

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE METRICAL ROMANCE FLORIS AND BLANCHEFLOUR:

AN EXEGETICAL READING

BY ROBERT METCALFE

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

For an important segment of the medieval community the autonomy of poetry, its right to a secular existence independent of revealed truth, was inadmissible. This does not mean these men denied that secular poetry had been written: the classical world provided evidence to the contrary; nor that it was not written by Christians: if this were so, many of the pronouncements against such poetry would not have been made; but, in the name of truth, and what, for them, was a nobler purpose, they deplored the practice of secular letters. For them poetry was justified (and also made more beautiful) only by the support it gave to Christian truth. These theorists of a Christian poetry were not just Churchmen, eager to remove worldly influences from the lives of men; they included many of the poets themselves, who were anxious that their art be accepted with full seriousness as mirroring the truth, which truth could only be Christian. As a result these theorists of what poetry should be, or was, articulated a system whereby poetry, including technically profane verse which yet included some truth, could be brought within the sphere of Revelation. This thesis reconstructs the major intellectual and critical assumptions of these men and brings them to bear on the Middle English romance Floris and Blancheflour. In view of this end, it

has the ancillary purpose of establishing the likelihood that many medieval romances functioned in this intellectual milieu, and how they did so.

Chapter one goes to the root of the theological opposition to poetry, but in the larger context of a discussion of exegetics, which discipline provides a paradigm of the recommended thought processes, both investigative and creative, in a society founded upon a revealed Scripture. On the one hand exegetics condemns poetry as being false, in opposition to the truth of Revelation. Yet, on the other, it illustrates the techniques and principles of the art of "useful reading" as understood by medieval men, and recommends their application to all literary realms, the secular as well as the Biblical, in the pursuit of truth. From this there emerges a critical methodology that stands as a blueprint for the creation of "real" poetry to meet the demands of Christian truth. The second chapter, which is directed mainly to establishing the link between romance and religion, investigates the exemplum in order to illustrate the ideal in "true" story-telling from the Church perspective, to demonstrate the narrative tastes of the period, and to show the gradual expansion of exemplum sources into profane areas to meet these tastes. Then it posits that the English romances are, in formal effect and

in content, much like certain species of exempla, and that from one perspective these romances represent an extension of exempla story-telling principles into the secular realm. Chapter three demonstrates the spiritual and intellectual foundations of medieval art, and thus serves to establish the theoretical connections between poetry and religion. It begins with a brief discussion of the Catholic dogma of grace, which provided the "supernatural" framework for all medieval esthetic speculation. Then it discusses the esthetic doctrines themselves, both as they concerned art in general and literature in particular; here it is shown how exegetic techniques applied to poetic criticism. It concludes with a few remarks on the medieval mystery play, a literary phenomenon contemporary with the romances, to illustrate the principles articulated in this chapter in operation. Then, in the final chapter of this thesis, Floris and Blancheflour is analysed in the light of the foregoing, to demonstrate its Christian content and to show how it operates (deliberately, it is felt here) in the service of Revelation.

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I wish to express
my most sincere appreciation
to Professor R. E. Finnegan
for his patience and counsel
in helping me to write this thesis.

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will have the ancillary purpose of establishing the likelihood that many medieval romances functioned in this intellectual milieu, and how they did so.

Chapter one will go to the root of the theological opposition to poetry, but in the larger context of a discussion of exegetics, which discipline provides a paradigm of the recommended thought processes, both investigative and creative, in a society founded upon a revealed Scripture. On the one hand exegetics condemns poetry as being false, in opposition to the truth of Revelation. Yet, on the other, it illustrates the techniques and principles of the art of "useful reading" as understood by medieval men, and recommends their application to all literary realms, the secular as well as the Biblical, in the pursuit of truth. From this there emerges a critical methodology that stands as a blueprint for the creation of "real" poetry to meet the demands of Christian truth. The second chapter, which is directed mainly to establishing the link between romance and religion, will investigate the exemplum in order to illustrate the ideal in "true" storytelling from the Church perspective, to demonstrate the narrative tastes of the period, and to show the gradual expansion of exemplum sources into profane areas to meet

these tastes. Then it will be posited that the English romances are, in formal effect and in content, much like certain species of exempla, and that from one perspective these romances represent an extension of exempla storytelling principles into the secular realm. Chapter three will demonstrate the spiritual and intellectual foundations of medieval art, and will thus serve to establish the theoretical connections between poetry and religion. It will begin with a brief discussion of the Catholic dogma of grace, which provided the "supernatural" framework for all medieval esthetic speculation. Then it will discuss the esthetic doctrines themselves, both as they concerned art in general and literature in particular; here it will be shown how exegetic techniques applied to poetic criticism. It will conclude with a few remarks on the medieval mystery play, a literary phenomenon contemporary with the romances, to illustrate the principles articulated in this chapter in operation. Then, in the final chapter of this thesis, Floris and Blancheflour will be analysed in the light of the foregoing, to demonstrate its Christian content and to show how it operates (deliberately, it is felt here) in the service of Revelation.

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CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

I

Exegetics is the science of Scriptural study, and its methodology has as its goal the drawing from Scripture of its full meaning. Traditionally, Scripture is regarded as meaning according to two senses, the literal and the spiritual, and it is the responsibility of exegetics to discover both. But the spiritual sense, which is sometimes concealed beneath the literal text, has precedence, for it is understood to contain the sum total of Christian doctrine, culminating in a knowledge of God Himself. This spiritual sense, to be understood properly, must be understood in spirit, and such understanding is a grace; and, since grace is involved, the pursuit of this knowledge requires faith. Thus exegetics, as it was understood in the Middle Ages, cannot be regarded as a science in the modern sense of this term. While it adheres to a system of rules and procedures that are rationally communicable, this methodology is circumscribed and determined by the supra-rational notions of faith and grace. Indeed, in seeking out a spiritual understanding of Scripture, the exegete is by necessity seeking his own sanctification, that is, his transformation by the grace which is the spiritual sense. Regarded thus, exe-

getics becomes synonymous with the Christian way to perfection, and for this reason medieval spiritual authorities considered some knowledge of it to be indispensable to every Christian in his spiritual progress. It did not matter if one was illiterate. Along with the text of Scripture, the Church preached the accepted spiritual interpretations handed down from the Fathers, as well as the principles on which they were based. In this way the methods of exegesis, its terminology, and its established interpretations, came to provide a framework for all serious intellectual activity in the Middle Ages, whether by the Church Doctor or the common man.

In fact, so important was exegesis that its principles can be said to be responsible for the structure of the entire medieval Christian world, which deliberately composed itself in imitation of the ideal of Scripture.¹ This is most notably true of the Church and its theology: indeed, the Church was considered to be the allegorical sense of Scripture made manifest, and theology, as the doctrinal statement of the Bible's meaning, was the formal product of exegesis. But the influence of exegesis was also felt outside the sphere of Revelation, properly so called. Christianity made known to man certain errors of perspective which he had long lived by, and which he needed to correct. Thus the world, "the Book of Nature," was no longer to be

regarded as a subject for profane speculation, but was to be seen as a revelation from its Creator: what truths it told were to be related back to Him. In addition, there was the legacy of profane experience represented mainly by classical civilization, which was not devoid of truth and beauty, and which had to be understood, in its virtues and limitations, in the light of the Christian God. The task of re-evaluating nature and classical culture in accordance with the Christian point of view was performed by, or, at least, was an extension of, exegetics: it was regarded as a restoring to things of their proper worth, not only in the light of, but sometimes in the manner of, Scripture; that is to say, redemptively.

The following chapter will illustrate these remarks by a detailed analysis of two exegetical treatises that were most influential in the Middle Ages: the De Doctrina Christiana of St. Augustine, written in the fifth century, and Hugo of St. Victor's Didascalicon: de Studio Legendi, written in the twelfth. An attempt will be made to discern those elements in both works which would apply to a Christian literary esthetic in order to suggest the means by which secular literature might be accommodated to the Christian faith, and even permitted a role in its active propagation.

II

In the De Doctrina Christiana St. Augustine indicates the importance of Scriptural exegesis by showing how it functions in the Christian scheme of salvation and sanctification, a scheme which he describes according to Solomon's delineation of man's seven-stage progress from fear of the Lord to wisdom (cf. Bk. 2, ch. VII, pars. 9, 10, 11).² He locates exegetics at the third stage, which is knowledge. This stage is preceded by 1) fear and 2) piety, which are both necessary for a fruitful reading of Scripture: the first makes man desire to better himself; the second gives him such faith in the sacred utterances that he does not dispute them when they offend him. Both of these stages are nourished by exegetics, but primarily it leads man to 3) knowledge. This knowledge is, first of all, knowledge of what he should do, which is, following Christ's two commandments, to give all of himself to the love of God, and to love his neighbour as himself, or, according to St. Augustine, to love both neighbour and self in God, the second commandment being determined by the first. In short, the exegete learns what constitutes true charity, which, as a Christian, it is his goal in life to possess. But he also learns that he does not have charity, that its opposite, cupidity or self-love, governs his fallen nature, and that he requires divine assistance in order to be transformed in charity. It is at

this stage of knowledge that the exegete learns to hope in the grace promised him by Christ, and to pray for it,³ assisted by the already acquired virtues of fear and piety. In the last four stages, should he achieve them, he proceeds along the path of his sanctification, concluding in wisdom, which, for St. Augustine, is perfect charity.

Formal exegetics, while it is not at the summit of the Christian's path of return to God, is at the juncture, so to speak, of this world and the next, i.e., of nature and grace, and this determines its vital importance. Moreover, it already partakes of grace itself to a considerable degree. The virtues of fear and piety are themselves a grace. But more importantly, Scripture, according to St. Augustine, has a virtue whereby the knowledge it teaches is concealed from the proud and revealed only to the humble and sincere:

But many and varied obscurities deceive those who read casually, understanding one thing instead of another: indeed in certain places they do not find anything to interpret erroneously, so obscurely are certain sayings covered with a most dense mist. I do not doubt that this situation was provided by God to conquer pride by work, and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless. (2. VI.7)

There are, among other things, similitudes in divine Scripture, whose meaning is to be sought out with difficulty and, when found, experienced "with more pleasure" (2.VI.8). For

St. Augustine this greater enjoyment is necessarily accompanied by the soul's experiencing something of the true nature of charity or grace as an indispensable constituent to the proper understanding of these oblique passages. In one sense, the De Doctrina is directed mainly to introducing the exegete to the fruitful contemplation of Scriptural obscurities, that he therein might begin to be transformed in charity. In the process it offers a critical methodology that, were Scripture not its object of study, could well be termed an esthetics of grace.

St. Augustine regards exegetics as the study of signs through which the knowledge of things is achieved. By things he means spiritual things, ultimately God, Who is uncreated and hence "insignificant." By signs he means all created things, which thereby serve as signs for what is uncreated, indeed, which are a revelation from the uncreated: "All doctrine concerns either signs or things, but things are to be learned by signs" (1.II.3). Employing the term things in its broader sense, he explains this hierarchy to show how it works for the sanctification of every Christian:

Some things are to be enjoyed, others to be used, and there are others to be enjoyed and used. Those things which are to be enjoyed make us blessed. Those things which are to be used help and, as it were, sustain us as we move towards blessedness. . . . (1.III.3)

It is God Who is to be enjoyed, in which process man is made

blessed, and it is Scripture, along with the material Creation, which is to be used to gain this enjoyment (beatitude, true charity). However, St. Augustine observes that many people enjoy what they should use and understand as the signs of other things, and are thereby "shackled to an inferior love" (1.II.3). By this he does not reject an enjoyment of a less absolute kind, valid insofar as it leads to God, for there are things which may be enjoyed and used, but he condemns those who regard only the literal sense of Scripture, and not its spiritual meaning. These people fail to take advantage of the grace which Scripture holds out to them and remain in their "natural" state of cupidity, which is the real cause of their literal-mindedness. To eliminate this error, St. Augustine instructs the exegete in the proper use of signs through which the knowledge of things may be achieved.

St. Augustine classifies signs as natural and conventional. The former are objects and events in the natural world which signify without any conscious attempt at doing so. He mentions them only in passing and it is the latter which are his main concern: "Conventional signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood" (2.II.3). These are primarily words, but include anything where

the will to communicate a motion of the "spirit" is present. Among such signs are those given by God and contained in Scripture, which man is to read in order to seek His will and to cure the maladies of his own. St. Augustine stresses that man first read those parts of Scripture that are clear, for the edification of his faith and morality; only then should he turn to the problem of the Scriptural obscurities. These passages, he says, are not understood because "they are obscured either by unknown or ambiguous signs" (2.X.15). He first addresses the problem of unknown signs, those which are capable of being explained by human resources, but which remain obscure due to a lack of certain information.

To amend this he recommends above all a knowledge of the Scriptural languages, which helps to clarify the literal sense of many things. In addition there are those figurative signs which are doubly unknown when one does not even understand their literal significance. This is remedied not only by a knowledge of languages but also by a knowledge of things. This last permits a man to know the natures and properties of the things used figuratively in Scripture and thus their likely function in divine similitudes. For the same reason St. Augustine counsels a sufficient knowledge of the mystical value of numbers and, by extension, of certain principles of music. It is with this last point that he embarks on what is one of the most important sections of

the De Doctrina, its discussion of pagan institutions (the entire apparatus, really, both material and intellectual, of classical civilization), and how and when they may be legitimately used by Christians on the principle that every "true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's" (2.XVIII.28).

St. Augustine distinguishes two forms of institutions among the pagans, the human and the divine. Among the former he distinguishes that which is superstitious from that which is useful; in the latter, however, he makes clear that whatever is good and useful is from God. He justifies for the Christian his use of those things which are proper, i.e., divine in origin, by drawing a Biblical analogy to the Jew's spoiling of the Egyptians, at God's command, of their gold, silver, and clothing:

In the same way all the teachings of the pagans contain not only simulated and superstitious imaginings . . . but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some precepts concerning morals. Even some truths concerning the worship of one God, are discovered among them. These are, as it were, their gold and silver, which they did not institute themselves but dug up from certain mines of divine Providence, which is everywhere infused, and perversely and injuriously abused in the worship of demons. When the Christian separates himself in spirit from their miserable society, he should take this treasure with him for the just use of teaching the Gospel. And their clothing, which is made up of those human institutions, which are accommodated to human society and necessary to the good conduct of life, should be seized and held to be converted to Christian uses. (2.XI.60)

This was to be the standard attitude of the Christian world to its pagan inheritance throughout the Middle Ages.⁴ The work it performed in modifying these resources for its own purposes was not unlike the individual Christian's personal obligation to seek his transformation in Christ. But it is interesting to note that St. Augustine classes those "thousands of imagined fables and falsehoods by whose lies men are delighted" (2.XXV.39) as among the most pernicious of human institutions. They are thus doubly removed from any relevance to truth for they are both human and false. The manner in which they might be substituted by something of Christian value is interesting to ponder; and while St. Augustine's remarks seem to discourage such considerations, it is worthwhile to note the following advice extended by him in a letter to a certain Licentius. He counsils him to keep a poem he had begun on Pyramus and Thisbe, which he now for religious reasons thought to quit, but to rearrange it that its intent might be praise of divine love. Similarly, he himself was not averse to illustrating his thoughts with lines from Virgil.⁵

Having disposed of unknown signs, St. Augustine turns to the problem of figurative ambiguities in Scripture. These "require no little care and industry" (3.V.9), and he here applies the Apostolic injunction: "For the letter killeth, but the Spirit quickeneth" (2 Cor. 3.6). St. Augustine

discovers figurative passages in Scripture when "whatever appears in the divine Word . . . does not literally pertain to virtuous behaviour or the truth of faith . . . [for] . . . Scripture teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity, and in this way shapes the minds of men" (3.X.14,15). The obscure passages are thus of particular value "for the destruction of the reign of cupidity" (3.XV.17), for the libidinous man will not understand them, and his blindness is a form of judgment from God. But the man who seeks diligently for "an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity" (3.XV.23) removes the secrets of these figurative passages "as kernels from the husk as nourishment for charity" (3.XII.18). It seems, then, that to remove obscurity from Scripture for one's own purposes is analogous, if not identical, to the eradication of concupiscence from one's self. Clearly, a form of grace is made operant in a reader by these passages in a unique manner, which explains St. Augustine's great anxiety to ensure that they be identified properly by the exegete before he strives to interpret them: otherwise, his misuse of this discipline, which is not for St. Augustine essentially erroneous so long as it builds up charity, might produce a formal error, which, when discovered, might weaken the faith of the exegete in question. This doctrine of charity was to become the basis for all allegorical interpretation in the Middle Ages, and,

because the predominant mode of exegesis in the years between St. Augustine and Hugh was allegorical, the De Doctrina enjoyed a particular pre-eminence.⁶

In the final book of this treatise St. Augustine discusses "what the Lord has provided us concerning the manner of expressing what is thought" (3.XXXVII.56), that is, eloquence, and its use in the activity of teaching Christian doctrine. In fact, St. Augustine considers eloquence to be one of those institutions despoiled from the pagans, although deriving ultimately from God. Moreover, Scripture, he says, contains an eloquence inspired by God, although its principles have never been formally articulated; and, while the tendency in all pagan expression is towards vanity, Scriptural expression has a quality appropriate to it alone, a certain humility, by virtue of which it surpasses all other forms of eloquence: "the more it seems to fall below that [eloquence] of others, the more it exceeds them, not in pompousness but in solidity" (4.VI.9). Significantly, it is when Scripture is most obscure that it is most eloquent, for St. Augustine adds concerning this virtue in the Prophets: "The more these things seem to be obscured by figurative words the sweeter they become when they are explained" (4.VII.15).

Contrary to this, expositors of Scripture are to strive to make themselves understood and not to "offer them-

selves for interpretation" (4.VIII.22): clarity is the first goal of teaching. This seems to leave little room for eloquence, although St. Augustine finds plainness to be a form of it, and one too little appreciated. However, the goals of a speaker are not only to instruct: sometimes he must please, and sometimes persuade, for the truth is not only to be known, it is often to be performed in the form of virtuous or moral actions. Paralleling these three modes of instruction, St. Augustine postulates three styles of oratorical delivery, the plain, the moderate, and the grand, all of which he finds in Scripture. A description of the last of these indicates the train of his thought:

The grand style differs from the moderate style not so much in that it is adorned with verbal ornaments but that it is forceful with emotions of the spirit. . . . It is carried along by its own impetus, and if the beauties of eloquence occur they are caught up by the force of the things discussed and not deliberately assumed for decoration. (4.XX.42)

Formerly he advised the would-be exegete to begin with the clear passages of Scripture and then to proceed to the more difficult. Similarly, although not identically, the teacher should elevate his style according to whether something should be taught, praised or condemned, or performed. This involves the addition of ornamentation and forcefulness, and it implies a connection between these and a spiritual understanding of Scripture, for to be pleased with truth charity is required, and the performance of truth, by which the

tropological sense of Scripture is realized, also demands charity.

The relevance of this point would be of significance not only to Christian preachers, but also to Christian poets in the Middle Ages. It is significant that eloquence is a divine institution used by pagans, while their literature, the "lying fables," are human institutions. These stories are thus disfigured by content and not by surface, a distinction which is implied by St. Augustine when he describes a classical poem, the theme of which he disparages, as having a "sweet shell" (3.VII.2). Literature, to be justified, must be infused with a valid content, which is Christian truth. How this is done might vary in complexity, but St. Augustine's injunction to Christian teachers to be clear makes no mention of poets (not that he is thinking of them here); and, since Scripture is accounted "sweetest" when most difficult to understand, it is but a logical step to employ this benign obscurity in poetry, for reasons both moral and esthetic.

III

Hugh of St. Victor, sometimes called the "second Augustine," wrote his Didascalicon partially in response to an increasing tendency towards secular learning in the schools, and to a discipline of Bible study that was becoming ever more dependent on secondary sources such as the glossae and questios. The task he set himself was:

. . . to recall rebellious learning back to the scriptural framework of the De Doctrina Christiana, adapting the teaching of Rome and Carthage to the very different climate of twelfth-century Paris.⁷

In that it is an hermeneutical treatise, it is inspired directly by the De Doctrina Christiana, but as its full title, Didascalicon: de Studio Legendi, indicates, it is not restricted to a discussion of the science of reading Scripture. In fact, it describes the method by which all things should be read and at the same time categorizes the extra-Scriptural subject matter which is proper for study, i.e., which furthers man in his pursuit of Christian wisdom.

The orientation of the entire treatise, as well as the tone of its first half, is established in book one where Hugh sets forth in philosophic terms his concepts of "Wisdom," the human soul, and the creation, and from there establishes what philosophy is and how it relates to man. For Hugh, "Wisdom" is "that in which the form of the Perfect Good stands fixed" (Bk. 1, ch. I),⁸ and which illuminates man so that he may recognize himself. Man's real self is his soul which is, outside of God, uniquely capable of knowing all things, for it is composed of them all, not physically, but by analogy. This means that its true knowledge of things is not external but internal, and what it knows is its own nature, which is itself. But since it is Wisdom which illuminates man concerning himself, it is

necessary that the pursuit of true knowledge, which is the pursuit of self knowledge, be the pursuit of Wisdom. This quest is called philosophy, and by it souls are drawn back to the primordial Idea behind created things, receiving from this Idea (the Logos) something of Its divinity in the form of truth of thought and chastity of action.

But philosophy is not only the pursuit of an intellectible Wisdom: man, because he is uniquely endowed with a rational soul, is committed to a subordination of his other faculties to his reason and to a rational investigation of natures other than his own. Since "Wisdom is a kind of moderator over all human actions" Hugh infers that philosophy properly includes:

. . . not only such studies as are concerned with the nature of things or the regulation of morals but also those concerned with the theoretical consideration of all human acts and pursuits. . . .(1.4)

Moreover, philosophy is always directed to a purpose which is the "restoring of our nature's integrity" (1.5), or, on the material plane, to the alleviation of the human condition, which is the deficiency of our nature. As regards our integrity, two things, knowledge and virtue, which are "our sole likeness to the supernal and divine substance" (1.5), are the proper goal of all learning: it is thus that man is rendered divine.

For Hugh there are, to begin with, three acts or

forms of philosophy proper to man: the theoretical, by which he seeks truth; the practical, by which he accomplishes virtue; and the mechanical, by which he relieves his temporal needs. In addition to these, he says, there has arisen in time a fourth philosophical act, the logical, which is the perfecting of reason and expression so that the other three may be properly investigated and then made clear. It is only the third form of philosophy which concerns us here. Hugh calls it "mechanical" or "adulterate" because human work is not the work of nature, but an imitation of nature's work. "How the work of the artificer in each case imitates nature" (1.9), Hugh declares to be too long and difficult to pursue in detail. However, he does affirm that the origin of all mechanical arts (which includes the ornamental crafts and fine arts) is in usage or nature, which art, devised by the genius of man, excels. Art excels nature because in pursuing the utilities suggested by nature, it reproduces a clearer, because more useful, representation of the celestial Natures which themselves have shaped the physical world. In so doing, art reduplicates in its own realm the more general Christian pursuit of virtue and Wisdom, for to alleviate creature discomforts is analogous to curing spiritual ailments. As Hugh has mentioned, it is by pursuing Wisdom, the Ideal, that souls are graced with something of Its divinity. Likewise,

art, which is a form of philosophy, pursues utility, an aspect of Wisdom, and thus creates in a material form something that more adequately reflects this Wisdom. Hugh has thus articulated, albeit briefly, the essence of medieval esthetic theory, its concern with how art imitates nature, and how it achieves utility. And, while he has located art in the Christian world, he has not confined it. Rather, by establishing the continuity of Wisdom throughout this world, he has shown how art, "bound" to the concept of utility, inevitably serves man's spiritual needs as well by helping him to see things as they are in God.

In the second and third books of the Didascalicon Hugh offers an Aristotelian classification of the arts according to the above four branches of philosophy, and recommends how they should be studied. He advises specifically that the student set as his practical goal the mastering of the seven liberal arts, "the foundation of all learning" (3.4), by which he will become "perfected."⁹ It is in these books that he makes his only references to literature, as he first of all classifies theatrics, the "science of entertainments" (2.27), among the seven basic forms of the mechanical arts. This activity Hugh justifies in that it diverts people's energies away from lewdness, and he notes the ancient dictum that from the temperate motion engendered by the plays their audience receives a salutary

enjoyment: it is evident that the plays he intends have a definite moral orientation to begin with. Later he describes two kinds of writing, which concern the arts and the appendages of the arts respectively. The former, such as grammar and dialectic, deal with established parts of the subject matter of philosophy; the latter are only "tangential to philosophy," and can "if their narrative preparation is simple . . . prepare the way for philosophy." These include, he says, "all the songs of the poets" (3.4).

Hugh is scarcely exuberant in his praise of these works and counsels the serious student to devote his time to the Trivium and Quadrivium, in which anything that is good in their appendages will be found more perfectly. Nevertheless, he concludes that if time permits these other things might be read:

. . . for sometimes we are better pleased when entertaining reading is mixed with serious, and rarity makes what is good seem precious. Thus, we sometimes more eagerly take up a thought we come upon in a story. (3.4)

Indeed, Hugh, on more than one occasion, illustrates a point with a few lines of verse, including the present one of the superiority of the arts to their appendages. Moreover, he later holds up as examples of earnestness in the pursuit of wisdom such poets as Homer and Sophocles, and he praises the latter's Oedipus as a "specimen of his wisdom" (3.4). If this phrase was altered to signify God's wisdom or the

equivalent, and Hugh, notably, does not bother to distinguish Sophocle's wisdom from that of God, then it would describe a poetic ideal little contested in the Middle Ages.

The final three books of the Didascalicon are a discussion of lectio divina. Book four offers mainly factual information, including what comprises the canon of Scripture. In book five Hugh describes the properties of Scripture and how it is to be read. Its essential property is what Hugh calls the "three-fold understanding" by which its narrative is to be read according to its historical, allegorical, and tropological significance.¹⁰ The last two, which are situated at various places throughout the text, may only be understood spiritually. At certain times all of these senses are found together, and when they are Hugh likens the perfection produced to the beauty of the zither's music, which derives its resonance not only from the strings, its spiritual senses, but also from its reflection in the delicately curved wood, which is the literal sense. Such an observation is characteristic of Hugh for no theologian was more anxious than he to reaffirm the sacramental efficacy of the literal surface of Scripture in the face of the increasingly abstract discussions of the schoolmen. To ignore the virtue of the literal sense was for him an error equivalent to denying its spiritual sense.¹¹ The exegete who did this was

usually guilty, he felt, of placing his own intellectual abilities above the grace of God. Meanwhile, it should be noted that Hugh's analogy of the doubly beautiful music of the zither is identical to the arguments of the estheticians that art has in its surface that which is worthy of immediate enjoyment, as it is an extension of its inner veracity.

An important property of Scripture, according to Hugh, is that even its things (those objects from the natural world which, as St. Augustine has said, cf. p. 8, are of figurative significance when found in Scripture) have meaning, and that their meaning is greater than that of mere words. The latter spring from human usage, but the former derive from "Nature," the celestial archetypes; consequently, these things lead back directly to truth itself. Thus Hugh recommends a knowledge of the Quadrivium, which is directly concerned with the study of nature, above that of the other arts, and his reasons are similar to St. Augustine's when he recommends to the exegete a knowledge of the properties of things that he might better understand Scripture. The sacramental trend of Hugh's thought is more apparent, however: for him, these things of Scripture are, as it were, doubly capable of conveying grace and wisdom in that they are part of the surface construction not only of Scripture,

but of a redeemed creation. In retrospect it is possible to say that the elements of at least four of the liberal arts exist outside of the sacred sphere only for purposes of discussion.

Hugh sees the result of sacred reading as knowledge of the realms of history and allegory, and an instruction in morals, which is tropology. The latter, however, is to be preferred above the former, although exegetics does not provide a man with morals, it only instructs him in what he ought to do; that is, the capacity for virtuous action comes from the transformation of the will through grace, not by mere knowledge of what constitutes moral action. This is the same stage described by St. Augustine as knowledge (cf. p. 4 of this chapter) wherein the exegete learns to pray for "fortitude," i.e., the ability to act rightly. Thus Hugh makes formal exegetics the proper activity for the beginner in virtue, reserving action for the perfect or at least for those who seek perfection, the monks. Like St. Augustine, he does not permit formal exegetics to extend its function to the end of the Christian's path save in theory. It is the first of four steps, to be succeeded by meditation, prayer, and performance, all of which culminate in contemplation, "in which, as by a sort of fruit of the preceding steps, one has a foretaste, even in this life, of what the future reward of good work is" (5.9). This is a mystic's

description of anagogical things and Hugh's situating it outside of the other steps is equivalent to his exclusion of the anagogical sense from his discussion of Scripture.¹²

The last book of the Didascalicon instructs how Scripture is to be read for knowledge. Hugh here gives a fuller explanation of the three sense doctrine, one that is of manifold esthetic significance. But it is its final segment, which deals with the exposition of Scripture, that is the more pertinent to this thesis, for there is enunciated here a critical system which Hugh has already shown to be applicable to secular documents (cf. 3.8,9). Scripture, says Hugh, is explained according to three things: "the letter, the sense, and the deeper meaning" (6.8). All writing contains a literal sense but sometimes it lacks one of the other two. When it is the sense that is lacking the sententia, whose existence is thereby implied, must be found by the reader. In Scripture, however, even when the sense is present it may be unfitting: "of unfitting sense some is incredible, some impossible, some absurd, some false" (6.10). In these circumstances the exegete must supply a fitting sense, which is provided by a spiritual interpretation or sententia. The sententia of Scripture, which is to be sought as a result of either an absent or unfitting sense, he defines as follows:

The divine deeper meaning can never be absurd, never false. Although in the sense, as has been said, many things are found to disagree, the deeper meaning admits of no contradiction, is always harmonious, always true. (6.11)

In terms appropriate to the quest for wisdom Hugh has re-articulated St. Augustine's doctrine of charity for the twelfth-century world. Moreover, he has demonstrated the role which the verbal arts play in the dissemination of such wisdom. If words come from human usage, the arts which employ them, the Trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, are a part of philosophy, and thus, as Hugh has previously mentioned, derive from God. This is similar to St. Augustine's affirmation that eloquence stems from Providence. From the above it follows that the manipulation of words to procure for them a sense or a sententia is a branch of mechanical philosophy. This particular branch, however, has in a Christian world its supreme exemplar in the Bible, in which the verbal arts are themselves deployed by their own source, the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of communicating grace: it is a consideration that was of enormous relevance to Christian artists.

CHAPTER II

THE EXEMPLUM AND ROMANCE

I

A study of the exemplum tradition in the Middle Ages, besides illustrating the central role played by these stories in the propagation of the Christian faith, will reveal St. Augustine's principle of "spoiling the Egyptians" at work incorporating secular narrative materials into a Christian world-view. An attempt will be made to show the extension of this principle to include many of the Middle English romances, to demonstrate that they, too, may be considered from the perspective of the Christian faith. This will be done on the premise that there was a Christianized romance in the Middle Ages "tangential to philosophy,"¹ which represented but another instance of St. Augustine's aforementioned dictum. In establishing the connection between the exemplum and romance, the discussion will first consider the exemplum. Here, in addition to showing the theory behind its operation and the process of its growth, the affinity of several of its popular themes with common romance motifs will be demonstrated, and the particular significance of exemplum material in thirteenth and fourteenth century England, the time when most of the English romances were written, will be noted. This accomplished, it will be argued that there is a viable

religious interpretation to many of the Middle English romances, and that their narratives are thematically akin to the exemplum, especially to the Saint's legend, a type of exemplum that shares many formal and structural elements with romance.

The romances are neither exempla nor Saints' legends, however, but part of an autonomous literary genre, possessing certain qualities in unique combination. Thus it will be suggested that in the process of being Christianized, the medieval romance contributed certain of its own generic properties to the service of the faith, in particular the quality "romance." What this quality is, is more easy to suggest than define; but it may be remarked that while an exemplum cannot become a romance, it can become "romantic" by accentuating the elements of the adventurous or heroic, the exotic or faraway, the miraculous, and the role of feminine beauty, thus giving itself more popular appeal. Its theme or moral, however, which must be some reflection of Christian truth, is always prominently displayed in the story, and it is this which most differentiates the exemplum from romance, as the surface narrative of the latter is always presented as a fiction (or as a fiction pretending to be fact). Significantly, it is this fictional surface, among other things, which makes a romance more "romantic"

than an exemplum, as fiction is to fact what the exotic is to the everyday. Thus, if a romance could serve Christian truth, while retaining its fictional surface, it would contribute something unique to this truth, namely, its own generic quality as a romance and a fiction (these terms are often almost synonymous in the Middle Ages), thereby enhancing, for some, the appeal of the truth.

Stated in the Augustinian terms employed in the last chapter, while the romance stories are human institutions, because composed by man, their qualities (that which contributes to their being romantic), if not their genre,² are divine institutions, that is, things created by God for the use of man. The ability of a set of elements in a story to be romantic is comparable to the ability of (Egyptian) gold to be worked for ornamental purposes. In each case a given effect is achieved through the work of man; but he only realizes or brings out a quality inherent in his material, which was instituted in it by God, and which man discovered through his observation of nature (in other words, to make something more romantic is to excel nature through the maximization of her own properties³). The Christian, in turn, is to put these qualities in the service of God, and it can readily be seen how the capacity of the romantic to evoke wonder and longing could serve to evoke a sense of and desire

for the transcendant (in this sense, the romance effect bears a certain correspondence to that achieved by the illuminated manuscript and the stained glass window).

In discussing romance from the aforementioned perspective, reference will also be made to the medieval concept of history (the temporal equivalent of nature) as a storehouse of examples and stories, and how, as such, history was "mined" of its materials not only by the exemplum, but by romance and chronicle as well. The essentially identical manner by which these separate narrative forms, with their ostensibly different approaches to "reality," accomplished this transformation of history, shows their conjunction in a Christian universe. It also reveals something vital in the artistic methods of the period, but at the same time renders the boundaries of medieval "artistic" activity totally arbitrary.

II

In his book, L'Exemplum dans la Littérature Religieuse et Didactique du Moyen Âge, J-Th. Welter gives the following broad definition of the exemplum, its types, and its functions:

Par le mot exemplum, on entendait, au sens large du terme, un récit ou une historiette, une fable ou une parabole, une moralité, ou une description pouvant servir de preuve à l'appui d'un exposé doctrinal,

religieux ou moral.

Celui-ci comprenait, d'après les compilateurs mêmes des recueils d'exempla, non seulement les historiettes et les légendes de l'origine sacrée et profane, les anecdotes extraites de l'histoire et de l'antiquité classique et du Moyen Âge ou empruntées aux souvenirs de l'auteur, à la tradition et au génie populaire, mais encore les fables et les contes orientaux et occidentaux, les récits plaisants, les moralités ou les descriptions tirées des bestiaires ou des traités de l'histoire naturelle, bref tout le fond narratif et descriptif du passé et du présent.

Il devait renfermer trois éléments essentiels à savoir; un récit ou une description, un enseignement moral, ou religieux, un application de ce dernier à l'homme.⁴

The use of the exemplum can be traced to the parables of Christ himself, and while it is not until the Patristic period that there is textual evidence for its employment in sermons, Welter assumes the likelihood that it figured in a continuing tradition from earliest Christian times (cf. p. 10). Three things can be affirmed about it from the beginning: that it plays a central role in cultivating the active faith of Christianity; that it is involved in a continuing tradition by which the living faith is extended through the generations from master to disciple; that the fruit of its activity is a grace. In what manner it achieves the last is described by Gregory the Great, who, more than any Latin Father, is associated with the use of exemplum--and, not insignificantly, with the tropological level of Scripture--: "Ad amorem Dei et proximi plerumque corda audientium plus exempla quam verba excitant."⁵ This sentiment, or ones

approaching it, is almost universally the justification for the use of exempla in the Middle Ages. Everywhere it is accorded a special facility for moving the hearts of its hearers to charity, and for making them eager to imitate the good and shun the evil it displays. It is also credited with the ability to impart in a spiritually efficacious mode the profound and universal doctrine of Christianity, and with an almost exclusive capacity for making this doctrine graspable to men of diverse social and regional conditionings. Thus Etienne de Bourbon, a thirteenth century theoretician of eloquence, recommends the exemplum, to use Welter's paraphrase, as:

Le seul moyen pratique pour faire comprendre sous une forme palpable aux auditeurs des diverses classes sociales, et particulièrement aux esprits frustrés, les grands verités de la religion chrétienne et les graver à jamais dans leurs coeurs. (p. 70)

Such sentiments, which seem universal among the writers who use exempla, are a direct echo of the message of the De Doctrina Christiana in its fourth book, wherein St. Augustine discussed the place of eloquence in communicating Christian truth. Indeed, well before the close of the Middle Ages his dictums on the use of rhetorical effects in teaching had blossomed into a system that pervaded the Christian pulpit, and paralleling his expanding influence we find a corresponding increase in the use of exempla.

The use of the exemplum undergoes two forms of expansion in the Middle Ages. The first regards its mode of employment, which was not confined to sermons and oral teaching, but included all manner of moral, instructional, and polemical treatises. The second, which is more relevant to this thesis, pertains to its ever broader base of subject material. At first its sources were purely religious and from them, according to Welter, derive four main types of exempla representing the main divisions of sacred exempla, properly called, throughout the Middle Ages:

. . . l'exemplum pieux ayant trait à des actes de devotion, l'exemplum hagiographique tiré des faits et des gestes de saints personnages, l'exemplum prosopopée concernant des visions et des apparitions et l'exemplum personnel emprunté à l'expérience religieuse de l'auteur. (p. 16)

But while profane sources were being used to provide exempla in relatively early Christian writings, e.g., in St. Augustine's De Civitate Dei or in the Consolatio Philosophiae of Boethius, it was not until the thirteenth century, after a long and gradual process of expansion had taken place, that the exemplum could claim for its own "Toute la matière narrative et descriptive du passé et du présent" (p. 79). In addition to the above named forms of pious exempla, the following categories, by Welter's account, had arisen: profane exempla from literary monuments of antiquity; historical exempla as in the chronicles; legendary exempla from

the chronicles, ancient history, and Celtic myth; exempla drawn from stories and fables, which were frequently Oriental in origin; moral or prodigious exempla drawn from natural history and geography; and, finally, the vast range of personal exempla (cf. p. 50).

What appears to be a development from the sacred to the profane would be better described as a redemption of the profane by the sacred. Secular exempla were always directed towards moral ends and given a religious colouring. Frequently this involved merely the reorientation of their figures according to a Christian perspective. In Augustinian terms, a thing that had formerly signified another created thing, was now made to signify something eternal, an object of Christian doctrine. Similarly, anything with a ready-made moral was subordinated to the Christian concept of grace with little other alteration. As for personal exempla, they were Christian to begin with and their use indicates only an increased willingness on the part of preachers to refer to their own experience as Christians.

Despite this expansion, the formally religious categories of exempla never relinquished a dominance founded on solid popular appeal. Certain sacred themes, however, were more popular than others, including three of special relevance to this thesis: stories of Mary, whose miracles

began to constitute a special type of hagiographic legend; stories of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; and prosopopeic exempla, "récits de visions et de voyages dans l'autre monde" (Welter, p. 92). Similar themes are not uncommon in medieval romance, with the ideal or idealized heroines, miraculous devices or incidents, and exotic or ideal settings through which a hero passes. (Welter himself observes the connection between the affective patterns of the last motif, the visionary "pèlerinage," and folklore and chronicle accounts of journeys to far-off lands, cf. p. 149). There seems thus an equivalence in the popular mind between its desires for the miraculous and the romantic, which is relevant to the study of medieval romance proper. Significantly, romance first flourishes in twelfth century France, in the same time and place where the exemplum exhibits a remarkable acceleration in its growth (cf. Welter, p. 34).

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the mendicant orders fell heir to the medieval exemplum tradition, and it was their members who assumed the role of its chief exponents and theoreticians. It was the friars who were responsible for the exemplum collections which began to appear in the second half of the thirteenth century, and they exercised a determining role in perfecting the mutual arts of sermon and exemplum delivery. As a result, they

created for the exemplum by the beginning of the fourteenth century: "Un rôle prépondérant dans l'éducation religieuse du peuple chrétien par l'enseignement de la chaire" (Welter, p. 149). This is nowhere more true than in England where the coming of the Dominicans and Franciscans "completely revolutionized preaching."⁶ Their success was due primarily to the popularity of their methods, which seem to have accorded perfectly with the English disposition. The result for English preaching was that the delivery of homilies and exempla became esteemed as the most fruitful form of preaching technique.

It is also significant that the preachers sanctioned their stories in the name of the exegetical tradition, which, too, was now dominated by the friars. In fact, the use of the four-fold exegetical method was, according to the Artes Predicandi, a recommended means of amplifying the sermon,⁷ and its own principles could be the theme itself on occasion, as G. R. Owst demonstrates.⁸ The preachers expected their audiences to apply these methods, albeit crudely, not only to Scripture, but to the exemplary stories. They thus made current the principle that extra-Scriptural narrative material might be read according to the critical methods of, for example, a St. Augustine, and did not, at the same time, suggest any

limits to the applicability of these methods. The preachers also strove to make available to their listeners the traditional figurative significance of the things of Scripture. In so doing they might recount verbatim almost the organization of these terms provided by the collections of distinctiones which were in large part written for preaching purposes. This information, too, was intended to facilitate the reading of exempla as well as Scripture, with the result that the audience became accustomed to regarding the sacral aspect of things as their primary signification.

The preachers, as a whole, were traditional in outlook, and were content to pass on to their parishioners the accumulated wisdom of Christianity, its exempla and the fruit of its exegesis. There were certain ways, however, in which they altered this heritage in order to meet the needs and tastes of the period and locality in which they lived. Thus, from the twelfth century onward there is an increased use of the vernacular and of realistic detail, both of which elements are prominent in exemplum delivery. In fact, the latter element is regarded by Owst as being in England the foundation of the satirical tradition in literature.⁹ But, more pertinently to this thesis, and, in a sense, in contradistinction to an expanded

use of realism, the pulpit begins in the twelfth century to give a new prominence to exempla which treat of grace and things miraculous. Smalley, who observes the rise of realism and satire in pulpit exempla in twelfth-century France, still characterizes that period as essentially concerned with allegory and sacrament.¹⁰ The taste for these things, as manifested in the desire to hear of things miraculous, of Saints and of Mary, both Smalley and Owst term "romantic," as opposed to "realistic." While each is more enthusiastic about tracing the rise of the latter, this was not the sentiment of the times, as both attest. Owst expresses the preferred taste of both priest and parishioner in late medieval England as follows:

The predominating motive in the English choice of anecdote for sermons is undoubtedly one which is common to all preaching of the time and has been noticed already in these pages in connection with stories of the Saints and stories from the chronicles. It is a characteristically childish affection for the marvellous. . . .¹¹

Medieval listeners wanted to hear a "wonderful thing or dede."¹²

Besides satire, then, there is a second great area in which preaching influenced English literature:

To the pulpit . . . our literature owes at least something for an enterprise which thus opened a new world of legend and romance to those whose only source of popular fiction lay hitherto in the traditional folklore, all too imperfectly preserved. At the preacher's disposal there had accumulated a mass of stories wrought by relics, by the Sacred Host itself, or by some other means of divine intervention in the affairs of men.¹³

To this an important qualification must be added: "unlike some classes of anecdotes . . . they were obviously intended to be taken very seriously."¹⁴ By a seeming paradox, the most "far-fetched" of stories were the most earnestly told and listened to, since, despite the new realism in exempla, it was the next world that was the true reality. The miraculous exemplum displayed to man the trust he should place in God's grace and in the sacraments of the Church; while there was a great concern for morality, which inspired the output of satirical exempla, it was by grace and not by works that man, as ever, would be saved.¹⁵

III

The medieval romance has frequently been consigned a special place in literature by modern critics of the genre. This has often been due to the fact that the notion of romance conjures up for the contemporary reader troublesome associations with escapism and fantasy. Perhaps the classic statement on the subject is by W. P. Ker who defines "romance" as: "the name for the sort of imagination that possesses the mystery and the spell of everything remote and unattainable. . . ."¹⁶ in contrast to the solidity and dramatic grandeur of "epic." He also suggests that "romance" was originally "an element in the

epic harmony,"¹⁷ and it is there that it not only belongs, but also where its mystery is most successfully achieved. This opinion has been only slightly qualified by Dorothy Everett in her essay "A Characterization of the English Medieval Romances." Accepting Ker's definition of what constitutes the "romance quality," she asks if this is the "quality of the romances."¹⁸ The answer in most cases is "no": for while the romances are characterized by lavish setting, superhuman heroes, and miraculous incident, these elements are not presented "romantically" but with a "matter-of-fact air."¹⁹ She does add that the best of the romances do have a romantic quality, citing Sir Orfeo and Sir Gawain and the Grene Knight as examples, but leaves it at that, and does not investigate at all the potential of an accepted romance quality to serve ends other than (or, perhaps, the same ends served by) the "epic harmony."

The romance quality, as Ker describes it, has an obvious potential for embellishing religious truth, and many of the romances are primarily religious in motivation, a point that is coming to be more and more recognized. Everett herself notices that much romance material bears strong kinship with the Saint's legend, and Laura Hibbard affirms the same in her categorization of the non-cyclical romances.²⁰ It is only lately, however, that some

truly innovative work has been done on the Christian content of the metrical romances, most notably the efforts of Ojars Kratins on Amis and Amiloun, Kenneth R. R. Gros-Louis on Sir Orfeo. John C. Hirsch on Sir Launfal and Lai Le Freine, and Laurel Braswell on Sir Isumbras.²¹ Each of the first three named has attempted not only to show in his respective topic a similarity between the themes of romance and pulpit, but to demonstrate how the romances themselves have been carefully structured to convey their Christian themes of grace and Providence. Laurel Braswell has investigated further the long-recognized connection between Sir Isumbras and the legend of St. Eustace, concluding that not only Sir Isumbras, but a whole group of romances produced in the East Midlands, embody to some degree the legend of this Saint, although none reproduces its structure so completely as Sir Isumbras. Having begun her essay with a reference to the pulpit condemnations of romance which were a "commonplace" of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, she concludes by saying of this romance:

More effectively than their [the religious moralists'] work does it convey to "lewed men" the nature of God's providence and the endurance of man's faith.²²

Finally, mention must be made of a recent book by Dieter Mehl, The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth

and Fourteenth Centuries. His basic premise is that the English romances:

. . . did not aim at the faithful representation of present-day reality, but . . . at the illustration of moral truths by way of an exemplary story. They are, for the most part, homilistic, in intention, rather than courtly and topical.²³

The romantic quality they do possess he sees subordinated to an essentially Christian moral ideal, and not to a more independent chivalric code as may have been true in twelfth-century France. Like Braswell, he responds to the recurring charge of levity brought against these romances by the pulpit, saying that: "Many of them are so pious and moral that they have been ascribed to monkish authors; even secular subjects could be adapted in such a way that made them almost into Saints' legends. . . ." (p. 18). In support of this he points to the homogeneity of style and spirit to be discerned in many manuscripts which collocate romances with a great deal of religious material. From an analysis of these manuscripts he observes that the "secular" occupied an extremely small place in Middle English literature; that what we now call secular was probably valued then for its religious qualities; that the most explicitly religious romances have survived in the greatest number of copies; that the same narrative which appears in one place as a romance can be classed

as a legend in a different manuscript (cf. p. 18). He concludes that while there may have been minstrel versions of the same romances which would have aroused the ire of the pulpit, such was not the case with the manuscript editions:

The written down versions have obviously been made more like the legends with deliberation, partly perhaps to make them more accessible to moralists, partly because there was a real popular demand for such types of instruction, or simply because it was the same scribe who copied romances and Saints' legends. (p. 19)

In defining romance, Mehl notes that almost any narrative poem could be so termed, but adds that in a true romance there must be a hero who illustrates an ideal of virtue in love or war. This is one essential difference between the romance and the exemplum, which does not necessarily require a hero as such. But the romance hero, he says, ". . . might be any Saint or even Christ himself, which again leaves us without a clear definition of the romances" and he adds that by the thirteenth century in England ". . . edifying Saints' legends and moralizing romances . . . are often hardly distinguishable" (p. 17). This leads to his own preferred method for discussing these tales. In each case he concentrates on the fortunes of the hero who is to be identified with, or tried by, the good which is being portrayed. This good may be more

explicitly knightly than Christian, but the two realms are never made contradictory: "Christian" is always an essential adjective for any good knight.

For Mehl this approach proves very fruitful and it would not be contended with here save for his statement that an analysis of form and structure in the Middle English romances would prove unrewarding due to the lack of conscious artistry on the part of their creators (cf. p. 13). Indeed, his own work frequently belies this contention. The method in this thesis will be closer to that of Kratins, Gros-Louis, and Hirsch, all of whom emphasize Christian doctrines of grace and redemption and their role in affecting the structure of certain romances. This is not absolutely contrary to Mehl's approach, but, to borrow exegetical terminology, his may be described as tropological as opposed to the anagogical investigation of the pattern of grace as manifested in a romance, which this thesis attempts. Moreover, as will be seen, the activities of a romance hero are easily incorporated in the latter perspective. Another criticism of Mehl that must be made is that as a means of establishing the moral credibility of the romances he denigrates the role of the "lewed audience" and emphasizes that of the aristocracy and middle class in comprising the intended audience of these tales. In so

doing he neglects to take into account that the preaching and exempla traditions had furnished the common man with the tools for extracting a moral from a tale. Moreover, the arguments that the exemplum had a supra-rational efficacy for communicating concretely the truths of Christian doctrine to simple men, and a consequent capacity to influence them towards moral imitation of these truths, would be valid for a romance also, once it had been affirmed to be of legitimate religious content. If there was an elite among the audience of such works, it was a classless one based on wisdom and virtue. Nor was any religious literature, in principle, addressed to such an elite, but rather to the creation of this elite, and thus to lesser men.²⁴

Finally, Mehl argues that the historical and, particularly, the national content of the English romances indicates that they were written to meet the tastes of the upper classes. This is precisely contradicted by the history of the exemplum tradition in England. Mosher notes that historical and legendary material began to be employed as early as Aelfric;²⁵ and Smalley more stridently affirms:

Every Englishman or woman has a stake in ancient history because Brutus came to Britain. The words "Greek" and "Roman" sound as magic to the preacher's lips. His tales go down better if he presents them as ancient.²⁶

The relationship of romance to history is an important one, for it helps clarify in what manner the romantic quality itself could forward moral and spiritual purposes. This is partially explained by Mehl when he draws a comparison between romance and chronicle. Each, he notes, organizes its subject matter towards the end of pointing a moral and each treats of heroes. Also, they are found side by side in many manuscript collections in a manner that further suggests their essential unity of purpose (cf. pp. 25-28). If this comparison enhances for the poetry its seriousness of intention, it also points out that history was not for the Middle Ages what it is conceived to be today. In pointing a moral the chronicler made his material more romantic than it might be more significant.²⁷

It is appropriate now to try and establish some synthesis of the religious, the romantic, and the historical as they relate to the creation of the medieval romances. Already it has been shown that a didactic purpose can function in all three realms. However, it is useful to refer back to the remarks of Smalley and Owst who affirmed that the main appetite of the medieval audience was for stories of the supernatural, of Saints and of miracles. More significantly still, Welter drew the connection between "prosopopeic" or mystical exempla and the exempla drawn from

the chronicles dealing with voyages and adventures in far-off lands. So, too, Smalley describes the words "Greek" and "Roman" as magic on the preacher's lips. These cultures were no longer threats to a nascent Christianity; by receding in time they had been gilded with an aura of the supernatural, and thus become adequate settings for otherworldly truths. Remoteness, whether in time or in space, serves to evoke in man an awe analogous to that which is due the mysteries of his religion. In turn these mysteries more easily maintain the sense of their otherness when situated in an earthly context, or rather in a pictura of a poem (pictura here understood in the medieval sense as the surface configuration produced by a poem's narrative and descriptive elements) that has already been made a little unearthly. Thus it is that history and geography not only furnish moral examples, but help provide for exemplum and secular poem part of the very substance of the romantic. It is then up to the tale or, rather, its teller to use this quality to the ends of religion should that be his purpose.

It might be countered that much romance material was of English origin and thus neither remote nor wonderful. But one can respond that national history, in the form of a past greatness now lost, would have an even

more potent effect in promoting a spiritual longing and a striving for virtue among Englishmen: certainly it was from some ideal perspective that the matter of England was both written and heard. Another objection that might be brought forth is Everett's statement that the majority of the English romances are not "romantic" in their telling. However, the observation that romantic material has been described realistically does not negate the possibility that it appeared sufficiently wonderful to its medieval hearers, in comparison to whose tastes our own are more demanding, or more jaded, as the case may be. The miraculous exempla, for instance, were presented in a down-to-earth manner, and the two poems Everett names as being "romantic" are nevertheless consistently narrated in a matter-of-fact style. This is not to say that the medieval romances are not qualifiable as to the degree to which they are "romantic," but this matter pertains to the level of artistry involved, rather than to a generic definition. Considered positively, a heightened "romantic" tension indicates the work of a better writer, although he has only magnified a quality implicit in the genre. By the same token, a banal romance derives from the failings of its creator, who has inevitably overworked the standard devices of his material.

Of course, a romance has rarely been written for the sole purpose of being "romantic," least of all in the Middle Ages. To have regard, then, only for the "affective" patterns of these stories is to be in error; nor do they really seem to encourage such an approach. The best of them must be seen in the total context provided by medieval esthetic theory, and, inevitably, in the context of Christian doctrine. It is in this light that their content is to be pursued. At the same time, it should be remembered that this content, when adequately perceived, would have had an effect on the pious Christian, analogous to, although greater than, that which he first experienced in the "romantic" forms of the poem's surface. Thus, while he would have moved from "romance" to "truth," he would not have left all of the "romantic" behind him. Indeed, by coming to a better understanding of the poem as truth, he would have achieved a fuller appreciation of its perfection as a romance.

CHAPTER III

ESTHETIC DOCTRINES IN AN AGE OF GRACE

The Christian doctrine of grace was of inestimable concern to the medieval world, for while one was to believe in God or Christ, one was to seek grace, albeit from Them, as the very substance of sanctification and salvation, and as the only means of "real" participation in the Christian religion. Moreover, the Christian, living in the Age of Grace, felt obliged to shape his world, so far as he could determine it, upon this concept of grace.¹ But grace, which exists at the heart of every sacrament, remains a mystery in itself: whence it follows that a Christian civilization, designed to be the manifestation of grace, must be the manifestation of a mystery as well, although at differing degrees; or, from the point of view of function, it must be varyingly sacramental. The question that arises is how the creation of this civilization was achieved, since only grace can properly be termed the cause of its manifestation.

From the human perspective, it was exegesis, a discipline that itself was grounded in the pursuit of grace, that was responsible for the building of the medieval Christian world. Exegesis made possible the construction of this

world "in imitation of the ideal of Scripture" (cf. p. 2); that is, in imitation of Scripture's having a spiritual as well as a literal reality; and, in imitation of the Scriptural Letter's sacramental efficacy by which it was able to communicate to men the substance of the spiritual level, which is grace or the mysteries of the Christian religion. However, grace itself is not to be imitated: it is either present or it is not; and, since man cannot make spiritual things, it would seem he cannot give to his works a real spiritual dimension and a real sacramental efficacy. But he can shape the surface of his works to make them reflect the spiritual level of Scripture, a task that presupposes, among other things, an orthodox method of interpreting signs, i.e., of allegoresis, which method was derived from exegetical practices. In so doing, he gave his work a spiritual level by borrowing this level, as it were, from Scripture. Consequently, because the surface of his work is now able to communicate spiritual things, it is by definition sacramental.

A glance at the exemplum, as it was studied in the last chapter, will illustrate these remarks, and will show as well that the methods of imitating Scripture were not devoid of stylistic considerations. As for having an interior, or spiritual, content, this the exemplum achieved

through a standard use of signs and types as established by Scriptural usage. Thus the exemplum became an object of allegoresis to such an extent that it came to form a sort of training-ground for exegetes among the public at large (cf. p. 44). But, insofar as its interior content, the doctrinal "kernel," was spiritually valid, this content derived from Scripture, which the exemplum led into and to which it was "tangential," as true art is to philosophy, according to Hugh (cf. p. 19).

However, it was for the sacramental efficacy, with which it was generally credited, that the exemplum was most prized: i.e., for its ability to move hearts to truth and virtue. Here, while the question of content remains paramount (it must be Christian truth), there is also the matter of form: the means of delivery must suit the subject at hand. Yet the form of the exemplum is as dependent on Scripture as its content: the primary stylistic concern of exemplum writers was to achieve an effect of holy simplicity, which is precisely the quality that Hugh and St. Augustine found most engaging in the Scriptural surface, and which the latter recommended to Christian preachers. This reminds us that the exegete, while his intention should be to enjoy the spiritual realities within Scripture, should also appreciate its surface configuration, insofar as it is

one with the substance of grace, and, indeed, should far prefer it to the glittering eloquence of the pagans; that there is a valid esthetic or formal dimension to exegetical study (the case of St. Jerome need only be mentioned); and that the fruit of exegesis is not only truth, but knowledge of how best to convey this truth. The case of the exemplum is relatively simple, but even the most complex Christian structures could be shown to have evolved, in form and in content, from the same thinking that went into the exemplum, and this thinking derives from Scriptural exegesis.

But, while exegetics may have been instrumental in constructing the Christian world, it would be more true to say, from a divine perspective, that it was grace itself which was really operant in its creation. As such, grace gave to the forms of this Christian society, in differing degrees, something of its own mystery and efficacy. How this was accomplished is explained by an analysis of the theological doctrines of grace themselves.

Le Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique offers this definition of grace:

Grâce signifie: 1. bienveillance, faveur que l'on a à l'égard de quelqu'un, . . . spécialement la bienveillance et la libéralité de Dieu à l'égard des hommes. . . 2. Grâce signifie aussi la conséquence ou l'effet de la bienveillance, c'est à dire le bienfait, le don gratuit, spécialement l'ensemble des dons concédés par Dieu aux hommes en vue de leur sanctification et de leur salut, un état de sainteté. . . Le mot grâce est aussi employé pour désigner

la condition de l'homme juste après la venue de Jésus Christ et la caractéristique de l'oeuvre accomplie par le Christ: dans ce sens grâce est opposée à la loi (mosaïque). . . . 3. La grâce est une qualité d'une personne ou d'une chose, qui la rend aimable ou agréable aux autres. . . . /literally, graceful/ 4. Enfin grâce signifie la reconnaissance pour le bienfait reçu. . . .

There is in these points the outline of a cycle of bestowal and return, from God to man and back to God again. By the first movement man is sanctified or favoured by God, and by the second he recognizes the source of any gift by expressing his thanks to God, a concept that is caught in the words to express gratitude of the several romance languages. Of course, the Christian was to have faith in the true source of bounty, God, in order to pray to Him for grace before he received it; but even his faith was to be regarded as a grace in the final analysis.

The above scheme refers to an order that is properly termed the state of grace, which state, in principle, is infinite. This is the state which man enjoyed in Eden and which he lost through Adam's "Fall." By this "Fall" an opposition was established between the states of nature and grace, and it is to the laws of nature (including his own nature) that unredeemed or fallen man is subservient. In order to redeem man grace must transform his fallen nature, and it is in the process of doing this that grace seems to leave its boundless sphere and enter the order of the con-

tingent and finite. To explain this process the Church Fathers enunciated several categories of grace. This does not mean they introduced qualitative gradations into the notion of grace itself; on the contrary, they were intent on eliminating any such conceptions: they divided grace solely with regard to the modes it adopted in acting upon man.

The first category of grace was directly addressed to the issue of how infinite grace can affect finite man and in the process sanctify him. Two complementary modes of grace were postulated: supernatural grace, which remains apart from that grace by which man is sanctified; and sanctifying grace, by which man's soul is transformed. These two graces were described, respectively, as uncreated and created grace: the former is God Himself, Who by his love gives Himself supernaturally to man, while the latter is that which is acknowledged in the righteous man as a distinct effect of God; created grace is thus the supernatural gift made manifest in man. There is a problem, however, insofar as the nature of the continuity between uncreated and created grace is never articulated; but it should be remembered that the discussion at hand is of a theological order, demanding faith in the face of a mystery, and man's transformation by grace was regarded as a mystery.³

The second division of grace offered by the Church Fathers is relatively straightforward. It occurred within sanctifying grace itself, which was divided into two types, external and internal, according to its mode of influencing man. External grace was said to include all predication of the revealed truth, i.e., the Prophets, the Law, the examples of the Saints, and the miracles; while internal grace was intended to mean that by which man was transformed from within.⁴

The preceding division, which referred to the means by which grace influenced man, is of an evident spatial character. It was matched by a further distinction of sanctifying grace, made in terms of the man possessing it and from the standpoint of duration. Thus the medieval theologians defined the two forms of grace called habitual and actual, or, according to scholastic terminology, gratia gratum faciens and gratia gratis data. By the first was meant that grace which has become inherent in the soul of man, thus rendering its recipient pleasing to God; by the second was intended that grace with which God momentarily clothes man for a specific divine purpose, and it was considered to be given primarily for the benefit of others. These two graces were viewed as being essentially alike. Actual grace, like external grace, was defined as being directed always toward the establishing of habitual (and internal) grace in man,

be it in the form of faith or sanctity; the beginning of faith, as well as each "increment" in sanctity, was taken to signify an instance of actual grace. Habitual grace, as in the form of patient obedience and worship, was not to be considered the cause of its own increase, nor, for that matter, was it to be credited with its own durability. What seemed habitual was to be understood as a continuing instance or instances of actual grace: seen in this way, all pride of works would, it was thought, be confounded. In return, habitual grace was regarded as being at any time capable of providing an instance of actual grace towards another person, by causing the engendering or increase of habitual grace within him.

These terms, habitual and actual grace, effectively displayed the entire life of the Christian in his faith, in that they described the performance and the fruit of Christ's two commandments. By habitual grace man was thought to participate in the beatific life, the life proper to God, which is His love for Himself; for man this meant that he was to love God as he should, which is selflessly. By actual grace man was considered to act like God in extending grace or beneficence towards others. In other words, these two forms of grace are identical to the two charities which St. Augustine described man as lacking

since his fall, and which he must consequently regain, in part by sacred study (cf. p. 4).

While the Christian was to seek his sanctification in all of his activities, he was particularly directed towards the Church as the dispenser, through its sacraments, of the grace he required. Here the effects of the doctrine of grace were directly experienced in the liturgy, as well as in the architectural plan of many of the churches. The liturgy, as canonical prayer, by necessity inculcated in the supplicant the proper attitude he should take towards God, which attitude was defined by the doctrine of grace. The architectural plan was an elucidation in spatial form of the purpose of the sacraments, for which it provided the setting. It depicted to man his growth in grace in terms of the progress he made from the baptismal font at the door of the church to the altar where his consummation in grace was figured, and emphasized his absolute need of the sacraments, especially those of baptism and communion, at every stage of this progress. The importance of these two sacraments for the spiritual growth of each Christian was a theme for almost every Father of the Church, and what they described was the alchemy of the human soul, beginning with faith and ending in sanctity.⁵

However, in this chapter it is not the individual

Christian's "growth in grace" which is the subject, but rather, it is the manner by which art facilitated this process in the Middle Ages through its own participation in the doctrinal system of grace. If it is objected that there is an unwarranted shift from the realm of individual religious experience to that of esthetic doctrines, even to that of a sacred milieu, one should remember that it was not only by analogy that esthetics was related to individual religious experience in the Middle Ages: the two realms directly converged in the Church structure, and in the grace therein dispensed (it may here be remarked that if the Church was thought to embody a spiritual reality that was essentially supra-individualistic, its formal aspect was correspondingly to be considered as supra-esthetic⁶). It was stated above that the plan of the medieval Church reflected the individual Christian's progress in grace which was consummated at the altar. Yet the same Church layout, considered from the converse perspective, i.e., as emanating outward from its spiritual centre in the altar, also displays the essential process and hierarchy of Christian art at its outset. This is described by Titus Burckhardt:

The sacred art of Christianity constitutes the setting of the liturgy, of which it is an amplification in the fields of sound and sight. Like the non-sacramental liturgy, its purpose is to prepare

and to bring out the effect of the means of grace instituted by the Christ Himself. . . .

The liturgy itself can be thought of as a work of art comprising several degrees of inspiration. Its centre, the Eucharistic sacrifice, belongs to the order of Divine Art; through it is accomplished the most perfect and the most mysterious of transformations. Spreading outwards from this centre or kernel, like an inspired but necessarily fragmentary commentary, is the liturgy, founded on usages consecrated by the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. . . . It is by virtue of certain objective and universal laws that the architectural environment perpetuates the radiance of the Eucharistic sacrifice. . . .

The pattern here described is the transformation of the supernatural, internal, and formless, into the sanctified, external, and formal. This latter exists in itself as an habitual grace, but functions as an actual grace in leading beyond itself to its sacramental source. Thus it is that sacred art contains within itself, as both its ontological and operative principle, that which is the Catholic doctrine of grace. For a theocratic civilization such a consideration is absolute in its formal modalities: "When grace is in question no environment can be 'neutral': it will always be for or against the spiritual influence, whatever does not 'assemble' must inevitably 'disperse.'"⁸

In his book The Esthetics of the Middle Ages Edgar de Bruyne characterizes his subject matter as follows:

The Medieval Esthetic system is distinguished not so much by the subjects treated in its art, as

by the profound influence of Christianity on its very heart and soul. The unique character of medieval symbolism, the medieval philosophy of art, and the medieval attitude towards beauty must be explained in terms of the Christian religion. . . .⁹

At the same time he establishes from the outset that to be understood the Christian esthetic system must be seen as it saw itself; that is, as based upon the twin heritages of the pagan and Judaic traditions.

From the classical world Christianity derived its esthetic theories along with its other philosophical tools, and, characteristically, it was an essentially Platonic esthetic system which it incorporated. However, it quickly assigned this pagan tradition to its proper context: if it was technically correct, its terms necessarily erred in degree, as they were all world-bound. This criticism has already been met in St. Augustine's faulting a few lines of pagan verse for being but a "sweet shell" devoid of content. Similarly, he noted that pagan eloquence, which is formally perfect, is sapped from within by vanity. The pagans or gentiles thus served as examples to the Christian world of the heights reached by natural intelligence, and, perforce, of the necessary human limitations which undermined these achievements.

The Jewish influence upon medieval esthetics was twofold. What evidence the Old Testament gave of philo-

sophical and esthetic principles was eagerly seized upon and integrated with comparable Greek doctrines (cf. de Bruyne, pp. 1-5). Yet it was the negative side of Jewish culture, or rather its symbolic value to the Christian as the age of Law, which was even more important to medieval theorists. Thus, from the esthetic perspective, the Old Testament was considered hypothetically as the great art work of the Jews and as the next step above pagan art. It, too, was perfect in form, yet in a way mysteriously surpassing the other as it was shaped by the Holy Spirit; moreover, it was never vain in intention as it referred in form and spirit to a world beyond itself, that of the spirit. What the Old Testament shared with pagan art was that, of itself, it was still of this world: it could not transform a nature other than its own, i.e. the human; and while the Book itself was not corrupted, the Jews were corrupted through personal self-righteousness and, as regards Scripture, an arid literalism.

Christianity thus found itself as heir not only to classical theory and Biblical wisdom; it was itself representative of the final stage of God's plans of redemption. As the Age of Grace was prepared for by the previous reigns of nature and then law, so Christian art had to situate itself upon foundations established by gentiles and Jews.

First, however, these foundations had to be discerned; then they had to have added to them the vital element of grace. The craft arts were thus transformed in the same manner that a redeemed nature became the object of study in the Quadrivium, as the artisan was now obliged to depict things, not as the natural man saw them, but as they were in God. Man no longer lived in a natural, but in a supernatural world, and in art this meant the replacement of allegory, a human convention, by the symbol and Icon. Scripture had restored things to their primordial and sacramental value as in the days of Adam, and the Christian artist had to strive for the same ideal. In the Eastern Church this principle was formally declared at the Seventh Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787) where the rules of Iconography were established and allegory banned as false representation.¹⁰ In the West no such formal justification was provided, yet the esthetic writings of its great religious thinkers led to the same conclusion. Thus, for example, every classical esthetic concept, i.e. order, harmony, light, symbol, allegory, which had already been given a metaphysical basis by the Platonists, was further idealized by Christianity: by bringing all these qualities to their simple perfection and superabundance in God, it made of them all reflections of His Grace (cf. de Bruyne,

pp. 47-48, "The Fundamental Principles").

But the major preoccupation of medieval esthetics was with the good, both spiritual and moral, to which the above terms were always subordinated. This is reflected in the concepts decorum and honestum, also of classical origin, which in a sense described the entire esthetic process. These terms referred to the exterior decorative elements and the interior motive, respectively, of art, and their analogy to the field of morals was explicit and intended, even before Christianity. Based on this principle, that what is conceived as "good" becomes manifest as beautiful action, the Middle Ages propounded, to use de Bruyne's categorization, various forms of moral, sapiential, and mystical esthetics: his summary of the last shows the essential trend in all of this thinking:

Every created form is made in the image of God, Who is Beauty and Goodness. If the beauty of God is revealed in His Goodness, and this Goodness irradiates His Beauty, the beauty of the soul is inevitably the expression of the goodness which constitutes its spiritual life, of the love which unites it with the Supreme Good, and of the agreeable feeling of possession of the good. Similarly, this goodness, love and happiness are perforce the manifestation of the presence of the Beautiful, intuitively contemplated. (p. 99)

The above passage points to the esthetic nature of the Christian experience when compared to the three primary co-ordinates of art. The first is the critical:

by contemplating beauty we become good; which gives rise to the second, the creative: by being good we become beautiful. True creativity, however, exists in the act of establishing virtue within ourselves, which of course is performed by God, and active virtue is merely a commentary or reflection of the real and inner work of art: it is nothing in itself but it can be beauty and beneficence to the onlooker. The real work of art for this second person will begin when he seeks the beauty before him within himself, and thus seeks God. It can be seen that this process reflects perfectly the various stages of the Catholic dogma of Grace, beginning in the supernatural, and extending to its habitual and actual modes and operations. Finally, there is the third aspect of esthetics which is the enjoyment of art, "the agreeable feeling of the possession of the good." But since the good enjoyed is divine, although originally sought from its manifestation in art, then the proper enjoyment of this art is a foretaste of heavenly or anagogical things: this, too, is a grace, and, indeed, its purest form.

If the new dispensation created such boundless themes for the Christian artist it also brought equivalent responsibilities. While the pagan artist had been trained by rules, inspired by genius, and taught his symbols by

tradition and the evidence of experience, the Christian artist could not be satisfied with this, just as he could not be satisfied with mere obedience to the law: "The Christian artist, on the contrary, works under the influence of the Holy Spirit, without Whose inspiration nothing of beauty can be created" (de Bruyne, p. 136). On the one hand this grace is the more easily obtained kind provided by external revelation. The artist was to use the things of creation, the substance of his art, in a way concordant with the universal symbolism developed by the Fathers and handed down to the Middle Ages:

Influences both theoretical and practical led the medieval thinkers to construct a vast allegorical vision of the world, which was to dominate artistic creation, and which as they were well aware, was uncontestably esthetic in nature. (de Bruyne, p. 9)¹¹

He was thus responsible for a knowledge of the Quadrivium in the same manner as the exegete of Scripture. Indeed, even should he so desire he could not remove from symbols their accumulated sacred meanings: religious connotations literally monopolized the language of signs.

This, however, was not all: the artist had to be aware of Scripture's mode of operation, i.e., its art. Thus he had to realize the difference between Scriptural and pagan allegories if he was to create in a Christian manner. Now the supreme teacher of Christian style is God

Who through His Spirit shapes both Scripture and Nature, and thus initiates all modalities of art. It is the responsibility, then, of the artist to create "in the image of God" (de Bruyne, p. 138). From which derives a problem: should the artist imitate the nature around him which is produced by God, or should he imitate the ideal as it exists in the mind of God, and which is manifest in the patterns of nature?

The medieval estheticians formulated their answer to this as follows. While God creates freely and by grace from out of Himself, man creates by necessity and by work to meet the needs of his own nature: "The artistic ideas of man, born of his needs, are suggested by his nature, to which he submits." Thus: "Man imitates nature in all that he does" (de Bruyne, p. 141),¹² but with these conditions: man does not copy nature, but creates what never existed in it; taking his lesson from things, he imitates nature in its operation. At the same time nature does not inspire art; rather, the same ideal laws which govern nature inspire man in his creative activities. These laws exist with God and it is there that man must seek them: "The artist's pattern is modelled upon the pattern in the mind of God (de Bruyne, p. 143).¹³ Thus, while man imitates nature in his work, the product is not a reflection of nature but an alternative

reflection of the same divine idea that is manifest in Creation.

The above argument, which recalls Hugh's discussion of mechanical philosophy in the Didascalicon, illustrates the medieval propensity for beginning with the mundane and practical and quickly moving to the divine and ideal. Art to the Middle Ages was pre-eminently a practical activity, governed solely by utility. In a Christian world, however, utility converges ultimately on God. Thus while a narrow concept of usefulness might define the fine arts as superfluous, here they assume a tremendous importance, as is attested by the role played by the decorative arts in the sacred structure. Moreover, outside the Church, the existence of decorative elements, including fictional narrative, is doubly in need of justification. Their existence among practical forms of human endeavor is analogous to that of obscurity in the literal sense of Scripture, an obscurity that requires a sudden transposition to a spiritual sense in order to be understood. Thus the usefulness of the fine arts, which is the sine qua non of medieval art, is that they be capable of extending a spiritual benefit to Christians in one form or another.

This leads to what de Bruyne calls the central principle of Christian art criticism:

Art, according to the ancient tradition, should be useful and enjoyable. It seems to us that the entire medieval system of art criticism can be reduced to this single principle. . . .

A work of art is useful by virtue of its veracious content, and pleasing by its harmonious form. (p. 153)

Again he writes: ". . . art had to justify its existence above all by its seriousness, that is by the intellectual, moral, and religious value of its themes which it was to materialize in correctly proportioned forms" (p. 156).

While "veracious" or "serious" content referred to truth in general, it is obvious that in a Christian world it meant Christian truth. This included truth in all its forms, but ultimately it intended the same truth spoken of by St. Augustine as the only "thing" that is properly "enjoyed" in itself--God. Moreover, it is plain from this that the medieval estheticians had taken to heart, if only indirectly, his admonitions on vain and foolish forms and sought to eliminate them.

However, it was also stated that truth should be "pleasing by its harmonious form," and that art was to "materialize" truth "in correctly proportioned forms." For the Middle Ages the primary goal of the critic was to realize the artist's vision of the truth, which demanded that he curtail his immediate enjoyment of art and use the work in question to progress to its interior truth, which was

more properly and more rewardingly to be enjoyed. Nevertheless, there is that in the surface which may be enjoyed immediately and which is an integral part of its truth. Thus on the one hand the surface beauty of a work of art is an enemy to its true understanding; to pause in its enjoyment is to forego the more perfect pleasure of contemplating the ideal it serves. On the other hand, the pleasures and beauty of the surface are an extension of those to be obtained later, and an incitement to seeking them out; not to love surface beauty would be to negate the desire to seek the greater beauty therein reflected. This is identical to Hugh's defence of the historical sense of Scripture, except for the explicitly sacramental dimension of his argument.

Medieval esthetics was possessed, says de Bruyne, by a "nostalgia for the infinite" (p. 128), and absorbed with the paradox of the presence of this infinite within finite forms and thus with its effect upon man:

Even in the feeling aroused by the clearly defined configuration of a melody, a poem, or a picture we experience (or such was the belief of medieval man) not only a foretaste but even a certain possession of a happiness which transcends us. (p. 127)

Similarly, he quotes Cassiodorus as marvelling at the therapeutic effects of music: "How remarkable is its method of curing. It removes the disorders of the soul through the

sweetest pleasures" (p. 157). Art is thus capable of conveying immediately an effect that is a form of grace, and which is dependent upon the perfection of its formal arrangement. It might be said that Christian esthetics condemns a heresy of form as well as content, believing that the truth portrayed poorly is not really portrayed.

Art thus functioned in two realms at once, the supernal and the temporal, and the resulting synthesis it achieved was described by the twin purposes accorded it by the Middle Ages: "Art, it maintained . . . should both teach and preach. The moral aspect is the special province of music, the didactic role belongs to the plastic arts, literature combines both functions" (de Bruyne, p. 157).

The peculiar function of literature, and especially of rhetoric and poetry, "to instruct and excite simultaneously" (de Bruyne, p. 160) derives from its participation in qualities belonging to both painting and music. From the former it receives the capacity to embody truth and from the latter the power to excite to action. The manner by which it may be said to modify man's actions needs clarification. In one sense the statement refers, for example, to the metre and rhythm of poetry, which partake of the therapeutic qualities extolled by Cassiodorus. Thus man is prepared for the good by the pleasure he takes in

the beautiful. Yet the intention of the theoreticians was even more ingenious than this:

. . . the goal of literary art is not to proclaim abstract ideas of which we have a theoretical knowledge, but rather to give concrete form to truths which we have actually experienced and the value of which we have realized through this practical experience. Sapientia a sentiendo (non est) scientia a sciendo. The development of this principle could be traced from beginning to end of the Middle Ages. (de Bruyne, p. 160)

The embodiment of truth in literary art is thus determined in two directions: one is upward into the ideal and the spiritual; the other is downward into duration and the lives of men. It is this latter which is the musical activity of literature; only here the notes sounded are on the scale of human experience. Man's time-bound life, the arena for his vices and virtues, thus has a special relationship to music. For the poet to embody the truth in terms irrelevant to his audience's experience would be like sounding a note which no one could hear. This principle, which descends from the classical rhetoricians, "St. Augustine applied . . . to the Christian art of preaching" (de Bruyne, p. 160)¹⁴ as earlier seen. In addition it was a major premise behind the creation of exempla throughout the Middle Ages and, especially, in the preaching revival of the twelfth century.

It is the function of the pictorial (ut pictura)

dimension of literature to display truth, and above all, to communicate to man the supraformal verities of his religion. The picture of a story is painted by its narrative and it comprises two elements: the imaged or descriptive, and the composition or arrangement of it. These correspond respectively to the subject matter of the Quadrivium and Trivium. But, prior to arranging this material, the subject matter possible to and, more precisely, proper to, poetry had to be clearly established by reference to the criterion of truth.

De Bruyne, quoting ninth century theory, says: "poetics is the art of composing imaginary narratives" as, for example, in the Metamorphoses. But, he notes, in addition to the imaginary narrative, the Middle Ages distinguished three other forms of poetic treatment: ". . . argumentative or fictitious, as in the plays; . . . historical, as in Livy or Sallust; . . . rhetorical, as in Cicero" (p. 161). It can be seen that these ascend in their treatment of reality with pure poetry, or the "imaginary narrative," at the bottom, and pure argument, graced by poetics, at the top. It is the "poetic treatment" which survives at each level, and it is clearly to be distinguished from poetry, i.e., the "imaginary narrative," in the same manner as "romance" quality and the genre romance

were distinguished in the last chapter. Indeed, poetry, thus defined, is virtually synonymous with romance as the Middle Ages understood the latter term.

Summarizing the above categorization of poetry from the perspective of its content, de Bruyne adds:

In addition to imaginative poetry there is "real" poetry, which relates only true events and strives for serious results. We must not think that medieval man believed poetry could deal only with Christian ideas and deeds: anything true, in nature as well as in revelation, unquestionably belongs within the sphere of religion. Moreover, all pagan discoveries and creations which were in conformity with the true and the good passed by right of conquest to Christianity: Israel received the mortal remains of Egypt into her keeping. . . . Christian art transcended profane art by assimilating it. (p. 161)

This explains how the "real" poetry of antiquity was accommodated to the Christian world, but it leaves unresolved the problem of how truth could be made to descend to the false or lying exterior of an "imaginary narrative," i.e., to the domain of "pure" poetry (significantly, there was never any question of the desirability of such a goal), so as to include it, too, within the legitimate range of Christian intellectual activity. De Bruyne responds to this question, of how a fictional surface could "relate to the true or the possible, the good or the moral":

In this area the medieval writers developed their twofold doctrine of the argument (that is, resemblance to reality) and the integument (the figurative or parabolic significance). They also made

use of these two theories to justify the assimilation of classical literature within the general framework of realism and prodesse, as well as to encourage the creation of "modern literature." (p. 162)

The argument referred to content, the integument to form: the argument must be "true" while the integument must serve or reflect the truth. With the enunciation of these terms there was also a reassessment made of both the poet, who was now termed a philosopher, i.e., an exponent of truth, and of his art, which was conjoined to the branches of philosophy, the seven liberal arts.

As de Bruyne has already noted, truth, for the Middle Ages, while it was primarily of a religious order (be it mystical or moral), included another dimension as well: i.e., there was also "natural" or "physical" truth (of which profane history was an aspect), which derived from the phenomenal order. "Natural" truth was the distant equivalent of today's scientific data, and it referred to all conclusions, accepted as true, about the physical world, or "nature." This truth was studied by the several disciplines of the Quadrivium, each of which considered the whole of "nature" from a certain qualitative aspect;¹⁵ and while it, "natural" truth, was accepted as being of a lesser order than moral or mystical truth, it was considered to be with them a proper subject for Christian poetry.

Moreover, the things studied by the Quadrivium furnished the poet with the surface material (the integumentum or pictura) of his work, and they could be used to lead to religious truth (or even to veil what was still "natural" truth) when so desired. What was scientific truth in the hands of the philosophers, i.e., the known properties of the things of "nature," could be of figurative value in the hands of a poet. Nor was there a contradiction in their activities: the scientist-philosopher of the Middle Ages always pursued his investigations of the "natural" order with an eye, at least in principle, to what it could tell of the supernatural, or to what it could provide in the way of moral exempla, and this determined the results of his findings. Thus, for him, this study was but a part of a more comprehensive philosophical programme, itself designed to lead into exegesis.

In celebrating the truth, the medieval poet had at his disposal the literary arts of the Trivium. Whether poetics itself is defined as incorporating all of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, or is restricted to a branch of grammar (both of these views were put forward in the Middle Ages¹⁶), is not in question. The point is that the poet was considered to use the three liberal arts (either in the service of poetry, or graced by poetry) in order to

promote truth. This, combined with his use of knowledge deriving from the Quadrivium, entitled him to be regarded as a philosopher: "Poetry, the twelfth century declared, is a branch of philosophy" (de Bruyne, p. 162). Indeed, Hugh of St. Victor refers disparagingly in the Didascalicon (3.4) to these poet "philosophers" who embody a "simple meaning in confused discourses," making "a single 'picture' from a multitude of 'colours' and forms." Still he does not refute their reasonings, only their excesses, and he has in mind certain long-winded philosophical poems. It is clear in any case that the medieval estheticians sought to justify poetry (in all its forms) to as rigorous a conception of "philosophical" utility as held by Hugh.

It is apparent, then, that the poet's writing is informed by two forms of truth or knowledge. One is knowledge of the truth of which he writes, his argument and the content of his poem; the other is the skill of his craft, which in this case is poetics. From this derives the integument which de Bruyne defines as follows: "As for the integument it is simply the veiling, consciously willed or gratuitously assumed, of a physical or moral truth behind the screen of a story whose characters and events never existed" (p. 162). These two forms of knowledge are essentially related. Poetics, which is a constant in

all poetry, is at the same time an alternative modality to the truth which is the argument of the poem, just as all of the other arts, in fact all human activity, are similar modalities of wisdom. Thus to appreciate this poetry even at the lowest level is to be affected by the truth. At its highest level criticism appreciates the pure form of poetry, the art of the art. These two aspects of literature have already been discussed in the two pleasures appropriate to art, one external, the other internal, yet essentially one.

De Bruyne does not explain how the critic is to proceed from form to content or from picture to truth, other than in terms seemingly appropriate to mystics alone. Thus D. W. Robertson complains that he fails to emphasize the role of St. Augustine and the De Doctrina Christiana¹⁷ and thus the application of exegesis, and in particular the doctrine of charity, to Medieval esthetics. He says this with regard to poetic theory especially, and to the means of proceeding from integument to argument. In de Bruyne's defence, however, it should be said that both Hugh and St. Augustine make of formal exegetics an intellectual tool bordering on the mystical, and not a device for plumbing the entire depths of Scripture. Thus, should certain forms of sacred art, including poetry, be capable

of leading to spiritual realities, it would not be up to a transposed exegetical system, insofar as it was an intellectual device, to do more than point to them, as it does in Scripture. That is, it is possible to articulate intellectually the religious argument of a poem and how it operates, without penetrating to the Ideal. All the same, the doctrine of charity, if applicable to secular art, does imply for its explanation some form of spiritual benefit, and it is on this count that Robertson's observations are valuable.

Central to Robertson's thesis is the intimate analogy, and one that was felt by the Middle Ages, between Biblical and poetical exegetics: "Poetry and theology were sometimes compared, since both reduce an obscure exterior to a comprehensible truth."¹⁸ This is reflected in their use of identical terms such as nucleus and cortex to describe the opposition in their respective materials of an inner and outer reality. He notes one term in particular, the aenigma, which was applied to poetry by St. Augustine in opposition to the term allegory: "An enigmatic statement contains a cortex which is itself obscure, whereas the cortex of an allegorical statement may be perfectly clear" (pp. 675-676). This is comparable to the obscurity in Scripture that is not resolvable through a knowledge of

things but which necessitates the application of the doctrine of charity. Robertson concludes: "The poetic obscurity of the integumentum is thus especially appropriate to divine subjects" (p. 675). He establishes the difference between pagan and Scriptural allegory, which has been explained here earlier, and notes the obligation of a Christian poet to work with the opus restorationis, or the things of Creation according to their "revealed" sense.

However, he observes that poetry is distinguished radically from Scripture by the concept of the integument or pictura. Whereas Scripture portrays the actual events of sacred history, poetic fiction displays what has never occurred in nature. Instead the poet creates a pictura, or seeming reality, which Robertson, paraphrasing Hugh of St. Victor on this subject, defines as follows:

The poet is said here to bring together diverse things, or things not actually combined in nature, so that a pictura appears made up of many colors and forms. The pictura is essentially an artificial combination of elements. As is well known, the fables of poets are frequently called lying "fables." The pictura is the lying configuration of the surface of a poem. (p. 684)

This definition gives the essential nature of the integumentum, conveying respectively its degrees of reality and of unreality. In terms of the elements or things employed,

including the works themselves, Christian poetry shares the same significance as Scripture. The crux of the difference is contained in the opposition between poetic narrative and history. In the latter the sequence of events and the events themselves are signs of God because authored by Him. Thus man must regard Providence, the art of God, not only with an eye to form in things, but also to form in time. The last is not the case with poetry, or so it seems; while its elements are true, its arrangement is false: it is thus an "artificial combination" or "lying configuration."

The problem of situating truth in fictional poetry is solved in two ways. One has already been mentioned in the discussion of the musical aspect of poetry. There it was seen that the poet plays not only upon the significance of things but also upon the experience of his audience. Thus the truths learned from the understanding of the temporal aspect of Providence are essential to understanding poetry, while poetry in turn inspires right action in time. More important than this, however, is the poet's art itself. If the poet is not God and if his stories are fictitious, yet something in the art of his arrangement may partake of the truth by leading to it. This function of his art is rendered by the term conjunctura:

. . . the pictura results from a conjunctura.
 . . . The cortex of the poem is false, but beneath the surface lies a nucleus of truth. The falsity of the exterior is due to the fact that the poet is not an historian. He uses diverse materials from various places. . . . but the sequence in which he places them is his own. This new sequence is the conjunctura, which should be made, as Isidore says, with a certain perfection or attractiveness. When the conjunctura has been made cum decore aliquo, an attractive pictura results. The conjunctura is thus the construction of the cortex of the poem, and it was conventionally made so that a nucleus of truth lay beneath it. (p. 684)

The poet cannot create truth, but he can create a work which leads to it, or rather, invokes its presence; and while he cannot manufacture beauty he can make a beautiful arrangement. His poem should be beautiful because the truth is beautiful, but in the final analysis his poem will be beautiful because it embodies the truth. By analogy, the poet cannot inspire another man with the truth, but he can impress him with the need to seek this inspiration. In this respect the arts of the Quadrivium should not be enough to decipher his poem: reading a spiritual meaning is not the same as having the Spirit move within one. The arts of the Trivium, specifically the poetic art, thus come into play and they have a particular potential all their own. By these there is added to the clear allegory of things an obscurity in their configuration, the resolution of which requires the aid of a special wisdom.

Resorting to the terminology of the Didascalicon, Robertson says that obscurity was achieved in secular poetry in imitation of the manner in which it was found present in Scripture. That is, the existence of a sententia being understood, the sense was left out that the former might be sought with difficulty and found with greater pleasure. Or, the sense itself might be "absurd" in the exegetical sense, that is, contradictory to charity or divine wisdom. Robertson even asserts "that it was not considered impossible to obtain a message consistent with charity from a cortex having to do with adultery" (p. 691). In his strict application of this principle to many so-called profane poems, Robertson puts himself in conflict with many other critics. However, the discussion in this chapter has sufficiently indicated that outside the range of grace or charity--which extends itself to truth in whatever form--the esthetic and critical assumptions of the Christian Middle Ages effectively disappear. The same is true for the poet's mandate: "Whatever 'poetic license' a poet may have had in the Middle Ages, the fact of his being a poet did not give him any license for heresy" (p. 687).

It is one thing to determine the theory behind the performance of Christian art in the Middle Ages and another

to confirm its actual operation in individual works, especially as they move away from the Church and out into the world. As regards Church art proper, the vigorous spiritual and intellectual framework within which it was achieved is now, due to the work of Iconographers,¹⁹ an accepted fact. This is even more true of the liturgy, which, as Titus Burckhardt has demonstrated, is the exemplar of all Christian art. Still, this is remote from the romances, and plausibility demands a more popular example of Christian art constructed upon the aforesaid principles. Such an example is provided by the mystery plays.

These plays, as both O. B. Hardison, Jr. and V. A. Kolve demonstrate, emerged from the liturgy itself, which relates to them, according to Hardison, as their entelechy or archetype. They are one of the "noblest monuments," he says, "of what the early Middle Ages considered its most imperative challenge: the need to achieve outward and visible expression of the forms of union between the human and the divine."²⁰ Both he and Kolve are concerned with the manner in which these plays absorb the temporal situation of their audience into the ritually schematized vision of eternity, as it reflects God's plan of redemption for man. Hardison, who deals with the plays in gen-

eral, relates them to the liturgical drama of the Lenten season, and especially to its culmination in the Easter weekend. Kolve confines himself to the English Corpus Christi cycles, and, more to the point for our purposes, is concerned with the concept grace itself and the convergence in "grace" of three modes of time: the eternal, the contemporary, and the historical.

What emerges from Kolve's discussion is a notion completely at variance with the present concept of time as a record of horizontal cause, effect, and development. This view would be to medieval men the nadir of literalism, and they might regard it as one of the essential types of man's temptation, in which he is diverted from the everlasting truth by the distractions of this world. Instead they placed man and the present moment wherein he resides on the vertical axis of eternity. Time for them was spatial and hierarchical, and real movement the ascent or descent of man between the temporal and the eternal, between nature and grace. Kolve summarizes the effects of this vision on the Corpus Christi cycle:

". . . plays called Corpus Christi imitated all time, in chronological sequence and as metaphysical structure, achieving . . . a formal completeness almost sacramental

in its impact."²¹

He finds the art of these plays conditioned by two great considerations: to present in argument the truths of the Christian religion in a manner determined by tradition and usage; to make these truths applicable (i.e. via the integument) to a contemporary society. It is thus not a lack of imagination, but a greater purpose, which caused their authors to give historical and Scriptural events an everyday and local treatment:

The church and the Corpus Christi drama concentrated alike upon the significant past and the significant future; the drama's addresses toward present time were hortatory and didactic, designed to shape action, not record it. (p. 103)

This leads Kolve to a reconsideration of history. In contrast to the present moment, in which the opportunity for grace still resides, history is the record of events which have already been judged. As such it casts a mirror on the present, that reflects it and the future as well. The proper business of the historian, then, is to seek in history an outline of the will of God. Historical verity is determined by the meaning events yield, and Kolve emphasizes the term "significant time," which refers to the intervention of God in history, to define this discipline as seen by the Middle Ages. In recording these moments the historian is aided by the figural relationship

of events as they have been disposed by Providence:

Human time is the artifact of God; it is shaped by Him and expresses His truth through a multitude of correspondences, congruences, and paradoxes. In imitating human time the Corpus Christie drama imitates it as this sort of artifact, in seven ages answering to the seven ages of man and the seven days of the creation: at the same time it furnished a moral image of contemporary English society and instructed men in the instruments of man's salvation, his passage through time into eternity. (p. 122)

This description of God's arrangement of history recalls Robertson's discussion of medieval poetic technique, particularly the manner by which the "kernel" is concealed within the "shell." For the Corpus Christie plays to display this pattern is but another example of the medieval dictum that art should be imitatione naturam in sua operatione. They imitate the operation of time and nature as it really is, as the history of God's redemption in time of man and Creation.

At the same time the gist of the above passage recalls the discussion of the medieval concept of poetry as functioning uniquely in two domains, the pictorial and the musical. The architecture of eternity reflected in time, that is, the seven ages, which Kolve describes, is clearly of a pictorial and iconographic dimension, and leads from time into eternity. Meanwhile, the contemporizing of events which he discerns everywhere in the Cor-

pus Christi plays belongs to the corresponding musical dimension of poetry: eternity is translated into the beat of life by its relevance to its audience's experience. The art Kolve discerns in these plays contains nothing new: it adheres perfectly to medieval poetic theory:

In its portrayal of human goodness the Corpus Christi drama furnishes an object lesson in the art of making religion relevant; and both terms of that lesson, the art and the relevance, may be admired. (p. 253)

The relevance, of course, is part of the art, and these plays are ample proof of the capacity of an intellectual esthetic conceived in rigorous spiritual austerity to permit, time and again, the extension of religious truth in a suprarational mode to the lowest levels of understanding. Describing the intended range of the plays, Kolve writes:

The medieval dramatist would have reassured his audience . . . that every response to the Christian story, from the most simple to the most complex, is valid and useful. . . . The function of theological understanding is to interpret the Christian story, not to replace it by another thing. The attentive and the educated among the Corpus Christie audience did not understand differently from their fellows, but they understood more. (p. 266)

Again, the plays demonstrate the sagacity of the Church in achieving its objectives through the medium of art: they are a unique example of the expansion of sacred themes into

an almost entirely new art form to meet the needs of the Christian community.

The points made here have been brought forth, as mentioned, to suggest a similar development in the "Christianized romance."²² It may be argued that the mystery plays are conceived, so to speak, almost ex nihilo while the romance is an established mode of poetry by the thirteenth century. Yet this does not prevent such a finished genre from being radically altered from within, even in the case of already recorded stories.²³ To continue the above similitude, it might be said that such a process, the "redemption" of an art form, is in keeping with the Christian tradition which had to deal with an already "fallen" world. However, this argument is best pursued by showing how a romance, too, could achieve similar goals.

CHAPTER IV

A STUDY OF THE ROMANCE FLORIS AND BLANCHEFLOUR

In the Middle Ages a capacity for cognitive and critical perception was valued far more highly than the physical acts of performance or passive pleasure. Thus, in defining the medieval notion of the true perceptor of music, de Bruyne says: "Strictly speaking the theoretician of mathematical harmony is not the musician, not the musically illiterate man who spontaneously enjoys music, but the critic who possesses the ability to judge" (p. 110); and of its conception of the critic in general he says that the "true critic judges not on the basis of his own individual pleasures, but by the objective criterion of the rules" (p. 148). The artist, of course, had knowledge beyond that of the critic, but this must be understood in perspective, since "art," considered in its broadest sense as the ability to make, was possessed by every man with regard to the work he did. But the same man, as a consumer, was a critic of all things that he employed but did not make himself, and the basis of his judgment was whether a given product satisfied his needs, both corporal and spiritual. This point should be remembered, for it shows that the artist-critic relationship was reciprocal

as well as hierarchical.

In the hierarchy which he perceived, medieval man drew an analogy between the knowledge of the artist and that of God,¹ while the knowledge of the judge or spectator was considered as human (cf. de Bruyne, p. 148). The practicing artist most fully appreciated art because of his own technical experience with the rules, and, if he had it, because of his creative ability: there was a distinction made between the ability to conceive within, in imitable form, that which may then be produced without, and the practice of imitating already existing models, which was followed by lesser artists. The artistic ability, in both of its degrees, existed in the superior artist as "an awareness of an actual power" (de Bruyne, p. 148), but the act of creation was required for the artist to know that power. Only by directing his attention to the perfecting of his work would the power of his art and the truth of his vision be validated and made known to him. The critic, too, was dependent on the created work, but for a different reason. Lacking the ability to create (in the mode in question), he was able to appreciate the artist's creative vision, and the skill employed to express it, through his perception of the work. This perception was not considered passive, but was attained by an active pursuit of

all the dimensions of the artist's achievement whereby the critic realized the full scope of his vision. At the highest level of appreciation the critic would experience the visionary power itself, which conceived the work, but as something existing in the artist. Meanwhile, he would have come to appreciate the technical rules in a particular case, but his enjoyment of these, too, would be less than that of the artist, who had actually mastered them.

In using the rules as the basis for his judgment of art, the critic was to be guided by memory (e.g., having experience of what a house should be like, he could judge how successfully a craftsman had built one). This implies for every craft a tradition which safeguarded its forms and gave it uniformity of style, and one in which each new generation of artists was instructed. The standard of a master-work has to be defined before a master craftsman can be recognized, since by definition he is one who has produced a "master" piece. That this normal situation, which obtained in craft guilds throughout the Middle Ages, extended also to the craft of romance writing, is suggested by the uniformity of style which is to be observed among the romances, both generally and within certain schools, and by the formal continuity of

the romance genre. It is these common denominators of form and style which permit the standard of superior works to be set. Only by studying one of the finer English metrical romances does one gain a perspective with which to evaluate all of them.

However, it was not only formal and stylistic achievement that was to be remembered in considering romance. Above the craft tradition there was the Christian tradition. This demanded of all Christian art a uniform purpose of another sort, as the artist was responsible for placing his works in the service of Christian truth. Here his vision of things would not necessarily surpass that of certain of his spectators, which accounted for the subordination of the craft guilds to the clerical authorities. In matters of technique, however, the two traditions converged. As the last chapter made clear, the incorporation of a Christian meaning into a work of art was accomplished through the extension in it of certain traditional methods as inherent in the composition of such a work. Thus classical esthetic terminology was put in the service of Christian art by medieval thinkers, so that the critic not only studied art on the premise that it served Christian truth, but also approached the individual work with the "memory" of how other works of the same

kind had achieved this purpose. In the case of poetic fiction this meant that he had a right to expect beneath the integument of its surface narrative an argument concordant with the truth, and a perfectly conventional if at times innovative means by which the former led to the latter.

In this chapter an attempt will be made to criticize the Middle English romance Floris and Blancheflour from the perspective of a medieval Christian critic. Thus the work will be approached as a "specimen of [its author's] wisdom,"² both technical and Christian, to see with what skill it has been made a support for religious doctrine. It will be shown by a figurative reading of its pictura that the poem establishes a conflict which signifies the opposition of nature and law to grace or charity, and that in its resolution it depicts the redemption or transformation of a fallen order by grace. In addition, because the poem stems from a French romance of superior quality and, especially, of greater symbolic clarity, it is possible to estimate whether the English poet is a mere "musician" or imitator, or is an artist himself, aware to some degree of the way in which his model poem established its meaning. This will give rise to several selected references to the French source, to show what has been omitted in transla-

tion, but also to show what, occasionally, has been added. Finally, by way of resumé, one recurring concept or image from the poem, that of the "ginne," will be considered as providing a criterion of the entire romance, one in which doctrines of grace and esthetic theories converge.

II

The much translated Floris and Blancheflour was very popular in the Middle Ages. Its origins remain obscure, but Margaret Pelan and A. B. Taylor are both sympathetic to the possibility of an Eastern source, either Byzantine or Arab.³ It first appears in Western Europe in the twelfth century in company with an influx of much new exemplum material from diverse areas. The original French romance was composed about A. D. 1170, possibly by a cleric,⁴ and it is either from it, the so-called "aristocratic" version, or from a later French popularization, that all of its appearances in other European languages are derived. There are four surviving English copies, all stemming from an original translation of the "aristocratic" French poem written towards the middle of the thirteenth century in the East Midlands.⁵ This is the same area, it will be recalled, where Laurel Braswell detects what amounts to be almost a school of religiously motivated romance composition.⁶

Despite its "aristocratic" source, which it has contracted by almost two-thirds, the English romance is clearly a "popularization of the French original,"⁷ as Derek Pearsall notes. According to Taylor, it retains the narrative integrity of the French poem, yet reduces much of its pictorial expansiveness and greatly condenses the tender and sentimental element; in turn, like most English romances translated from a French source, it gains, he says, in liveliness and humour, qualities that would endear it to an English audience.⁸ In other words, the translator has redirected the musical dimension of the French romance to suit an English context, an accomplishment which is to his credit as a poet. Moreover, as A. C. Gibbs notes, the English poem is still "full of luxury and artifice" despite the sacrifice of much of the "detailed elaboration" of the original.⁹ If it lacks the cumulative symbolic power of the French poem and certain of its finer workings, the English romance still establishes its meaning in the same way; that is, it leads to the same truth and by the same means.

It has been the fate of Floris and Blancheflour to be made light of as a result of its own attractiveness. Thus, while it is frequently anthologized, it is almost inevitably introduced as an idyllic poem of entertainment value only. Donald B. Sands groups it among his romances

of "Chivalry and Sentiment"¹⁰ and Gibbs finds it to contain "the characteristic concerns and qualities of romance": i.e., emotion, sentiment, an exotic and romantic setting, and a sense of wonder; he also notes its lack of chivalric feats of arms and its complete emphasis on love as an overriding theme.¹¹ Among literary historians, William L. Renwick refers to it as "by general consent one of the most charming of the Middle English romances," and Ker has occasion to point out its artless "prettiness."¹² Unfortunately, such an attitude has all but eliminated any serious critical approach to the poem.¹³ Recalling what was said in the second chapter about the potential function of romance as a vehicle for conveying religious truth, it is already possible to say that the idyllic and exotic qualities of this poem could offer much in this regard. However, only an analysis of the argument of Floris and Blancheflour can determine whether it does function in this way.

In beginning a criticism of the English Floris and Blancheflour one is immediately confronted with the problem of textual deficiencies. Because of various accidents, every surviving version of the English romance is lacking a beginning, and none of them commences earlier than what corresponds to l.190 of the French poem. Based on his performance in the remainder of the romance, it may be fairly

assumed that the original English translator would have retained most if not all of the sequential development of the story here, although contracting its descriptive element sharply.

The French romance¹⁴ begins with an introduction of Floire and Blancheflor, two royal lovers of long ago who are ancestors, it is said, of Charlemagne. Their story is presented as the narrator, entering the richly adorned maidens' chambers of a certain castle, hears it related by one sister to another as an illustration of perfection in love. Thus it is told how Blancheflour's mother, the widow of a knight killed in the Holy Land, is captured by Saracens while performing the pilgrimage to Compostella with her father, an old knight, who dies in the attack. The leader of the "paynims," King Fenix, brings her back with him to his court, also in Spain, and makes her a servant to his Queen. Once there, however, her beauty and the warmth of her personality win her instant admiration and she becomes the close friend of the King's young wife. They discover themselves both to have been pregnant from the same day, and on Palm Sunday each gives birth. In honour of this festival the Christian girl is named Blancheflour and the "paynim" boy Floris. Both are baptised and, cared for together, their love for each other begins to form. It is

at this point, approximately, that the English poem begins:

Ne thurst men never in londe
 After fairer children fonde,
 The Christen woman fedde hem tho;
 Full well she lovid hem both two.
 (ll.1-4)¹⁵

Coincidentally, these lines conclude the first movement of the story, as it is immediately afterwards that difficulties begin to beset the children. It is perhaps asking too much of one line, but the pointed statement, "The Christen woman fedde hem tho," seems to indicate the development the English poem must have taken to this juncture. In this respect it appears that its author is quite cognizant not only of the dramatic situation created by his source material, but also of its spiritual implications.

The initial action of the romance reveals a pattern of crime and attempted redemption that will form a commentary on the succeeding story. A knight has been slain in an attempt to redeem Jerusalem, and his widow prevented from reaching Compostella, by the same forces which have killed her husband. In one sense they have each failed in their quest, but from a more subtle perspective it is the forces which seem to have defeated them that have really suffered. When Saracens are not used in medieval literature to symbolize pure evil, they generally signify the fallen order of man and nature that is opposed to or shut

out from grace. This is the situation in Floris and Blancheflour and it accounts for the unusually tolerant way in which the "paynims" are here described.¹⁶ In such a case the wrongs they inflict on the Christians, taken as the order of grace they oppose, can symbolize, inversely, the limitations of their own state. Thus the slaying of the Christian knight and the capture of his wife can figure, respectively, that which has been shut out and that which has been shut in by a fallen humanity: i.e., the spirit, or grace, in its supernatural and interior modes, or from another perspective, spirit and soul; in the latter case their roles are interchangeable. If this is accepted, then it is the reunion of the Christian parents which is the prerequisite for the overthrow of the states of law and nature, and for a happy ending to this romance. In the literal sense, however, they never are united, as attention shifts to the children Floris and Blancheflour. But when the knight and his wife are considered figuratively, in the aforementioned manner, then their reunion in Floris and Blancheflour is sufficient. In addition, this new pair of lovers breaks down somewhat the Christian-pagan dichotomy with which the poem began. Only Blancheflour is born of the Christian parents: Floris's parents are Saracens. As a positive symbol, he demonstrates the

existence of good within the "paynims" considered as a whole, and that they have the potential to receive God's grace.

Meanwhile, the striking effect of the Christian girl upon the pagan court, where her beauty and virtue win her admiration and respect, marks the beginning of the redemptive process in the poem. As Mehl's discussion of Emaré indicates, the beauty of a Christian girl in a pagan environment, and its effect, inevitably refers back to the religion itself, and in particular to the activity of grace.¹⁷ This theme of grace is furthered by the birth on Palm Sunday of the two children, a coincidence that is doubly portentous as this day prefigures both their coming trials and their future triumph. As their names indicate they are to be identified with the festival "Paques Floris,"¹⁸ which association links them with Christ Himself and the Easter drama. In this connection, however, one of the unfortunate symbolic limitations of the English poet must be mentioned.

In the French romance it is made quite clear that Floris is to be identified with the rose and Blanche-flour with the lily (cf. ll.568-73). This enables them to be connected throughout the narrative with the colours red and white respectively, which figure prominently in the

French poem's symbolism. In the English poem, however, the flowers are not mentioned, and Floris's connection with red is virtually omitted, only Blancheflour's whiteness being dwelt upon. This results in a loss of symbolic clarity. The union of rose and lily, or red and white, was a powerful symbol, as Robertson notes: "It is well known that a combination of lilies and roses was used to show martyrdom and purity, charity and innocence, or related ideas."¹⁹ Among the most important of these related ideas was that of the ideal relationship of Christ and Mary, which was a fundamental principle in the fabric of the medieval world. Thus they exhibit the perfect marriage of forma and materia, the goal of all the arts. Meanwhile, the English poet's failure to establish red as Floris's colour eliminates the most immediate basis for identifying him with certain important images in the story--e.g., the carbuncle and the red and white horse.

Still, a strongly positive sense is conveyed by the English poem at this point. Even without the symbolic direction given them by rose or lily, flowers serve to evoke the general concepts of grace, charity, or purity, when used positively. This notion is reinforced here because the names are given at baptism, by which the Christian is cleansed of original sin. While Floris's

parents do not intend him to be converted, his baptism, and indeed his birth, are symbolic of the spiritual foothold that the Christian mother has gained in the heathen society. This foothold is maintained and nurtured in the way suggested by the line, "The Christian woman fedde hem tho," which almost demands to be taken figuratively. Thus it refers not to who feeds them, but what they are fed, which is grace, of which Mary's milk was a traditional symbol.²¹ Indeed, Blancheflour herself is in one sense an extension of her mother and her blossoming love with Floris re-articulates, as it were, in another symbolic form, the real nature of her mother's feeding. What is suggested then is the sacrament of the Eucharist itself, by which man's sanctity is maintained following his baptism, and by which he grows in habitual grace as he progresses towards the second baptism of the spirit, his consummation in grace, which is figured by the altar.²³

However, the world begins now to threaten the happiness of the children, as the King decides that it is time for Floris to prepare for his future responsibilities. This, at first, portends nothing, and indeed, when Floris complains "Ne can I in no scole sing ne rede/Without Blancheflour" (ll.20-21) the King grants that "She shall lerne, for thy love" (l.24). But when five years have

elapsed and the strength of their love has become more apparent, the King is concerned, for he desires that his son "shuld wife after the lawe" (1.40). Going to his Queen, he says:

"Dame," he saide, "I tell thee my reed:
I will that Blanchefloure be do to deed.
When that maide is y-slawe
And brought of her lif-dawe,
As sone as Floris may it underyete,
Rathe he wille hur foryete.

(11.45-51)

While his concern is understandable, the measures he proposes to remedy the situation are drastic and but little prepared for. The Queen then replies with her own "reed":

"Sir" she saide, "we aught to fonde
That Florens lif with menske in londe,
And that he lese not his honour
For the maiden Blauncheflour.
Who so might reve that maide clene
That she were brought to deth bidene,
Hit were muche more honour
Than slee that maide Blancheflour."

(11.55-62)

She does not appeal to his mercy, but to his pride of family honour and his need to conform to justice, pointing out in Blancheflour's defence that she is a "maide clene." Grudgingly, the King grants her point, then asks her "rede us what to do" (1.64).

The Queen's plan is this: that Floris be sent away to stay with his aunt and uncle in Mountargis to receive, ostensibly, further education; but how he will be taught is

darkly hinted at by the tone in which the aunt, his intended educator, is described:

Blithe will my suster be,
That is lady of that contree;
And when she woot for whom
That we have sent him us froom,
She will do all hur might,
Both by day and by night,
To make hur love so undo
As it had never been so.

(ll.67-74)

Her name is not given here, but in the French poem it is dame Sebille, which taken negatively, can connote a sorceress of sorts, by reference to the pagan seeress. And, indeed, she is opposed to Blancheflour, who, while she has been educated with Floris, can also be thought of as educating him herself in charity. Meanwhile, the other half of the Queen's plan is that the Christian girl be retained at home by the feigned sickness of her mother.

To this council the King agrees, and Floris is sent away, although with the promise that Blancheflour will join him in a fortnight. He then travels to Mountargis in stately array. "As fell to a riche kinges soon" (l.100), and there he is received by his uncle, the Duke Orgas, and his aunt "with muche honoure." But, amidst all the official hospitality proffered him there, he can only think on Blancheflour, and when the fortnight passes without her arriving:

So muche sorrow he hath noome
 That he loveth mete ne drinke,
 Ne may noon in his body sinke.
 (11.128-30)

When word of this is brought to the King he is enraged and determines that Blancheflour be beheaded. Once more, however, the Queen intervenes with an alternative plan:

"For Goddes love, sir, mercy!
 At the next haven that here is,
 Ther been chapmen riche, y-wis,
 Marchaundes of Babyloin full riche,
 That woll hur bye bletheliche
 Than may ye for that lovely foode
 Have muche catell and goode;
 And so she may fro us be brought
 So that we slee hur nought."
 (11.144-52)

The main portion of her appeal is to the King's greed, but there is a subtler request as well. She asks him to show mercy in the name of God, which is a radical departure from her previous appeal to his sense of honour.

Similarly, the conflict itself, as it is emerging in the story, encourages a more subtle response from the critic. While it is valid on the literal level, the finality of the King's threatened punishment of Blancheflour promotes an equally absolute explanation of his opposition to her relationship with his son.²⁴ On the one hand, as both King and father, he is doubly sanctioned in his efforts to rule his son. But, as a Saracen, this consideration is

denied him since his son has been baptized and his loved one is a Christian. Likewise, while Blanche flour is affecting his son's sense of values, there is the stronger suggestion that she herself is replacing it with something more important in the words, "Wonder it was of her lore, / And of her love well the more" (11.27-28).

In this light the whole set of circumstances surrounding Floris's stay at Mountargis has the quality of a temptation episode. It is significant to note that the English poet has substituted the name Mountargis for Montoire, and changed the Duke Jorran into the Duke Orgas, one of the rare instances of any initiative on his part. A tentative interpretation of the names in the English romance is that Mountargis means "silver mountain," while Orgas refers to "orgueil," pride.²⁵ In substituting them the English poet may have been trying to outline more clearly the real nature of the dangers that abide with the aunt, whose arts never amount to more than worldliness itself. Thus it transpires that Floris is unable to learn without Blanche flour, and when she does not arrive at the appointed time he refuses to eat or drink. These actions, while they are suitable to any lover, can serve to indicate Floris's abstinence from the evils inherent in the situation at Mountargis, an abstinence which is dependent on his

love for Blancheflour. Moreover, the Queen soon after refers to her as that "lovely foode," which recalls the earlier stress upon the Christian mother's feeding the children, and which, taken figuratively, here confirms that the conflict is between the world of "catell and goode" and that of grace. Again, the description of Blancheflour as "lovely foode" is the English poet's own addition, and it is obvious that he has been attracted to the spiritual potential in the reciprocal metaphors of feeding and abstinence in his French source.

The conflict that has developed is not only between things material and spiritual; it is also between law and grace. Thus the King would have Floris "wife after the law," and he in turn is first withheld from killing Blancheflour by an appeal to his sense of legality, which he clearly maintains for appearances sake, and not for any sense of the intrinsic value of justice. When he opposes Blancheflour's marrying Floris he is like the letter that kills, or the state of the fallen man that instinctively seeks to destroy the spiritual reality that has come to supersede the letter.²⁶ At this point the plot of the story has begun to resemble that of a favourite theme of both pulpit and mystery play, the oppression of the innocents,²⁷ which is the opposition of the nature and law to

grace, with the Saracens serving as substitutes for a Herod or Pharoah.

At the same time the conflict is somewhat muted here as the "paynims" are so well treated in this story that one almost forgets they are not Christian. Such would not be the case in King Horn, for example. Although this blunts the sharpness of the Christian-pagan conflict, it does not interfere with the religious intention of the poem. By making the Saracens in Floris and Blancheflour into human figures the Christian artist has sacrificed pictorial clarity for musical efficacy, so that the stigma they bear may be relevant to his audience. While their figurative significance is still communicated, the point is made, if only dramatically, that the real denier of God's mercy is not the "paynim," but a part of every man. In turn, the nature of this denial is refined. The King does not stand for pure negation in the face of grace: as the head of a worldly kingdom he is representative of several positive values, including a certain level of order. That he is in conflict with grace shows it is not only bad values which must be ruled by good, but good by superior. Ojars Kratins, in commenting on the conflict in Amis and Amiloun, makes a remark that is very pertinent to the situation here: "In permitting such a conflict of

values to exist (i.e., between feudal and eternal law) and in even pointing to it, the English poem conforms to a model of thematic structure characteristic of the Saint's legend, where the two values which often conflict and which have to be properly subordinated are those of secular family ties and the love of God."²⁸ In the same way Floris and Blancheflour confronts a viable set of worldly values with an overriding spiritual consideration.

The Queen's plan is now followed through and Blancheflour is sold. In addition to the money with which she is purchased, there is also given in exchange for her a magnificent cup:

Twenty mark of reed golde,
 And a coupe good and riche
 In all the world was non it liche,
 Ther was never noon so well grave;
 He that it made was no knave,
 Ther was purtraid on, I weene,
 How Parise ledde away the Queene;
 And on the covercle above
 Purtraide was ther bother love;
 And in the pomel thereon
 Stood a charbuncle stoon;
 In the world was not so depe soler
 That it nolde light the botelere
 To fille both ale and wine;
 Of silver and golde both good and fine.
 Enneas the King, that nobel man,
 At Troy in bataile he it wan
 And brought it into Lumbardy,
 And gaf it his lemman, his amy.
 The coupe was stoole fro King Cesar;
 A theef out of his tresour-hous it bar;
 And sethe that ilke same theef

For Blaunchefloure he it yeef;
 For he wist to winne suche three,
 Might he hur bring to his contree.
 (ll.163-86)

The cup with its ultimate origins lost in the understated line, "He that it made was no knave," is, together with its history, one of the most important devices in the romance. Read as a Christian symbol, it immediately suggests the Eucharistic chalice, the bearer of grace. Furthermore, it is identifiable with Blanche flour because given in exchange for her; and, as it has endured a long captivity, so must she now. The problem that arises is to see how its history and its decoration contribute to a similar reading, a task that becomes difficult when the significance of Paris and Helen is first undertaken.

The medieval perspective on Troy was radically different from one provided today by the reading of Homer. In fact, Homer was but little known in the Middle Ages, which learned its Trojan history from the pseudo-historical narratives of Dares the Phrygian and Dictys the Cretan, the former being preferred by medieval people because of his pro-Trojan point of view. This last was in keeping with the predilection of various national groups at this time, including the English and French, to trace their genealogy back to Troy, in imitation of Virgil's making

Aeneas an ancestor of the Roman race.²⁹ Virgil's purpose was to enhance Rome's greatness and to give it a sense of its destiny as a nation favoured by the gods, and among Christian countries this motive changed but little. Indeed, it was fostered by the similarities between the scattered Trojan nation and the Jewish race. To give oneself a Trojan ancestry, then, was to affirm the guiding hand of Providence in the fortunes of one's nation and to see in one's tribe a kind of chosen people.³⁰ Such use could not be made of a symbolic Jewish heritage, for the Jews had acquired a negative significance with the coming of Christianity. In Christianity, however, there is a parallel with the wandering Trojans afforded by the grail myth, in which Christ having withdrawn to heaven, his presence is preserved by the Grail, which, according to legend, has been brought to England by Joseph of Arimathea. It is coincidental, perhaps, but the cup of this story is connected symbolically to both traditions.

The veneration of Troy in the Middle Ages is matched by a like veneration of Virgil himself, whom custom makes out to be a kind of white magician and a prophet of the coming Messiah, and whose works were scrutinized for the purpose of finding an allegorical reading consonant with Christian truth.³¹ Aeneas, for instance, was

made a figure of the soul, and his adventures were taken to mean the soul's search for and growth in wisdom. Nevertheless, even Virgil's admirers had trouble making him into a Christian. More often, as Nitchie remarks, he was taken as "an epitome of the Old Testament"³² whose vision of Rome's greatness fell short of its triumph under Christ, as his own wisdom fell short of grace. Aeneas, then, is more Moses than Christ and the cup, in his hands, more an arc of the Covenant than a vessel of the Eucharist, although in Floris and Blancheflour it shows no apparent growth in value. Still, in the poem, the cup's history is extended into the Christian context by reference to King Caesar, which might be either Julius or Augustus, but which in either case provides a link with Christianity. Each is symbolic of the temporal might of the Roman Empire that was providentially ordained, or so the Middle Ages considered it, to receive the Christian message throughout its reaches.³³ However, King Caesar has had the cup stolen from him, which can resemble the fall of the Empire itself, Caesar here being taken as synonymous with it. This interpretation, which, granted, may be strained, is nevertheless in accord with the device in the French poem's introduction, by which Floris and Blancheflour are made ancestors of Charlemagne. When this last figure is

considered as the pious king and restorer of the aforesaid Empire, who was worthy to figure in the Iconography of church architecture,³⁴ then this poem can be taken to reflect, by an extension of its symbolism, the real nature of his triumph, i.e., by grace.

Finally, the Aeneid itself was transformed into a romance in twelfth century France, as was the Troy story. The Roman d'Eneas, which Pelan suspects to be the basis for Floire et Blancheflor at this point,³⁵ substantially alters the character of Aeneas so that he becomes a chivalric knight. In particular his love affair with Lavinia is greatly expanded, and he becomes the symbol of the perfect lover, a point which would be sure to interest the author of the French Floire et Blancheflor. The problem that still remains is how Paris could function as a like symbol. The beginnings of an answer are found in the Roman d'Eneas in which the love of Aeneas for Lavinia is not contrasted to that of Paris for Helen, as between true and false, but praised for being its equivalent.³⁶ If Troy were accepted as a spiritual value in opposition to Greece, then Paris's abduction of Helen could be considered as legitimate, and not adulterous, a secular parallel to the "la belle captive" figure from exegetics, which de Lubac notes to be a popular and alternative figure to St. Augus-

tine's "spoiling the Egyptians": by this a girl symbolizes the spiritual riches held falsely by pagans, and which are deservedly expropriated by Christians.³⁷ Thus the two figures on the cup can be taken as allegorical figures of true faith in love, itself interpreted religiously, as Floris and Blanche-flour themselves were to become in Emaré.³⁸ In the French romance this is made more probable when Floris, faced with the seemingly impossible task of penetrating the Amiral's fortifications of Babylon, overcomes his despair by happening to gaze on these figures on the cup (cf. ll. 1508-20).

In addition to its somewhat enigmatic decorations and history, the cup is graced with that which is of immediate and powerful Christic significance: this is the carbuncle, a stone traditionally associated with Christ for its redness (Floris's colour), which signifies his martyrdom,³⁹ and, presumably, for its reputed ability to shine in the dark. It is this last quality which St. Augustine mentions in the De Doctrina (2.XVI.24) when he offers it as a symbol of that knowledge concerning the things of nature which may be profitably applied to Scripture. Of course, one of its most noteworthy appearances in secular medieval literature is in the Well of Life of the Roman de la Rose, where its sacred value is clearly inferred. Indeed, a cup

shares a certain identity with a well, and the Eucharistic cup is in turn comparable to the Well of Life. When it is said that the stone's radiance is such that "In the world was not so depe soler/That it nolde light the botelere/To fille both ale and wine," the statement can be taken as a description of the power of grace, especially as it functions in the Eucharist. This the "wine" suggests as well, although its symbolic effect here is diminished by the presence of "ale."

The discussion of the cup and its history has been, perhaps, lengthy, yet it is one of the two figurative set-pieces of the French original (the other being the description of the Amiral's garden) that has survived in anything resembling its former intricacy in the English poem; and here, as there, it is in these set-pieces that the major figurative and thematic strains of the story are found most concisely, if obscurely, expressed. The immediate significance of the cup, its story, and the events just described, is of something of spiritual worth (Blancheflour) being lost or perverted by its sale into unworthy hands. That the merchant who buys her is a "theef" contributes to this reading, and it is further confirmed by her sale to the Amiral of Babylon. Babylon, as in the De Civitate Dei, is perennially associated with the worldly city that stands

opposed to the celestial Jerusalem, a reading that is all the more obvious here by the anachronism of the name Babylon. Moreover, the king of Babylon, says St. Augustine in the De Doctrina, is the figure of the devil (3.XXXVII.55), which, while it overstates the evil of the Amiral from a dramatic standpoint, is still valid symbolically, and points to the nature of his error.

But the cup and its story also connect Blancheflour to a seemingly timeless drama, and to a cycle of rise and fall, which displays, albeit briefly, a concept of history centred in grace. The cup is associated with the survival of something and with the conferring of greatness on the right possessor, be it a man or a nation. Thus Aeneas, who won it in battle, was a worthy possessor, and through him Rome was favoured. But the "theef" clearly has not merited the cup, nor does he gain anything from it but a degraded bartering power. In this the cup is not so much a victim, for it remains constant in potential value (just as Blancheflour remains essentially inviolate), but its misuse reflects a decline in society from a former greatness. Taking the cup and Blancheflour as symbols of the spirit or grace, their fates, then, are as touchstones by which the world is judged: here they confirm the fallen status of the King and the Amiral both.

Blancheflour having been deposited in Babylon, the narrative returns to Spain where the second half of the Queen's plan is now unveiled. In order to prevent Floris pursuing Blancheflour, she has a mock grave constructed for the girl that he may think she is dead:

They lete make in a chirche
 A swithe faire grave wirche
 And lete lay theruppon
 A new faire painted ston
 With letters all aboute write
 With full muche worshippe,
 Whoso couth the letters rede,
 Thus they spoken and thus they saide:
 "Here lith swete Blauncheflour,
 That Floris lovid par amoure."
 (ll.209-18)

This short description is one of the main examples of how severely the English poem has condensed the figurative set-pieces of Floire et Blancheflor. There the description of the tomb (cf. ll.542-653) portrayed many supernatural devices including a tree blossoming perpetually in red and white flowers in counterpart to the Tree of Love later to be met with in the gardens of paradise. There is also a diminished emphasis here on the "new faire painted ston," although it still is identifiable with the carbuncle on the cup; but in the French poem there is a carbuncle explicitly situated on top of the tomb. In fact the English poet has changed the tomb into a grave, with the implication of something much smaller in size, and he has

placed it within a "chirche," which is his own image. In this situation it can suggest the altar itself (although the poet adds nothing at this point to indicate the connection be made), and its stone reminds one of the altar-stone on which the mass was to be performed, which was specially consecrated for this purpose. Nevertheless, the description here does convey the basic sense of the French original, which is that the tomb or grave is more a monument to love, like the cup, than it is a symbol of death. As such, the falseness in its function is neatly countered by the truth it manifests, much like the lying integument of a poem is redeemed by its veracious argument, although here the literal interpretation really is death.

Soon Floris returns and hastens to see Blanche-flour. Meeting her mother, he asks after her, and she, when pressed, tells him, as she has been instructed to, that Blanche-flour is dead. But when Floris swoons she cries out "To Jesu Christ and Saint Marye" (l.248), which brings the King and Queen running: he, notably, is "all in care." When Floris awakes he asks to be brought to Blanche-flour's grave where he now swoons three more times. Then he addresses a complaint to death that would take one of them and not the other. There is a beauty to his actions here, but there is something wrong as well. His complaint

to death amounts to a doubting of Providence, and his perversity is substantiated when he tries to kill himself, only to be stopped by his mother, who delivers at this point in the French poem a Christian diatribe on the infernal rewards of self-slaughter.

In one sense the tomb is a hoax, but in another it reflects something that is amiss in both the King and Floris. The King, by his narrow adherence to the "lawe," has shown himself to be the enemy of grace and charity, and the tomb he has constructed to contain Blancheflour is the symbol of his error, as its literal emptiness figures the emptiness in his position. In addition, the grave's truth, which is contained in its epitaph to the love of Floris and Blancheflour, illustrates that the tomb or death never can contain Blancheflour: her union with Floris persists beyond the grave. From one perspective Floris's desire to kill himself attests to the same truth, that death cannot separate them, and this accounts for the beauty in his action. But he errs in thinking she is dead and that the grave can contain her. What is on the literal level an honest mistake is figuratively an extension of the same sin as his father's, a sin which Floris must surmount in order to rejoin Blancheflour. He has taken a sign for a thing and the limitation of his love has been

announced to him by the grave. In this light the events of Blancheflour's capture and the building of her grave reveal themselves to be a form of mercy. For now when the Queen tells her husband of Floris's attempted suicide, which the grave has provoked, and pleads, "For Goddes love, sir, mercy!" (1.300), his intransigence is overcome by pity for his son. Then the Queen informs Floris of what really happened:

"Floris, soon, glad make thee;
Thy lef' thou shalt on live see.
Floris, son, through enginne
Of thy faders reed and mine,
This grave let we make,
Leve sone, for thy sake,
Yif thou that maide forgete woldest,
After oure reed wif thou sholdest."
(11.311-18)

The "roughstone" (1.323) is removed and the grave is found empty. (The use of "roughstone," incidentally, which is simply "pierre" (1.880) in the French source, contradicts "the new faire painted stone" of an earlier reference, and gives rise to a charge of inconsistency against the English poet. He has, of course, changed the tomb to a grave and he has tried to retain the suggestion of the carbuncle on top of the French poem's tomb in his description of the stone which covers the mouth, i.e., the top of his grave. Now, however, he wants the image of the stone and even embellishes it, and the answer, I think, is that he per-

ceives the reference to Christ's tomb, and wants to maintain it in the story. Why he did not leave the grave a tomb is a valid question, but as his later treatment of this image will confirm, he has his own plans for its use in the romance.) Floris, then, vows to pursue Blancheflour "to the worldes ende" if need be, and when his father bids him stay, he replies: "Sir I will let for no winne;/Me to bidden it were grete sinne" (ll.333-34). The King is moved to agree and now he prays for Floris's success: "Jesu thee of care unbinde" (l.338).

With the King's change of heart his conversion to Christianity has also very quietly taken place, as the last line indicates.⁴⁰ Floris, in turn, has been led to perceive that Blancheflour is alive, and, presumably, the folly of his despair. That he recognizes their separation to reflect something wrong in himself is confirmed by "Me to bidden it were grete sinne." For him not to go would leave Blancheflour effectively dead, just as he would remain beyond the pale of charity, as symbolized by their love. The boundary of their separation is also alluded to, perhaps, by the "Worldes ende," for it is there, of course, that heaven begins. Meanwhile, the recent activities of the mother have rendered her an almost totally ambiguous force in the poem. On the one hand she sends Floris to his aunt

to end his love for Blancheflour; yet pleas for mercy come readily to her lips, and in retrospect it is impossible to determine whether she has been deceiving her son, or gradually preparing the way for her husband's transformation. She it is who has commissioned the tomb, and now when she refers to it as built by "enginne" (a word that derives literally from the French romance), she prepares for its later assimilation in the expanding significance of this story as it becomes, figuratively, a device for promoting the activity of grace. In this sense the word might describe her as well.

Floris's departure is now prepared for, and at his own command he is decked out in the guise of a merchant, thus assuming the identity of the same "theef" who took Blancheflour away. In the description of his readying, however, the far nobler reality of his person and his purposes is thinly disguised, if at all, which recalls the inability of the tomb to conceal that Blancheflour is still alive:

His fader was an hinde king;
 The coupe of golde he dide him bring,
 That ilke selfe coupe of golde
 that was Blauncheflour for yolde.
 "Have this, soon," saide the King,
 "Herewith thou may that swete thing
 Winne, so may betide-
 Blauncheflour, with the white side,
 Blauncheflour, that faire may."

The King let sadel a palfray,
 The one half so white so milke
 And that other reed so silke.
 I ne can telle nought
 How richely that sadel was wrought,
 The arson was of golde fin;
 Stones of vertu stode therine,
 Bigon aboute with orfreis.
 (ll.355-71)

The most important echo in this passage is that between the white maiden and the half-white palfrey. The horse is also red, the only place in this version where red is mentioned other than in the carbuncle itself. Unfortunately, because he has not prepared for it, the English poet makes it difficult for the horse to symbolize the union of Floris and Blancheflour, although he clearly intends that Floris be seen to be transported by the love of Blancheflour. As such, the horse is potentially symbolic of the vehicle of grace, although when Mary's grace was pictured as transporting it was usually in the form of a chariot or ship.⁴¹ But, had the value of red and white been maintained, it would have suggested the horse as the Cross itself, and that Floris's action is also a redemptive activity. As Rosemary Woolf notes, the figure of Christ the lover-knight, a popular image in all the preaching books of this time, included the conception that His horse is the Cross.⁴² This perspective, in which Floris is not redeemed, but is himself a figure for the Redeemer,

is equally valid within the poem, and must be appreciated if the romance is to be fully understood.

The other prominent image here is that of the "Stones of vertu." Mehl, commenting on jewels which have a similar appearance in Emeré, says they illustrate the virtues of that lady, and that such stones generally con- note chastity and an unwavering faith in God:⁴³ i.e., they are both radiant and immutable. It is just these virtues that Floris will need in order to regain Blanche- flour. Stones also are traditionally associated with the virtues of Mary,⁴⁴ and Blanche flour, taken as a figure for Mary, can be thought of as gracing her lover with her own qualities that he might be worthy to reach her. Finally, the stones are of the same category of imagery as the carbuncle, which reinforces their spiritual significance in the romance.

Floris having been outfitted, the Queen removes a ring from her hand and gives it to him:

"Have now this ilke ring;
While is it thine, dought no thing
Of fire brenning ne water in the see;
Ne iren ne steele shall dere thee."
(11.375-78)

The ring in its strength is a passive equivalent to the radiant power of the carbuncle, and thus its complement. Its domination of the elements is even more apparently a

supernatural power, which reflects its meaning when given in a religious ceremony; there, it invariably symbolizes the mystical bond of its recipient with God.⁴⁵ Now Floris departs and his parents "make him noon other chere/Than her soon were laid in bere" (ll.381-382). In the French poem the parents weep as if his departure were his death (cf. l.1029), but the English poet nicely alters this to suggest that, figuratively, Floris is entering the tomb of Blancheflour, and that what he has to defeat is death itself, which separates them.

His first day's journey brings him to an inn where there occurs what will become a familiar pattern in the poem:

So have they her havin nome
 That they been to the havin come
 There Blanchefloure was all right.
 Well richely they been dight;
 The lord of the inne was welle hende;
 The childe he sette next the ende
 In all the fairest seete,
 Alle they dronken and all they yete.
 Ete ne drinke might he nought;
 On Blanchefloure was all his thought.
(ll.385-94)

The rich reception recalls that given him by his uncle, and also the "much honoure" (l.200) with which Blancheflour has been received by the Amiral, so that by now its significance as a temptation is apparent. As before, he refuses nourishment to think on Blancheflour, whereupon

his "morning" catches the eye of the innkeeper's wife who tells her husband: "He is no marchaund, as me thinketh" (1.402). It is important to note here that it is Floris's thinking on Blanchefflour which proves him to be more than a merchant. It also establishes the connection between them as the innkeeper's wife, prompted by the resemblance in their demeanors, tells him of a certain Blanchefflour, who had earlier sojourned there, and who displayed a similar mourning attitude while on her way to Babylon to be sold. Thus he receives the information he needs unsolicited, or so it seems. There is the strong suggestion that it is divine grace that has really come to his aid, in which case his prior thinking on Blanchefflour can be interpreted as a prayer, which both calls this grace forth and proves him worthy of it.

Upon hearing this news Floris's "hert began to light" (1.415) and he repays the woman for her kindness with gold and with a wine-cup. These recall the items with which Blanchefflour was purchased and show that, symbolically, Floris is returning grace for grace. The next day he sets out for Babylon across the sea:

At morn, when it was day light,
 He dide him into the wilde floode,
 Winde and weder with him stooode;
 Sone so Floris come to londe,
 There he thanked Goddes sonde-
 (11.426-30)

His submission to the demands of his love for Blancheflour has brought him into a submission to Providence, which he had formerly lacked, and this again indicates the greater realization he now has of her true worth. Moreover, his triumph over the "wilde floode" is precisely one of the powers conferred upon him by the ring, and the true source of its power is now seen to be "Goddess sonde."

Having arrived, Floris thinks he is in "paradise," although it is clear his problems are not yet over. Then he hears of a great feast to be held by the Amiral and determines to go there in the hope of seeing Blancheflour. Coming "to that citie"--which contradicts, actually, his later need to have it depicted to him--he goes to another inn described here as "a palaise; was non it liche" (1.445). As events will prove, every major image in Spain has its counterpart in Babylon, only here it is invariably richer, a point which lends credence to Floris's conception that he is in paradise. The inn which is also a palace is the first instance of this, but it only anticipates the more intricate relationships that will be seen to obtain between the tower and gardens of Babylon and every image preceding them in the story.

At the inn a time-honoured process repeats itself as Floris ignores the fine welcome and supper given him to

think on Blancheflour. Seeing this, his host chides him:
 "Ow child, me thinketh welle/That mucche thou thinkest on
 my catelle" (11.461-66). To which Floris replies:

Nay, sir, on catel thenke I nought"
 (On Blancheflour was all his thought),
 "But I thinke on all wise
 For to finde my marchaundise;
 And yit it is the most wo,
 When I it find, I shall it forgo."
 (11.461-66)

The host's wisdom is not yet manifest, but the youth's veiled reply in his own metaphor evidently satisfies him, for now he mentions Blancheflour who had been there previously and ever mourned her lover Floris. This naturally arouses his guest, who rewards his host with a cup of silver and a fur-trimmed mantle of scarlet, and then asks for further information concerning the girl. The host then tells her story with the added information that the Amiral intends to make her his queen.

The next day Floris begs his host to advise him
 "Yif he might, with any ginne/That faire may to him winne"
 (11.497-98). The innkeeper himself has no plan to offer but he sends Floris to one who does:

"Childe," he saide, "to a brigge thou shalt come;
 The senpere finde at hoom,
 He woneth at the brigges ende;
 Curtais man he is and hende;
 We arn bretheren and trouthes plight;
 He can thee wish and rede aright.

Thou shalt bere him a ringe
 Fro myself, to tokeninge,
 That he help thee in boure and halle
 As it were my self befalle."
 (11.499-508)

With this speech the innkeeper drops his worldly guise, and reveals himself to be yet another station in what has begun to appear as a spiritual "underground" designed to transport worthy individuals to their destination, a conception that is reinforced by the symbolism of the ring. At the same time this way itself is kept open by brotherhood and charity: the bridgekeeper will help Floris, says the innkeeper, "as it were my self befalle." If Floris's request for some "ginne" has not been answered, there is, nevertheless, every evidence of a "ginne" already at work for his benefit.

Floris now proceeds to Dares (or Daris) the bridgekeeper, whose office denotes his pivotal function in the story, and whose name is perhaps deliberately modelled on the Latin verb dare, to give. He, too, feasts the youth, and when Floris abstains from nourishment he asks if all is not well with him. Floris replies that he is grateful for his treatment, but adds in the same cryptic manner used with the innkeeper that he is depressed because of certain irretrievable "marchandise." Dares not only comprehends his intent, he perceives a flaw in Floris's attitude:

"Childe woldest thou tell me thy grief;/ To hele thee, me were full lif" (ll.537-38). His choice of "hele" alerts the reader to see in his remark more than just a reference to the girl Blancheflour, but to see her spiritual significance as well, and that her separation from Floris is still matched by a corresponding fault in his own nature, in that he still despairs of regaining her.

Floris now tells his story to Dares, concluding with how he has come "To fonde, with quaintyse and with gin,/ Blancheflour for to winne" (ll.543-44). Surprisingly, at this Dares rebukes him:

"Now," saith Dares, "Thou art a folt"-
 And for a foole the childe he halt-
 "Now I woot how it gooth;
 Thou desirest thin own deeth.
 (ll.545-548)

There are several levels to Dares's response, and they are not all detrimental to Floris. Literally, the remark is prelude to Dares's description of the impregnability of the Amiral's fortifications which would prevent the "alder-richest king" (l.551) from entering. But Floris's ignorance of the situation should not earn him the title of "fool," and a more subtle interpretation of the bridge-keeper's remarks is required if their sense is to be understood. Thus the temporal absoluteness of the Amiral's defences can be taken to figure not only the futility, but

the sin, in seeking to approach Blanchefflower by physical means.⁴⁶ This relates to Floris's misconception of Blanchefflower, still not fully overcome, whereby he sees her physical nature instead of her spiritual reality. In exegetical terms this is the literalism which is cupidity and spiritual death, and Floris, in seeking this "death," albeit unwittingly, is a fool. Dares's intervention here is thus like the Queen's earlier when the youth was more obviously on the point of killing himself. But here, as there, there is a more positive interpretation to Floris's behavior, and to Dares's remarks as well. By this Dares can be seen to be announcing to Floris that he must die to regain Blanchefflower, and, at the same time, he is acknowledging his willingness to do so, and that he has passed an important test. But the death Dares has in mind is a death to sin, which is man's consummation in the spirit or grace. While Floris has some intimation of this already, there is still an element of despair present in his attitude, in his inability to foresee how Blanchefflower and he will be reunited. As the discussion of St. Augustine has indicated, ignorance regarding grace impairs the attitudes of faith and hope, and thus confounds for the individual his ability to receive grace or charity. Significantly, Dares will teach Floris a "ginne" of charity with which to gain access to Blanchefflower.

After describing the impenetrable exterior of Babylon, Dares turns to its interior and to a central tower that is also impregnable, although not by virtue of any troops that guard it: "Now is the mortar made so wele,/Ne may it breke iron ne stele" (ll.575-76). Like the well-made cup, the tower's perfection suggests a divine rather than a human artificer. Moreover, its "pomel" is fashioned so perfectly that no lantern is ever needed in the tower for "hit shined a-night so dothe the soone" (l.582). Its strength is described word for word like that of the ring given Floris by his mother, and its radiance matches the luminous power of the carbuncle on the cup given in exchange for Blancheflour. Not only do these images converge, however, but the tower and its stone recall the grave in which Blancheflour has been laid. Indeed, from this point on almost every major figure from the earlier part of the poem begins to find its fulfilment, so to speak, in the Amiral's gardens and the tower which encloses them.

Within the tower, says Dares, are "two and fourty nobel boure" (l.584), each occupied by a maiden, and he adds that within "that onn" (l.586) a man might never "Covete after more blisse" (l.588). Here, by the use of "onn," the English poet confirms in his own way the symbolic value of the inns encountered earlier as steps in Floris's progress

to this point. Together with the tower they can signify the stages and the consummation of his advance in habitual grace, in which they are instances of actual grace being given. It is the maidens, however, and Blanche flour in particular, who signify the grace itself. These maidens are guarded by sergeants, none of whom may serve "That bereth in his breche that ginne" (1.592). The eunuchs represent (negatively) one "ginne," mere procreative power, which will not succeed against the Amiral's methods. At the same time his precaution of having them guard the maidens of his tower is indicative of the value he places on his prospective brides. As he defends them only physically, so he intends only to enjoy them physically. His "ginne" of castration subtly refers to the fact, later to be more apparent, that he has been castrated spiritually in a manner he cannot conceive, and that he is more his own victim than an oppressor. Floris, meanwhile, has been pursuing some "ginne" whereby he might outwit the Amiral's defences and enter the garden. In return he has been receiving unawares a spiritual education, which from one perspective is the eradication of concupiscence from his nature through grace. But from another perspective it is grace itself that he is being transformed into, and it is against grace that the Amiral has no defence.

After a brief reference to the "proude" porter who guards the gate of this tower (or of the city: they are virtually identical from here on), Dares next describes the marriage practices of the Amiral, who has a custom, strange to those "com of Christendom" (1.600), of taking a new wife every year. Moreover, his marriage selections are governed by an unusual ritual that itself stems from the major properties of the garden situated in the centre of the Tower:

Then shall men bring doun of the toure
 All the maidens of grete honoure
 And bring hem into an orcharde,
 The fairest of all midlerde.
 Therein is mony fowles song;
 Men might leve therin full long.
 About the orchard is a walle;
 The foulest stone is cristall;
 And a well springeth therinne
 That is made with mucche ginne.
 The well is of mucche pris;
 The stremes com fo Paradise;
 The gravel of the ground is precious stoones
 And all of vertu for the noones.
 Now is the well of mucche aught.
 Yif a woman com that is forlaught
 And she be do to the streeme
 For to weshe her hondes clene,
 The water wille yelle as it were woode
 And bicom red as bloode.
 On what maide the water fareth so,
 Sone she shall to deth be do;
 Tho that been maidens clene,
 They may wesh therin, I wene;
 The water woll stonde faire and clere;
 To hem maketh it no daungere.
 At the walles hed stondeth a tree,
 The fairest that on erthe may be;
 It is cleped the Tree of Love;
 Floures and blossomes springen above.

Then they that maidons clene bene,
 They shall be brought under the trene,
 And which so falleth the floure
 Shall be queene with mucche honour.
 Yif any maiden ther is
 That the Amiral telleth of more pris,
 The flour shall be to her sent
 Through art of enchaument.
 The Amiral cheseth hem by the flour,
 And ever he herkeneth after Blaunche flour."
 (ll.603-42)

The description of this ritual and the garden in which it takes place constitutes what is both narratively and figuratively the heart of Floris and Blancheflour. Even the most literal response to the story's narrative would here appreciate the sense of something sacred, as conveyed by the potentially religious connotations of the garden and its imagery, being perverted through the Amiral's misuse of it to further his secular ends. On the figurative level this impression is confirmed, but something much more subtle is revealed as well, for the processes of the garden are seen to provide a unifying key with which the entire romance is to be understood.

The garden, of course, recalls immediately the paradise of Eden, and the state of innocence that therein reigned. Then, as a Garden enclosed, it particularly refers to the like image in the Canticle of Canticles, which was taken by the Christian exegetes to be a symbol of Mary in her inviolate purity, or of the Church or soul

in the same state. The tower itself, in fact, is an important figure, and as Yrjö Hirn notes: "chastity was allegorically represented under the image of a woman enclosed in a tower."⁴⁷ In addition, Hirn, who has devoted an entire study to the influence of the Madonna on sacred art, discusses among her standard images several that are found here. These are: jewels, which signify her virtues, and which are found here in the "precious stones"; flowers, which are the radiance of her beauty or grace; and water in general, although especially as it is found in a well or fountain, and which also signifies her grace.⁴⁸ Finally, the maidens themselves, at least those who prove chaste, are so in imitation of Mary, and are extensions of her person, and thus of her grace.

But there is another aspect of the garden which may be called masculine or Christic, and which is figured in its central image, the Tree of Love. The flowering cross was a prominent symbol of grace in the Middle Ages, which served to fuse the figurative identity of the Cross and the Tree of Life, as well as to display the grace that is the mystery behind Christ's martyrdom: in turn its fruit was taken as symbolic of the Eucharist, a significance which is readily fixed to the flowers on this tree.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the Cross within the garden is potentially sym-

bolic of Mary's role in bearing the incarnate Christ, one that is qualitatively identical to the Eucharistic cup holding the wine (or to the white bread soaking it up).⁵⁰ The same meaning is conveyed by a castle or a tower in which Christ or the Cross is enclosed. Indeed, the tabernacle in the Church in which the Cross was preserved often resembled, or was even termed a tower, and a like symbolism was applied to the Eucharistic cup and to Christ's tomb.⁵¹

The masculine and feminine dimensions of this garden are bound together in the ritual by which the maiden is eventually chosen by the Tree of Love, ostensibly to be married to the Amiral. But the well in which the maidens are washed and judged also connotes the idea of baptism in this context,⁵² and the consummation of this process in the judgment of the Tree figures the second baptism of the spirit, in which the Christian is united irrevocably to Christ. Of course, the marriage symbolism is also present, but it is too easily forgotten that marriage, itself, is a sacrament, constructed around the mystery of grace. Furthermore, marriage is a symbol of the union of Christ to His Church or to the individual soul. In this respect the maidens waiting to be judged recall the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, themselves symbols of the soul. The garden, then, taken as a whole, can be seen to portray in

that which it unites, and in the process it reveals, the very heart of the Christian mystery, be it considered as the sacraments, the Incarnation, the Redemption, or the Ascension, all of which hinge on the concept of grace.

But if this figurative reading is to be accepted certain negative connotations attaching themselves to the garden must also be accounted for. For example, the garden is in Babylon, the symbol of the worldly city. However, images of captivity have been present throughout the poem, and Blanche flour's capture helps clarify the real status of the garden in which and with which she is imprisoned. The medieval audience could be trusted to recall the image of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, and since the De Civitate Dei at least, it was a common preaching theme that the heavenly Jerusalem and its members were mysteriously present within the earthly city, Babylon. Also, as Owst notes, preaching in England at this time frequently fostered the notion that the devil and his accoutrements are the inverse of God, or that he is the perversion of what God has created good.⁵³ In an age that was so concerned about unclean hands administering the sacraments, the Amiral might even suggest to some the familiar image of the defiled priest.

There is also the matter of the well's sentencing

the maidens to death, which seems to contradict the reading given it here as a symbol of grace and baptism. According to this reading one would expect it to purify the maidens instead. However, it is the Amiral who has them killed; the well only indicates their guilt, and even then it can be seen as purifying the maidens, its violent reaction being interpreted as a sign of sin departing. The Amiral's harsh justice can thus symbolize the Old Law, because, while it takes guidance from the discernment provided by grace, it does not then seek out the grace that, under the New Law, would cleanse the sin, but instead punishes it.⁵⁴ Ultimately this error reverts upon the judge himself, in this case the Amiral, for the concupiscence condemned by the law is man's very nature when it is divorced from grace. It is this cupidity, which binds him to the Letter of Scripture, that prevents him both from forgiving others and reforming himself. This is the real death, the death of the spirit, of which physical death is only an image.

Finally, the situation whereby the Amiral possesses the garden and makes it serve by "enchaument" his own purposes needs explaining, as this would deny that Providence governs the fall of the flower, and thus would collapse the garden's vitality as a sacred realm. However, although the Amiral seems to have control of the garden, the story dis-

plays how the Tree makes its own choice without any interference from him and ultimately for his own benefit. It should have been remarked by now that the flowers of the Tree of Love relate most strongly within the poem to Floris and Blancheflour themselves, just as the Tree recalls the Palm of Palm Sunday. The redemption of Floris by Blancheflour may then be seen to have been merged with the processes of the Tree itself. The French poem makes clear this connection between the two lovers and the Tree of Love when it says that Love has planted a flowering tree in the young man's heart that will bear fruit only when the two are reunited (cf. ll.377-87). This greatly helps to confirm the spiritual nature of their love as well as the essentially interior aspect of Floris's journey. Without this the English poem still conveys the same sense, but with less emphasis. Likewise, it has communicated the impression that, despite the Amiral's restrictions, the flowers on the Tree will fall into the world as far as they need to, i.e., as far as they are needed; and this, while it was true for Floris, is even more true for the Amiral who appears to be devoid of all grace.

However, it is Blancheflour now who appears to be most in need of grace. She is awaiting the judgment of flowers, and is both removed from the Tree and imprisoned.

Thus, while she saves Floris, i.e., he is the soul and she is grace, there is the other perspective in which these roles are reversed and he is the flower that saves her. As the redemptive figure he is more easily taken as a type of Christ, whereby she is capable of becoming a symbol for the Church, which the garden can also signify. In this sense the Tree, accepted as a figure for Christ, may be said, in the final analysis, to choose its own bride. And, in the process, it is setting right, in the person of Floris, all the wrongs committed by the "paynims" since the beginning of the poem. This includes the crimes inflicted on Blanche flour's parents. The tower can figure both Jerusalem and Compostella, and the successful completion of Floris's quest will signify, in spirit, the father's entry into the former and the mother's arrival at the latter.

It should be noted that Floris, even as a redemption figure, retains his character as a passive and naive recipient of benefits right until the end. Now, after the above description, he swoons three times as he had done earlier before Blanche flour's mock grave. Then, weeping, he implores Dares for "som reed." The latter now describes the only way known to him by which Blanche flour may be won, and he begins by advising Floris on a disguise:

Wende to-morn to the toure
 As thou wer a good ginoure;
 Take on thy honde squier and scantlon
 As thou were a freemason.
 Behold the tour up and doun;
 The porter is cruel and feloun;
 Well sone he will come to thee
 And ask what manner man thou be
 And bere on thee felonie
 And say thou art com to be a spie.
 And thou shalt answeere swetliche,
 And say to him mildeliche-
 Say thou art a ginoure
 To beholde that faire toure,
 For to loke and for to fonde
 To make suche another in thy londe.
 (11.653-68)

This passage bears a remarkable potential for being discussed according to certain of the esthetic principles outlined in the last chapter. Although Floris is only impersonating a "ginoure," in this case a freemason, he is at least doing so in the right manner. For the tower is the embodiment of an ideal form, whose contents, moreover, are grace, and Floris's coming there as a craftsman is perfectly consonant with the orthodox processes of artistic inspiration in the Middle Ages. When the analogy of the esthetic or creative experience to the moral and mystical realms is remembered, then the deception in Floris's pose all but vanishes.⁵⁵

In addition, Dares has introduced the porter, a strange figure who now looms as the immediate barrier to be surmounted. The porter is not only "cruel" and "feloun" as

described here, he is also vain and arrogant, as an earlier couplet has confirmed: "He is wonder proude withalle/ Every day he goth in riche palle" (ll.597-98); and soon his extreme covetousness becomes apparent from the manner in which Floris deceives him. The porter thus concentrates in himself, in exaggerated form, all of those vices that have been evident in the King, and which will later become apparent in the Amiral.⁵⁶ The error in each of these men begins in an acquisitiveness and pride in corporal things that leads them to be hostile and envious of anyone that would threaten them; thus the King is jealous of his son and the Amiral of Blanche-flour. But the porter is also placed as the final obstacle between Floris and his love, and in the situation he suggests something in the youth himself that must finally be defeated. This is based on no resemblance in their characters, as Floris's vice is never more than a despairing attitude, but on the symbolism in the confrontation. This symbolism is supported by the fact that the porter is stationed to guard a door that shuts in what has already been shown to be of sacred value.

As Burckhardt notes, the door is one of the most powerful symbols of Church art, in which context it invariably connotes the entrance to the Christian mysteries as based on Christ's saying: "I am the door, by me if any man enter in,

he shall be saved. . . ." (John X.9).⁵⁷ Christ is also the mystery that is entered, in which case the door serves to convey the narrowness of the way by which he is approached. When a door is closed it acquires a feminine significance, that of chastity. But chastity, understood in the largest sense as purity of action, is co-extensive with the "straight way" that leads to Christ. Thus the masculine (Christic) and feminine dimensions in the symbolism of the closed door are complementary. Since the closed door has these significances in Christian Iconography, the closed door in the poem can take on the significance of something internal to Floris rather than external, and passage through it becomes symbolic of his triumph over concupiscence, taken as his fallen nature in general, and his rebirth in Christ through grace. In turn, that which obstructs his entry into grace must also be interpreted as something that is in reality internal to him. The porter may then be taken to signify, in modern parlance, the selfhood personified. From this vantage it is interesting to observe how his function neatly opposes that of Dares: the bridgekeeper, who is the sole person capable of helping Floris, teaches him how to defeat the gatekeeper, the primary object to be removed. In retrospect, it may be wondered what it is exactly that Dares's bridge conjoins, and the answer that will be offered here is earth and heaven.⁵⁸

When Dares outlines his plan for duping the porter, he predicts all the latter's responses as if this manoeuver were a time-honoured procedure. The porter, he says, will inevitably challenge Floris to gamble at chess, which challenge he is to accept. He then adds:

Yif thou winne ought of his,
 Thou tell thereof litel pris;
 And if he winne ought of thin,
 Loke thou leve it with him.
 So thou shalt, all with ginne,
 The porters love forsoth winne
 That he thee helpe on this day.
 But he thee helpe, no man may.
 (ll.675-82)

Chess is the closest this poem approaches to martial deeds, and, while it lacks in action, the method of Floris's victory here might provide interesting commentary on how certain other Christian knights win their battles in romance. The porter, who dwells in a world of fortune and competition, is to be confounded by the "ginne" of charity which Dares is teaching Floris. This process is to be performed not once, but on three successive days, with the stakes being increased on each occasion. In the third contest Floris is to keep the cup that was exchanged for Blancheflour beside him. This the porter will "yerne" after greatly, and he will offer to play for it in another game. Floris is to refuse the gamble and then "blithely yeve it him" (l.697), thus winning for himself the porter's complete gratitude and love, as well

as the "trouth of his honde" (1.704).

As Dares plans them, so do events go, and soon "The porter is Floris man becom" (1.707). He then tells the porter his story and requests he "rede" some plan that will permit him to enter the garden. At this the porter begins to reply in a curious manner:

. . . "I am betraide aright;
Through thy catel I am dismaide;

Therefore I am well evil apaide.
Now I woot how it gooth;
For thee shall I suffer deth!
I shall thee faile nevermo,
The while I may ride and go.
(11.720-26)

This response, with its mixed fidelity and despair, recalls Floris's own state of mind in his search for Blancheflour, and now serves to strengthen that dimension of the porter's symbolic function which makes him an extension of an aspect of Floris. In fact, the porter's fears will be justified temporarily by the concluding events of the poem, although they will ultimately prove to be unfounded.

The porter then sends Floris back to his inn for three days while he thinks of some "ginne." The plan he eventually devises calls for Floris to hide within a basket of flowers, which the porter will give to two of the maidens of the tower to carry in to Blancheflour. In this way the door will be successfully entered. The symbolism in the

events here is quite pronounced. In order to co-operate with this plan Floris must submit to the devices of a man whom he still has great reason to distrust. That he does submit shows his trust in Dares who has instructed him to follow the porter's counsel. In the larger sense, however, it shows his complete submission to Providence, whose spokesman is Dares. In this light his action here has been anticipated by his readiness earlier to enter the ship in which he crossed the "wilde floode." Only now the significance of his submission is absolute: it connotes his complete overthrow of self. This is confirmed by the fact that the "ginne" enables him to pass through a door, which, with its own Iconographic value and the sacred quality of the tower's contents, confers on his passage the significance of entry to a higher state, i.e., beatitude.

The plan is carried out successfully, except that once within the tower Floris is not taken to Blanchefflour's room, but is "mistakenly" deposited in the room of Claris, another of the tower's maidens. When Floris leaps out of the basket expecting to find Blanchefflour, he is sorely dismayed: "Into the lepe ayen stert he/ And helde him betraide clene" (ll.758-59). His fear of being "betraide" is, significantly, identical to the porter's fear earlier, and will soon prove equally groundless. This the reader dis-

covers while Floris lies hidden in the basket. Claris, meanwhile, has screamed at the sight of Floris, which has brought several of the maidens running. When they arrive she does not give him away, but excuses her cry as follows: "And or I it ever wist/ A botterflye cam against my brest!" (ll.771-72). This statement not only establishes the reader's confidence in Claris, it dissolves what apprehension had been aroused over Floris's plight into charm and amusement, an effect that is augmented by the youth's ignorance of what is going on. The charm in this situation will later turn out to be highly significant. At the same time, any doubts as to the figurative value of Floris's entry are also dispelled by Claris's remark. Floris's fear of betrayal must be referred back to his previous state on which it forms a parting commentary. In effect, he has surpassed the final barrier separating him from Blancheflour, both inwardly and outwardly. Claris, who soon exhibits herself as the examiner of Blancheflour's sincerity, takes no offence at his alarm. She has already judged him to be worthy of Blancheflour. In the English poem the figurative value of her judgment and of Floris's triumph is confirmed by the explanation that Claris maintained Floris's secrecy because she thought she saw "Blancheflour the white" (l.776). Literally, she demonstrates soon after that she knows who Floris is

from the start, having heard of him, presumably, from Blancheflour. But figuratively, her motivation affirms that Floris has been brought into complete identity with the goal of his quest, Blancheflour, herself interpreted as grace. This fulfills the motif begun earlier in Spain, when Floris, through his resemblance in demeanor to Blancheflour, procured at an inn the information he needed to find her. Now, however, it is not just information he will receive, but Blancheflour herself.

The above has served to convey the spiritual significances surrounding the events of Floris's entry to the tower. But there are several important symbolic elements in this episode still to be discussed. These, when understood, will again illustrate how closely the poem is connected with the central rituals, Iconography, and dogma of Christianity, and will further confirm the spiritual transformation that Floris has undergone. For example, the basket by its shape, and by its function here as a vehicle, is related to all of the major images previously encountered in the poem. As a container it recalls Blancheflour's tomb, the cup given in exchange for her, the ring, too, perhaps, and the tower enclosing the garden; as a vehicle it reminds one of the ship, and also of Floris's horse, whose symbolic as opposed to literal function has been made further apparent by its

complete disappearance from the poem following its description. In the light of what the basket accomplishes here, however, in transporting Floris into the tower, and also by its Iconographic relationship to the immediate setting in the narrative, it is most clearly comparable to the cup taken as a Eucharistic symbol. Here the flowers are tokens of grace in a manner analagous to the wine in the cup, and Floris's hiding among them can indicate his transformation by this grace. But since he, too, is in a sense a flower, as his name intends, he figures the grace that is coming to Blancheflour. It is only by virtue of the mysterious transformation wrought by grace, that the door is penetrated.

It also should be remembered that the Eucharistic sacrifice is performed at the altar, which is the symbolic equivalent of Christ's tomb,⁵⁹ and which in medieval churches often was a grave, housing the relics of some Saint. Indeed, the intimate relationship of the sacrament to the grave is further extended by the conception that the Eucharistic cup itself corresponds to the tomb of Christ.⁶⁰ Moreover, there is among the many analogies that pervade the sacred structure an identity between the symbolism of the door and of the table of the altar, for the latter is the door of the tomb and the way of entry into its grace. In turn, both of these "doors" derive their Iconographic value from the fig-

ure of the stone which was used to seal Christ's tomb, and which has already been evoked, or so it is maintained here, by the wording of "rough stone" used to describe Blanche-flour's grave earlier. Now a further reference to her grave is indirectly supplied when the maidens ask Claris "why she made such a bere" (l.765), referring to her cry at seeing Floris. "Bere," which connotes a mourner's lament, is explicable here by reference to its earlier appearance when Floris's parents were described as making at his departure "Noon other chere:/ Than her soon were laide in bere" (ll.381-82). Figuratively speaking, Floris is just now emerging from the tomb which he entered so long ago in search of Blanche-flour. In actuality he is entering within something, the tower, which has been established as symbolically analogous to the grave. Yet, when the tower's contents are accepted as sacred, it should be realized that it is everything external to them which is truly judged to be entombed, i.e., the world. Of course, Claris does not really lament Floris's arrival at all: her cry of surprise (or rejoicing!) merely sounds like a "bere" to the other maidens. But the English poet neatly uses the literal situation as a pretext for establishing his own symbolic connections. That he did intend some subtlety here is supported by the fact that what little tampering he does with his

source is mainly concerned with the image of the tomb and its sacramental potential.

From this vantage Claris's reply to the maidens can be seen to be richly suggestive. The butterfly is in Iconography a figure of the soul, and because of its transformation in its chrysalis, of rebirth in Christ.⁶¹ Meanwhile the breast, or heart, is still another symbol of the altar, which relates to the church structure as it, the heart, relates to the body;⁶² also, the heart is traditionally accepted as the seat of an understanding which surpasses the rational, and which is capable of, in fact by nature made for, the knowledge of the divine mysteries.⁶³ Meanwhile, this phrase is spoken by Claris, whose name signifies light, which relates her in this poem to one of its most manifest supernatural symbols, the carbuncle. By itself, however, light is a term under which God or His Grace was frequently conceptualized in the Middle Ages. Thus for St. Augustine, according to Gilson, God is in Himself "eternity," while in respect to men He is "both light and beatitude."⁶⁴ From this vantage, the placing of the basket containing Floris in Claris's room was no mistake. This reading entails seeing in Claris Blancheflour as she really is; that is, as supernatural light, the essential form of Blancheflour's own whiteness or purity. In this case theology and esthet-

ics converge; as light is the supernatural form of beatitude, which achieves outward expression in the individual possessing it, so it is also the source, and once again a supernatural one, for all formal beauty as conceived by the Middle Ages⁶⁵ (here, Blanchefflower, in that she is a flower, can be taken as the epitome of formal beauty). In retrospect, Floris's sense of betrayal upon seeing Claris can be defined as the false application of an earthly standard to a heavenly ideal. But the very fact that he does see her demonstrates that in reality he has overcome his "natural" self.

The poem has thus achieved the portrayal, in its pictura, of the mystery of the sacraments and of man's reception of sanctifying grace to the point of his departure into the world of supernatural grace--here an earlier remark, that Floris's "hert began to light" (l.415) upon hearing certain news of Blanchefflower, is rendered less innocuous, and indicates again that his progress has been a growth in habitual grace, at the reception of actual grace, to its consummation at this point in the narrative, when a complete death of the fallen self is achieved. Finally, it should be stressed again that the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Ascension are also conveyed, and are viable perspectives from which to consider this poem, for they are the types and assur-

ances of man's own transformation by grace.

With Floris's entry to the tower having been secured, there is a re-orientation in the poem, both narrative and figurative, as Claris leaves him in the basket and goes to test Blanche flour in a manner similar to that which he has met with all along. Thus she greets her as follows:

"Fellow, come and see a faire flour!
Such a flour thee shall well like,
Have thou it sene a lyte."
(11.780-82)

Blanche flour sees in these remarks a reference to the flower by which the Amiral will choose her to be his bride, for she protests at Claris's levity about an issue that can only cause her grief, and professes her faithfulness to Floris, "Ne shall noon other of me have blisse" (l.794). This convinces Claris of her sincerity:

Claris stood and beheld that rewth
And the trewnesse of hur trewth
And saide, "Lady Blaunche floure,
Go we see that ilke floure!"
(11.795-98)

Blanche flour is only proved openly the once, but it may be assumed that her temptation has lasted since the Amiral first received her with "muche honoure." She passes the trial but the fact that it occurs establishes that she, too, must be perfected, or rather, shown not to have lost her original perfection. This allows Floris to appear as a figure of Christ (a role into which he himself has had to grow) coming

to redeem His bride, who is the Church or Jerusalem, as Blanchefflower, by turning away from all the honours proffered her, thus proves herself worthy to be Floris's spouse.⁶⁶

Clariss, meanwhile, has emerged with a role in the narrative commensurate with the figurative reading that has already been made of her, based largely on her name and on the Iconographic significance of her first appearance in the story. In her dealings with Floris and Blanchefflower she is invested with an evident superiority, and this hierarchical status is reflected in her conversation. Like Dares and the second innkeeper she sees two worlds, the finite and the infinite, and allows her speech to tread the boundary between them. This is evident now when she unites the lovers, for, observing the girl's "blisse," she says to her:

"Fellow, knowist thou aught this flour?
She shall conne full muche of art
That thou woldest thereof geve part."
(11.810-12)

When Floris is understood as the flower from the Tree of Love, and when the reunion of the lovers is credited to Providence, then the concluding two lines of Clariss's remark take on the nature of an infinite understatement, so to speak, for no human art can subvert the will of God. (They are analogous in effect to the line "He that it made was no knave," used to refer to the maker of the cup, if its maker was indeed God.) No overt attempt to thwart God's plan has been apparent

in the poem, although the "enchaunement" with which the Amiral is claimed to regulate the fall of the Tree's flower approaches this significance at the literal level. But sympathetically Floris and Blancheflour have become synonymous with the good in this romance, and attempts to oppose them take on, even in the literal text, a demonic aspect. However, it is only at the poem's figurative level that one realizes this opposition is actively being encouraged by the Good, something which the literal Floris and Blancheflour would never do. It is in the very process of fostering the selfish wiles of the King and the Amiral that the realm of grace, through its own greater design, draws them into itself.

The lovers having been united, they turn to Claris and "Crien her mercy," to which she replies:

"Ne dought no more of me in alle
 Than it were myself bifalle.
 Wete ye well weturly,
 Heele I will youre drury.
 (ll.817-20)

"Than it were myself bifalle," which suggests so strongly the second of Christ's commandments, has its parallel in the last innkeeper's remark about his friendship with Dares, and it serves to confirm again the role of true charity at every stage of Floris's progress. It is this charity which will "Heele" Floris and Blancheflour, and Claris's use of this word further identifies her with Dares and with the "ginne"

of charity operating in the poem. Floris then demonstrates his merit of these benefits as he renders credit where credit is due:

. . . "Lorde, that madest man,
I it thonke Goddes Sone
That all my care I have overcome.
(ll.828-30)

This recalls his gratitude at successfully passing over the "wilde floode," but it is also the fulfillment of his father's prayer on his departure: "Jesu thee of care unbinde" (l.338). There remains, however, the transformation of the Amiral to be accomplished, who is the counterpart of Floris's father in Babylon, and who, unlike the father, is as yet unredeemed.

The Amiral's discovery of Floris and Blanchefflour together comes when in pursuance of his custom to bathe each morning with the assistance of two of his maidens, he summons Claris and Blanchefflour. On the day following Floris's arrival Blanchefflour sleeps through her duties, and Claris is obliged to excuse her saying that she stayed up all night reading in "hur book," which is almost certainly the Bible, and praying to God that He grant the Amiral His "benisone." Here again it is possible to transform the seeming deception in this remark by taking the children's lovemaking at its figurative value, i.e., as a spiritual union which manifests the activity of grace. It was apparent in the analysis of the events in Spain that the good-will engendered by Blanche-

flour's mother, and the ill-will brought out by the love of the children, were two sides of the same process, which was the effect of grace upon the fallen court of Floris's father as it was being transformed, the culmination of which process was figured by the King's assenting to the love of his son for Blanche flour. In Babylon the same activity will occur minus the direct participation of Floris's mother (instead the children will be seen both to win sympathy and to antagonize the Amiral); and it will culminate with the Amiral receiving God's "benisone" as he foregoes his claim on Blanche flour. Thus, the "lie" has a thoroughly utilitarian dimension, and one consonant with the poem's literal meaning as a love story, but which must be understood figuratively. In turn, this same figurative reading which renders Claris's statement as literally true, demonstrates it to be a direct manifestation, paradoxically veiled, of the argument of the story in the integument of the text. Finally, it should be noted that Claris's activities in delaying the inevitable moment when the Amiral will have to discover Floris and when his rage will be pushed to the limit, are parallel to those of Floris's mother (or, inversely so, if she is taken as siding with her husband) when she served to mollify the King's wrath sufficiently to spare Blanche flour's life. By this yoking of their identities, the final coincidence of

the major characters in Spain and Babylon is achieved.

The next day, when Blanche flour again does not appear, the Amiral sends after her his chamberlain, who finds the lovers in bed together. He then tells the Amiral, who races to the chamber and confirms "That oon was woman and that oother groom" (l.901). As was Floris's father, when he (from his chamberlain) learned his son not to be studying at Montargis, but mourning Blanche flour, the Amiral is enraged, and, it seems, even more justifiably. However, unless the patently Christian significance of this poem is to be denied, a more orthodox reading to this situation must be found, it being accepted as that type of poetic obscurity in which normal standards of morality and piety are contradicted for the sake of the inner meaning.

To begin with, the sympathies of the audience have been aligned completely with Floris and Blanche flour and against the Amiral; moreover, it could hardly be expected that a medieval audience would enjoy the portrayal of the two Christian lovers as the moral inferiors of a Saracen, and would not strive to give a more complementary reading to their actions. Indeed, the values of purity and chastity have been established in the poem already by the test of the well, but also, by specific reference to Blanche flour. Thus when the Queen first intercedes with her husband to

save Blancheflour's life she refers to the girl as a "maide clene," whose unmerited death would compromise the honour of both Floris and the King. And, while it is only family pride that stays the King at this point, this is not his final attitude. In his last speech, when he praises her as "Blancheflour, with the white side,/ Blancheflour, that faire may" he reveals an appreciation of her worth and her purity, which her whiteness symbolizes, that betokens the depth of his recent conversion to Christianity. Now, the way the two lovers are described as lying "Nebbe to nebbe, and mouth to mouth" (l.890) suggests no passion, but rather an innocent communion, and evokes the potentially sacred value of nudity when it implies the sinlessness of Eden.⁶⁸ (In the French poem the chamberlain who finds them thinks they are Claris and Blancheflour, [cf. ll.2,378-2,401], which confirms even more the purity of the lovers' relationship.) Furthermore, when Floris's identity with the flower of the Tree of Love is considered, along with the significance of his entering the door, then the lovers are, essentially, married at this point, and what the Amiral is faced with is not infidelity, but a mirror of purity, in which his own failings, as well as his impotence before grace, are reflected back at him.

The Amiral, having discovered the children, is ready to slay them, but holds back that he first might learn "What

they were" (1.905). The children then awake and cry him mercy, receiving it insofar as they are not killed immediately, but sent to prison. The Amiral then calls his barons "To wreke him after jugement" (1.919). This remark echoes the desire of Floris's father that he should "wife after the lawe," and revives the conflict of love and law established earlier. To the barons he pleads his case, telling them how he has treated Blancheflour with "muche honoure," only to find her in bed one day with "a naked man":

Than were they to me so looth
 I thought to have slain hem booth,
 I was so wroth and so woode;
 Yit I withdrough min hoot bloode,
 Till I have sende after you, by assent,
 To wreke me with jugement.

(11.934-39)

However, the phrase "muche honoure" has already been undermined by its unvarying use to describe the temptations which Floris and Blancheflour have met. In addition, the Amiral's description of his anger, "I was so wrothe and so woode," recalls the reaction of the "stremes of Paradise" when they judged unclene maidens: they "will yelle as it were woode." But the Amiral does not work in accord with the garden, he is its captor, just as he has now imprisoned Floris and Blancheflour. He has perverted its "ginne" of purification into a sentence of death and has subjected the providential fall of the flower to his desires. Yet, as mentioned, it is

he himself who is the victim, and his rage now reveals him to be receiving the bitter side of the fountain's justice. True justice, however harsh, should only be an expression of love, i.e., mercy. This is hardly the Amiral's attitude and it explains why it is he who is shut out from the garden's grace.

The Amiral, having asked assent to his vengeance, is stayed by a lesser king's reply that in the name of justice the children, too, must be heard: "Yif they will aught again us legge" (1.947). They are then sent for, and as they come they fall into a noble dispute over who should wear the life-preserving ring which Floris has received from his mother. While each struggles to give it to the other, the ring is dropped, and a king, trailing behind them, picks it up and brings it with him as well as the knowledge of its significance that he has overheard. Its real power, of course, is perfectly apparent: it is the love that would allow each to die for the other. Now, brought before the judges, they present a rueful sight:

There was noon so stern man
 That the children looked oon
 That they ne wolde, all well fawe,
 He jugement have withdrawe,
 And with grete catel hem bigge,
 Yif they durst speke or sigge;
 (11.984-89)

The court, symbol here of all earthly values, and upheld in

its power by position and formal justice, begins to melt at the sight of the children, who display in their plight and in the perfection of their love something which transcends it. This sympathy they generate is their grace and it is received now by everyone save the Amiral:

The Amiral was so woode
 Ne might he nought cele his hoot bloode.
 He bade the children fast be bound
 And in the fire slong.

(11.994-97)

Again it is emphasized that he is a creature of wrath, only now it is more apparent that this wrath is shutting out mercy, and that it is rendered more furious by the sight of the thing it denies.

The Amiral's stated intention to kill the children, which has preceded their opportunity to speak, is now countered by the king who brought them, as he relates the details of the incident with the ring. At this the Amiral begins to be moved, and the children, who have been sent away, are recalled that he might hear their story. But, instead of relating it, Floris steps forward to accept all the "gilt of oure dedes" (1.1,011). The Amiral says they both shall die and pulls out his sword to perform the sentence there. Then ensues another contest between the children as each strives to be the first to die. It is here, when the tragedy of the situation has been raised to a pitch through its immediacy

and through the manifest nobility of the lovers, that a king intervenes with an alternative suggestion that would mollify the Amiral and save the childrens' lives:

"Sir," he saide, "it is litel pris
These children for to slee, y wis;
And it is well more worship
Floris counsel that ye weete:
Who him taught that ilke ginne

Thy toure for to come inne
And who him brought thare,
And other that ye may be ware."
(11.1,028-35)

The kings are assuming the role of Floris's mother as mediators in the operation of mercy, but in stages, which, while they can reflect their own transformation, are more designed to reveal the delicacy with which the Amiral must be handled. Their first appeal was to the rules of justice, but now one of them, like the Queen earlier, has evoked his lord's sense of "worship," offering, at the same time, what is on the surface a practical and advantageous alternative to slaying the children. To this plan the Amiral agrees:

Than saide the Amiral, "As God me save,
Floris shall his life have
Yif he me telle who him taught therto."
(11.1,036-38)

The porter, of course, is the one "who him taught therto," and if Floris were to betray him now he would be returning ill for good. He would also be confirming the porter in his error, whereby he expected for his fidelity, betrayal

and death. Thus Floris replies, "That shall I never do" (1.1,039). In rejecting the literal terms of the Amiral's bargain he proves his honour and validates the porter's love for him.

But the meaning of his reply goes further than this in a way that considers the best needs of the Amiral himself. It refers to something deeper in the king's advice that the Amiral is unaware of, which sense must be understood by the reader as well if the sudden happy reversal at the end of the poem is to be fully appreciated. What the Amiral has asked for is a literal understanding of how Floris entered the garden. Upon receiving it he will then take literal means to see that it does not happen again, executing the porter, for instance. As a result he will continue in his sinful marriage customs, and, while Floris and Blancheflour will be spared, they will not, it seems, be reunited, as proven by Floris's later need to ask this boon. The life the Amiral promises them, then, is a barren reflection of his own literal mentality.

At the same time, the real secret of Floris's entry to the tower, as has been repeatedly pointed out, is a spiritual one. The Amiral's defences are already perfect literally, that is, against physical entry, but they are as powerless against the "ginnes" of charity and grace as the unre-

deemed Amiral is presently capable of understanding them. Moreover, the real sin that has been committed in this poem is not the breach in the Amiral's defences, but the breach made between the two lovers. This breach was instigated by the King out of jealousy, and maintained by the Amiral, albeit without specific knowledge of Floris, for the same motive. But it is the porter, who shuts Blancheflour in and Floris out, who incarnates this motive, which itself springs from cupidity, his own prime vice. Thus Floris's entry to the tower, which repairs the breach made between himself and Blancheflour, and which restores to the garden the integrity of its operations, was by necessity accompanied by his overthrowing and transforming the personification of the evil which had separated them.

Literally, it is he alone who accomplishes this, but figuratively, his arrival in the tower is a type for the entry of grace to the embattled soul. Everyone, then, who is redeemed in this romance, most notably the King and Amiral, is redeemed by virtue of this action, but to receive its grace they must consent to it, or at least to its result, the union of Floris and Blancheflour, who then stand as their own spirit and soul (more specifically, Floris is the soul of his father, and Blancheflour is the soul of the Amiral, whose garden she inhabits: each lover then functions as spirit with regard to

the other). This the King has already done. It is only the Amiral who has yet to benefit, because he has failed so far to understand the spiritual meaning and means of Floris's entry to the tower. He is still in the state of the porter who would help Floris, but who also holds himself "betraide." The real betrayer, of course, is the Amiral himself, just as he is really shut out from the garden. Should he kill the external porter it would be as effective as his castrating the guards: his garden would still be under the reign of tyranny and concupiscence. These things being understood, it will be seen that the King's remarks are not designed to provoke the Amiral to find out how Floris entered the tower, but to find out how he himself is unable to enter, for, knowing this truth, he will then be admitted to the tower's grace.

This dilemma is now recognized by the other nobles, who after Floris's refusal to reveal the porter's guilt, bid the Amiral "To foryeve that trespass/ Yif Floris told how it was" (11.1,042-43). Unstated is the reciprocal consideration in the Lord's prayer that man will be forgiven to the degree that he forgives others. The Amiral, by forgiving the porter freely, will release himself from his own bondage: this is the gift of grace which is charity to the man possessing it and beneficence to his fellow to whom he directs it; and it is toward this action of the Amiral's that the whole

poem has been tending. Floris now rehearses his story, moving all the court to laughter when he recounts how he was brought to Blancheflour (it says in the text "to Floris," but that is clearly a scribal error). The Amiral by this time is completely transformed, although his conversion to Christianity is left to be assumed rather than stated explicitly as it is in the French poem. He, then, has Floris dubbed a knight, and at his request brings him with Blancheflour to a "churche" where he "let wed hem with a ring" (1.0,065). Then, at Blancheflour's suggestion, Claris is brought from the tower and married to the Amiral as his queen: this, which is symbolic of his reception of grace, reveals again the true power of the Tree of Love which not only gives the maidens but renders their recipients worthy. There follows a great feast, in the middle of which news comes that Floris's parents have died. As the poem concludes he departs for home with Blancheflour to "fonge his faire kingdoom" (1.1,079). Indirectly, this completes the process alluded to by Floris's excuse to the porter, to whom he appeared in the guise of a "ginoure," that he had come to admire the tower in Babylon in order "To make such another in his londe" (1.665). Having perceived the ideal, and been transformed by it, he is returning as the architect of his own kingdom.

III

This reading has attempted to demonstrate the subtlety and consistency with which Floris and Blancheflour has been inspired by a religious purpose. It is not the only Middle English romance that offers such possibilities of interpretation, a point which may not be substantiated here, but which the discussion in chapter two of current romance criticism suggests; however, this poem has a certain kind of sophistication that is, perhaps, uniquely its own among the romances, but which, because it has been merged perfectly with the simplicity and the poise of the surface narrative, has generally gone unnoticed by the critics. This sophistication is most apparent in the degree to which the romance is conscious of its own identity, i.e., as a work of sacred art. In conclusion, then, this aspect of the poem will be considered, and, more particularly, its consideration will be based on the perspective now provided by the word "ginne," which has acquired such enormous significance in the course of the story.

In the discussion of the poem's argument, "ginne" was taken to mean, in its highest sense, the "ginne" of grace which was seen to be operating throughout the story, but which was specifically embodied in the operations of the Tree of Love, here accepted as a figure for Christ in His role of dispenser of grace (the Tree, of course, is not

actually called a "ginne" but the "stremes" of paradise are, and, moreover, the implication is clearly supplied that every device in the poem qualifies to be so named). From this perspective the rest of the tale was read as an articulation, still obscure in itself, of this process at the heart of its narrative to which it was proceeding. What was not brought out was that a delineation of the esthetic process, either creative or critical, was being appended to, and in fact merged with the developing Christian argument to provide an ideal vision of the creative process as seen by the Middle Ages.

At the opposite extreme of the Tree of Love is the "ginne" no longer born in the "breche" by the guards of the tower of maidens, a "ginne" which signifies pure unredeemed nature in opposition to grace. Yet it is this very nature which must be transformed by grace, not castrated as the Amiral would have it, and it is this process of redemption that is recorded by the story. This activity has its direct artistic equivalent as well, wherein it may be described, to quote the title of Coomaraswamy's book on sacred esthetics, as The Transformation of Nature in Art. As the last chapter made clear, the process of creating art is inseparable from the process of creating the artist; and as the introduction to this chapter pointed out, the creating artist

was considered by the Middle Ages to have a knowledge surpassing the human and analogous to God's. Thus it is that when Floris comes to the Tower of maidens as a "ginoure" with the stated intention of learning how it was built that he might then reproduce it in his own land, he is really telling the truth in another form. The fact that he is in disguise should not obscure the truth that all of Floris's roles, including that of lover, have an interlocking validity, and that they can all be seen to be fulfilled in the title of kingship which he assumes in the end. Thus Floris returns to Spain as the perfect artist, as well as the perfected Christian, well capable of constructing his kingdom.

Indeed, this same process is subtly introduced into the telling of the poem itself at the beginning of the French romance, which section, as mentioned, is missing from the English version. There the romance's teller, after introducing his theme, narrates it as he himself received it, when, having entered secretly into the beautiful chambers of the maidens of a certain castle, he overhears it being told by one sister to another as a tale of perfect love. This seemingly innocuous detail is rendered much less so when it is recalled that the centre of the tale itself is a chamber of maidens, which is the goal of Floris's quest. The poet's coming to this room is analogous to Floris approaching the

tower in the guise of a "ginoure," except that while Floris takes for himself the disguise of an artist, the poet seems bent on disguising the artist in himself, saying he copied the tale from someone else. This remark, however, may be taken in a very different sense by relating it to what was said at the start of this chapter on the proper sources of artistic inspiration as conceived by the medieval art theorists whereby they distinguished the canonical model from the inward realization of the ideal. In each case a copy is made of what is "seen" (as Floris intends to copy what he sees of the tower), but the second mode of inspiration is superior and involves a greater perfecting of the artist as a Christian. Read as a "figure of thought," the French poet's humble description of how he came to "copy" this tale can be taken to represent the superior form of artistic inspiration, a point that is confirmed if the maidens' chamber which he enters is allowed to share the same figurative significance as that entered by Floris within the tale itself.

Not only does the poem reflect backwards into its own creative processes, it anticipates also the proper critical reaction to itself. In one sense this simply means that the critic must try to realize the creative vision of the artist, that is, follow his steps as set forth in his art; but this point is here more understood than expressed.

There is, however, the fact that Floris tells his own story time and time again within the tale, and that in each instance his telling wins for himself a grace--i.e., information as to Blancheflour's whereabouts--or brings about a grace for others, figured ultimately in the conversion to mercy of the Amiral and his court. This last is most tangibly apparent in the general laughter that breaks out when Floris tells how he was brought into the tower of maidens (a development, incidentally, which marked the fulfillment of his own quest). Now, Floris's story, which grows as the tale develops (and which, in fact, changes, as Dares literally provides him with a happy ending) is essentially co-extensive with the romance itself on one hand, and with his own real nature on the other. Thus, his manner of telling it, and the way in which it and he are received is worthy of note, for what it illustrates above all is the triumph of simplicity, informed by truth.⁶⁹

Throughout the tale his progress is marked by his continually requesting some "ginne" from others to help him on his journey. Yet, while they always help him, and while Dares in fact does give him a "ginne," it is made apparent that his real progress is through merit, i.e., that it is provoked by his innocence and his stated love for Blancheflour, as revealed in his story. The mark of his perfection is his

ability to tell his tale, unconscious to any temptation to gild it, but remembering only Blanche flour whom he is seeking. It is this thinking on her which makes both himself and his tale sympathetic, and which proves that he is worthy to draw nearer to her: in fact, it is an analogy, albeit extreme, to the artist's dictum to place truth above form, so that, paradoxically, his form may be all the more beautiful. This story, then, which Floris has all along, is his real "ginne" and it is an extension of the "ginne" of grace operating throughout the poem. From this perspective, what Dares teaches Floris is only a variation on the same process he has been following unconsciously from the first.

In conclusion, it may be said that the ingenuousness of Floris's narrative, unconsciously achieved, reflects the simplicity, deliberately cultivated (although not as an affectation) by so many medieval authors, not only the romance writers. It is a stylistic device, moreover, which has its roots in the exemplum. As noted in the second chapter, the primary purpose of the exemplum was to affect the hearts of its audience in such a way as to make dwell in them the truths of their religion, and to move them to virtuous action. This is, notably, the final effect of Floris's completed tale upon the court. Despite all its trappings, Floris and Blanche flour has essentially not departed from the animating purpose of this basic form of Christian narrative.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹Cf. Henri de Lubac, Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'Écriture, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959), I, 16-17: "Or cet 'acte complet' qu'est l'ancienne exégèse chrétienne est une très grande chose. . . . Elle met en oeuvre une dialectique, souvent subtile, de l'avant et de l'après; elle définit les rapports de la réalité historique et de la réalité spirituelle, de la société et de l'individu, du temps et de l'éternité; elle contient, comme on dirait aujourd'hui, toute une théologie de l'histoire, en connexion avec une théologie de l'Écriture. . . . Elle organise toute la révélation autour d'un centre concret, marqué dans l'espace et dans le temps par le Croix de Jésus Christ. Elle est elle-même une dogmatique et une spiritualité complètes, et complètement unifiées. Elle s'est exprimée non seulement dans la littérature mais dans l'art avec une force et une profusion merveilleuses. . . . C'est 'la trame' de la littérature chrétienne et de l'art chrétien. C'est la forme principale qu'a longtemps revêtue la synthèse chrétienne. C'est au moins l'instrument qui lui a permis de se construire. . . ."

²All quotations from the De Doctrina Christiana are from the edition translated by D. W. Robertson, Jr., On Christian Doctrine (New York, 1958).

³Here it is significant to note the role of exegetics in determining the format of the liturgy, which is the Christian's petitioning of grace; cf. de Lubac, pp. 156-57, 401.

⁴Cf. de Lubac's section "La Belle Captive," pp. 290-304, for a well-documented discussion of this tradition in the Middle Ages.

⁵Cf. D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton, 1962), pp. 337-38. Robertson brings forth several other instances of St. Augustine's attitude to pagan fables, notably a defence of Aesop's fables against the charge that they are lies. It is clear that St. Augustine considers a moral utility to render legitimate the lying surface of a fable so long as its literal falseness is clearly admitted.

⁶Cf. Le P. C. Spicq, Esquisse d'une Histoire de l'Exégèse Latine au Moyen Âge (Paris, 1944), pp. 16, 17. Spicq elsewhere refers to St. Augustine as "le maître de l'exégèse médiéval," p. 11.

⁷Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1952), p. 86.

⁸All quotations from the Didascalicon: de Studio Legendi are from the edition translated by Jerome Taylor (New York, 1961).

⁹The concept of the seven liberal arts in the service of exegesis, which derives ultimately from Scotus Erigena, had become by Hugh's time almost a secular dogma, cf. Spicq, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰It will be noted here that Hugh makes no mention of the anagogical sense. However, both de Lubac, pp. 140, 166, and Spicq, p. 101, attest to the fact that he recognizes this level. In fact blessedness, which is the anagogic state of understanding, is the goal of his entire programme of learning.

¹¹Cf. Spicq, p. 82.

¹²Cf. de Lubac's discussion of "le double anagogie," pp. 621 ff., one mystical, one eschatological. It was not unusual for an exegete to be absorbed with only one of these as Hugh was with the mystical significance of anagogy.

Chapter II

¹Cf. page 19 of the preceding chapter. This is Hugh's terminology for describing legitimate art forms. They are legitimate because they "prepare the way for philosophy," which they are "tangential" to.

²Certain modern attempts to make sense of the entity "literature" according to its generic and archetypal structure come close to affirming the same thing. The prime example is Northrup Frye's Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957). Of course, Frye rejects any subordination of poetics to religion or metaphysics.

³Cf. Hugh's discussion of the principles of "mechanical philosophy," i.e., human art in the broadest sense of the term, pp. 17-18 of the preceding chapter.

⁴Paris, 1927, pp. 1-3. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

⁵"Homeliae in Evangelia," in the Patrologia Cursus Completus, ed. J. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1857-1866), LXXVI, col. 1300. It is quoted by Welter on page 15.

⁶J. A. Mosher, The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England (New York, 1911), p. 84.

⁷Spicq, op. cit. (chapter one, note 2), p. 86.

⁸Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (New York, 1961), p. 57.

⁹P. 3

¹⁰Op. cit. (chapter one, note 10), p. 370.

¹¹P. 168.

¹² John Mirc, Festial, ed. Thomas Erbe (London, 1905), p. 200.

¹³ Owst, p. 168.

¹⁴ Owst, p. 169.

¹⁵ The seeming dichotomy that has been posited between "romantic" and "realistic" or "satirical" exempla was not so in fact. As categories, these terms are useful for denoting content and theme; but even then the same story might both castigate worldly folly and celebrate grace. That wholesome and vigorous treatment which has been considered the essence of English realism characterizes the telling of all medieval exempla, satirical or sacramental. John Mirc's Festial is a case in point: while he invariably celebrates the marvellous it is always done with everyday matter-of-factness, as in the story concerning the Emperor Constantine's leprosy, so that the fabulous incidents of grace bestowed appear as the most natural of occurrences, providing they have been merited.

¹⁶ Epic and Romance (New York, 1957), p. 321.

¹⁷ p. 321.

¹⁸ In Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Keans (Oxford, 1957), p. 7.

¹⁹ Everett, p. 10.

²⁰ Medieval Romance in England (New York, 1924). Cf. the section "Romances of Trial and Faith."

²¹ "The Middle English Amis and Amiloun: Chivalric Romance or Secular Hagiography," PMLA, 81 (1966), 347-354; "The Significance of Sir Orfeo's Self Exile," RES, 18 (1967), 247-252; "Pride as Theme in Sir Launfal," N&Q (1967), 288-291; "Providential Concern in the Lay Le Freine," N&Q, 16 (1969), 85-86; "Sir Isumbras and the Legend of St. Eustace," MS, 27 (1965), 128-151.

²²P. 151.

²³(New York, 1969), p. 3. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

²⁴This is in accordance with St. Augustine's dictums on Scripture in the De Doctrina when he notes that the purposes of Scripture are fulfilled when the "perfect" man is created, who no longer needs Scripture as he no longer needs faith and hope, because he is in possession of perfect charity; however, he continues to use Scripture for the benefit of others as God uses His Creation (cf. l. XXXIX.43). Likewise, any Christian artist, imitating the Creation, i.e., "nature," should intend any "specimen of his wisdom" for the spiritually needy, and not for the "perfect," although the latter may enjoy his work in the highest Augustinian sense of this term (cf. p. 6 of this thesis).

²⁵Mosher, op. cit. (above, note 7), p. 20.

²⁶English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century (Oxford, 1960), p. 133.

²⁷Thus Ker comments on the "elusive touch of fantasy" with which Joinville has invested his Life of St. Louis (cf. p. 274). However, he ascribes the presence of this romantic quality only to the sentimental inclinations of Joinville.

Chapter III

¹Cf. Titus Burckhardt, Sienna, The City of the Virgin, trans. Margaret M. Brown (London, 1960). This book provides a case example of the point in question. It is devoted to showing how a still preserved medieval town, Sienna, was shaped in the Middle Ages, both in its form and in the life-style of its people, by its Cathedral and the liturgy, and above all, by the patronage of the Virgin Mary. The following passage is indicative of its argument: "The Church strove to spiritualize special qualities in each section of the community by favouring the formation of Orders of Knighthood and by incorporating guilds and companies into the liturgical life" (p. 33). The latter activity is comparable in method and in principle to the production of the Corpus Christi play. Of course, the most comprehensive statement of how a society was to be constituted around the worship of God was provided for the Middle Ages by St. Augustine's De Civitate Dei. Implicit in the conception of such a society is the premise that everything in it should promote to some degree the remembrance of God; or, stated otherwise, all things in this society should partake of the sacramental.

²J. Van der Meersch, "Grâce," in Le Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, ed. A. Vacant et al., 15 tomes (Paris, 1925), 6, deuxième partie, 1555, hereafter to be cited as "Grâce."

³Here it is useful to refer to the dialogue in the Greek Church that went toward defining the process by which man was restored to the divine likeness, because its arguments were extended to include a definition of the Icon and the means by which it was to be rendered truly faithful unto its divine subject, and, at the same time, sacramental with regard to its viewers. It thus illustrates the close bond that was accepted as existing between the theology of redemption and esthetic theory. This dialogue was conducted in the Western Church under the terms "nature" and "grace," but they were never officially transposed to the esthetic realm: cf. Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), p. 94. Titus Burckhardt, Sacred Art in East and West, trans. Lord Northbourne (London, 1967), has an excellent discussion of the genesis and justification of the Icon (p. 68).

Another point that might be made is that the problems

involved in this discussion were not confined to theology. A similar difficulty arises in Augustinian metaphysics when the explanation of how our mutable intelligences can possess in duration immutable truths is held by some to be insufficient: cf. Armand Maurer, Medieval Philosophy (New York, 1962), p. 11.

⁴Significantly, the New Testament, since it comprised the life and sayings of Christ, was not considered an external grace. In the same manner it had no literal or allegorical level for the exegetes (cf. de Lubac, pp. 308, 352-53, 410, who goes so far as to call the Old Testament a sacrament, of which the New Testament is its kernel or mystery). When read, its benign effects were not said to be due to an operant grace generated in the reader's soul; rather, it sanctified and made intelligible of its own accord, being one with the light with which, according to Scripture, every man was born, and which, according to dogma, was the recipient in man of sanctifying grace. Its external or literal level existed before it in the Old Testament and after it in the righteous deeds of the faithful. Its allegorical level was contained in the Church and her sacraments.

⁵Cf. "Grâce," p. 1678, for a discussion of this important point.

⁶The Church is visible grace, the allegorical level of Scripture existing in time (cf., above, note 4), and therefore beyond the category of art as it applied to human works. Otherwise stated, it was the only real art, and existed in relation to all other Christian forms as their archetype. Thus Hans Sedlmayr, speaking of the Romanesque style, says that it "knew but one fundamental problem, the Cathedral. Whatever lay outside this great composite work and had any pretension to be a work of art itself was a mere reflex from the sacramental sphere. Admittedly there is in the different territories--and beyond these in the different orders--a wealth of different forms of church, but they are all variations of the same pattern, and everywhere the fundamental character of the style is determined by the fact that the work which it informs is a single clearly circumscribed artistic unit," Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre, trans. Brian Battershaw (Chicago, 1958), p. 63.

⁷Op. cit. (above, note 3), pp. 59-60. Dr. Karl Franck, Fundamental Questions on Ecclesiastical Art, trans. Sister M. Marghretta Nuthe, O.S.B. (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1962), affirms the same principle: "The last source of inspiration for art as well as for symbolism in medieval times is found in the liturgy of the Church" (p. 35). In addition he says: "Art, arising outside of the Church, was only a part of or reflection of, Church art" (p. 11).

⁸Burckhardt, p. 59.

⁹Trans. Eileen B. Hennesy, abr. 1 vol. ed. (New York, 1969), p. 45. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

¹⁰Burckhardt, p. 68.

¹¹Similarly, Burckhardt describes the "absorption" of genius "by the collective style" in a religious climate, and also its subordination to traditional "prototypes" (p. 143). Franck says the same and notes that in the richly symbolic world of the Middle Ages: ". . . monk and laity, theologian and preacher, poet and artist, are one" (p. 35).

¹²Ananda Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), describes in a more detailed way the implications of this doctrine of creativity for religious civilizations (cf. pp. 61-109, for its applications in medieval Christianity).

¹³He is here quoting St. Bonaventure whom he refers to repeatedly at this point.

¹⁴It is interesting to note that Hugh's concept of the role of music, which is mentioned in his discussion of the Quadrivium (cf. the Didascalicon, 2.12) is replete with moral implications. Thus the soul's virtues and powers are described as forms of music, and its relationship to the body, in the process of governing it, is similarly described.

¹⁵An example of the medieval attitude toward the sciences

of the Quadrivium is provided by Hugh in book 2 of the Didascalicon. These sciences as a whole he calls mathematics and its "proper concern" he says is abstract quantity. Quantity itself he divides into the continuous and the discrete, which he terms magnitude and multitude. In turn, quantities in magnitude are either mobile or immobile, while quantities in multitude stand either "wholly in themselves" or in relationship to another quantity. Geometry considers immobile magnitude, while astronomy studies the mobile. Quantities that stand in themselves are investigated by arithmetic, and those that stand in relation to others are examined by music (cf. 2.6 ff.).

¹⁶ John of Salisbury sees poetry as a part of grammar in his Metalogicon (trans. Daniel D. McGarry, Berkeley, 1955). The liberal arts, he says, all derive from nature, "the mother of the arts" (book 1, chapter 11). This includes grammar, which, while it is a human institution, imitates nature in its operation. One example of how it does so is provided by poetry, a part of grammar: ". . . the rules of poetry clearly reflect the ways of nature, and require anyone who wishes to become a master in this art to follow nature as his guide" (1.17). Significantly, John's discussion of how poetry imitates nature is intimately bound to considerations of how it should most forcefully affect man's own nature, which recalls the musical aspect of poetry mentioned earlier. This is not to say that he downplays the pictura role of poetry, for he later accepts as "axiomatic" that "'Poetry is the cradle of Philosophy'" (1.22); but he is evidently concerned to define poetry only according to its substantial and affective elements so as to leave it within grammar: "Either poetry will remain a part of grammar, or it will be dropped from the roll of liberal studies" (1.17).

Bernard Silvestris, however, in his commentary on the Aeneid (see Ernst Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York, 1953, pp. 481-82), claims poetry to be one of four branches of science or philosophy (the others are theorica, practica, eloquentia) to which the study of the three liberal arts of the Trivium leads. There is a real difference between the two men as to the status of poetic knowledge; however, both affirm the essential compatibility of poetry and philosophy.

¹⁷ Preface to Chaucer, op. cit. (chapter 1, note 7), p. 52.

¹⁸ The ensuing argument is drawn entirely from one of

Robertson's articles, "Some Medieval Literary Terminology with Special Reference to Chrétien de Troyes," SP, 1(1948), 669-92. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

¹⁹The most notable example is Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image; Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century, trans. Dora Nussey (New York, 1958).

²⁰Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1965), p. 176.

²¹The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, 1966), p. 101. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

²²Cf. Robert Ackerman's Backgrounds to Middle English Literature (New York, 1966), p. xiii. This is the term he uses to describe the resulting synthesis of romance genre and Christian purpose in the Middle Ages.

²³Cf. Robertson's article on Chrétien de Troyes, op. cit. (above, note 18). Using examples provided by Chrétien, he demonstrates how old stories could be reworked so as to make their integuments lead to Christian truth.

Chapter IV

¹Augustine observes that the architect who builds a house therein displays his art; though it may fall to ruin the art within his soul neither ages nor decays." Coomaraswamy, op. cit. (chapter 3, note 12), p. 87. He is here quoting from Meister Eckhardt, translated by C. de B. Evans from Franz Pfeiffer's collected German edition of 1857, 2 vols. (London, 1924), 1, 129.

²Cf. Hugh's remarks on Sophocles' Oedipus on page 19 of this thesis. It could also be said here that in reading Floris and Blancheflour the Christian "wisdom" that informs it will be removed, to use St. Augustine's expression, "as kernels from the poem's husk, as nourishment for charity." Cf. p. 11 of this thesis.

³Cf. Floire et Blancheflor (Paris, 1956), p. xxlv; Floris and Blancheflour (Oxford, 1927), p. 12.

⁴Cf. Pelan, p. xv.

⁵The four texts are: Cambridge MS Gg. 4.27.2 and Cotton Vitellius D. iii both produced in the thirteenth century; a third text found in the Auchinleck MS produced in the second quarter of the fourteenth century; Egerton MS 2862 produced in the fifteenth century.

⁶Cf. p. 39 of this thesis.

⁷"The Development of Middle English Romance," MS, 27 (1965), 103.

⁸Op. cit. (above, note 3), cf. p. 23.

⁹Middle English Romances (London, 1966), p. 33.

¹⁰Middle English Verse Romances (New York, 1966), pp. 247-309.

¹¹Cf. pp. 32-33.

¹²Beginnings of English Literature to Skelton (London, 1939), p. 366; op. cit. (chapter 2, note 16), p. 361.

¹³It has been possible to find only one article on either the French or English versions of the romance with any serious critical pretensions. This is W. C. Calin's "Flower Imagery in Floire et Blancheflor," FS, 18 (1964), 103-111. It is encouraging to note that Calin, who adopts an archetypal perspective in his approach to the French poem, sees the lovers' story as a "myth of spring" (p. 108), which concords essentially with the redemptive pattern that will here be discerned in the romance.

¹⁴All references to Floire et Blancheflor are to Pelan's edition, op. cit. (above, note 3).

¹⁵All references to Floris and Blancheflour are to the text of the Egerton MS as found in Sands's modernized version, op. cit. (above, note 10).

¹⁶Cf. Pearsall, p. 104.

¹⁷Cf. p. 29.

¹⁸Cf. Pelan, p. xiv.

¹⁹D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum, 26 (1951), 29; hereafter cited as "The Doctrine of Charity. . . ."

²⁰The English poet's obvious indifference to the symbolic value of the colour red as it operates in his source is most tellingly evidenced when, at a later point, he omits to describe that the Tree of Love is entirely vermillion, which it is in the French poem (cf. l.1810). In the latter version this detail serves to confirm beyond a doubt that Floris, through his association with the colour red, is to be identified with the Tree.

²¹Cf. Yrjö Hirn, The Sacred Shrine (Boston, 1957), pp. 358-60, 363.

²²The presence of this sense within the narrative is more fully appreciated when the English poem is compared to its French source at this point. In the latter it is emphasized that Floris is suckled by a "paynim" nurse in compliance with his parents' express wishes. This demonstrates even more obviously the significance of the Christian mother's feeding as a grace. Floris's failure to receive this grace, although he is baptized, serves, then, to confirm the real nature of his later separation from Blancheflour--i.e., that it is a severing of his connection with the supernatural. The English poet, on the other hand, sacrifices the clarity of this point in order to accentuate the theme of Floris's gradual progress through the infusion of grace, beginning with his suckling. He does not change the French romance's essential argument, but he alters its development in order to give added emphasis to the Eucharistic motif. In so doing he indicates, albeit unintentionally, his own commitment to the meaning of the tale as well as to the task of its translation.

²³Cf. p. 56 of this thesis.

²⁴The manner in which romance characters "over-react," as exemplified here, to apparent provocations or other incidents, is a reflection of their own basically absolute nature (often mistakenly criticized as one-dimensional), whereby they are symbols as well as characters. Moreover, the extremes they go to disturb the narrative "sense" (according to Hugh's use of this term, cf. p. 23) and provoke the search for a sententia beneath the cortex or surface of the poem, which search is guided by, or directed towards, the pictorial or symbolic values of the characters involved.

²⁵It has not been possible to confirm this reading etymologically from the Old French, as the vowel endings of "argis" and "Orgas" contradict the normal Old French spellings of the root meanings suggested for them here. However, it has not been proven impossible either, and the reading will remain as it is, a suggestion: even were it not valid it would not alter the interpretation given here of this passage.

²⁶ Cf. St. Augustine's discussion in the first chapter of the opposition of Spirit and Letter, pp. 10-11. The King is most comparable in his attitude to the hollow legality of the Jews.

²⁷ Cf. Owst, pp. 493-94; and Kolve, p. 156.

²⁸ Op. cit. (chapter 2, note 21), p. 351. An opposition such as this in the "sense" of a narrative may be classed as another device intended to alert the reader to the existence of a sententia.

²⁹ Cf. Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (New York, 1961), pp. 19-20; and Elizabeth Nitchie, Vergil and the English Poets (New York, 1919), p. 18.

³⁰ Cf. Mehl's reference to the thematic significance of Troy in Le Bone Florence, p. 145, where he notes its contribution to a spiritual pattern in the story.

³¹ Cf. Nitchie, pp. 26, 80-81; and Seznec, pp. 16, 88, 97.

³² P. 14.

³³ Cf. Dorothy Sayers's introduction to her translation of the Divine Comedy (Hammondsworth, England, 1968), p. 45, where she refers to the medieval conception that the Romans were "a chosen people appointed to be the seed of the Holy Roman Empire."

³⁴ Cf. Mâle, op. cit., (chapter 3, note 19), p. 352.

³⁵ Cf. pp. 16-17.

³⁶ Cf. the edition of J.-J. Salverda de Grave, 2 vols. (Paris, 1964), 1, ll.4, 176-82.

³⁷ Cf. his chapter "La Belle Captive," pp. 290-304.

³⁸ Cf. Mehl, p. 138.

³⁹ Cf. George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art (New York, 1954), p. 53.

⁴⁰ At this point it is appropriate to supply some reading of the King's name, Fenix, which is given only by the French poem, and which, consequently, has been omitted here since the discussion of the English version began. The name Fenix, by reference to the bird of that name which, after an act of self-immolation, was reborn in its own ashes, was an obvious symbol for Christ in the Middle Ages, most notably perhaps in the Old English poem The Phoenix. However, it may be asked how the Saracen Fenix can share in this significance, since he, until his conversion, is a hostile figure. The answer lies in his relationship with his son by whom he is converted. Thus his name alerts the reader to see the spiritual meaning behind Floris's later ascension to his father's throne. While Floris assumes his father's title, the old king is cleansed and reborn, like the dying phoenix, in his son.

⁴¹ Cf. Hirn, pp. 456-457.

⁴² Cf. "The Theme of Christ the Lover Knight in Medieval English Literature," RES, 13 (1962), 13.

⁴³ Cf. p. 139.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hirn, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ferguson, pp. 285-286, 318.

⁴⁶ The temporal might that here guards Blancheflour is reminiscent of the means by which Sir Orfeo sought to prevent his Queen, dame Herodis, from being seized by death in the figure of King Pluto. Only here it is the positive principle, Floris, who is shut out. His approach to Babylon is thus like that of Orfeo to Pluto's kingdom in which he seeks his wife, and it suggests here that the regaining of Blanche-

flour will also involve a defeat of death, which can be accomplished by no earthly means. On the other hand, the Amiral, who is guarding Blancheflour, might be said to incarnate the mistake of Orfeo whereby he at first thought he could save his wife through temporal means. From this perspective he and Floris can be seen to be two sides of one individuality, the false and the true self respectively, a point that is fully in accord with the symmetry operating in the poem; for it would show the relationship between Floris and the Amiral to be a continuation, in essence, of that which obtained between Floris and his father.

⁴⁷P. 445.

⁴⁸Cf. his chapter "The Symbols of the Virgin," pp. 434-470: here the particular references are to pp. 434, 436-437, 446-447.

⁴⁹Cf. Robert Hughes, Heaven and Hell in Western Art (New York, 1968), p. 74.

⁵⁰As Burckhardt makes clear (op. cit., chapter 3, note 3), the mystical union of Christ and Mary, which the garden is here considered as depicting, is, when regarded under the doctrine of the Incarnation, the symbolic matrix of all Christian art, cf. p. 68. Whether the poet of this romance had this principle in mind (only the Greek Church made a formal declaration of the Incarnation being the justification and true cause of Christian art) is an open question; however, the intrusion of other esthetic doctrines into his narrative, which will be discussed later, support the theory that he did.

⁵¹Cf. Hirn, pp. 158-159; and Hardison, p. 129.

⁵²Cf. "The Doctrine of Charity. . . ," 31.

⁵³Cf. Owst, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁴This is St. Paul's theme in Romans: 7-8, 11; and St. Augustine's in "On the Spirit and the Letter," in Basic

Writings of Saint Augustine, ed. Whitney J. Oates, 2 vols. (New York, 1948), 1, 461-518: cf. chapters six and nine especially.

⁵⁵ Floris, in seeking to "excel" nature by copying the ideal, is inevitably "excelling" his own nature through grace. Or, rather, the disguise he is to adopt is an adequate symbolic reflection of the reality of his quest (which is being interpreted here as a pursuit of grace) because of the "real" connection that was held to exist between the artist and the Christian in pursuing their goals. Cf. Hugh's discussion of mechanical philosophy, pp. 17-18 of this thesis.

⁵⁶ As Owst notes, cf. p. 12, the surly and ridiculous gatekeeper was a frequent type in English sermons of the time. He generally served as an obstacle in man's quest for virtue or grace, and his duping was symbolic of man's defeat of the devil.

⁵⁷ For an indication of the great importance of the symbol of the door in Christian art, see Burckhardt's chapter on this theme, "I Am the Door," pp. 77-100.

⁵⁸ Cf. Mircea Eliade's discussion of the relationship of the two symbols, the bridge and the gate, and their meaning in traditional Christian thought, in The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1961), p. 181. Together, he says, they indicate a "passage from one mode of being to another," and figure such things as "Initiation, death, mystical ecstasy, absolute knowledge, faith. . . ."

⁵⁹ Cf. Hirn, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hirn, p. 79.

⁶¹ Cf. Ferguson, p. 9.

⁶² Thus Burckhardt writes: "Some medieval liturgists, such as Durante de Mende and Honorius d'Autun, compare the plan of the cathedral to the form of the Crucified: His

head corresponds to the apse with its axis to the East, His outstretched arms are the transepts, His torso and legs are at rest in the nave, His heart lies at the principal altar." P. 149.

⁶³ Thus St. Augustine speaks of "the eye of the heart" in the De Doctrina Christiana (2.VII.14), which is cleansed in the sixth stage of man's progress towards wisdom. It is through this eye that man then receives the divine wisdom itself.

⁶⁴ Gilson, op. cit. (chapter 3, note 3), pp. 70, 71.

⁶⁵ Cf. de Bruyne's discussion of "The Esthetics of Light," pp. 55-61.

⁶⁶ The testing of Blancheflour is identical to the King's testing of his daughter in The Squire of Low Degree to see if she sufficiently prefers the Squire above all else. The two incidents share the same figurative significance as well by our reading. Also, the two persons doing the testing, the King and Claris, are both invested with an evident omniscience regarding the hero and heroine of their respective tales.

⁶⁷ This inner meaning, needless to say, must promote the "reign of charity," to use St. Augustine's terminology (cf. p. 11), but this should not be taken to mean that the outer shell of the poem is celebrating sensual love, independently of the poem's inner purpose, and for the benefit of the so-called "lewed" audience. In a way the poem has no outer "sense" at this point because its literal meaning does not make Christian "sense," which is what Hugh really has in mind when he uses this term in its broadest meaning. The sententia is thus directly present in the surface of the poem at this point in a way designed to jolt the Christian reader into an awareness of its presence.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ferguson's comments on "nuditas virtualis," p. 67.

⁶⁹ This aspect of the story bears remarkable parallels with traditional exemplum materials treating of the virtue

of simplicity: cf. Millenium: A Latin Reader, ed. F. E. Harrison (Oxford, 1968), items 23, 24, as reproduced from Caesarius of Hessterbach, The Dialogue on Miracles, trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. S. Bland, 2 vols. (London, 1929), 2, items 1, 2.

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