Chapter Three

Fictions of Meaning and Interpretation

The Queste del Saint Graal is perhaps the most problematic of the Vulgate romances because its episodic narrative line is accompanied by a second textual layer, an overlay of elaborate interpretations offered by resident hermits for each successive adventure. The telling of the adventure story is systematically interrupted by a retelling of the preceding event in more Christianized terms. This dual narrative structure leads Albert Pauphilet to conclude in his Etudes sur la "Queste del Saint Graal" that the Queste is a "renversement du monde romanesque," a text that makes sense only when read allegorically. Beneath its deceptive chivalric appearance, the story of the Queste follows, according to Pauphilet, a didactic plan that alone lends unity to the narrative episodes. To understand this romance properly, the reader is obliged to extract its hidden "sens réel," a meaning derived from the monastic doctrine and practice of Citeaux, for the Queste is seen here as a novelized version of the military metaphor used by Christianity to express its conception both of the world and of individual destiny. This is a tale, we are told, that belongs to the tradition of the adventure story, but the world it presents is not romanesque. The presence of the second textual layer, that of the interpretations, cancels the function of
the Arthurian story and transforms the romance into a moral treatise such that "le monde des idées est le seul qui existe vraiment et qui soit décrit dans la Queste."¹

VÉRITÉ

Is this, then, a narrative that has escaped the error of textual idolatry as Augustine describes it?² Can the interpretative passages in this romance, which are themselves firmly anchored in the realm of the verbum, serve to lift the romance récit out of textuality toward a more transcendent spiritual or theological message? The Queste's interpretative segments are introduced typically in one of two ways: they are advanced as vérité, statements designed to explain the truth of the preceding adventure, or as senefiance, declarations that are supposed to decode the meaning of exploits undertaken by Arthur's knights. In most cases, however, the interpretations claiming to offer vérité serve less to explain events than to provide a historical context for each Arthurian adventure. The first incident to be interpreted in the Queste is the trial of the shield, a trial that Galahad completes successfully after Bademagu has failed.³ The subsequent explanation given by the mysterious white knight near the blanche abeie simply tells the shield's history (pp. 32–35): how it was marked with a cross by Josephé, son of Joseph of Arimathea, and given to the Saracen Evalach who used it to defeat his rival Tholomer; how Evalach took the Christian name Nascien and traveled to England in order to free Josephé from prison; how he received a shield a second time from the dying Josephé who marked it with a cross in his own blood and proclaimed that it would be used by no one but Galahad, "Li Bons Chevaliers, li darreins dou lignage Nascien" (p. 34). Although the white knight was asked by Galahad to reveal the vérité of his encounter with the shield, to tell both how and why these events took place ("que vos m'en deissiez la vérité et coment et por coi ce est avenu" pp. 31–32), the explanation provided is devoid of religious or allegorical significance. What appears to be an interpretation is actually historical or pseudo-historical documentation that allows the reader to re-
construct the linear story of the shield, to understand how it was passed on through the centuries from Josephé to Evalach to Galahad. The narrative function of this “interpreter’s” tale is not, in the most immediate sense, to derive a moral lesson from the secular event, but to locate the Arthurian adventure in a fictive historical context. The white knight responds only to the first part of Galahad’s request, relating *coment* without explaining *por coi*. In terms of the proposed narrative struggle between moral truth and fictional narrative, his discourse falls squarely in the second camp.

The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the relation between text and interpretation in the *Queste*, investigating in particular how the “allegorical” discourse presented here is grounded in a thoroughly literary process of rewriting. For when the chivalric exploits that compose this tale are “interpreted” by the *Queste*’s resident hermits, they are not so much glossed in abstract language as simply retold in a different narrative register, recast in yet another literary form. As this text unfolds, the adventure story that forms its core is slowly dispersed into a series of intertexts which, like the plural authorial voices in the *Estoire* and the *Merlin*, result from a combined process of proliferation and repetition. What we will examine here is the way in which this process of writing propels the text forward while constantly guiding the reader away from the developmental storyline toward other, related textual fragments. Despite the hermits’ elaborate efforts at explanation, this text’s hidden meaning is never revealed clearly, but systematically displaced from one textual segment to the next.

We have seen in chapter 2 how the Vulgate tales work to undermine the medieval tradition of *auctoritas* by creating an analogous and rival system of vernacular authority within the romance text. In the *Queste*, it is not the process of writing but that of reading which is at issue. Through the creation of its multiple interpretative intertexts this romance offers, in a sense, a vernacular version of medieval typological interpretation. Instead of proceeding through a set of fixed levels of meaning toward an ultimate and definitive exegesis, this tale
leads the reader through a series of fictional analogues whose meaning remains ambiguous. Rather than moving closer to a transcendent sense or a moment of spiritual understanding, the Queste’s "interpretations" serve the opposite end. With each explanatory fiction, each intertextual reprise, we dig ever deeper into what medieval theologians considered the idolatrous realm of literary discourse.

ALLEGORY

The kind of allegory that Pauphilet ascribes to the Queste conforms to the nineteenth-century definition of the genre that has come to be recognized generally as "substitutive" or philosophical allegory, a system in which one seeks the particular for the general, such that the particular serves as an example for a concept that precedes its creation and governs its development. Following this model Pauphilet explains that the author of the Queste composes his material in the abstract and then transposes it into the format of romance. The reader performs the process in reverse, extrapolating from the chivalric tale the doctrines of transubstantiation, Grace, mansuetude, and chastity. The Queste, in Pauphilet's analysis, is thus constructed as an emblematic narrative, similar, it would seem, to Guillaume de Lorris's Roman de la Rose in which there is a reduction of meaning to image such that the code of fin'amors is objectified in symbols and figures. By a somewhat paradoxical turn of terms, the text's "second" meaning actually precedes the first. In both the Roman de la Rose and in Pauphilet's reading of the Queste, fiction furnishes the literal meaning for a predetermined didactic sense.

At other times, however, Pauphilet offers a very different notion of allegorical structure in the Queste. In discussing the text's "composition parabolique," he explains how a moral sense is applied to an otherwise secular tale in the manner of the parables where "le sens final explique les détails parfois singuliers et disparates du récit." Even the most fanciful tale can be Christianized by an astute author-commentator who, "après avoir donné à sa narration le tour le plus merveilleux possible
s'applique à en dégager la plus claire leçon." This kind of corrective interpretation in which a narrative is made to conform to criteria distinct from those governing its storyline, is not distinguished, in Pauphilet's study, from constructed allegory in which the second sense is written into the text from its inception. In fact, Pauphilet attributes both processes to the author of the Queste, stating alternately that "il traduit ses idées morales en choses concrètes partant du monde moral, il recompose un univers sensible qui en sera le miroir," and that "il analyse les événements, interprète chaque circonstance, explique chaque symbole" in the manner of a gloss, as if he were adding commentary to a previously existing text. It is thus difficult to ascertain from Pauphilet's analysis just how the allegorical mode of the Queste functions, whether the relationship between the Queste's narrative layers, between chivalric tale and moral lesson, is one of representation or explanation.

A third view is advanced by Todorov, who rejects the existence of substitutive allegory in the Queste, contending instead that the literal and allegorical levels of the tale are mutually referential. In many cases several interpretations are given for a single event, indicating a plurality of signifiés for each adventure, and demonstrating the impossibility of univocal or absolute definition. There exists, thus, an irreconcilable division between the polysemous text and the ineffable, celestial Grail it hopes to describe. The Queste demonstrates, according to Todorov, that one cannot reach God through text or quest. What Arthur's knights are really searching for is the meaning of the Grail, a code that can never be revealed to them within the confines of romance.

Yet for both Todorov and Pauphilet, the allegorical mode of the Queste transforms the adventure story into a nonstory. In Todorov's terms: the narrative logic is constantly retreating in the face of another logic which is ritualistic and religious, and which wins the textual battle in this romance. We are left finally with a "récit qui refuse précisément ce qui constitue la matière traditionelle des récits: les aventures amoureuses ou guerrières, les exploits terrestres." For Pauphilet the hermit's pro-
nouncements also destroy the romance narrative, but in the opposite manner: by creating a didactic treatise that is laden with hidden meaning and "nullement narratif." In this case the empty narrative shell, the "forme vide" of the Celtic tale, is supplanted by interpretations that alone make the story make sense."\textsuperscript{11}

**HISTORY AND ANALOGY**

And yet, as we have seen, the "interpretations" included in this text are most often simply a retelling of the romance adventure in one of several historical timeframes. In the example given earlier, the historical epoch assigned to the chivalric event coincides roughly with the era of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain.\textsuperscript{12} In other instances it may reach further into the biblical past or extend only to the borders of the Arthurian era. The chronicle of the shield's previous owners mentioned above is not dissimilar in function from the testimony of the priest at the Chastiaus as Puceles (pp. 47–51). After Galahad has fulfilled the costume or aventure (p. 47) of the castle by successfully defeating its seven defenders and liberating the female captives, the priest recounts how the women were taken prisoner (pp. 49–50). He tells how ten years earlier seven brothers killed the duke of the castle and his son in an altercation over the duke's daughter, how they pillaged the castle, waged war on its inhabitants, and punished the daughter's intransigence by imprisoning every young woman who happened to pass by. This portion of the explanation simply provides a record of past occurrence, situating Galahad's adventure in Arthurian history.\textsuperscript{13}

The incident of the *nef merveilleuse* (pp. 200–210) and its bed with three colored spindles is assigned a historical background that links it to biblical times. Once the questers have successfully entered the ship, understood the sword's cryptic inscriptions, and seen the strangely colored bed, we are told how the bed came into being, "coment ce poroit avenir" (p. 210). In this case the historical account is not rendered by a religious, but by the story itself ("Or dit li contes", p. 210), a story whose claim to truth ("si dit la veraie estoire," p. 214), resembles the
vérité of the shield’s history discussed above. In both instances the truthful account of the romance adventure does not involve an exposition of absolute meaning but a rendering of historical context. The “explanation” in the adventure at the *nef merveilleuse* (pp. 210–26) recounts how Eve planted the tree of life which was originally white but turned green at the birth of Abel and red at the moment of his murder, and how it bore offspring of three colors which were used by Solomon to build the special bed designed for his final descendant. Even though the tale of Eve and Solomon is biblical, it does not serve primarily to interpret the incident of the bed but to confer upon it a chronological dimension: to forge a linear link between the Arthurian present and the biblical past. In the three examples discussed thus far, the explanations offered for the *écu merveilleux*, the Chastiaus as Puceles, and the *nef merveilleuse* form secondary narrative tales whose function is etiological: to document how events evolved from a distant point in time to their present state.

However, the linear construct suggested by the historical subtales does not constitute the dominant mode of composition in the *Queste*. Although it appears that we are dealing with three distinct historical periods: the biblical epoch, the era of Joseph in Britain, and the time of Arthur, these historical eras are treated in the *Queste* as thematic analogues. The relationship between them is particularly clear in the story of the three tables. The recluse explains to Perceval how “la Table Jhesucrit ou li apostre mengierent par pluser foiz” (p. 74) was succeeded by the “Table dou Saint Graal” in the time of Joseph in Britain (p. 75), and how the latter was replaced by the “Table Reonde” under the direction of Merlin (p. 76). Throughout this description the emphasis is placed not on temporal distinctions but on narrative parallels. The recluse explains that Joseph’s followers sat at the Grail Table “come s’il fussent a la Ceinne” (p. 75), and that the seat designated for Joseph “avoit esté fez par essample de celui siege ou Nostre Sires sist le jor de la Ceinne” (p. 76), a trait shared by the special seat at the Round Table in which “ja mes nus ne s’i aserra qui ne soit morz ou mehaigniez” (p. 77). A
final analogy presents Christ, Joseph, and Galahad as mutual substitutes, “Vos savez bien que Jhesucriz fu entre ses apostres pastres et mestres a la table de la Ceinne; après fu senefiee par Joseph la Table del Saint Graal, et la Table Reonde par cest chevalier” (p. 78). The historical eras that provide the storyteller with a linear matrix are ultimately subsumed into an analogical construct unbounded by time or space.\(^1\)

The Queste’s historical passages, often presented under the guise of “interpretations,” are thus instances of rewriting, stories that supply antecedent or parallel versions of the Arthurian adventure without apparent didactic purpose.\(^2\) In fact, the text could be described as an elaborate retelling of the Arthurian adventure cast in different historical registers: the register of Christ, the register of Joseph, and the register of Galahad. The very existence of the analogical paradigm provided by the sequence of the three tables encourages a second reading of those incidents which seem purely chronological. Once the equivalence has been established between Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, and Galahad, any mention of one of these heroes calls to mind the other two. If we apply the paradigm retroactively to the instances of historical lineage discussed above, Galahad’s twofold association with Joseph of Arimathea is seen to serve a single purpose. Galahad will inherit Joseph’s shield and become his historical successor, because he will perform the same function as mestres et pastres. Regarding the marvelous bed, Galahad alone will understand the color code of the bed because, in the historical sense, it was destined for him by Solomon, and because analogically, like Christ, he will know the difference between Good and Evil (both personified in Eve: destroyer and creator of humanity). In the incident at the Chastiaux as Puceles, the historical dimension does not extend beyond the Arthurian era in which Galahad himself is the central figure. His actions will constitute a reversal of historical tradition, of the failure of previous knights attempting the tomb adventure. Galahad will triumph as the liberator both because he succeeds the other knights chronologically and because of his resemblance to Christ. In all three instances, historical
considerations are cast within a system of narrative analogues that transform history into fiction. As we have seen previously, historical veracity is equated, in the *Queste*, with the *veraie estoire*, as history becomes just another story used to spin the tale of the chivalric savior.

**SEN EFIANCE**

This brings us to the function of *senefiance*, the second kind of "interpretation" in the *Queste*. In these cases the rhetorical terms used by the *preudoms*, or the textual interpreter, seem to indicate more clearly than in other examples the presence of substitutive allegory because they promise to divulge a hidden meaning. The *senefiance* of the adventure at the tomb (pp. 35–40) in which Galahad hears a mysterious voice, lifts the tombstone, and removes the body as instructed appears at first to serve a tropological function, to deduce a moral sense from the Arthurian adventure. The body in the tomb is equated simultaneously with the physically hellish state of man imprisoned in the world before the coming of Christ, "li anemis les emportait en enfer tout pleinement" (p. 38), and with the sinners' spiritual hardness, "il les trova toz endurciz en pechié mortel, si que ausi bien poïst len amoloier une roche dur come lor cuers" (p. 38). The same *senefiance* is attributed to Galahad's victory at the Chastiaus as Puceles by the *preudoms*, who explains to Gauvain, "Par le Chastel as Puceles doiz tu entendre enfer et par les puceles les bones ames qui a tort i esoient enserrees devant la Passion Jhesucrist; et par les set chevaliers doiz tu entendre les set pechiez principaus qui lors regnoient ou monde" (p. 55).

In these examples the chivalric adventurer and uninitiated reader are instructed to substitute a revealed meaning for the literal event in the narrative sequence. However, these "interpretations" provide nothing more than a biblical analogue for Galahad's action, an analogue cast in the Christological register. Christ freeing the sinners from Hell performed the same function as Galahad freeing the body from the tomb and the woman from the Chastiaus as Puceles. The *preudoms* states this relationship clearly when he notes, "Et tot ausi come il envoia
son filz qu'il avoit devant le commencement dou monde, tout einsi envoia il Galaad come son esleu chevalier" (p. 55). The reader is here faced with an explanation that fails to explain, an interpretation that deduces no specific meaning. What we are asked to understand (entendre), to accept as the senefiance of Galahad's adventures, is actually another story: the tale of Christ liberating the sinners. And this tale is itself a fictionalized retelling of its pseudo-biblical antecedent.

Rather than guiding us to a transcendent meaning, the narrative of the Queste immerses us in a series of interrelated texts. We are thus firmly anchored in the realm of the verbum and cannot help but have what Augustine would call a “carnal understanding” of this tale. For the second sense that is supposedly offered to us in the explanatory segments of the Queste is itself encased in a literary wrapper. We as readers are here seduced into following one narrative thread after another with the promise that they will reveal a hidden senefiance. But instead of leading to a mode of unitary transcendence, these narrative shifts constitute a form of pluralism similar to that evidenced in the plural authorial voices of the Estoire or the narrative ressorts of the Lancelot. What we witness here is a proliferation of the verbum that masquerades as a spiritual message.

The addition of the tropological dimension in the preceding example merely serves to enlarge the text's semantic field in the same way that the Christological and Josephan registers do. The function of the preudoms' tale is to shift the focus from the Arthurian hero to his biblical analogue, creating a second, anhistorical and circular construct on the moral level. Similar to the initial paradigm in which the mention of Christ suggests in turn Joseph of Arimathea who, like Christ, is like Galahad, the moral register functions to conflate the sins of the biblical past with those of the Arthurian future. Although referring the reader, on the one hand, to the moral depravity of the pre-Christian era, the account of the sinners points as well to the moral status of Arthurian contemporaries. In both cases the reader is made to come full circle in a semantic loop that moves.
from one subtale to the next. And the senefiance of the Arthurian adventure, whether it is set in the era of Christ, Joseph or Galahad, or in the domain of the human soul can refer only to the other terms of the paradigm. The meaning presented in the Queste is thus not referential but analogical. Meaning is here not absent or illusively secret but wholly enclosed in fiction.

If we return to Pauphilet's analysis, it is clear that neither of the systems he posits to explain the allegorical structure of the Queste is applicable to a narrative founded on analogy. Pursuing the notion of parabolic composition, he explains how the author, interpreting each event and explaining each symbol, creates "une véritable glose du roman, tout à fait analogue à celle que le Moyen Age écrivit en marge des Livre Saints." Yet in demonstrating how this process works, Pauphilet resorts to a curiously inverted analysis. He begins by explaining the moral theme underlying the scene of Perceval's temptation, and then develops its application in fictional form. "En langage abstrait, cette aventure signifie à peu pres ceci: l'âme est une proie offerte au Démon et risque de se laisser conduire au mal sans s'en apercevoir; mais Dieu l'aime, l'avertit, et finalement lui pardonne ses défaillances car elles sont sans malice." This explanation is far more abstract than any offered in the text. If it were rendered by the religious interpretant in the temptation scene, it would point conclusively to what Pauphilet terms "parabolic" composition. Yet its absence indicates the text's refusal to interpret.

What we find instead is that interpretation here lies with the critic alone; for it is Pauphilet who decodes the textual adventures of the Queste for us. His analysis parallels that of a philosophical allegorist seeking to extract a meaning that has been made purposefully esoteric to protect it from misuse by the uninitiated. That this is Pauphilet’s understanding of the Queste’s double structure is clear in his statement, "des clercs seuls pouvaient démêler d'eux-mêmes le sens de tant d'allégories et de symboles accumulés; et encore leur eût-il fallu autant d'érudition et de subtilité qu'à l'auteur lui-même." Although asserting on the one hand that the role of the hermits'
interpretations is to make the *Queste* accessible to the lay reader, Pauphilet himself supplies the necessary glosses which are in fact absent from the text. He functions, in this sense, as the medieval interpreter whose secondary text provides a key to the hidden meaning of its predecessor.

Part of the contradiction inherent in Pauphilet's discussion of parabolic composition results from a confusion of two distinct exegetical processes: substitutive allegory that leads directly from the text to an abstract philosophical principle, and the interpretation of parables. The problematic relationship between these two genres is clarified by J. Mazzeo in the following way:

The traditional definition of allegory was sometimes taken to apply to the New Testament parables. While to some extent the parables may be so read they are certainly not systematic allegories and are not generally concerned with matters of a theoretical or technically theological character. The parable is essentially an illustrative tale working through similitudes, and the exegesis it demands is rarely of an explicitly allegorical kind.

**VERNACULAR TYPOLOGY**

The *Queste*, as we have seen, makes similar use of analogues that do not depend on philosophical abstraction, that point to no specific external referent. Yet the mechanism used to generate the textual allomorphs is not that of the parables, but resembles more closely the system of typological interpretation developed by the church fathers. Biblical typology, generally termed "figuralism," is a kind of allegorical analogy that replaces hierarchical, substitutive discourse with a more self-referential system of terms. Rather than one thing standing for another, both terms of the comparison have equal status. The first element, the earthly event, is a figure (*figura*) or "foreshadowing" (*umbra*) of the second, which is its divine fulfillment, its clearer image (*imago*). Both terms are historical realities (*res*) and also signs (*signa*), or meanings; neither is considered a fictional or semantic abstraction of the other. At bottom, this is an interpretative system that grants full status to textuality
since it uses one text to interpret another, reading the Old Testament in terms of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{27}

Distinct from the kind of allegory that purports to extract a single, definitive meaning from the secular text, typological interpretation is polysemous, producing plural meanings from events that are themselves signifiers of further events.\textsuperscript{28} Medieval theologians followed, in the main, the fourfold system established by Cassian (\textit{Collationes}, 14.8) in which the literal meaning, the words of the text (whether figurative or not), was accompanied by three additional semantic layers: the \textit{sensu stricto} or the "allegorical" meaning, the tropological or moral level, and the anagogical sense.\textsuperscript{29} The meaning of the Old Testament was, in this manner, systematically extended to Christ (or the Church militant), to the soul, and to the heavenly sphere. Figural interpretation underlined both the historical, or temporal, nature of the religious texts and their sacred, or atemporal, character. As Mazzeo explains, "Christian allegorism remained bound to events in the conviction that sacred history was both a system of events and a system of signs, illuminating analogically both the nature of the human soul and its ultimate destiny in time and beyond it.\textsuperscript{30} Biblical exegesis, as it was commonly practiced in the Middle Ages, was thus founded on a double vision of history. It posited on one hand an uninterrupted progression from events in the Old Testament to those of the New Testament, to the contemporary soul, and finally to the afterlife. Yet it established, at the same time, atemporal parallels between Old Testament figures and Christ, and between Christ's actions and those of the soul in this life and the hereafter.

Typological interpretation depends, thus, on a conflation of historical and analogical modes similar to the interaction of \textit{vérité} and \textit{senefiance} in the \textit{Queste}. However, the chronological vector is necessarily reversed in the \textit{Queste}, since the base text is not the most ancient but the most recent of those being compared. We begin with the Arthurian adventure story and retreat in time to the Arthurian era before Galahad, to the time of Joseph of Arimathea, and back to Christ. These three registers
are, however, not indispensable components to the building of
the romance text, as are the successive layers in biblical exege-
sis. The parallel historical epochs that figure in the Queste are
functional counterparts that may appear singly or in combina-
tion depending on the degree to which the Arthurian tale is to
be elaborated. Taken together, they constitute a plural histori-
cal antecedent for the romancer's tale, much as events in the
New Testament comprise a successive historical counterpart for
the Old Testament. The Christian, Josephan, and pre-Galahad
Arthurian eras should then be considered as a single narrative
register: an historical register comprising three temporal
modes. The second major register in the Queste is furnished by
the tropological dimension, which is roughly analogous to the
tropological level of medieval exegesis as it applies events in
the base text (the Arthurian adventure story) to the individual
soul. However, the Queste's two principal registers function
ultimately as mutual referents or analogical mates, eschewing
the hierarchical progression essential to biblical interpreta-
tion. In the case of Lancelot in the forest, for example, the
hermit who consents to explain the meaning of "pierre et fust et
figuiers," the words used by the mysterious voice at the forest
chapel to describe Lancelot (p. 67), begins by offering a series of
tropological analogues. He explains alternately that Lancelot's
heart is hard as stone, preventing his reception of the Holy
Spirit, and that it is like a decaying tree trunk without sweetness
(doçor, p. 69). In the third case, the hermit recounts the tale of
Christ and the fig tree, drawing an explicit parallel between
Lancelot's spiritual vacuity and the tree "desgarni de fruit,"
"Or resgarde si tu porroies estre autiex, et plus nuz et plus
despoilliez que il ne fu" (p. 70).

These analogues do not fall in direct succession in the narra-
tive, but are interrupted by a historical passage telling of Lance-
lot's past folly, his misuse of God's gifts, "Ne il nes te dona mie
por ce que toutes ces choses fussent en toi peries, mes escreues et
amendees" (p. 68). This past laxity is presented, however, both
chronologically, as the cause of Lancelot's downfall, and ana-
logically, as an exact parallel to his current behavior. A further elaboration is provided by the biblical story of Moses obtaining water from the rock, a story that is not used historically to develop a genealogical descendence (as was the case with Galahad, pp. 32 ff.), but as a reverse analogue: "Einsint peut len dire que de pierre issi aucune foiz douçor; mes de toi n'en issi onques nule, por quoi tu puez veoir apertement que tu es plus durs que pierre" (p. 69).

Although the explanations offered by the hermit for the images of stone and tree trunk appear initially to be without intertextual referent, the association of the motif of the fig tree with Christ links its predecessors by analogy to the Christological register. In this manner the tropological dimension of the text is incorporated into the historical, which in turn is subverted into a circular pattern. Moses attempting to obtain water from the rock is like Christ attempting to find fruit on a barren tree. Both resemble the Lord searching for douçor in Lancelot's hardened and desolate heart, now and in the Arthurian past.

The hierarchical organization that gives biblical exegesis its authority is here radically undercut by a less rigid process of literary rewriting. Although typological interpretation avoids making hierarchical distinctions and depends instead on a double-directional movement between the Old and New Testaments, and between Christ and the soul, the relationship between the four allegorical components remains essentially linear. The interpreter follows a fixed sequence from the Old to the New Testament, to the soul, and then to the afterlife. In the Queste, the system of rewriting admits more variation. The narrative may develop from the Arthurian base tale through one or more historical eras (Christian, Josephan, Arthurian) and may pass, in addition, through the tropological dimension en route. In reshaping Christian typological interpretation to fit a secular narrative mode, the Queste replaces privileged discussions of the soul and the afterlife with a non-progressive relay from one subtale to the next, from a tale of Lancelot to a tale of Christ to another tale of Lancelot, to a tale of Moses. The
emphasis here is not placed on advancing a definitive spiritual reading for chivalric events; rather interpretation is carried out in the form of fictive elaboration.

This is particularly clear in those passages that draw solely on the Arthurian era to interpret Arthurian adventure, providing a second sense that is chivalric alone. When Gauvain dreams of a meadow in which 150 bulls eat from a feeding rack, the preudoms takes this image to be a metaphor of the Round Table, "Par le rastelier devons nos entendre la Table Reonde: car ausi come ou rastelier a verges qui devisent les espaces, ausi a il a la Table Reonde colombes qui devisent les uns des sieges des autres" (pp. 155-56). The meadow is then said to represent humility and patience, virtues that are also linked immediately to the Round Table by a wonderfully circular piece of logic, "Et por ce que humilité ne puet estre vaincue ne pacience, i fu la Table Reonde fondee, ou la chevalerie a puis esté si fort par la douçor et par la fraternité qui est entr'ax, que ele ne pot estre vaincue. Et por ce dit on qu'ele fu fondee en humilité et en pacience" (p. 156). The "interpretation" so far derives principally from a tale of chivalry; what follows is yet another literary reference alluding to an earlier portion of the Queste's own narrative. The hermit continues his exegesis by retelling the scene in the meadow that was described just a few pages before (p. 149). But he makes significant changes in this redit, changes conditioned by the intervening mention of the Round Table: "En cel pré avoit un rastelier ou il menjoient" (p. 149) becomes "Au rastelier menjoient cent et cinquante torel. Il i menjoient et si n’estoient pas ou pré" (p. 156). Once the association has been established between the meadow and humilité et patience, the prideful bulls described previously as eating from a trough can no longer be linked to this locus of virtue, "car s’il i fussent, lor cuers mainsissent en humilité et en pacience" (p. 156).

Through rewriting, then, the historical and moral pretentions of this text are deftly undercut. What the bulls actually did is recast in a tale enumerating what they should have done. The initial account retold once in terms of the Round Table, must be
remodeled again as further adjustments become necessary. In the process a past event (in this case a dream) is remoulded in the present, as moral virtue is attributed to an event from which it is lacking.

Of further significance, the anagogical element, the crowning phase of biblical interpretation, is generally absent from the hermits' pronouncements in the Queste. Commentary on the afterlife has been displaced from the sphere of interpretation and incorporated directly into the fictional tale. Thus when Lancelot, having seen the Grail, falls into a death-like trance and is transported to another realm, it is he who describes the afterlife to us, "Tant je estoie ore plus aeise que je ne seré hui mes! Ha, biax peres Jhesucriz, qui porroit estre tant bons eurez ne tant preudons que il veist apertement les granz merveilles de vos secrez, et la ou mes regarz pechierres et ma veue conchicée de la tres grant ordure dou monde fu essorbee?" (pp. 257-58). Galahad, at the close of the tale, recounts, similarly his vision of the celestial world, "Ici voi ge l'a [sic] començaille des granz hardemenz et l'achoison des proeces; ici voi ge les merveilles de totes autres merveilles!" (p. 278).

The meaning of the Grail and the quest leading to it is never revealed clearly in this romance text. But the closest we come to seeing the illusive venerated object is through the eyes and words of the tale's protagonists. Interpretation does not serve this purpose. The role of the hermit's pronouncements is rather to expand the Arthurian tale by providing a series of narrative analogues that retell what we have already heard. Far from transforming the Queste into a purely religious treatise, or cancelling its function as an adventure story, the process of rewriting here permits the conflation of text and gloss into an ever-expanding story.

DREAMS

This is nowhere more evident than in the use of dreams and inscriptions as "interpretations" in the Queste. The incident of Perceval's temptation at the mysterious island provides a clear example of the manner in which senefiance is developed without
regard for the hierarchical narrative structure traditionally associated with allegorical composition.

When Perceval undergoes the lengthy trial of temptation he (1) puts an end to a fight between a serpent and a lion (p. 94); (2) dreams of two women: one riding a serpent, the other a lion (pp. 96–98); (3) speaks to a religious who interprets the dream: the woman riding the serpent is the Old Law, *li anemis* (pp. 99–104); (4) encounters a temptress (pp. 104 ff.); and finally (5) listens to a *preudoms* who explains the temptress' plural identity (pp. 113 ff.). She is the devil (*li anemis*), the biblical serpent who tempted Eve, and the woman riding the serpent in Perceval's dream (#2). The final explanation offered by the religious is similar in its analogical circularity to the response offered by the Recluse for the three tables. In both instances Perceval asks for historical documentation, "Si vos pri por Dieu que vos me diez qui ele est et de quel pais, et qui est cil riches hons qui l'a deseritee" (p. 112), but receives an answer cast in similitudes. The *preudoms* interpretation serves to remold the adventure with the temptress (#4) in a biblical register through the parallel with Adam and Eve, and then to refer the reader to another version of the temptation: its chimeric counterpart. Careful rereading based on this model reveals that all successive stages in the tale of Perceval's temptation function as allomorphs. Not only are the temptress and the woman riding the serpent in Perceval's dream parallel figures, additional analogues are provided by the wounded serpent (#1) and the Old Law characterized as *li anemis* (#3) (p. 103). The entire passage is based on a series of metamorphic variants such that the lion and the serpent in Perceval's initial adventure are transformed, in the dream version, into mounts for two women, then modulated into women-animal couplets representing the Old and New Law, and reduced, in the final version, to a woman-serpent combination that plays the role of the temptress.

Neither of the interpretive sections (#3, #5) offers an explanation of the temptation incident independent of its textual variants. The final explanation (#5), which links the temptress with the biblical serpent and with the serpent women in Perceval's
dream, “Li anemis qui ce li [la moillier Adam] ot conseillié, ce fu li serpenz que tu veis avant hier la vieille dame chevauchier, ce fu la damoisele qui ersoir te vint veoir” (p. 113), serves only to fold the text back on itself in multiple echoes. For the dream to which it refers (#2) has been interpreted previously (#3) in a manner that announces the hermit’s final description of the Old Law governed by the biblical serpent. The woman in Perceval’s dream has been described as “la Synagogue, la premiere Loi

Ce est li anemis meismes; ce est li serpenz qui par son orgueil fu gitez de paradis; ce est li serpenz qui dist a Adam et a sa moillier: ‘Se vos mengiez de cest fruit vos seroiz ausi come Dieu’” (p. 103). Thus Perceval’s encounter with the temptress (#4) and his dream (#2) are locked into a kind of semantic Ouroboros through their mutual association with the biblical Fall. Although the biblical allusion is stated explicitly only in the third and fifth variants, it is implicitly transferred to the dream (#2) and to the first incident (#1) as well, through the process of analogical contamination. Any mention of the serpent connotes, by its association with the hermit’s explanation, the temptation of evil. Thus all five incidents in Perceval’s temptation form part of a large semantic ring that turns around the temptress-serpent couplet. A final recasting of the motif provides a sixth variant of the initial incident, shifting the focus from the biblical to the Christological and tropological spheres. The final narrative layer reinforces further the association between the temptress and the anemis by explaining that her pavilion is the world of sin blocked from the light of both sun and Christ (p. 114). The apparent chronological chain that would isolate these six incidents as initial event, subsequent dream, explanation, second event, and final interpretation is here replaced by a metamorphosis tending toward timelessness. “Interpretation” here serves a function similar to that of the temporal refrains of the Estoire where the recurrent “chà en arriere” and “chà avant” transform straightforward reading into re-reading.

Moreover, the Perceval passage further collapses the distance between text and allegorical overlay by using the dream text as
both the basis and the tool for interpretation (as interprété and interprétant). The woman riding the serpent in Perceval’s dream explains the identity of the serpent killed by Perceval in the preceding incident, “Je avoie une piece norrie en un mien chastel une moie beste que len apeloit serpent, qui me servoit de mout plus que vos ne cuidiez” (p. 97), just as the religious subsequently interprets the identity of the two women in the dream, “Cele qui sor le lyon estoit montee senefie la Novele Loi, qui sor le lyon est, ce est sor Jhesucrist” (p. 101); “Cele dame a qui tu veis le serpent chevauchier, ce est la Synagogue, la premiere Loi” (p. 103). Rather than establishing clearly delineated boundaries between narrative modes, the Queste works toward blurring the distinction between romance adventure and dream, by allowing both of them to serve as a base text for interpretation. Yet interpretation, as we have seen, is itself not clearly distinguished from adventure and dream. Interpretation in the Queste is often nothing more than another tale, a story displaced in a pseudo time frame or, at times, a dream. Through its incorporation into the analogical paradigm, the dream text in the temptation scene is reshaped to conform simultaneously to both historical (biblical) and tropological registers, collapsing these narrative layers into a kind of perpetual foreground.

Corollary to the reduction of narrative hierarchy in the Queste we find a dissolution of temporal distinctions as past and future are made to appear synonymous. The hermit’s explanation of Gauvain’s dream concerning the bulls who venture away from the field recasts the secular tale into a double Arthurian/Tropological register explaining that the bulls that wandered from the field of humility surrounding the Round Table were those knights who fell into mortal sin during the quest for the Grail. This retelling of Gauvain’s dream in chivalric and moral terms transforms the narrative of the dreamed past into a tale of future adventure by equating what the bulls have done in Gauvain’s dream with what the questers will do in their Arthurian homeland. “Quant il [the bulls] revenoient, si en failloient li plusor, ce est a dire qu’il [the knights of the Round
Table] ne revendront mie tuit, ainz en morra partie. Et cil qui reperoient [the bulls] estoient si megre et si las qu'a peine se pooient il tenir en estant; ce est a dire que cil qui revendront [the knights] seront si essorbe de pechie que li un avront ocis les autres" (p. 157). Hector's dream, which describes Lancelot's inability to drink from the fountain, is similarly transposed through the interpretive process from the status of preterite to predictive discourse. "Quant il venoit a la fontaine, il descendoit, ce est a dire quant il vendra devant le Saint Graal, il descendra" (p. 159).

A reverse application of this process is found in the interpretation of predictions, where a text in the future tense is retold within the framework of the past. The inscription on the sword blade which warns that no one will be able to withdraw the weapon from its sheath without being wounded or killed, "JA NUS NE SOIT TANT HARDIZ QUI DOU FUERRE ME TRAIE, SE IL NE DOIT MIELZ FERE QUE AUTRE ET PLUS HARDIMENT. ET QUI AUTREMENT ME TRERA, BIEN SACHE IL QU'IL N'EN FAUDRA JA A ESTRE MORZ OU MEHAIGNEZ" (p. 203), narrates not a future but a past event, "ET CESTE CHOSE A JA ESTE ESPROVEE AUCUNE FOIZ" (p. 203). Perceval's sister, serving as guide for the chosen questers, interprets the inscription fixing the action it predicts in the past, by recounting "coment il en avint n'a pas lonc tens" (p. 204) that the Roi Varlan attempted to use the sword and was killed. One of the inscriptions on the sword's sheath serves similarly to forecast events that have already taken place. The dual prediction that he who praises the sword most will find it most worthy of blame, and that the blade will be treacherous to whom it should be faithful, is recast, through the young woman's explanation of it, into the historical past. She recounts how in the time of Nascien and the Roi Parlan, "ces deus choses sont ja avenues" (p. 206). The role of interpretation here, as with Gauvain's dream, is to undermine the temporal specificity of dream text and inscription, making them function as narratives of both past and future events.
PROPHECY

In line with the detemporalization of narrative elements in the *Queste*, it is curious to note that all of the adventures that are not interpreted in this tale are predicted. Pauphilet himself noted the absence of interpretation from the first and third sections of the text, stating that in the "Départ" which precedes the actual quest (pp. 1–26) and the "Récompenses," the section from the *nef merveilleuse* to the end (pp. 201–80), there is no moral gloss. Yet in the initial portion of the tale, three unglossed adventures are announced as follows: the adventure of the Siege Perilleux (p. 8): "et au jor de la Pentecouste doit cist sieges trover son mestre" (p. 4); the withdrawing of the sword from the stone (p. 12): "JA NUS NE M'OSTERA DE CI, SE CIL NON A CUI COSTÈ JE DOI PENDRE. ET CIL SERA LI MIELDRES CHEVALIERS DEL MONDE" (p. 5); and the appearance of the Grail (pp. 15–16): "Del Saint Graal qui hui aparra en ton hostel et repestra les compagnons de la Table Ronde" (p. 13).

In the final section of the *Queste*, some of the adventures are interpreted historically (The "Chateau Carcelois," p. 231 ff., and the "Lepreuse," p. 239 ff.) and some tropologically ("Le Cerf Blanc," p. 236, "Lancelot au Chateau de Graal," p. 258; "Symeon," p. 264). For the majority of adventures found in this section, however, prediction replaces interpretation. Before coming to the end of the text, the reader is forewarned that Hector will be denied admittance to the Grail castle (p. 150/pp. 259–60), that Mordrain will be cured by Galahad (pp. 85–86/pp. 262–63), that Galahad alone will view the Lord's greatest secrets (*grans repostailles*) (p. 19/p. 270), and that the Roi Méhaignié will be cured by Galahad (p. 10/p. 272). The first and last adventures of this series are announced just prior to their occurrence: Galahad and Lancelot will set out together on the journey to Corbenic (p. 249/p. 250), and the chosen knights will end their quest in Sarras (p. 271/p. 275). All of these predictions serve to diffuse linearity by enabling the reader to have read the adven-
ture before it is actually narrated in the text. In this case the official narration of the event becomes, necessarily, a rewriting of it.

**INTERPRETATION**

The allegorical composition of the *Queste* does not then produce a text that says one thing and means another, but a text that says the same thing over and over in slightly different form, recasting itself constantly in a series of analogical molds. This process could be termed "interpretation" in the sense that Michel Foucault speaks of it, a process that, through the compiling of linguistic layers, gives the illusion of depth, of escaping to a referent outside of the text.\(^9\) It conforms more accurately, however, to the *interpretatio* of medieval rhetoricians: a technique of narrative amplification based on reiteration or the repetition of a single idea in synonymous terms—not for the purpose of adding a more lofty meaning, but to elaborate and enlarge the tale.\(^{40}\)

The linguistic markers that seem to signal interpretation in the *Queste*, those claiming to provide vérité and senefiance, are deceptive clues, false heralds of an absent allegorical mode.\(^{41}\) In reality, the oft-repeated "ceci senefie" or "on doit entendre" are, in a sense, linguistic hooks that lead the adventure story into a second narrative register that is either historical or tropological. Once the contact has been made, strict interpretation is replaced by the retelling of a second story or a series of stories. Announced by the term "tout ausi come," these intertextual tales are recounted as parallels to the Arthurian adventure. What they add to the base text is neither discursive nor mimetic. And the result is not a curtailment of narrative development but quite the opposite: a fecund proliferation of plural *récits*. In fact this romance text appears to remake or rewrite itself constantly; but it refuses to interpret in the modern sense of the term. The hermit's pronouncements in the *Queste* serve a function that is, in the end, more literary than allegorical. Their role is to turn the text back on itself, to expand the tale of the quest by retelling portions of it in a historical or tropological mode without explaining the *senefiance* of either one.