, suggest his sanctity. Speaking to Lancelot, the hermit hints at the possibility of reform: “puis que li feux de luxure n’est en vos estainz, . . . la cholor de ceste fontaine n’estaindra” (5:130) (since the fire of lust is not extinguished in you, the heat of this spring will not diminish, 5:246). In other words, if Lancelot were to renounce his love for the queen, he could again make the spring drinkable as it was in his grandfather’s time.

The context and Lancelot’s current state of unworthiness echo the story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in the Gospel of John. When she arrives there hoping to fill her container, Jesus says to her: “omnis qui bibit ex aqua hac sitiet iterum, qui autem biberit ex aqua quam ego dabo ei non sitiet in aeternum” (4.13) (Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst). She would willingly drink the water offered to her, yet Christ hints that she is not ready to drink because she lives with a man who is not her husband.²⁷ Christ may deny her water, but in his stubbornness, Lancelot turns himself away. To the hermit’s suggestion that he seek to imitate his grandfather’s example, Lancelot reacts with a shrug, saying: “[p]uis que rien ne feroie ci . . . je m’an irai” (5:131) (since I can do no more here . . . I’ll leave, 5:246). Whereas at that first spring under two sycamores, the maiden’s infatuation with Lancelot implies that virtue abides in him despite the taint of adultery, the spring at the tomb highlights the greater worthiness of others in his family, those in the past and one in the future. Emulating them holds no interest for the hero.

His adventure at “la Fontaine des .II. Sicamors” (the Spring of the Two Sycamores) builds on the themes suggested in the earlier adventure under two sycamores (5:140) (5:250). No maiden appears at the spring itself, but the adventure’s prologue reminds the reader of a young lady whom the text suggests as a more appropriate love interest for the hero.²⁸ Sarras, the young knight who will lead

27 See Augustine, *In Joannes Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, 15.28 [1520].

28 Richard, *Amour et passe amour*, because Lancelot believes Pelles’s daughter to be Gue-

Lancelot to the spring, informs him that “uns chenuz prodom . . . dist que cil estoit nez par qui les hautes aventures del Saint Graal seroient menees a fin; si est issuz dou millor chevalier dou monde et de la fille au Riche Pescheor” (5:139) (an aged gentleman . . . announced the birth of the one who would accomplish the great adventures of the Holy Grail. He is the offspring of the world’s best knight and the Fisher King’s daughter, 5:249-50).²⁹ Despite the clear identification of the parents, Lancelot allows himself some doubt about his fatherhood: “se panse que tost porroit estre de lui issuz cil anfes” (5:140) (he thought the child might very well be his child, 5:250). Rather than ask about the mother or child, Lancelot brusquely changes the subject, asking Sarras where he is headed. Lancelot’s lack of curiosity about his paternity and hesitancy to acknowledge it, even to himself, underscore the same stubbornness that he demonstrates with the hermit at his grandfather’s tomb. The virtues that would suit him better and serve others well escape his interest.

The adventure features no new serpent or poison, but the harm Lancelot does at the Spring of the Two Sycamores implies the corruption of his prowess. Sarras loses his horse in the joust with a knight who has unhorsed Gawain and other Round Table knights. Unlike at the Forbidden Hill, the victor imposes no further harm on the vanquished, denying Sarras neither life nor liberty. Nevertheless, in avenging Sarras’s humiliation, Lancelot mortally wounds his opponent, that knight’s brother, their father, and several other men. The carnage complete, Lancelot learns that the brothers protected the spring at their father’s suggestion to earn reputations that would make them worthy of membership in the Round Table. The brothers killed no one and, generally, allowed the knights they defeated to

nevere when he sleeps with her, their carnal union, in a figurative sense, provides a child for the hero and the queen. In Richard’s words, his “infidélité, quelle que soit sa forme, répare les effets de l’adultère et amène les signes tangibles de son pardon” (299) (infidelity, whatever its form, repairs the effects of the adultery and brings tangible signs of his pardon). The translation is mine.

29 Sarras is also the name of the city in the Holy Land to which the successful questers in the next romance will accompany the Grail.

leave as they pleased. Although the adventure affords Lancelot a triumphant role, the victory rings hollow, for rather than end evil customs or slay villains, he destroys knights who aspire to be his brothers-in-arms. The prose romancer may elide Abel's name from the spring and sycamore translated from Chrétien's poem, but at this spring he presents Lancelot as a figure of Abel's brother, Cain.

At the Spring of the Two Sycamores, Lancelot comes to the aid of two knights, yet his good deeds further underscore the destructive nature of his love for the queen. The narrative presents the first knight as a figure of Lancelot, identifying him only as "le chevalier de la litiere" (5:180) (the knight in the litter, 5:268). The wounded knight tells Lancelot that only the "li millors chevaliers dou monde" (the best knight in the world) can pull the arrow from his thigh (5:67; 5:217).³⁰ In light of the hero's just-accomplished massacre of innocents, his success in removing the arrow reads like ironic praise. Moreover, nothing about the wounded knight's story suggests that Lancelot has restored a righteous man to health. The litter-bound knight explains that as he attempted to kill another knight in the forest on Easter Sunday, a pair of maidens "a une fontainne" (at a spring) fired the arrow at him, and he would have killed the young women, "si avint que mes chevax chaï en un grant fossé" (but it happened that my horse fell into a large ditch) (5:66; 5:217). Therefore, we know that the wounded knight, like Lancelot, resorts to violence with no thought of moral consequence. Mention of the fall increases the resemblance between the two knights, for the accident recalls Lancelot's own injury earlier in the romance when he becomes distracted with thoughts of the queen, and he and his horse "caï en unes crevaches moult grans" (7:377) (fell into a gaping crevice, 3:178). There follows an extended period where the narrative identifies the wounded hero as "li chevaliers de la litiere" (7:383-412) (the knight in the litter, 3:181-97).

The second knight is Arthur's nephew, Mordred, later revealed to be the king's illegitimate son who will kill his father

30 The two knights meet earlier, but, ignorant of his interlocutor's identity, the wounded knight rebuffs Lancelot's offer of assistance.

(5:221; 5:285). Prophecy in the Prose *Lancelot* says nothing of Mordred coveting his stepmother, yet his and Lancelot's adventures together hint at that future desire. As the two knights leave the Spring of the Two Sycamores, the animal from the Psalms alluded to earlier makes an appearance. A white stag, escorted by six lions, passes before them. Lancelot sees the same marvel immediately after leaving his grandfather's tomb. At that moment, he recognizes the sacred nature of the wonder, and after the animals have disappeared into the woods, Lancelot vows that: "jamés de ceste forest ne partirai devant que je sache la verité de cest cerf, se par home ou par fame le doi savoir" (5:134) (I will never leave this forest until I learn the truth about this stag, if I can learn it from any man or woman, 5:247). This modest pledge brings no harm his way, despite what appears to be a bad omen for him in his next encounter. He seeks shelter at a nearby group of pavilions where the host insists that he joust as a precondition for hospitality. When the joust proves fatal for the host, his entourage reproaches Lancelot for killing a king.

On the second sighting of the white stag, Lancelot makes a bolder vow, hoping to discover what he can first hand: "ja Diex ne m'aïst, se vos me volez croire, se je ne vois savoir ou cil lyon repairent" (5:204) (May God never help me if I don't go to find out where the lions are going, 5:278). His temerity brings a swift correction, though the reproof's connection to the supernatural becomes apparent only later. No sooner have Lancelot and Mordred begun their pursuit than two knights approach them, attacking without warning. They knock Lancelot and Mordred to the ground and steal their mounts. A dwarf then leads them first to their horses, which they reacquire without a fight, and then to a hermit. He explains to Lancelot and Mordred that it is useless to pursue the stag and the lions because the adventure--"miracle merveilleux qui avint jadis par la volenté Nostre Signor" (5:211) (a miracle that was wrought in ancient times by the will of Our Lord, 5:280)--can only be completed by a knight more virtuous than they. The hermit offers no explanation of the stag's significance, and Lancelot and Mordred make no inquiries, despite Lancelot's earlier pledge to learn more-

-“se par home ou par fame le doi savoir” (5:134) (if I can learn it from any man or woman, 5:247). Nonetheless, the thirteenth-century reader can deduce the stag’s significance, particularly given what the hermit tells Lancelot about the king he has killed.

To Lancelot’s surprise, he receives a blessing for the homicide. In the words of the holy man, the victim, Marlan the Accursed, “estoit li plus desloiaux hom et li plus fel dou monde” (was the most disloyal and wicked man in the world). Marlan assumed the throne of the Scottish Borderlands by hanging his father, the king, “qui moult estoit prodom” (who was an excellent man) (5:212; 5:281). The rank and domain reference the earlier adventure about the pious vagabond king of the Scottish Borderlands whose vita resembles that of St. Eustace. The adventure and its allusion underscore both Lancelot’s virtue, his ability to vanquish the wicked, and his vice, his unwillingness to confront his own sin. Whereas St. Eustace finds sacred truth in hunting a stag, Lancelot finds nothing but disappointment.

Because the allusion associates the stag and the divine, one can understand Lancelot’s adventure at his grandfather’s tomb more thoroughly in retrospect. According to the story that the hermit there tells him, a lion appeared at the tomb as it pursued a stag. As the lion began to eat its prey, a second lion arrived and began to fight with the first over the carcass. The two fought until each had mauled the other. After finding themselves healed by blood dripping from the tomb, they worked together to guard the site. In killing the stag, they act as enemies of the divine, until the grandfather’s blood transforms them into protectors of sanctity. In slaying the lions, Lancelot resembles the beasts themselves, imposing in his ferocity yet indiscriminate in the harm he sows, but unlike the lions, Lancelot resists transformation. As indicated earlier, although invited by the hermit to amend his luxuriousness, Lancelot turns away, literally and figuratively, from the divinely roiled spring.

The hermit’s indication that Lancelot and Mordred cannot resolve the stag adventure gives the impression that the episode has

concluded, yet the narrative thread continues as if it were a parable from the *Queste*. When the pair leave the hermit behind, they come upon “une valee ou il sourdoit une fontaine desouz un pin” (a valley with a spring flowing beneath a pine), and because of the day’s heat, “descendirent andui et burent tant com il lor plot” (they both dismounted and drank their fill) (5:213) (5:281). The two knights, who earlier took Lancelot’s and Mordred’s horses, return for battle and are defeated. Against chivalric custom, Mordred and Lancelot then leave the scene without extracting an admission of defeat from the losers or a pledge that they will go to court and surrender to the king or queen. No witnesses stand by ready to administer medical care to the wounded. They are left where they lie. In this way, the text treats the nameless knights like those in the *Queste*, not so much as flesh and blood, but as representatives of a vice or virtue in a moral lesson for knights of the Round Table.

In the first encounter, the nameless knights act as incarnations of humility lacking in Lancelot and Mordred as they chase after the white stag. Humility opposes their presumption, thwarting their pursuit of the animal. Just as the heat at the grandfather’s spring holds sinners at bay, the nameless knights protect the holy object. As the dwarf leads Lancelot and Mordred to the hermit who will tell them of their unworthiness, humility has no quarrel with them. No nearby chapel, saintly corpse, or monk suggests the holiness of the water that Lancelot and Mordred drink at the “fontaine desouz un pin” (5:213) (spring beneath a pine, 5:281). But the pine connects this adventure with those at the Forbidden Hill and at the grandfather’s tomb highlighting the sanctity of marriage “par la loi de Sainte Eglise” (5:94) (according to the law of Holy Church, 5:229). As Lancelot demonstrates at the Forbidden Hill, and in his commerce with the queen, that sanctity is not inviolable, for the divine does not prevent the sinner from sinning. The romancer would have readers understand Lancelot’s and Mordred’s drinking from “une fontaine desouz un pin” (a spring beneath a pine) as symbolic of their violation of the sanctity of marriage. Both drink from the spring, just as one thirsts and the other will thirst for King Arthur’s wife.

The romance's last fountain keeps the reader's attention on the motifs borrowed from hagiography and Scripture. The impetus for Lancelot's visit to this spring comes from the realization of Guenevere's earlier nightmare. At Camelot, the queen discovers Lancelot in bed with King Pelles's daughter and banishes him from court. Distraught, Lancelot "em perdi le sens si outreement qu'il ne savoit qu'il faisoit" (6:177) (lost his mind so completely that he did not know what he was doing, 5:403). He wanders about the forest, "si fu em poi d'ore tainz et noirs del souleil" (6:207) (and was soon colored and blackened by the sun, 5:418). When others try to offer him assistance, he lashes out violently. After more than two years of wandering, outside King Pelles's castle, Lancelot happens upon a fountain, "desouz un sicamor" (6:221) (under a sycamore, 5:425). No one at Corbenic recognizes the deranged man, until the stranger drinks from the fountain. Then Lancelot becomes recognizable to Pelles's daughter, "cele par cui Lanceloz out esté chaciez de cort" (6:221) (she because of whom Lancelot had been driven from court, 5:425). Because the queen's anger holds their liaison in abeyance, his drinking from the spring implies no assault on marriage as it does when he and Mordred drink from "une fontaine desouz un pin" (5:213) (a spring beneath a pine, 5:281).

Although the proximity of this spring to the Grail would seem to suggest the water's holiness, Lancelot's recovery remains incomplete, until King Pelles has him brought into the Palace of Adventures where the Grail restores the hero's memory. Cured of his illness, Lancelot looks out a window of the palace and remembers the garden as the place where, on his first visit to Corbenic, "il avoit jadis occis le serpent" (6:224) (he had once killed the serpent, 5:426). This memory provides the key to understanding the quenching of his thirst. Although Lancelot the truculent madman may seem to bear little resemblance to an animal as gentle as a deer, authors of Antiquity saw the stag as an aggressive creature.³¹ The Church

31 See Pliny, *Natural History*, 8.50.117-19 [84-85]; Oppian, *Oppian, Colluthus, Tryph-*

fathers drew on that notion to explain the metaphoric choice of animal in Psalm 41. Saint Augustine, for example, writes in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*: “Audi quid aliud est in cervo. Serpentes necat, et post serpentium interemptionem majori siti inardescit, peremptis serpentibus ad fontes acius currit” (Listen now to another particularity of the stag. He kills serpents, and after doing away with them he burns with more intense thirst than before, and runs to the spring even more urgently).³² With Augustine’s exegesis in mind, we can better understand the figurative meaning of the serpents that poison Lancelot at the spring shaded by two sycamores, for according to the bishop, serpents killed by the stag represent the iniquities against which every sinner must fight.³³ In shedding his skin at that spring, he makes temporary progress in that struggle with the maiden’s assistance. At the spring under the sycamore at Corbenic, he again changes his outward appearance, figuratively shedding his darkened skin. As an unrepentant sinner, he can drink the water, recalling the stag and its spiritual thirst for the reader, because he behaves like an animal, having “perdu le sans et le memoire qu’il soloit avoir” (6:207) (lost his customary reason and memory, 5:418), and, in dress and appearance, resembles Eliezer and the elder Lancelot, “nuz piez et an langes o povres vestemenz” (5:125) (barefoot and in poor woolen clothing, 5:243). At the same time, we may understand the sycamore as diluting the water’s salvific power, for the hero’s adulterous love reawakens. Although the Grail affords Lancelot the grace to live chastely for six years with Pelles’s daughter, his struggle with serpents resumes in the romance’s last folio. Rather than continue the chaste life, he chooses reunion with the lady first associated with springs and sycamores, the queen.

iodorus, 2.232-50 [76-77]; Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 6.763-68 [1:552-53]; Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.673 [162].

32 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 36:465. The translation is from Boulding’s and Rotelle’s edition, 239. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century bestiaries attribute the same lethal role to the stag. See Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire*, 721-56; and Pierre de Beauvais, *Bestiaire*, 55:1-14.

33 Augustine, *Enarrationes*, 36:465.

Evidently, the Grail adventure has not yet begun, but Lancelot's extended abstinence, like the episode at his grandfather's tomb, points to the values animating the next romance of the cycle, the *Queste*. Although we know why the water of one spring boils and may guess why the water from another alters the appearance of the drinker, the full measure of these fountains remains bound in their allusive power. Inscriptions and proximity to the Grail do not by themselves convey the springs' metaphorical connection to Scripture and to hagiography, where water and stags that drink from them serve as metaphors for the love of God. Nor does explicit prophecy reveal other figurative meanings of springs in the romance. They symbolize the queen herself and contrast her worth with models of uxorial virtue in the Old Testament. Indeed, the narrative's internal allusions, and one to Ovid's poetry, add to the evocative power of springs and pine trees, underscoring the sanctity of marriage, holiness that the hero has violated and that his liberated prisoner, Mordred, will seek to corrupt. The hero's inner serpents defile him, turning his prowess astray and costing his would-be brothers their lives under the shade of *sicamors*—a danger foreseen in the queen's distressing vision at the Fairies' Fountain. With these figurative reinforcements of prophecy, the romancer would have us understand the source of Lancelot's inspiration as becoming the center of his moral troubles.

He remains the best knight in the world, but not for long.

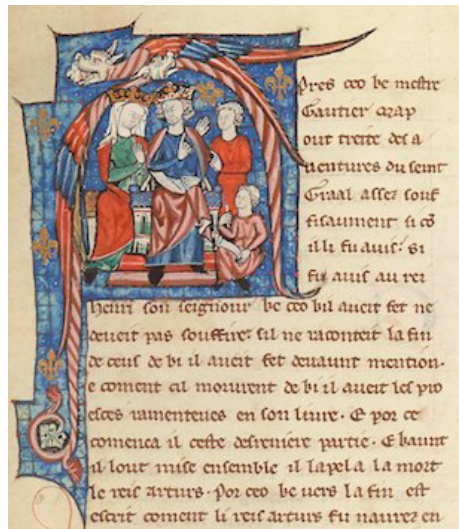
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From a 14th Century Manuscript of the Lancelot-Grail

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