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Article

Published Version

Kay, S. (1991) Commemoration, memory and the role of the past in Chrétien de Troyes: retrospection and meaning in 'Erec et Enide', 'Yvain' and 'Perceval'. Reading Medieval Studies, XVII. pp. 31-50. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84207/

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Commemoration, Memory and the Role of the Past in Chrétien de Troyes: Retrospection and Meaning in 'Erec et Enide', 'Yvain' and 'Perceval'

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In his first and his last Arthurian romances, Chrétien, with a professional's consciousness of the value of time, condemns repetitiousness:

> por ce que d'enui croist son conte
> qui deus foiz une chose conte.
> (*Erec et Enide* 6273-74)[1]

> Qui autre fois le conteroit
> anuis et oiseuse seroit,
> que nus contes de ce n'amende.
> (*Perceval* 1381-83)

This principle does not, however, inhibit him in practice from multiplying accounts of certain episodes. In the *premier vers* of *Erec et Enide*, for example, the encounter in the forest is first recounted by the narrator as it 'takes place', and is then retold in varying degrees of completeness by the queen, Erec, Kay, Gauvain and Yder himself.[2] An even greater degree of repetition is exemplified in Perceval by the incident of Kay's aggression against the laughing damsel, retailed authorially in vv. 1048-52 and subsequently retold or alluded to by the characters on ten occasions.[3] Chrétien's concern to perpetuate the memory of a notable *estoire* (*Erec* vv. 23-24) and to celebrate the values and achievements of the past (*Yvain* vv. 29-41) is thereby passed on from the narrator to his characters who participate with him

in the act of narration. This retelling of events by the characters within the text I call commemoration.[4]

The archetypal form of it arises when a prisoner liberated or a champion vanquished goes to Arthur's court to give account of the heroic deed which sent him there. Such scenes are not unique to Chrétien, being found, for instance, in the Occitan romance of *Jaufre*. Arthur's court is a natural forum for them because of its long tradition of chivalric and courtly excellence. It is also the domain of custom and laws which codify the established usage of the past for the benefit of the present. Customs not sanctioned by this central institution are often annexed to it by the hero, or else destroyed.[5] The court is rooted in past experience which it mediates to the present, and so it is an appropriate setting for a consideration of the past achievements of the individuals associated with it.

To the extent that all the heroes of Chrétien's Arthurian romances work out their individual careers against the backdrop of the established order represented by the court, they can all be said to situate themselves with regard to the collective past. The three romances chosen for detailed study here deal additionally with the gradual self-realisation of the central character(s) in response, at least in part, to inadequacies in their personal pasts.[6] Past time thereby becomes a central theme one aspect of whose treatment is commemorative discourse in which the hero's exploits are reviewed. Another aspect is the exercise of the hero's own memory, through which he is able to maintain contact with his own past or, alternatively, to lose it. The three romances are 'quest' romances, which derive their narrative impetus from the forward movement of the adventuring protagonist. But the importance of the past in all three means that we should also consider the value of backward reading, or retrospection, in determining their meaning.

I *Erec et Enide*

A self-conscious preoccupation with traditional values is made explicit in Arthur's much-quoted speech (vv. 1749-70), in which he declares his duty as a monarch never to deviate from the customs which obtained under his father.[7] At the end of the romance, when Erec succeeds *his* father, he is enthroned beside Arthur on an identical throne, thereby achieving similarity of status with him and annexing to himself the values of community and tradition.[8] This scene has

indeed been prepared by the whole series of deftly choreographed court scenes in which now Erec, now Enide, walks hand in hand with Arthur or Guenevere. Despite its virtuoso elements, Erec's career is primarily one of integration into the court and what it stands for.

On the rare occasions when the court is found to be deficient, the fault is promptly rectified. The brief display of bad form by Kay (v. 3940 ff.) is immediately neutralised by Gauvain's tasteful good manners; the potentially much more destructive effects of a miscarriage of the white stag hunt are averted within three days. No legacy of lasting harm is bequeathed to society by the past; and the remedies which the present provides are expressive of continuity rather than of change: Kay was disguised as Gauvain on the occasion of his misdemeanour, so that Erec could be said to have been confronted by an inauthentic and then a true image of the Arthurian world; the sparrow-hawk custom which furnishes a solution to the white stag episode presents manifest analogies with it, but is more up to date.[9] So far as Arthurian society is concerned, past time is viewed optimistically. Its benefits are handed down and its errors remedied. It is as though time were a transparent and easily manipulated medium.

In the *premier vers* of *Erec* commemoration of past events in the lives of individuals is particularly insistent, and serves three main functions. First, it relates individual experience to the social group. Adventure befalls the stragglers in the hunt and is pursued by Erec alone. Society is alerted to the danger which threatened one of its most egregious members (Guenevere) and is then reassured by its triumphal averting. Erec enjoys a surge of prestige, and the court is able to congratulate itself on having so fine an adherent. Secondly, it furnishes an ethical commentary on physical events. Yder is confronted with a condemnation of his behaviour by Erec:

grant viltance est de ferir fame...
trop grant oltrage asez feïs
quant tu tel oltrage veïs.

(1014, 1017-18)

He is forced to admit his own inferiority to the courtly qualities of his victor:

an vostre prison
m'anvoie ci uns gentix hom,
uns chevaliers vaillanz et preux,
cil cui fist hier santir les neuz
mes nains de la corgiee el vis.
(1183-87)

Thirdly, commemoration underlines the retrospective value of adventure. Bezzola was the first scholar to point out that heroic status, in Chrétien's romances, relates less to personal capacity ('I am doing x') than to the retrospective evaluation of development ('I am what I am as a result of having done x').[10] Subsequent scholars have observed Chrétien's playful offsetting of psychological motivation, which precedes action and constitutes its apparent cause, against its results, which are its real or final cause.[11] In the case of the *premier vers*, Erec sets off to avenge the queen and himself; by the midpoint of his fight with Yder circumstances have already caused his love for Enide to become the principal motive (v. 907 ff.); and on his return the retrospective significance of the whole episode is formulated in new terms by Guenevere:

bien doit venir a cort de roi
qui par ses armes puet conquerre
si bele dame en autre terre.
(1722-24)

In retrospect, the value of his 'quest' was not revenge but initiation to love and monarchy.

Commemorative speeches serve, therefore, to elicit the social, ethical and teleological implications of earlier action. The particular events of the *premier vers* are a matter for congratulation. As with society in general, the individuals within it appear to reap nothing but benefits from history, and all its wrongs are righted.

It is not my purpose to contribute a further study to the *recreantise-parole* nexus of *Erec et Enide*, but it is worth observing that in this period of crisis the patterns discerned in the commemorative passages of the *premier vers* are temporarily reversed. Instead of heroic achievements being retold to the honour of the hero and the advantage of the community, the community's grievance is passed on to the hero, who becomes the object of ethical criticism and is asked to

reconsider his own recent behaviour. Instead of a chivalric feat being celebrated by a knight who was himself concerned in it, inaction is made the cause of reproach. As a result, the question of whether there may not be a right and wrong use of language is raised in the text, complementing the question of the right and wrong forms of action featured in the discussion of Yder's behaviour and now raised more acutely in the case of the hero. The dichotomy of speech and action manifested in commemorative scenes thereby becomes thematic.

The series of self-castigatory monologues in which Enide lengthily laments her *parole* and wonders whether she ought not now to speak (vv. 2585-2606, 2829-39, 2962-78, 3100-112 etc.) constitutes the nearest approach to the treatment of memory as a literary theme in this romance (though one might wish to include some of Erec's reproaches to her under this head, for example vv. 2993-3006). Individual memory forms an important complement to public commemoration in Chrétien's later romances, as will be shown below. It is interesting that in *Erec et Enide* it is only associated with unhappy past events. The heroes are destined for so important a public position that their successes are a matter for general celebration; only they dwell at all extensively on their possible mistakes.

Predictably these reversed patterns are quickly righted. After his renewal of contact with the court on its hunting expedition in the middle of the romance, Erec returns to the model of the *premier vers* by sending Cadoc there to sing his praises:

et gardez ne li (=Arthur) celez ja
de quel poinne je ai mis hors
et vostre amie et vostre cors.
Je sui a la cort molt amez:
se de par moi vos reclamez,
servise et enor me feroiz.
(4500-05)

When Erec himself arrives back at court he enumerates all his exploits except for the defeat of Maboagrain.[12] This adventure is, however, celebrated at Brandigan where it inspires composition of the *Lai de Joie* (v. 6136), though Chrétien admits that this remains a little-known work (v. 6137). Erec's reputation is restored and the courts rejoice at his achievements. Commemoration has made individual experience accessible to the collective.

The element of moral commentary, though not a consistent feature of this second commemorative series, reverts to the *premier vers* pattern of always reflecting favourably on Erec and Enide. The first lecherous count is humbled to the point where he denounces his own faults and expatiates on the virtues of his intended victims, when he tells his retinue to desist from their pursuit:

esploitié ai vilainnement:
de ma vilenie me poise;
molt est preuz est saige et cortoise
la dame qui deceü m'a...
que fos fesoie et deslëax
et traïtes et forssenez.
Onques ne fu de mere nez
miaudres chevaliers de cestui.
(3630-32, 3640-43)

Similarly the exchanges following Maboagrain's defeat endorse the ethical choices of Erec and Enide at the expense of those made by the lovers in the orchard.

The single adventure in which a retrospective reading is most explicitly indicated is that of the Joy of the Court, since it is only after it has been completed that its name makes sense. Before that, the 'joy' was paradoxically only associated with grief and fear; for example, the people of Brandigan cry out to Erec:

Ceste Joie, Dex la maudie
que tant preudome i sont ocis.
(5660-61)

But as Bezzola realised, the significance of all Erec's adventures is consequent to their achievement and not prior to it.[13] It is no coincidence that the passage in which Erec commemorates his exploits on his return to court is also the point at which Chrétien disclaims the need to adduce any other reason for his departure:

Erec ancomance son conte...
Mes cuidiez vos que je vos die
quex acoisons li fist movoir?...
Li reconters me seroit griés

que li contes n'est mie briés,
qui le voldroit recomancier
et les paroles ragencier
si com il lor conta e dist.
(6417, 6420-21, 6425-29)

Erec's story on his return is the reason for his departure; the act of commemoration, by directing attention back over the past, can alone endow it with meaning. Even if the precise content of that meaning proves, as here, to be elusive, retrospection proves to be the culminating point of the hero's adventures.

The resolution of the couple's crisis takes just three days, from the Thursday morning when they leave Lac's court to the Sunday night of their reconciliation (vv. 4882-894). This interval recalls the *premier vers* where three days were needed to sort out the aftermath of the white stag hunt.[14] Also reminiscent of the *premier vers* is the episode of the Joy of the Court which shares a number of mainly Celtic-derived features with the sparrow hawk episode. The first precedes the wedding, the second the coronation, in a way which offers assurance of continuity despite the vicissitudes of conjugal life. Overall, the romance gives a somewhat complacent view of the action of time on the lives of its principal characters. Their errors - if they exist - are quickly retrieved, and the accumulation of experiences is a source of public celebration, moral illumination for others, and fulfilment for themselves.

II *Yvain*

Yvain's relationship with his own and the collective past is less satisfactory. From the outset the Arthurian court appears in a less favourable light, with Arthur's forgetfulness prefiguring Yvain's own. The first passage of commemorative discourse - Calogrenant's tale - far from shedding lustre on the protagonist and the court to which it is told is a source of *honte* (v. 60) which provokes immediate dissension (Kay's altercation with Yvain) and the break-up of the court (Yvain's secret departure). On the one occasion when Arthur acts with universally recognised authority, dispensing justice to the younger sister in the inheritance case of Noire Espine (v. 6365 ff.), he arrives at his judgement by instinctual flair rather than by appeal to law, and his decision manifests innovation rather than tradition.[15] Society's link

with the past is more opaque, and less reassuring, in this romance than in *Erec*.

It is not surprising to discover that the straightforward and coherent relationship between individual endeavour and public acknowledgement attested in *Erec* is profoundly modified in *Yvain*. Yvain does not himself recount any of his adventures except for his first winning of Laudine, which gets short shrift from Chrétien (vv. 2297-301). The liberation of Gauvain's niece and nephews is the only one directed by him to be told at court, or rather to Gauvain (v. 4278 ff.), and the court also witnesses his championship of the younger sister. Laudine's circle knows of the rescue of Lunete, and has somehow been informed of the rescue of Gauvain's relatives (see vv. 6603-05). The anonymous *pucelle* who follows in Yvain's tracks on behalf of the younger sister of Noire Espine learns from those concerned about these last two adventures (vv. 4907-18, 4980-86). His defence of the dame de Norison is applauded by the onlookers but is not recounted elsewhere. The rescue of the lion and the battle with the demons at Pesme Avanture remain entirely uncommemorated by any of the characters. Yvain's choice of an alias for all but his first, and the dénouement of his last, adventure further reduces the extent to which any of his actions can be said to be knowable. From the point of view of the other characters in the romance, Yvain's reputation and his very identity are fragmented.

Instead, speeches of commemoration serve as much to inform relations between individuals as those between the hero and the social group. Rehearsal of their reciprocal obligations reaffirms the friendship between Yvain and Lunete (see vv. 1001-15, 3636-43, 6701-09); more importantly, the patterns of retelling give ironic definition to Yvain's relationships with Gauvain and Laudine, the two characters closest to him in his old persona and among those who know most about him in the new one of *chevalier au lion*, and yet who signally fail, at the end of the romance, to equate the two. Gauvain is prepared to fight to the death against 'the knight of the lion', although he loves 'Yvain'; Laudine promises to restore the *chevalier au lion* to his *dame* while at the same time convinced that she and Yvain are irreconcilable. The apparent digression on *Amours* and *Haine* intercalated into the Yvain-Gauvain duel (vv. 5998-6107) highlights this difficulty of correlating conflicting descriptions of the same individual. Is Yvain Gauvain's friend (since he loves him) or his enemy (since he is fighting him)? The passage recalls Yvain's *ami-anemi* monologue in Laudine's castle

(vv. 1428-1506) in which he asks whether his victim's widow, bound thereby to hate him, could also regard him as her love since he loves her. The varying descriptions of Yvain that the other characters could offer at different stages of the romance are never resolved by them; it is the hero himself who eventually reveals how his history accommodates those which are true. The awareness of individual identity is thus vested in the individual, not the collective consciousness. As a result, the social implications of commemorative scenes are fundamentally different in *Yvain* from in *Erec et Enide*. There is no easy access to other people's past, and consequently no automatic integration of them to the community.

The refusal to cultivate a public image appears to be a conscious decision on Yvain's part[16] since it was an excessive preoccupation with *honte*, the *qu'en dira-t-on* of the court, which vitiated his conduct both when he won and when he lost his wife.[17] Nemesis strikes when Laudine's damsel denounces him in front of the full court. In not seeking to make his rehabilitation as public as his disgrace,[18] Yvain conforms to the model of the *preu* as contrasted with the *mauvés* by Kay:[19]

> Mout a antre mauvés et preu;
> que li mauvés joste le feu
> dit de lui unes granz paroles, ...
> et li preux avroit grant angoisse,
> se il ooit dire a autrui
> les proesces, qui sont an lui.
>
> (2191-93, 2196-98)

Thus the first of the three functions assigned to commemorative scenes in *Erec* is denied in the case of *Yvain*.

The element of moral commentary, which I identified as their second function, is slight in *Yvain* by comparison with *Erec*. If Yvain's acts have ethical significance, it is not publicly apparent.[20] The most enlightening observation is that made by the younger sister of Noire Espine to the effect that Yvain has become a champion of women (vv. 4819-20); this is also the only formulation of the teleology of his adventures. By contrast, the accounts offered by Laudine's damsel when she announces her lady's rupture with Yvain (v. 2722 ff.), and by Laudine herself (e.g. v. 6761 ff.) both differ from the account offered by the narrator, since the women assert that

Yvain's is a failure of love, but the narrator strongly maintains that Yvain continued to love his wife (see vv. 4583-84, 6511-16). These differing commentaries point to the difficulty of achieving moral certainty about past events.[21]

Whereas in *Erec et Enide*, therefore, public criticism of the hero's behaviour provided the spur to his adventures and public acknowledgement set the seal on their successful accomplishment, confirming their moral usefulness and demonstrating their retrospective significance, in *Yvain* this external measure of the hero's knightly career is largely lost. The happy equation between public recognition and personal achievement has gone; personal identity is no longer guaranteed by its place in the public consciousness. Thus it comes about that memory, relatively unimportant in *Erec*, becomes crucial in *Yvain*, and that the conception of the individual's relationship with the past is transformed.

Several passages suggest that memory is a means of preserving integrity, whether in a moral or an existential sense.[22] In the prologue Arthur's neglect of his duties is presented as an act of self-forgetfulness (v. 52); conversely Gauvain's relatives display courtesy by remembering Yvain's wishes (v. 4052). Lunete's faithfulness as a friend is shown by her assurance that she will remember Yvain and

> qu'ele n'an iert ja oblïeuse
> ne recreanz ne pereceuse.
>
> (4649-50)

Forgetting is linked with madness, as when the dame de Norison's damsel forgets her instructions (vv. 2997, 3006), or Yvain explains his failure to return to Laudine (v. 6784).

When he takes leave of her, Yvain is concerned lest unforeseen events should prevent his returning by the date specified (vv. 2587-91). Laudine's reply is to give him a ring which magically embodies the power of memory. Addressing herself to his fears, she reassures him that as long as he wears it, remembering her will protect him from harm and keep him strong. The vitality of his commitment to the past will protect him from the uncertainties of the future:

> Nus essoines ne vos atant
> tant con vos *sovendra* de moi ...
> Prison ne tient ne sanc ne pert

nus amanz verais et leaus,
ne avenir ne li puet maus
mes qu'il le port et chier le taigne
et de s'amie li *sovainge*,
einçois devient plus durs que fers.
(2598-99, 2604-09)

The traditional language of love (note the imagery of imprisonment, wounding, and strength greater than iron) is recast around the idea of memory, as though to establish it as the principal priority of a lover. What Laudine is enjoining on Yvain is the importance of a sense of continuity with his own previous experiences; integrity is a matter of inner consciousness, of which memory is the essential guarantee.

Instead of concentrating on his ties with the past, however, Yvain launches himself precariously towards the future, trusting to the quality of *esperance* which he takes with him on his departure in place of his heart (vv. 2656-59), and which, like himself, *traïst et fausse de covant* (v. 2660).[23] The result is forgetfulness which transforms him from the *amanz verais et leaus* (v. 2605) of the past to *le desleal*, *le traïtor*, *le mançongier*, *le jeingleor* (vv. 2719-20) and which causes him to renege on his obligations:

Yvain! mout fus ore *oblianz*
qu'il ne te pot *ressovenir*
que tu deüsses revenir
a ma dame jusqu'a un an. ...
Et tu l'eüs en tel despit
qu'oncques puis ne t'an *remanbra*.
(2746-49, 2752-53)

Both the existential and the moral significance of memory are clearly shown in this crucial displacement of personality from the domain of memory to that of hope. Yvain's amnesia in the forest during the period of his madness (vv. 2822-23) is at once a commentary on his error and a fit punishment for it. He is deprived of any identity, whether individual or social. By the same token, this amnesia is also a preparation for his reconstruction of the self, which can begin once his recovery is signalled by the return of sanity and of memory:[24]

... fu gariz et respassez
et rot son san et son memoire.
(3018-19)

Yvain's choice of an alias and of a non-human companion for the adventures which make up the major part of the remainder of the romance guarantee the essentially private nature of his experiences, as regards the other characters in the text (as we have seen) and also as regards the reader. It is pointless to try to assess his 'quest' in terms of motive. In terms of achievement, however, the circumstances of Yvain's reunion with his wife so closely parallel those of his marriage that there is little reason to see the exploits which intervene as representing a radical change of 'character'. Having mistakenly associated his identity with public repute in the eyes of such people as Kay, and then 'lost' his private past through his forgetting of Laudine and her rejection of him, Yvain returns to his starting point as Laudine's *amanz verais et leaus*. His quest, despite its apparent forward movement, has brought him back to his past.

Like Erec and Enide, Yvain is given a second chance whereby he can correct earlier errors, but whereas their career is public in its orientation, his is private; for him, therefore, commemoration is subordinate to memory. In both romances, however, the characters' pasts play a positive part. Their adventures are addressed to the past, in order to recuperate it, to make it accessible and to endow it with meaning. The meaning of quest in both is retrospective.

III Perceval

Given the incomplete state of this romance, investigation of its treatment of past time can reach at best only tentative conclusions; though interest in the past is manifested to an almost obsessive degree in the parts of the existing text which deal with Perceval.[25]

What is particularly striking about the use of commemorative discourse in this romance is its division into two distinct series, a pattern which contrasts both with the fragmentation found in *Yvain* and with the near unity provided by Arthur's court in *Erec et Enide*.

One series consists of archetypal scenes where a defeated knight is sent to the Arthurian court to testify to his victor's achievement. Engygeron, Clamadeus and Orguelleus are all witnesses to Perceval's feats.[26] (There are additionally sixty nameless knights despatched on

the same errand during the five years of Perceval's unsuccessful grail quest, vv. 6233-35, but their speeches are not recorded.) Since Perceval's defeat of the Scarlet Knight is also known to the court through the account volunteered by Yonet (vv. 1228-38), his entire history of chivalric activity is public knowledge. It provokes much adulation: Arthur seems to be as depressed at the loss to the court of Perceval as he was by the outrages of the Scarlet Knight (v. 1240 ff., v. 1282 ff.) and does not cease to lament it. There are, furthermore, suggestions of a parallel between Perceval and Arthur. Both are seen absorbed in a state of *penser* (Arthur in the opening court scene, Perceval in the famous episode of the drops of blood on the snow),[27] and their determination to set out in quest, Arthur of Perceval and Perceval of the Grail Castle, is phrased in very similar words (cf. vv. 4136-140 and 4727-740; Perceval's resolve to seek out his mother is another parallel passage, vv. 2917-32). All this is reminiscent of the coherent world of *Erec et Enide* and leads us to expect that Perceval, like Erec, is preparing to become king of some territory near Arthur's.[28]

A major difference from *Erec et Enide*, however, is that since Perceval is not a member of the court his achievements cannot contribute to its prestige. Indeed, until after the report by Orguelleus, the victor's name and identity are all but unknown there; the tales of Perceval's prowess, then, bear no relation, for the Arthurian audience, to the unmannerly irruption of the Welsh *valet*. Perceval's growing fame in fact reflects unfavourably on the court's shortcomings. Mention of Perceval's knighthood in the Arthurian context is always coupled with reminders of Kay's brutality towards the laughing damsel, a patent infringement of the knightly code as taught by Gornemant de Gorhaut, yet which nobody but Perceval thinks fit to punish. There are grounds for inferring that, whereas in *Erec et Enide* scenes of commemoration are expressive of the hero's integration into the court and in *Yvain* of his separation from it, Perceval is contrasted with the court to his own advantage.

This inference is compatible with the unfavourable image of Arthurian culture which emerges from the *Conte du graal*. Arthur's inertia in the first court scene recalls the opening of *Yvain*. Gornemant comments on the decadence of a court which he does not expect to have any interest in chivalry; when told that Arthur has made Perceval a knight, he replies:

Chevalier! Se Dex bien me doint,
ne quidoie c'or en cest point
de tel chose li sovenist;
d'el quidoie qu'il li tenist
ore que de chevaliers faire.
(1371-75)

Perceval did not linger there in his search for a *preudome*, and he sends Engygeron and Clamadeus there as a last resort, possibly, as Pickens has suggested, because they will find safety in its indifference.[29] As Pickens also observes, apathy and a dreamlike sense of unreality are the court's most obvious characteristics.[30]

Reiterated in such a context, Perceval's successes at arms do not bring him much glory. At first it may be gratifying to see the foolish *valet* holding his own among establishment figures, but at least by the time of the grail quest the ritual despatching of knights has become an empty gesture bearing witness to the deficiencies of conventional knighthood as exercised by Perceval, rather than its greatness.[31] He himself admits his consciousness of inadequacy to the hermit:

Sire, fait il, bien a cinc ans
que je ne soi ou je me fui,
ne Dieu n'amai ne Dieu ne crui,
n'onques puis ne fis *se mal non*.
(6364-67)

Although in outward form these scenes of commemoration are archetypal, they are in fact far removed from the mutually congratulatory atmosphere of equivalent scenes in *Erec et Enide*. If Perceval, like Arthur, is to be a king, it seems he will be unlike Arthur in other respects.

Awareness of moral values, or of a significant teleology, is also lacking from these orthodox commemorative scenes. There is an allusion to the *viltance* and *honte* inflicted by Orguelleus on his damsel, v. 4054, but it is not clear whether the judgement is his or Chrétien's.[32] On the other hand, these are precisely the features that characterise the second commemorative series, which are otherwise deviant in that they are all critical of Perceval; they are pronounced by characters marginal to knightly activity (two girls and a hermit); and their audience, on two occasions is Perceval alone, on the third, he and

the court. From them we learn of Perceval's sin in respect of his mother, and its repercussions for the Fisher King and for his own life (see vv. 3507-611; 4652-83; 6392-431).

Perceval's catalogue of failure highlights, as in *Erec et Enide*, the disproportion between intention and the significance of events as perceived in retrospect. Perceval's motivation was innocent enough, but he has been caught in the play of spiritual forces beyond his comprehension. Whereas for Erec, however, success exceeded anything we know of his expectations, the very nature of Perceval's failure is unintelligible to him, unless perhaps enlightenment is prepared for in the scene with the hermit.

These two series of commemorative scenes present two pictures of Perceval's past: one of startling if superficial success, the other of failure. His achievements are in the domain of prowess, but his failure, perhaps like Enide's, is in that of *parole*, the reflection of speech on action which, embodied in the act of commemoration, also assumes the status of a theme. His achievements are reported at court, but seem to be of only moderate value to Arthurian society; his failure is apparently to have catastrophic consequences for the Fisher King and his world. Finally, Perceval's success is a physical one, confined to the physical world of knights, but his failure involves the notion of sin and so belongs in a realm of conscience or understanding from which, apparently, knights (except Perceval) are excluded.

Conscience and understanding are also signally lacking in Perceval's own memory. His uncomprehending obedience to half-remembered instructions is exploited as a comic device in the early parts of the romance, but it also constitutes a serious abdication of personality. Perceval is like the husband in the *Farce du Cuvier*, who relinquishes his will to act by substituting for his memory a roll of paper with his wife's orders on it. Inevitably it proves inadequate to cope with the unforeseen crisis of her falling into the washtub. The comic technique of exposing the deficiencies of a mechanistic or role-learned code for dealing with the complex ethical or spiritual operations of the human psyche is the same in the romance. Perceval's substitution of an automatism of memory for personal responsibility is especially clear in his parting words to Gornemant, who tells him not to keep invoking his mother but to refer all his actions instead to Gornemant's authority. Perceval replies:

que jamais tant come il soit né
n'en parlera, de ce soit fis,
se de lui non; qu'il li est vis
que ce soit biens qu'il li ensaigne.
(1690-93)

His inability to ask the right questions at the Grail Castle, arising as it does from the conscious but unintelligent following of Gornemant's advice not to talk too much, shows the extent to which his 'character' has been modified by this overlay of received instruction: in the waste forest his questions to the five knights were irrepressible. The necessity for identity to be reliant on something other than memory and linked instead with conscience or understanding is pointed by the passage in which Perceval first speaks his name (vv. 3573-77). It has been suggested that this scene reveals a connection between Perceval's true identity and the world of the grail encountered in the scene immediately preceding. Chrétien's normal practice is, however, to associate the revelation of a name with the identity implied by the scene with which it is concurrent (Enide at her marriage, Lancelot in his defence of Guenevere); and as we have seen, the weeping damsel with whom Perceval is talking when asked his name is the first of the three speakers in the deviant commemorative series that represent to him his failure in the domains of conscience and understanding. Now Perceval does not remember his name, he divines it:

Et cil qui son non ne savoit
devine et dist que il avoit
Perchevax li Galois a non.
(3573-75)

What makes these lines so odd from the perspective of psychological realism is precisely what makes them informative about what constitutes the psychologically real: namely that identity belongs in the domain of insight, rather than of memory.

We see here the difference between the *Conte du graal* and *Yvain*. Put at its simplest, Yvain goes wrong by not seeing the importance of memory in constructing an enduring identity, but Perceval shows the deficiency of exclusive reliance on it. Chrétien's conception of the character's relationship with his past is therefore quite different in the two romances. Yvain gets a second chance to win his wife; the need to

look to the past is confirmed and the search for a repetition of past experience rewarded with success. Perceval's past, on the other hand, holds out no hope. When he models his behaviour on what he has been told he goes astray; the reiteration of chivalric success proves an empty experience which brings him no nearer to a return to the castle of the grail. For him as for no other Chrétien hero the words of the hideous damsel seem to be true: Fortune has passed him by and the mistakes of the past are irretrievable (vv. 4646-68).[33] Just as the Grail Castle seems to have an extra-temporal, extra-spatial existence,[34] so the solution of Perceval's career can only come from outside his past experience, from some (to us) undivinable source of insight. Perceval is thus sharply differentiated from Chrétien's earlier heroes. For them the notion of 'quest' is largely rooted in the significance not of the future but of the past. In *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*, quest, though it implies a movement forwards, in fact demands a reading backwards. Such a reading locks Perceval in failure and inadequacy. In his romance alone, the notion of quest might involve an open-ended interrogation of the meanings made available by the unfolding of events. Quest, with the *Perceval*, ceases to address the past and turns instead to the future, a future with which Chrétien failed to provide us.

In his remarkable essay on time in Chrétien's romances, Ménard concludes that there is no significant evolution in its treatment between *Erec et Enide* and *Perceval*.[35] The change seems to me on the contrary to be dramatic. Arthurian institutions, relatively venerable in *Erec et Enide*, are shown in a progressively less sanguine light in *Yvain* and *Perceval*; and as this picture of the product of society's past deteriorates, so the past lives of individual heroes become more problematic. Erec and his wife rise quickly on the stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things, to general public acclaim; but Yvain endures far more hardship just to retrieve his former position in a manner which will enable him to maintain it. His achievements are not fully recognised by others and restoration of status is only achieved after a near-disastrous conflict between memory and forgetfulness. As for Perceval, the picture others paint of him is either vain or depressing, and the memory of well-intentioned counsel brings results that range from the burlesque to the catastrophic; years of fighting do not seem able to shake off the incubus of past failure. The idea that past time plays a crucial role in individual experience and identity remains a constant of Chrétien's writing, but is accompanied by increasing pessimism about our ease of access to the past, the

erasability of past error, and the value of retrospection as a key to understanding. Given the fragmentary state of the *Perceval*, the repercussions of these changes for the idea of quest are impossible to detail; but Chrétien's decision that the past no longer holds the key to meaning and value is momentous.

NOTES

[1] Romances of Chrétien are cited from the following editions: *Erec et Enide*, ed. M. Roques (Paris: C.F.M.A., 1952); *Yvain* (*Le chevalier au lion*), ed. T.B.W. Reid (M.U.P. 1942, repr. 1974); *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. William Roach (Geneva etc., T.L.F., 1959).

[2] See vv. 323-34, 1009-21, 1095-96, 1110-12, 1122-23, 1186-87.

[3] See vv. 1199-200, 1247-49, 1267-69, 2316-19, 2695-96, 2859-61, 3972-74, 4033-36, 4070-71, 4572-75.

[4] For the idea of the text as commemoration of a signal past event, see L. Spitzer, 'Marie de France, Dichterin von Prolemmärchen', *Zeitschrift für rom. Philologie* L (1930), 29-67, and E. Vance, 'Roland et la poétique de la mémoire', *Cahiers d'Etudes Médiévales* I (1973), 103-115.

[5] E. Köhler, 'Le rôle de la "coutume" dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes', *Romania* LXXXI (1960), 386-97.

[6] The particularly close similarities between these three has been noted by William W. Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), p.137, 'Perceval behaves as though he has read *Erec* and *Yvain*. He follows the formula...'.

[7] Donald Maddox, *Structure and Sacring: the Systematic Kingdom in Chrétien's Erec et Enide*, (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Monographs 8, 1978), pp.51-2, 82.

[8] *Structure and Sacring*, p.68.

[9] *Structure and Sacring*, p.108ff.

[10] Reto R. Bezzola, *Le Sens de l'aventure et de l'amour: Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1956), in particular pp.134, 230.

[11] For *Erec et Enide*, see Maddox for whom the prologue shows 'awareness that the text must act as a stimulant to retrospective conceptualization of instinctive truths', *Structure and Sacring* p.22; and more recently, Paul J. Archambaut, 'Erec's Search for a New Language: Chrétien and Twelfth-century Science', *Symposium* XXXV (1981), 3-17.

[12] This omission is commented on by Barbara Nelson Sargent, 'L' "autre" chez Chrétien de Troyes', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* X (1967), 199-205, p.200. Her suggested explanation is that the episode may be imaginary. More likely in my view is that the different functions of commemoration can all be met in the community of Brandigan itself.

[13] Bezzola, *Le Sens de l'aventure*, p.230.

[14] Cf. Douglas Kelly, 'La Forme et le sens de la quête dans l'*Erec et Enide* de Chrétien de Troyes', *Romania* XCII (1971), 326-358, pp.329-30.

[15] See P. Jonin, 'Aspects de la vie sociale au XIIe siècle dans *Yvain*', *Information Littéraire* XVI (1964), 47-54, esp. p.50.

[16] Thus Yvain asks Lunete not to reveal his name, vv. 3728-31 and 4640-42.

[17] On Yvain's infringements of the law in the first part of the romance see Anna-Susanna Matthias, 'Yvains Rechtsbrüche', in *Beiträge zum romanischen Mittelalter. ZrPh Sonderband zum 100jährigen Bestehen* (1977), ed. Kurt Baldinger, pp.156-192. She suggests p.157 'dass Chrétien im jungen Yvain einen gänzlich, ruhmsüchtigen und desalb die Gesetze rücksichtslos brechenden Draufgänger darstellt'.

[18] Some of Yvain's achievements seem to have become known despite himself, since when he reveals his association with the lion after the duel with Gauvain, people seem to have heard of *les avantures au lion* (v. 6471), although the only one mentioned is the killing of Harpin (v. 6474). Likewise in v. 5060 the anonymous *pucelle* speaks of *li granz renons de vostre pris*, although we can only impute certain knowledge of two of his adventures to her.

[19] On the irony of this incident, and the elimination of the *mauvés* conception of chivalry from the romance, see Tony Hunt, 'The Dialectic of *Yvain*', *MLR* LXXII (1977), 285-99, p.294.

[20] Though admittedly Chrétien gives us to understand that Yvain is fighting on the side of right.

[21] Cf. further vv. 2647-71 (explanations by the narrator); 3655-66, 6748-58 (explanations by Lunete); 6780-89 (explanations by Yvain).

[22] See Margaret Pelan, 'Old French *s'oublier*: its Meaning in Epic and Courtly Literature', *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* X (1959), 59-77. The relationship of memory to self-knowledge is an important theme of Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

[23] In the Guiot MS (ed. M. Roques, Paris: C.F.M.A., 1960) hope also resembles Yvain in that it *se vant* ('prostitutes itself') v. 2661.

[24] It has been argued that Yvain abandons his earlier identity entirely and sets about building a new one; see for example Sargent, 'L' "autre" chez Chrétien de Troyes' p.204. This is surely to ignore the importance of the return of memory, which can only indicate a connection with Yvain's former self. His choice of a pseudonym does not imply rupture with his *personal* past since he is later to resume his own name; it is used, instead, to elude his earlier *public* persona.

[25] V. 8560 ff. explain elements of the past lives of Orgueilleuse de Nogres and Guiromelas, and attribute significance to Gauvain's recent exploits. Otherwise there is no consideration of the past in the Gauvain section.

[26] Engygeron's words to the court are not recorded in full (vv. 2759-60), but the value he places on commemoration as testimony redounding to the

victor's honour emerges from his speech to Perceval, vv. 2243-67, in which he promises to give account of how he has been defeated.

[27] The comparison is underlined by Gauvain's word to Arthur, invoking his authority for not rousing a knight from his meditations, vv. 4350-56.

[28] Cf. the finding of Rita Lejeune, 'Préfiguration du Graal', *Studi Medievali* XVII (1951), 277-302.

[29] Rupert T. Pickens, *The Welsh Knight. Paradoxicality in Chrétien's 'Conte del graal'*, (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Monographs 6, 1977), p.67.

[30] *The Welsh Knight*, pp.62-66.

[31] See A. Micha, 'Temps et conscience chez Chrétien de Troyes', in *De la chanson de geste au roman*, (Geneva: Droz 1976), pp.115-122, p.120; Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, p.47. Micha's article was first published in the *Mélanges ... Le Gentil*, (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1973), pp.553-560.

[32] Like Orguelleus, Clamadeus has grounds for repentance since he tried to take Beaurepaire by a trick, v. 2396 ff., and later attacked Perceval in a spirit of *fol cuidier*, v. 2655.

[33] I differ here from Gabriel J. Brogyani, 'Plot Structure and Motivation in Chrétien's Romances', *Vox Romanica* XXXI (1972), 272-286, who sees the past as irretrievable for all Chrétien's heroes: 'the original missed moment never returns', p.274.

[34] The Fisher King is peacefully fishing when he offers Perceval hospitality for the night (v. 3028), but although Perceval proceeds on horseback, his host is there before him (v. 3085 ff.; admittedly the identity of the two men is not made clear). The host seems to think his castle further removed from Beaurepaire than it was for Perceval (vv. 3120-29). The castle itself materialises out of nowhere (cf. vv. 3037-39 and 3050 ff.) and its inhabitants disappear overnight. The weeping damsel knows of no decent dwelling place within forty leagues of where she meets Perceval, immediately after his leaving the castle (vv. 3468-73) and recognises that he has been the guest of the Fisher King by the quality of the hospitality he has received and not its location (see vv. 3490-95).

[35] Philippe Ménard, 'Le Temps et la durée dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes', *Le Moyen Age* LXXIII (1967), 375-401.