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# The king at *Kaamelott*

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The King at *Kaamelott*

by

Ahmed S. Bashi

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English Literature

(Medieval-Renaissance)

Thesis Committee:

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July 15, 2010

Ypsilanti, Michigan

To VHM Laoshi—for the inspiration...

## ***Acknowledgements***

I began this project with the intention of writing out in half the space, twice the content. It has been a painful process of discovery, on the whole, learning to live with my own limitations and the limitations of linear pages of text. In this process, I have benefited from conversations on style with Dr. Elizabeth Daumer (we worked on poetry together, very illuminatingly); lengthy editing with Dr. Melissa Jones, of application materials for my next step in an academic career (to focus on the Renaissance and Early Ottoman Period in the guise of a doctorate or two—Comparative Literature and perhaps Central Eurasian Studies—at Indiana University), which facilitated a shift in my own enunciative and analytic position as a writer: my self-understanding was effectively thereupon that much more subjective and free; Dr. Martin Shichtman’s fantastic lectures on Chaucer’s *Troilus*, which even make his erraticness as a Second Reader for this thesis acceptable; and the comradely encouragement of Dr. John Staunton, who taught an excellent class on things in the American 19<sup>th</sup> Century that are most often not taught at all, and who encouraged us to see things with our own eyes, as they learnt, squinting, to approximate those of the historical reader. Most useful of all to me in conceiving and organizing this thesis, was beyond any doubt, the help of Dr. Christine Neufeld, who despite her demanding teaching assignments and her appointment to the post of Acting Graduate Director of English, was able to make substantial commitments of her time to discussion, criticism, editing, revision, and review, beyond the call of duty, and beyond even what I thought importunately to expect. Even if she did humor my feeble smoking-cessation efforts with reprieve, I am sure she proceeded in all the many things she advised, suggested, and required (which I attempted my best to subsequently requite), with nothing but my academic and scholarly interests in mind. I feel as if, before I met Dr. Neufeld, I had

only a vague idea of what scholarship was. With her assistance, in my thesis and in the independent studies (on the obscure *Jungere Titurel* text, and its source, *Parzival*) I took with her previously, I have grown inestimably, and in general, having been at Eastern Michigan University for around only two years and some (writing the thesis took twice the time slated), the aforementioned faculty members have made my time dilate dramatically, and my growth, in proportion, swell in a very healthy way. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to them all for their altruistic instruction!

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If anyone beyond the inner circle of approvers ever happens to read this brief MA-thesis of mine, much-labored and a lesson to me in itself on how to labor intellectually, I do extend to them, also, somewhat ironic thanks for their patronage. Enjoy!

***Abstract***

French TV's M6 aired a ground-breaking television advance, known as *Kaamelott*, from 2005 to 2009, derived from a long tradition of Arthurian narrative form and a long tradition of that form's modernization. Spanning the split, therefore, between the Modern and the Medieval, Alexandre Astier's experimental Adventure-Comedy, adapting no single model, this Frankenstein, brought to life through canny theatrical *bricolage*, provokes the following concrete question: how have the dimensions of the exemplary human life of the King been updated by this installment of an eight centuries (and more) old tradition? Using the frame-work of Berne's *Games People Play*, I explore the respective fields of Childhood, Games, and Loves, in parallel to his *Child, Adult, and Parent*. To what extent, ultimately, has the self-retracting, pre-historical origin of "Arthur" mutated? Does this literary but trans-media window of history perspicuously describe the internal dynamics of tradition's after-life? And—is King Arthur really coming back?

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## *Preface*

*Liber scriptus proferetur, / In quo totum continetur, / Unde mundus iudicetur.*

— *Dies Irae* (requiem mass), 5

The last episode of the most recent “book” (season) of the hugely successful M6 show, *Kaamelott*, was shown around November 2009. The narrative is hereupon taken up into the large screen in a series of three films to be released in 2012. Entitled *Dies Irae* (as five years and five seasons ago was the 14-minute pilot), this last episode allows Alexandre Astier, the transcendent *auteur* of the series, to reprise his lead role of King Arthur, having played over the course of the precedent 8-episode (6-hour in total) season a fifteen-year younger Breton called Arturus, come home from the army to conquer, out of his Roman education/exile. From his recovery bed in monologue, after relating the dream in which he has achieved his quest by virtue of the conceit wherein the bath-basin into which he has let the sum of his mortal blood (near death experience before being saved magically by Lancelot) is itself rendered the fifteen-year-long-quested-for Holy Grail, he says—speaking as much as Astier as he does as Arthur—that “tous les suicidés sont le Christ.” Astier/Arthur thereupon confirms a shocking corollary: that “tous les baignoires sont la Grail!”

“Un os est un os,” posits Astier in the preface of the two user-friendly medievalist spin-offs I will not bother to cite, designed to comment from a quasi-academic perspective on the historical presuppositions of the TV show. In this old saw, Astier specifies the relation between what he grants as things of the world, his ontology, and what he will go on to say can be divined upon their basis, his epistemology. A bone is a bone (things are), but it is a giant step from a bare existence to the hypothesis of funerary rites (knowledge takes effort). The actuality of Arthurian legend is “Chretien de Troyes, the Vulgate, Mallory et al.,” and this evidence is the Arthurian bone. What he tries, as it were, to hypothesize in *Kaamelott* is the funerary rite. The restraint that he imposes on the process of deriving the reality behind the existent sign (the “bones”), according to the rhetoric of realism, has nothing to do with established generic rules of representation: his Arthur needs to wear a nightcap in his bed at the risk of mussed morning hair. The rites-behind-the-bones constitute the hypothetical TV-show world, ultimately arrived at through a certain style of close reading. I will examine in my thesis the correlative process of close writing, or the irony of a writing which, writing, writes *that* it writes—the rite that leaves the bones behind, marked by its sign (the sign of writing), to be divined by Astier’s discovering act of reading. Not the lost reality of the rites, that is to say, but their always retrospective ritualization in the transformative act of Astier’s reading (or any reading): this thesis is, therefore, no quest for the holy grail of the Arthurian Authentic; it merely seeks to investigate the contour of this ongoing expressive function (the Arthur-function) transforming/informing that material it originates *sans ex* in the very act of giving it creative body. This transmediating magic *Kaamelott* accesses courtesy of its clever creator, Astier, whose Arthur—in intensive and extensive canonical non-coincidence—this thesis seeks to explicate.

I look in particular at the lynch-pin of *Kaamelott*, the figure of the King, upon which, according to Astier's renovating conception, this thesis casts a particularly indoors light. The domestic sphere has always been an arena for comedy (tragedy happening on a grand scale, comedy more modest), and Astier helps to bring into actuality the romance of Arthur's strong comic potential. Normally generic, the comedy does not invite explication as such; rather, the grounds of this comic possibility—the *domesticity* of Arthur—demand dredging up. From this line of investigation, it emerges that Arthur has been stretched, always painfully, between the world of chivalry and the state, and the world of the *Domus* and personality—with the former receiving the positive accent and the latter being the seed of its dissolution. I focus in this paper on the *negative*: the tragic germ of the Arthur story that has become in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the precise ground of its comedic interest. Interesting previously for the heroic, Arthurian narrative's anti-narrative, its drive to an *ending* (Death-drive) has become, with encroaching cynicism, the anti-heroic, with the markedness of the reversal shifted up one marker. But “anti-“ is not “non-,” and a central portion of the story has always been how it ends, and as per *Kaamelott*, laughing at the foibles of Knights and Ladies has always negatively indicated the Ideal. The positive content of this negative path is the *comedy*; the occasion for this comedy is the flawed human world which is the nest of God's plan and the chivalry that implements it. In this thesis, analyzing the domestic dimension into three components (Childhood, Games, Loves), I survey the contours of the concepts that give it meaning, without being exhaustive, but seeking, nonetheless, to motivate the passage from the smaller world of Contingency and the personal to the grand world of Destiny and the heroic.

In Chapter I, “Childhood,” I reflect on what used to be called the Ages of Man, but instead of examining this dogmatically, looking at the intellectual history of the “divisions within Man’s life,” I unfold a critical theory of stages internal to narrative: Freud and Hegel are my theoretical inspiration, but intersecting the two gives something like Kierkegaard. I depart from purism to hunt down, if not the least implication of *Kaamelott* and the *Vulgate*’s biographic description of the *line of life*, then at least the major thoroughfares of said description.

Chapter II, “Games,” inquires into Childhood in Maturity: the King’s court’s *neoteny* (preservation undeveloped of infantile traits and behavior patterns well into the advance of age—as Dog = Wolf + neoteny). As vehicles of entertainment, Games predominate in this *life-style* of the chivalric class, committed to festivals and fights, which, self-generated and undirected, *a game*, verges on the inconsequential (autonomous). In this chapter, I ask to what real end such a commitment of freedom, danger, aesthetics, and exhilaration is put, analysis stemming from Huizinga and Callois.

Courtly and uncourtly Love composes the theme of Chapter III, “Loves.” Here, the approach is explicitly Freudian, with a pinch of Klein to leaven the mix. Basically, “Loves” asks about the heterosexual adultery that is the rotten core of Caameloth, but also another miscellany of transferences: from those of Arthur’s mother and father, to that of his favorite knight with his queen’s favorite maid. As *Kaamelott* is detained in *media res*, waiting until 2012 to be resumed, and much is unexplained and unanswered (Meleagant? Perceval? etc.), this chapter, after tossing around the ball of interminable analysis, merely sketches out the final narrative amorphousness.

## ***Chapter I. Childhood***

*Les enfances*, or the narratives of childhood, get written and transmitted with a particularly directed intention as a distinct genre of Arthurian (and non-Arthurian) romance throughout the Middle Ages. Living under the semi-autonomous conditions of the enclosing cycle, as with Lancelot's story in the Vulgate, but also at times as lengthy, self-standing texts, such as *Gauvain*, *Guillaume*, *Viviane*, *Garin*, *Renier*, *Ogier*, these *enfances* testify to a concern often—not because of its indistinctness, but because of its multiple coincidences of intent—somewhat hard to make out. In 1973-4, Wolfzettel examined this concern in light of several important Old French texts, on the tail of other scholars,<sup>1</sup> who had raised interesting questions regarding the status, not so much of the literary and textual trope of Childhood, but of its concrete and meaningful reality in the Medieval world, but also rather a leg ahead and calling on his own chasers. In 1974, there was also DeMause's *The History of Childhood*: a work that seemed to allow either Childhood or History to do double duty, or both—in resuscitating the explicit, present-oriented periodicity (too crudely to suit Foucaultian Moral Geneology) of the given periods of the recoverable past. But it has taken a while for the scholar's attention to return to the tropological question. Since our access from the present to the past of the Medieval world has been as much semiotic as material, in the bind of both which makes up the evidential text, tropes, effectively, have the prior claim. In 2002, J. Baker, working with OF Epic's trans-textual construction of Infancy (its how, and to what

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, G. Duby (1964) identified an acrolect of infancy among the Aristocracy of 12th Century NW France, but others among the *Annalistes* were also active at this game.

end), not finally, but conclusively enough, brings the three decades of testing and peregrination of the meta-genre of scholarship on OF *enfances* back to its own nascent beginnings, by beginning with a consideration of the Wolfzettel. The extensive results of this study subsequently are no doubt interesting, but as the object of my present study will only refer back to the prelapsarian beginnings obscured by time, metonymically, metaphorically, and elliptically, they exceed present demand. For only some years further on into the 21st Century does the M6 TV-show *Kaamelott* show conditions of the early life of the major characters of the Arthurian narrative inherited from the Vulgate to have persistent effects on their psyche. Rather than proving the testing stone and litmus test of a numinal puissance as, for instance, Lancelot's *enfance* does in the Vulgate, these childhoods are more in the vein of Philip Larkin's ersatz Encomium on Parenthood: "they screw us up."<sup>2</sup>

To anticipate the topos that Romance occupies for the Western tradition since at least the 19th Century, since Rousseau, I examine these childhood, sometimes familial, romances (of Arthur's world, from Chretien to *Kaamelott*) with a psychopathological lens ground by the Romantics, going beyond them, too, to Hegel and Freud. In this section, then, in loose view of such *enfances*, I consider, first, criteria by which one is, legitimately, held to have a childhood at all, or Fertility; second, conditions of said childhood in itself, or Beginnings; third, propagating results of the infancies of the two actors under consideration, or Middles; and fourth, their prospects on the future, or Ends.

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<sup>2</sup> For Ages of Man: Burrow 1986; Dove 1986; Gaffney 1990; Kelly 1994; Sears 1986.

### ***Fertility: Why Not Rather Nothing***

Within the Romance tradition, the romance which is chronological or historical (typified by Chretien's *Contes du Graal* and opposed to his more **episodic** *Chevalier de la Charrette*) specifies the active drive to characterological completeness, which ensures essentialistic ethical transcendence (that the Best are naturally best), filling the crux wherein Myth would underpin Tragedy (that derivations are ascertained). The famous colophon to Walter Map's *Mort Artu* (Lacy V.1) stating its commission by King Henry II documents its being for the general sake of the discovery of the precise end of all of the Arthurian heroes whose prior lives the narrative had adumbrated or detailed. Not only do the ends of all the heroes have to be on record—where they begin, their posterior provenance, or the earliest known of them epistemologically, is also thematic. Intra-cyclical *enfance*-insertions are common for the more noteworthy characters: Merlin, Arthur, and Lancelot each have their *enfance*. But the *enfance*, in this case, happens to be delimited extra-narratively by the possibility of these characters' existence. For the contemporary audience, this existential possibility happens in the domain of demographic fertility—in line with Astier's dictum regarding the unearthing of the Arthurian funerary rites that the bones of literature conceal within their strictures. On the level of the bones themselves, that is, the Vulgate's lengthy and numerous texts, and their continuations into Malory, what is restrictive of existence is not the bare existence itself (mortality or non-conception, while most probably common, both willfully in terms of contraception and accidentally in the case of attrition, is occluded by the sheer fictionality of the story's relation), but the status of that existence. Bastards are common in the *Vulgate*: Arthur has at least two, and Lancelot one. Merlin is not said to bear children, though he himself, because of his devil father, is (in a more literal sense than

normal) known as the “Fatherless Child” (Lacy II.6). Bastards, and corollarily orphans, or infants of challengeable legitimacy, have a fairy-tale quality, which gives them their laudable motive efficacy, in the accretional folk-texts that begin the Western prose tradition in the few centuries of its intensive invention. The final restriction, or if not restriction, then qualification, of the realm of births, would finally be Baptism: Lancelot’s baptism is the locus of his doubling, as we shall see in the last section of this chapter, and for *Kaamelott*, Perceval’s late baptism dramatically bookends one *saison*. Since this value is, nonetheless, separable from the question of birth as such, I will curtail here what in depth consideration the topic truthfully deserves (but see Niles 2006).

Applying Fertility in its capacity of demographic variable (somewhat bluntly, but with the force of painfully logical necessity) to our understanding of the general Arthurian narrative clarifies that, before any other discussion, as existential conditions of existence, as it were, both Arthur and Lancelot themselves needed to be originally engendered, and, for them to have childhoods, both needed not to die at birth, and to grow up as their parents’ children, they needed not to be abandoned at birth (Boswell 2004). The first necessitates Ban of Benoic and sexual usurper Uther Pendragon, their fathers, not be eunuchs, and that both parents be fertile. This, naturally, is taken for granted by the *Vulgate*, but, as *Kaamelott* proves adequately, need not be so absolutely assumed: even though eunuchs are rare in Europe, they are not unknown, and on those grounds might be viewed as haunting the gender-system of its world—as Astier hypothesizes dramatically (I.75). Infertility, in its guise of Morbidity, but also as an inexplicable congenital deficiency, plagues us to this day. The latter receives thematic consideration in the case of Arthur’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century post-Sexual



Revolution **impossible progeny** of *Kaamelott*,<sup>3</sup> within its respective articulation of a certain sort of benevolent Nostalgia-politics (as we shall see in the last section of this chapter). The second and third are complicated by the effective orphaning of both of our heroes, who later on will be caught in their progressively tragic tête-à-tête (cf. Guerin 1995), and demand the sufficient substitute sedulous care-givers these two children end up finding: although Uther has died, and Igerne is not forthcoming as a nurturing force, Antor the foster parent (Lacy I.4) supplies this role for Arthur, and when King Ban and Queen Elaine are on the run from the despot Claudas (Lacy II.1), the Lady of the Lake does this duty for the nascent Lancelot. Finally this also necessitates the willful and consenting parent (*pace* Igerne cohabitating with Uther Pendragon, Morgan's conceiving of Mordred, or Lancelot's befuddlement with Pelles' daughter) be at least not a complete innocent. The *Vulgate*'s sexual denizens do not suffer intellectual impotence on this score; in *Kaamelott*, by contrast, Lancelot and Guinevere would for the possible bastardy of a further generation—the Grail Quest's illicit but requisite Galahad, for example—require a generous extension of the facilitating *Aufklärung* (how to do it) of a run-of-the-mill maturity. Notwithstanding his being spawned this time around in truest, high Courtly Love, instead of—however the trick is hallowed by intention, lineage or

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<sup>3</sup> The question “why impossible” is pertinent to the *Vulgate*, too. The British Kingdom ends up as a tragedy, without the saving grace of Arthurian issue and inheritance. It is not clear that the Middle Ages indulged those Greek presuppositions of *catharsis* that made tragedy necessary, but it could be admitted as the source of valuable meditation. A verse of Boethius was the Latin *locus classicus* for this notion, much diluted from its dramatic application. Guerin (1995) extends this discussion.

necessity—sinfully and deceptively, the proposed (zygotic) child has exactly zero asexual potential.

These issues are hard to ignore in the context of *Kaamelott's* encyclopedic development of the various motifs of the various kinds of contemporary (and quasi-medieval) French humor. Along with sex generally being funny, or at least fodder for fun, conception, as a domain of mature reflection, is a field day for a kama sutra of humor—i.e. the permutations of sex's less elegant possibilities. The relative alienness of the Middle Ages, the good part of a millennium later, contributes to the imaginativeness of this theme of fertility. Eunuchs, in other words, are good for a laugh. Infant mortality is less funny, and clearly at the stage *Kaamelott* begins to explore this medieval problem, it has graduated—one might say—from comedy (existential, infantile, formal, physical) to mid-brow documentary lacking only public funding to make it fully *au fait*.

### ***Beginnings: Intimations of Destiny***

Since Aries' landmark 1962 book *Centuries of Childhood* (in French, 1960), we have debated what sort of reality to assign to the depictions, and the realities behind those depictions, of the very young in the Middle Ages. Far from agreeing with Aries that there simply were—as the strong version of his thesis implies—**no children** prior practically to the Industrial Revolution,<sup>4</sup> Medievalists have more recently come to conclude, from more careful examination of the literary evidence,<sup>5</sup> that, in a controlled and self-conscious way, childhood was a temporal condition of developmental transience that earned itself its fair share of obsession.<sup>6</sup> This contradiction might only be the skewed outcome of focusing, within Medieval society, on the period's more Aristocratic understanding of child-rearing.<sup>7</sup> As concerns the *Vulgate* and derivative Arthurian traditions, this is in fact the relevant ideology,

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<sup>4</sup> But really, for him, prior to Revolutionary Regime France that put an end to the Ancien Regime. (For a sympathetic update of the Aries thesis, see Classen 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Of anxiety (MacLehose 2005) or of scholastic classification (Reynolds 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Equally pedagogical (power *paideumia ala* Foucault-inspired Neo-Historicists), maternal (the medieval Dr. Spock: Berkvam [1981] excavates the literary remains of this concern), and paternal (*apropos* lineage: Léglu [2005], Vitullo [2005]).

<sup>7</sup> The early scholars Barstow (1975) and Talbot (1977) allow this “acrolect” its distinctness in their illuminating examination of Medieval Children's Literature.

but the generalities of the case<sup>8</sup> bear keeping in mind. At any rate, G. Duby's work (1964), while very relevant to the treatment of Childhood in the *Vulgate* in fine, is very particular in its claims. It does not make any wholesale universal pronouncements, obviating the urgency of any final decision about the whole of the length and breadth of the *Ancien Regime's* concept, such as it was, of Childhood. *Kaamelott* presents us with an equally particular claim.

Lancelot's early emergences on the scene of worldly tourney, as a nascent child adopted by the Lady of the Lake, are in some ways consistent through the account of the voluminous *Vulgate Lancelot-Propre* and *Kaamelott*. Thanks to Claudas the usurper and the War that he brings with him, Lancelot's home is broken early on, his mother and aunt entering a convent (in premature *moinage*) after the deaths of their unfortunate husbands, Kings Ban of Benoic and Bors of Gaunes. Solely due to the Fairy-world Lady of the Lake's nurturing protective surrogacy does Lancelot survive the purging regime-change of his infancy. Future King Arthur shares with Sir Lancelot the fact of his very early, transformative adoption, but compared with Lancelot, there is for him far less danger of the nurturing becoming too protective.

In and after the *Vulgate's* "Suite de la *Charette*" (Lacy III), Lancelot progresses to the point of acknowledging Hector (Brandsma 2007) as his warm kin and evocative *semblable*. Until then, and in Lancelot's earliest youth, before the machinations of Pharian and the Lady of the Lake have reunited him with his cousins (Lacy II.12), who will nonetheless remain

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<sup>8</sup> But perhaps we should not see these generalities so broadly—as N. Orme's more recent (2003) English History *Medieval Children*, may prove with its radically different results. Which Middle Ages, precisely?—the always pertinent question.

strangers to the degree of his ignorance of the actual relation, he seems at times to present the symptoms of what is still vulgarly known as Only-Child Syndrome. In *Kaamelott*, too, he is separated from both his parents and cousins, such that later in life, he responds with extreme anger at Bohort de Gaunes—son of his uncle, King Bors—when Bohort affectionately expects acknowledgement of the relationship, although recognition of his cousin Lionel, Lancelot does give, refusing the request Meleagant, or the Man in Black, makes of him, in his madness, to slay the next accosted wayfarer, who happens to be his very bourgeois cousin. His lasting, memorable, positive statement upon Arthur's original recruiting of him is, in fact, that he is “a Solitary Knight.” Known in China—where unfortunately it is, in this century, endemic—as the Little Emperor Complex, Only-Child syndrome never made it to DSM-IV. A notion isolated first in the Education-obsessed 19<sup>th</sup> Century, until G. Stanley Hall, the leading Developmental Psychologist of his day, famously came to call it “a disease in itself” (Hall 1907), Only-Child Syndrome is today rather less in vogue as a diagnosis, but still is accessible to all the common and various culture-bound, popular (mis)understandings. Since the culture of the *Vulgate* is a very different one, the presumptive “victim” of the disease, preparing to take his place in the aristocracy of the Feudal order qua warrior prince, born King of Benoic, Lancelot, Democracy's “spoiled brat” (if we believe Hall), will garner a correspondingly very different reception. An incident in the *Vulgate* with the young Lancelot's up until then relatively cherished tutor, the main direct caregiver of the youth, proves this: having been hunting, alone for a spell, Lancelot loses his roebuck and horse, as well, to Generosity. Taken to task by this disciplinarian and returned authority figure, beaten along with his dog, he responds only when the poor dog's back is broached by the whip. He ends up breaking his bow into bits upon the tutor's back and only regrets the action when

later he is without hunting bow to catch a beautiful doe. His guardian, having heard about it, only feigns anger and is, secretly, yet more assured of his fitness for knighthood. She inquires, “Do you think just because I treat you like a prince, you really are one?” signaling to the youth that the only finally deciding factor is class-status. The Only-Child is, therefore, would-be one-and-only-King, and equally, as customary possessor of the major mother-figure, the supernal Lady of the Lake, he will love Guinevere, mother of the state. But to stay with the relation of adopter-adopted, for a while longer, in *Kaamelott*, it is unclear how easily and how smoothly Lancelot’s ersatz social-worker (la Dame du Lac) eventually gives him up for “the Arthur case,” as it were. She makes it seem (V.7) that there was some question, on the part of the Supreme Power, whether this is meant to happen—Lancelot is not only the elevated hyper-moral spoiled brat, he is also in line for Pendragon’s throne.

Arthur, for his part, is not so lucky. Farmed out to a minor vassal, oppressed by his milk sibling (Kay) in Malory, he is in *Kaamelott* even less well off. When his temporary guardian Merlin has no time for his upbringing, he is baby-sat by a peasant family, before being shipped off to Rome at five, by his ambitious and unscrupulous mother Igerne of Tintagel—in effect, sent off to the military school of parental threat before having had a chance to misbehave. The future king of Britain thence grows up in the style of what might be biographically narrativized (in a folk way of knowing the *existential condition*) after the fact under the rubric supplied by the 20<sup>th</sup>-century American phenomenon of being an “Army Brat.” What comes along with this, that constellation of rough attributes of resilience and tried wisdom, the ability to “cope” however effective, can have drawbacks, as contemporary psycho-babble reminds us, as does the ugly fact of Arthur's later suicide (“suicide,” and not attempt, because blood-loss had advanced to such a stage that Lancelot actually had to rescue

Arthur from death itself). “Coping”—when it arrives at its limitations—is not, in fact, all it is cut out to be. Similarly, Arthur’s “premature maturity” is the loss of his childhood proper, and all that comes along with it: substantially, the many silly figurative infantile insistences of the normal post-toddler budding boy. In the meantime, having gotten used to the complicated logic of the Roman governmental regime, he is established early in life as “civilizer,” although this comes at the premium of real later dislocation in his newly Federated Britain. Abandoned by family, there is no one (unlike with Lancelot) to indulge or pamper his natural childish tendencies *not* to be moderate, *not* to be malleable to the given power structure, or even his peerage.

This formative severing of Arthur from all family ties results in his being individuated to a degree as drastic as Lancelot. We bear witness to another King-maker: the lack of love, rather than its profuseness. He grows up wholly ignorant of birth and destiny, with vague recollections of one *barbu* (Merlin—or, Uther?) and an older sister (Morgan/Morgawse), proud at the utmost to have achieved status as an entitled *Miles Ignotus* (VI.1). Self-dependence is a prime virtue of *Kaamelott*’s Arthur—as indeed of any real king—and he certainly develops this in the Roman campus. He learns early to take care of himself, to connive helpful friends and, according to the dicta of the school of Merit and Mediocrity that the camp is for him, to defer to a more propitious moment the self-centering—the dis-anonymifying, if you will, attentions of his superiors. The *Vulgate*’s Lancelot (Klinger 2001, *contents*) is a Knight with a Name to Make; Arthur, in *Kaamelott*, by contrast, is, or will be upon the assumption of his legacy, the King his Name Makes of Him. His progress as Roman soldier is, otherwise expressed, unexceptional—if unexceptionable. This Doctrine of the Mean, of the Middle Way, that Arthur makes his ruling policy is what gets expressed by

Julius Caesar's compliment (VI.3), that he never lets himself become unforgiving of the foibles of others. Arthur's adulthood, when it comes, is a restraint he knows well—and from an early age. The war conditioning Lancelot's upbringing in the *Vulgate* corresponds to Arthur's Roman education, as a concrete extreme of character-forming hardship, a dampener of infant whimsy, reeling in the fancy or playfulness of the parent-protected early dream-escapes (see *Ends* for notes on dreams), and raising the stakes to the mortal. The world has already laid siege to their innocence as they become individuals.

Lancelot, though an only child and a "Precious Orphan" is not (in the *Vulgate*) a lonely child. A point is made of announcing the assortment of a small company of buddies—boys and men—available at the Lake (Lacy II.18). In *Kaamelott*, however, since the ready aristocratic championing of Lancelot's youthful conceit is not operative, a suggestion of the kind is, in effect, made: that Lancelot was brought up by the Lady of the Lake in a kind of knightly greenhouse. Homeschooling him in White Magic and Healing (practiced in V.7, saving his own life through an enchantment—and in V.9, saving Arthur's), the Lady of the Lake neglects to ensure that he knows how to "relate." Exacerbating a preexistent Only-Child syndrome, his condition as lonely child isolates him from the Dialogic relation within the community of his peers, and it seems he never learns to deal with people who are not spiritual paragons or mere ideals: knights, peasants, girls and men, in their actual, often humble reality. Entirely innocent of the ability to assert his maturity sexually, when Guinevere elopes with him (Book IV), Lancelot is accordingly lonely. This loneliness is manifest as tragic fatality, the aloneness of the most dolorously solitary knight (cf. the famously best knight in the world in the *Vulgate*), and his deep, but ineffectual, religious inclinations only redouble his *isolation* drastically, dividing his romance idealism from the



realm of the achievable for *Kaamelott*'s given universe of moral actors—short of violence, the final, foundational, political violence of which he will finally not, in his episodic madness, stop short (VI.9). It is Arthur's benevolence not once to lose sight of the "animal" within the history of Aristotle's *political animal*. Lancelot fixates by contrast continually upon the solipsist Saint<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> See Ribard (1995), who compares the account of Lancelot's childhood in the *Vulgate* with a few accounts of the childhood of Christ.

### ***Middles: Carteso-Augustinian Recall***

One could have, perhaps should have, entitled this section: “Carteso-Augustinian Amnesia.” But the drama of the situation is in its “recall;” only the status quo is amnesiac. For we will see that, unlike with ill-advised presumptions about the Medievalness—the *passé-ness*—of the *Vulgate*, in terms of its more static conception of character, *Kaamelott’s* (post-)modern subjects are riddled with pot-holes or counter-temporal retentions, tending to reverse the flow of narrative with de-repressive “rememberings.” This, besides the onwards mounting squash and slush of what has gone by into “water under the bridge,” or the original repressive gesture that makes room for the present in the first place. But, really, such presumptions are too simplistic, for is not the *Vulgate* Lancelot, also, haunted by a suppressed, or even, *re*-pressed, past? Does he not also go on his errands anonymously more often than not (Gordon [2008] discusses namelessness for the verse romances), and often in the garb and armor of another to shake off his plentiful “tail” (practically half of the round-table, being in perennial search of “that pigeon,” Lancelot)? Why is it that he tries to ‘make his name’ by making it first the original unspeakable, an identity founded in the void of unvoiceable timelessness? Is this mode of behavior of Lancelot not in fact also just as representative of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century predicament of the transgressive, definitionless, apocalyptic, three-timed *kairos* of post-modern man in search of his own character, past his own finitude, being-toward-his-own-death? Only a meticulous, composing author—the “architect” of the *Vulgate*, e.g.—could be *sub specie aeternitatis* guarantor for such doubled self-relation and repetition, of the Self positing itself in relation to its own future through its

past. But the difference<sup>10</sup> between this antique Caameloth and newer *Kaamelott* is that such a position of omniscience is available for consultation—concentrated in two prime “deep throats”: the Lady of the Lake and Meleagant the Man in Black.

Ninianne, Lady of the Lake, inserting the element of quasi-divine *volition* into the mix, in the *Vulgate*, motivates the *Prose Lancelot* (Terry 2007) as Lancelot’s mirror, or the repository of his self-knowledge (Longley 2000), and in *Kaamelott*, she is even an angel—a beautiful creature of the ether, a little ditsy, until the convulsive season of Guinevere’s elopement (IV), when the Lady of the Lake is stunningly banished from Heaven for not preventing Arthur’s adultery with Dame Mevanwi<sup>11</sup> (raising questions of God’s justice, commenting, moreover, on the created, incarnate penury of the class of Mortals). In *Kaamelott*, stopping by Lancelot’s crib just long enough to dub him “du Lac,” she adopts the youthful, Roman King Arthur as a sole prodigy. When she appears, only Arthur can see her, except, again, for an occasion in Book IV when because of technical difficulties (Astier’s canny sense of humor, again), Arthur cannot see her at all, whereas to all others, she appears clearly. Lancelot remarks at this point that he feels like he has seen her before somewhere, that something is familiar about her. This signal predicament substitutes, maybe, for the one half of Lancelot’s retentive situation—he cannot remember that he has forgotten. But in

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<sup>10</sup> Neglecting the written predictions of the *Quest* (Lacy IV), which wait on every grave and spare stone—see Karczewska (1998), for the epistemology of prophecy—and the elite pearl-string of the members of the Grail-pedigree with perfect prescience on the basis of their insider information.

<sup>11</sup> I return to this in Ch. III, comparing it conjointly with the *Vulgate* Double Guinevere (Arthur’s effective adultery) and the “Episode of the Cart” (Guinevere’s elopement with Lancelot).

Book V, when dying from loss of blood from an arrow-wound caused by the cousin-germane, Lionel, whom he had previously (uncharacteristically, for once, acknowledging parentage) refused to kill, the now-banished Lady of the Lake reminds him of his first forgetting and he can begin to remember. The second half of Lancelot's retentive situation is precisely the rarity of that refusal, that now, he refuses instead to accept the past, and actively avoids it (with the prepared phrase: "I am a solitary knight, I am a knight errant") and disavows it: discovered to be the unknown son of King Ban, brother to the bastard Hector, cousin to Bohort (and his brother Lionel), he reacts violently, punitive and vengeful regarding the coming out of oblivion of this rare detail about his past prior to the lake, which, according to the *Vulgate*, he would not have known about himself until far later in life and after becoming a knight. If the story in *Kaamelott* is still (if Combarieu 1984 is believed) that of a novel of Apprenticeship, or a *Bildungsroman*, then Arthur—already alter-ego of the auteur—would have to be the hero of it, and not this huffy, tantrum-throwing Lancelot.

Aside from the nightmare of his frigid mother, Igerne, who personifies his irrelevant, non-personal past, the past that has ejected him, even in the *Vulgate*, which has no place for him, Arthur's walking, breathing memory, is really Meleagant, the man somehow *everywhere*, knowing everything. He takes Arthur down that excruciating hike down memory-lane of a past that Arthur, for his part, also, cannot remember that he ever knew. In the course of his mid-life break-down and abdication, or rejection (from the throne), led by his ill-favored "guide" Meleagant, the Man in Black, he meets, first, the baby-sitters of his boyhood, and then once again encounters Prisia, the childhood Gypsy friend that he knows, because so long prior, in a *smaller form* from somewhere in Rome. She will tell him—inspired by Meleagant's maybe manipulative interference—the secret of his present, or his

recent past, which puts an end to his future. Modernity in the moment, an apocalypse in germ, this news is of his infertility. Certainly, we will be able to turn to its consideration in more depth in *Ends*, but, for now, we merely attempt to note carefully the following important point: it is only after giving a perfection—in the sense of “an ending,” to his history, his *suicide-solution*, that he is able to dictate the whole to the famous Father Blaise (Merlin’s amanuensis in the *Vulgate*).

Meleagant plays, therefore, an evil Father-figure to the abdicated King Arthur, the master-before-him of his own past, procuring for him—as guide back to *Kaamelott* from his long walk-about in search of an heir (about which more shortly in *Ends*)—his small sum and collection of the thitherto dispelled and thenceforward oppressive, affective memories and memorable affections. Meleagant all-assuming, omnipotent man in black, manages, in the course of Lancelot’s long, desperate, mad, committed “apprenticeship” to his undefinable evil (anti-*Bildungsroman*), to be all too ubiquitous as the Pappy-to-Make-Proud. 'Darth Vader' of the *Kaamelott* series, Meleagant is balanced by history: the benevolent mothering of the Lady of the Lake. She meets Lancelot on the grass dying of an arrow wound, and reminds him of a “geste” she made up to teach him White Magic, in childhood, which goes something like this—“La chevalier blanc traversera la rivière, la coursière, la barrière, la coursière, la coursière, la barrière, la frontière, le barrière, le barrière, la frontière... .” But she does not remember, in actuality, herself. All she can do is indicate that he has forgotten it—and hope that, before the ugly event of his death (that she does not stay to watch), he will remember. Along with the intricate finger movements, which he begins to put into practice, the words of the incantation (or cheer, depending on the identity of the “chevalier blanc”) come to his lips, as he improvises, at first, then gains unconscious confidence within all the

correct grooves of the trained, unforgotten muscular memory. Re-ensigning—with growing presence of mind—the patterning of the words, he brings himself back to the time of their teaching. Instead of recollection being instrumental, a simple transference or carrying over of the past into the present, traveling, he leaves the present behind, this moment when he verges on death, to enter into the past of the body, the enduring, marked, inscription-bearing body: for the swift seconds it takes him to recall the chant, the palimpsest of the present is wiped clean to lay bare the diminished vista of history. And in remembering his trace of memory, the lost gains its lostness, approaching a step to being finally found, and the camera deftly and decorously cuts away as, defeating mortality like a sprinter breaking the finish line, he enters the de-repressive trance of his eternal soul: he has made his shrewd bargain with the lost past and with native White Lake Magic bought back his soul. Sadly, this Angel's Pact may not be binding. The attraction of the dark side is great. Having once seen his heaven in passing, he is just as factually accessible to the end of damnation as he is to the option of salvation, which he can never escape, if still he can refuse to recognize.

In the languid stillness of *Dies Irae* (VI.9), the after-life of his suicide, having revealed the sum of what belonged to him in memories, having confessed his life to Father Blaise and consigned it to scratched slate, Arthur has an intermittent dream sequence. Less the long recovery-beard and mane of hair, shorn like a Roman (as he has been for Book VI, generally), he has desultory pillow-talk with Dame Mevanwi (his co-adulteress), about his facial hair. Bending over to kiss him, by way of jump-shots, she morphs into his Roman first wife, Aconia, who asks him unaccountably, and uncustomarily, about the Grail. A mass of repressed material begins to extrude itself—after the grueling course of his “writing cure.” He speaks with his aunt of Tintagel, awake now (as a touch-stone moment of veracious

narrative, which adds vividness to the next episode), and he is informed that he is reported by them as dead—and apparently, though perhaps not (vividness naturally “carrying over”), nods off again, because the next visitor is his half-sister, Morgawse. She brings up material from his archaic past, his father Uther killing hers, the presence of Merlin, that she was the one who lifted him up to extract the sword aboriginally, and then inquires, in a manner only to be imagined, if it would please him to make love to his half-sister. Repeating the question several times, she is replaced by Bohort in the room, telling Arthur that he had been having a bad dream, refusing out of modesty to repeat the words that he had been muttering in his sleep. Even though perhaps Astier is being sensational by bringing the matter up at this point in the story, and the *Vulgate* is perhaps less explicit on this particular point, it should be hard (for the modern reader) to ignore the incestuous sexual relationship that, according to some accounts, brings about the end of Caameloth in begetting Mordred. In fact, this release of cathexis now, of all times, is only natural: after the end of the present, the past can truly begin. This then is the bargain that Arthur, for his part, makes with Tintagel’s frigid alma mater and the tyrannous blank space, to leave him in peace to mourn the lost loves he found, originally, to lose what he had originally lost, in them. In the first dream-sequence, he sees Mevanwi and Aconia (exactly both of his adulterously former wives—vs. his formerly adulterous present wife, Guinevere: I will explain this puzzle in Chapter III). Both complain of the cold. According to the logic of desire, he finds in this detail of phantasmic past-in-the-present, in this maternal, objective trace of identity, the never truly absent coldness, omnipresent and ineradicable, what the de-cathexis of his literary and near-literal death makes room for: a response. Morgawse, the half-sister, previously having attempted his brutal murder (V.3), exposes an “earliest” positive recollection of the *object*, and the noted

cold is the sign that facilitates the transference. If Lancelot had been “shot through the heart,” as strikingly he in fact is (V.7), in permanent exile from the lackadaisical idyll of the surrogate, ideal, dyadic, reduced, foreclosed, imaginary Family Romance by the Lake (where Arthur, both while King and after, likes to sit and to meditate), Arthur, in his turn, struggles to respond to the primordial coldness and fails—from love-object to love-object. As the coldness grows definitive of a trajectory, the cold becomes synecdochically the *objet petit-a* itself, Arthur's “type.” Morgawse's cold code-red murderous desire for him represents an ironic transfiguration of Coldness—therefore also the primary pleasure-based motor of his originating desire.



### ***Ends: Expecting a Next Generation***

The *Vulgate* ends in tragedy and renunciation. The cycle, from Grail to Sin, finally comes full circle, earlier births turn into later deaths, and in the *Mort Artu* (Lacy IV), all accounts are settled, the summation of the narrative reaches its last term. This sequencing does not match, however, the sequence of composition, notably (Frappier 1959) begun in the middle as the converse of *in media res*, in the *Lancelot*, only branching out later onto the wings of its prequel and sequel Grail stories and the *Merlin*, in passing, striking home with the swan-song of Caameloth in the *Mort Artu*. Linearity is not observed, in composition, nor in the manuscript history (which it would take us far afield to consider at this vantage). This is of paramount significance when considering the fatefulness of the development of the persistent strands of narrative across the various books of the cycle: Lancelot's love-paintings on Morgan LeFay's walls, for instance, in the *Prose-Lancelot* (Lacy III.157), which Arthur will not see until afterward in the *Mort Artu* (Lacy IV.5). Likewise, in *Kaamelott*, Arthur's life story is interlarded with back-story, and continuity is the outcome of contrivance. Living in several different *sorts* of time, simultaneously (Sit-com time; Soap-opera time; Cyclical time—all three of which bear comparison—Chronicle time, Feature film time, etc.), *Kaamelott* is jagged at its inner edges with the highly wrought effort of its *auteur* Astier to smooth over the changing and time-bound conceptions of the show's narrative-thrust and sense of purpose. *Kaamelott's* point of reference and its grand narrator is this Arthur of middle age and the Middle Way; in the *Vulgate*, Lancelot leads, and Merlin and the Lady of the Lake narrate (but not Arthur, who remains stuck on the level of the narrated, in restriction of his effective sovereignty).

Arthur, after his prolonged flashback to his salad days, dictating the innovative device of the **post**-suicide note to his scribe and chronicler Father Blaise, practically begins with the following element: trying to remember life *before*. He does not even know that he is Breton (British/Brythonic) until the senators searching for an answer to their colonial problem tell him. He thinks back and, over the course of the next several days, develops a marginally clearer picture. Oddly enough, when asked a direct question in reference to the past that he does not remember (e.g. Excalibur), he has answers. After his suicidal episode, the first element he tells of his former life, prior to Kaamelott, is his having forgotten, having to remember—whereas the last element of his lived life (in the direct time-sequence), prior to suicide, is the exact opposite. Not remembering (which is to say, retrieving or reversing the erasure), but instead the forgetting of the future. His future as he had searched for it, to remember it, lay in discovering feasible means to his absent *alliance*, or family in the cold world—namely, the most missing thing, as well in the *Vulgate* as in Malory—yet more missing than the Grail (probably present, unnoticed in V.1) in *Kaamelott*: Arthur's heir. In Dies Irae, Days of Judgment, an exhaustive dictation to Blaise, an apocalyptic story of the past that determines the future-in-the-past (the logical next step or expectation) comes to perfection. Only subsequently can come the truly unknown—the messianic X that erases this *positive* future to make room for a future proper toward which there can only be empty pretension. Lancelot in the *Vulgate* has a similarly prophetic relationship to his future-in-the-past, his double, heir, namesake, replacement and upgrade, Galahad, and like the wind-egg of Arthur's predicted infertility in *Kaamelott*, this prophecy, unchallenged, brings about his obsolescence.

Lancelot in *Kaamelott* resembles Lancelot in the *Vulgate*: in both he is ignorant of the past and suppresses it; only in the former has he—strictly speaking—repressed the fundamental fact of his sexualized humanity. Unbegotten, therefore unbegetting. The only potential progenitrix with whom he could cohabit in either and any case is Guinevere, but in *Kaamelott*, unlike in the *Vulgate*, Guinevere-impersonators are a rarity. Moreover when he eventually gets to be, in the *Vulgate*'s *Quest*, possessed of an incarnate future, Galahad, his son, he is at the same time deprived of the full flower of the actual future, the Grail's X. His sin of carnality and the insinuating substitute—his son—prevent the thitherto *best knight in the world* from attaining the world's supreme sublime and unique quest. As token of the insidious usurpation is the common name of the brief, blind lineage: "Galahad," (baptismal) name of father and son both. The psychosis of the mirror stage expresses the modality of this clone-paternity, whose need for existence is *justified* only by his existence—had Galahad not been begotten, Lancelot would not have had originally sinned, and no Galahad would then have been necessary. Crown of Chivalry, Lancelot can only give birth to his end: when there is no longer any further upward to go, one can go down and grow pre-climactic—as thenceforward the climax is left behind in the shape of untasteable perfection. The incarnate future is an authentic future, therefore, only in being direct incarnation of a dual lineage of Divinity, remaining incomprehensible, while at the same time existing. Lancelot can only entertain the primal internal intraegoic jealousy in respect of the trans-substantial existence of Galahad: oneself as the Other, and not simply another.

If dreams are wish-fulfillments, what are we to make of the dream Arthur has when first he learns that the girl he heard his peasant-pling<sup>12</sup> had had was lost to the attrition of infant mortality, and in addition, that she was probably the Tavern-keeper's? This dream in the slow-motion of holding hands with the young toddler, and walking through a field, expresses a need for an attachment, simply something to love in the world where women are unreachable or unlovable, and his vassals are universally problem-cases, at best. It is when the daughter is denied him that he dreams. According to this logic, then, what are we to make of his final bath-tub dream, after deciding to end his life with the fatal razor, having tragically been denied any possibility of child as a connived certainty—Meleagant's doing? This dream is different but similar. The girl is replaced by a boy and the grown-up holding his hand has short hair and no beard, and is additionally, wearing a dark coat. It is not obvious or assured, but hypothetically, the boy could be Arthur himself and the man Uther. Like their similar names, they have a striking family resemblance. But, biographically speaking, they have little else—time or love—in common. I see Arthur replicating his desire for futurity in that of his father, and desiring futurity in this absent boy to prove that his absent father desired Arthur,

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<sup>12</sup>This only much later exploited plot-twist is first sowed in I.43. Arthur is established as caring-king, partly because of his sexual, emotional solicitude to his peasantry. In this episode, the father of the peasant-girl in question (Madenn) petitions for reparation from his daughter's unknown partner in conception. When years, seasons, and books later, the narrative becomes far more serious, this planted possibility receives treatment during Arthur's quest for an heir. It bears mention that he does not try Guinevere, because, due to the vow he makes (VI.6) to his bigamous first wife Aconia, he has never tried Guinevere.

in the present process of absenting himself drop-by-drop. His need to love, or have something to love, is really a need for the love that would love him as he would love—stronger than **need**—to be loved, the love of his efficient cause, or removed mover, Pendragon. It bears indicating that Astier is the son of the actor who plays his father-in-law on *Kaamelott*, Lionnel Astier. They are clearly very close. Alexandre Astier, however, does not share a mother with his brother on the show (Simon Astier), even though the mothers of both brothers have roles on the show: Alexandre's mother plays the wife of his father's character, his mother-in-law, and Simon's character Ivain's mother; Simon's mother plays Alexandre's character's (Arthur's) mother, Igerne. The complications of the biographical reality informing the scenario on the show might favor treating the paternal desire as a symmetrical, or parallelistic, knitting of the string *down* onto the level superior, as its transversal string *down*: I love my son as my father loved me, becomes, for Arthur, I wish for the chance to love my the son/daughter, for whom I wish, as I wish that my father wished for the chance to love me. Both are dream experiences or wish fulfillments that span the obsolescence (death) of their patient and the cause for that obsolescence, and both are the future-in-the-past that, in Arthur's after-life (after death), he learns to overcome or forget.

Lancelot is, in contrast, in competition with his future: he weighs his present on the scales of comparison, in his own *Dies Irae*, and comes up absolutely *short* one venal virtue or two. He fails, in other words, to be available to achieve the quest that would seem to be defined by his identity as supreme knight, the supreme quest. His real future is already incarnate there—in the present—before him, and he is displaced. He would, in a Kaamelottian vein (to attempt to interlock the cantilevers of the bridge of the Arthurian reality, the composite picture), seek to avenge himself for its neglect upon destiny somehow,

but the quest is God's. Just as God has seen fit this time to advert to another hero (or “son”), Lancelot can at most choose his own *moinage*, or his retreat into solitude *qua* rejection of the doubleness of Fatherhood, over the achievement of **this** quest. He is (in the composite picture) a form of the archaic filicidal despot, jealous of his progeny (Ivan the Terrible, e.g.), reflecting in an exact mirror image their Oedipality, foreclosing their propagating possibilities with the iron law of his essential necessity. *Kaamelott* and its sources (Galahad stories) here create a unified psychological picture of Lancelot that Arthur altogether reverses. Arthur would die for a projection into the future, his child, and he does die finally in the death of the open possibilities of this child. Necessity finally defeats our progressive King with slurs of his progenitive impotence and infertility. Driven mercilessly by the caprice of necessity, Arthur finally tires of the forced march, and needs the belief in childhood's openness, its undefinableness and absence of any constraint. He needs equally the beauty of filial love, ideally, in place of the haggling of *les gonzesses* and the planctus of the needy goose that Guinevere is in *Kaamelott*. To place himself in the world, to have his one *alliance*, to avoid the cold, he demands the vibrancy of childhood—for the freedom that he lost in soldiering away his childhood, there must be at least the truthfulness of one *unquestionably* good thing, one thing fully formed and perfect and alive—a golden child, from whom he could inherit the fulfillment of paternity—a solid pivot that could generate for him his “out” from the endless divine farce of life, Redemption, Human Grail, immanent end to his contested royal identity: the divine childhood of *his* child.

## *Conclusion*

Incompleteness in their individual schemes of representation characterizes the Arthurian “bones,” from which Astier extrapolates the funerary rites: among the inexplicable mysteries of this divination is the comic transformation of Lancelot’s cousin, Bohort de Gaunes, into the Man of Mode, Sentiment, and Kaamelottian *Haut Couture*—and altogether too courtly an individual for the role that tradition had previously preserved for him, as comrade of Lancelot and Galahad in the *Quest*, no less, as well as the image and herald of Lancelot (Suard 1998). But *apropos* the deciphering of narrative necessity, what is clear at any rate is that the congealing of one theory, along with any analysis of that theory, has to take its place as yet one more Arthurian bone. To be derived, finally, is the end-state puzzle—put together, piece by piece, in the name of the essence of an Arthurian tradition that develops, bone by bone, to compose the harmonies of an unnamed monster, animated itself by forces needing on their own part delineation and definition. Childhood is the beginning of the traditional hero, and on the level of the *Vulgate*-installment of the ongoing Arthurian adventure in narratogenesis, the character of the hero is the completion of his set of quests; to lead, the hero must grow out of his beginnings. The *Vulgate* provides these for Arthur, Lancelot and Merlin, and leaves the finish, the designed total patina, or consolidated effect, of other heroes to other texts. As an experimental work of televisual adventure-sitcom, full of *polytropic* metamorphosis, *Kaamelott* is more open-ended, on **both** ends. This chapter, alighting on bibliographic material covered in Hanawalt (2002), applying a methodology that recalls Ingram (2003), has examined these two ends, as well as its past- and future-directed characterological arrows. This unravelled openness appears, however, only with the large part of the skeletal-structure of all the precedent Arthurian bones already in position—it

pretends at most only to the motivation of a relatively *solo* work, the comic ping-pong of the return of Arthur (to TV), on a thick aural basis of voices lain by the traditional orchestra of the separate, incremental legends—Chretien de Troyes, the Vulgate, translations, Malory, and so on. To understand incidental accretions, one must return to the justifying pretext within its surrounding context (e.g. of authorship and momentary actualities).



## ***Chapter II. Games***

*Kaamelott* not only transforms Bohort, stalwart boon-companion, into a new fey elegance, but Karadoc (one of King Arthur's strongest supporters in the *Vulgate*) is bound, also, to Perceval's side as co-alcoholic, unfailing failure in love/life, frivolous quest-mangler, stick-in-the-mud, and occasional object—for the normally, but not exclusively, humor-seeking audience—of unexpected compassion. He is such a loser, you can't help but love him. Yet more endearing still is his retarded brother, Kadoc, who will spout off such memorable reactive lines as “Le caca des pigeons c'est caca, faut pas manger” (III.28) — “Pigeon doodoo is doodoo, you must not eat it.” Whether the *Vulgate's* style and the overall make-up of its cast of characters supports or provokes such irreverent, strategic narrative raspberries—and even whether rank comedy is admissible at all as a form of Arthurian expression—*Monty Python and the Holy Grail* perhaps answers to the satisfaction of some, in advance. But I think, nonetheless, the energetic derivation of the comic implications of the staid Arthurian romance elements will probably raise far more questions in the long run than are perfunctorily subdued by the usual presumptions about Formula-Television and the Culture-Industry. Why, for example, does Tradition, under curious circumstances, take the turn it does, puncturing while reincarnating the previously remote medieval Arthurian text, resolving the light of the *Vulgate's* early prose with precedent Carnavalesque hints in Chretien's Aristocratic verse diversions, and lightening the load of the fraught saga of the solemnly Christian King?

Pagan spirit of pageantry, lost somewhere in between episodic *contes*—the continuators, although more earnest, I nonetheless include—and the architecture of their

perhaps clerical recension, is, I suggest, not only restored, but also redoubled. Humor becomes, in short, the welcome artifact of honesty. In this chapter, I seek to ground and illuminate the feature of *Kaamelott* evoked by characters like the caca-obsessed Kadoc—the sense of fun, or the idea that Arthurian adventure is, at bottom, *playful*—that this lack of gravity may be precisely the final theme of the story, one of the deepest, most revealing, particular things about it. *Kaamelott*, evolutionary reflex of the Middle Age’s prime-time, one of History’s most successful escapist fictions (“the Dream the Middle Ages Dreamt about Itself”), reflects, I will argue, a key feature of the original: the pre-Coming-of-Age narrative (akin to Freud’s stages, although more in line with the Economy) of the developmental socialization of Childhood’s impulse into the more or less serious and identity-forming Game-structure which, through rules (chess, warfare, courtly love) and prizes (liberty, supremacy, the damsel once-in-distress’ undying gratitude), gives it its ends.

Elected to the Round Table (V.42), eventually, Kadoc represents that which *Kaamelott* analyses as particularly Arthurian playfulness: pure child, he still manages to play a mean game of Horseshoe or, as is the case, Caillou (II.81). The tendency of the complex social organs of Medieval Christendom is, remarkably, to devolve from the parentally assigned evaluations of the life-and-death Destiny of Ludic Chivalry<sup>13</sup>—by way of the complicated set of transformations for which this chapter will account in detailed, multi-segmented argument—to the precedent utopia of Paidia.

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<sup>13</sup> Sacred Knighthood, as distinguished from the Secular, typified by the more serious areas of the Cistercian-influenced *Vulgate* and the Gospel- and Boron-derived *Estoire* (Saycell 1991).

***“Incipit—” ...the Norwegian Subtitles!***

Compared with the formality of the rules of the Ludic, the freedom of Paidia (the element of child’s play, defined as an “activity by children that is guided more by imagination than by fixed rules”) seldom peeps out in the *Vulgate*; we examine, initially, one example: Lancelot’s prize-gift of chess—won in adventure and, awarded to Lancelot’s lady patron, Queen Guinivere, transformed into Courtly Love-token (DeLacy III.154).

But, first, I lay out theoretical groundwork and explain some of my terms of reference. My terms for the gradations in the level of formality of games, Ludus and Paidia, pertain to Roger Caillois’ magisterial 1958 analysis in *Man, Play and Games*. Amorphous children’s pastimes—like *Kaamelott*’s royal food-fights (with fine cream cheese), fishing with no bait (Perceval’s crypto-St. Simonianism), or even, the “Jeu de Caillou” episode II.81— would strike Caillois as categorically distinct from more organized, culturally coded adult diversions. But, leading into philosophical rocks of the French ‘60’s, Callois’ disquisition on games stems from and is in partial tribute to the prior investigations (cited in the first sentence of his first chapter) of J. Huizinga, Dutch medievalist/philosopher, of *the Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924; 1954, English) and *Homo Ludens* (1944, German; 1950, English). Huizinga had done a thorough job of establishing Play’s prominent centrality as definitive of Man’s civilizational superstructures. Within the gauge of his Anthropological verities, Play is revealed as the unifying motif of the texture of culture as such, being claimed as Man’s patrimony and his essential particularity. After the apocalyptic toll of World War II, after encroaching skepticism and increasingly trenchant disqualification of the blunt 19<sup>th</sup>-

century Kantian assumptions,<sup>14</sup> Roger Callois works with far fewer 'self-evident' premises, and with quite another epistemological horizon.

Huizinga follows in the footsteps of Schiller's early attempt in his 1795 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, to define Man through Play, to posit that "Man is only truly Himself when he Plays," or perhaps even, that He is most *Human* at Play—in the Humanist twist that Huizinga reiterates (implicitly), **politically**, as the *zoon politikon* is reformulated into Latterly Romantic Homo Ludens. Callois does not presume Man the insurmountable scope of the arena of discovery, and digresses on the play of birds, frogs, monkeys, and so on. He furthermore marks the internal divisions of the concept Man (if appealed to at all), specifically and indelibly: the structure of the human and the animal in its place becomes the **result** of the strictures of the ongoing human and animal play-activity. Huizinga's saccharin, but at times militant, enthusiasm for Play alternates with his (Hegelian!) ability to so abstract the concept that it seems not merely one motif of Culture, or even the main motif of Culture, but Culture proper, or at the very least, Culture's very mainspring. To this recklessness of the distinguished rector of Leiden, Callois opposes a sanguine suspicion of the ultimate *detourné* of 'Play' through undercurrents tainted by economic motives: Gambling, Violence, Sex, and so on. Whatever else remains hazy about Callois' analysis and about the full ramifications of the range of propositions that it conditions, he is for one thing clearly no utopian—nor even especially optimistic.

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<sup>14</sup> Courtesy of Feminist/Post-Colonial dismantling of Man; also post-Hermeneuticist/French

Nietzschean transvaluation of Dithley-School Human Science: "Bad air!" as Deleuze would put it.

Scholarship less theoretical *dates* slowly, by the gradual inundation of the corrections and contradictions it invites; but Huizinga, risking philosophical speculation, is at once obsolete as a whole and, successfully transcending crude historicist symptomatology, of inestimable value for the discourse he initiates. Professedly eclectic, I will draw on both the universalist, philologically-informed claims of Johann Huizinga, and Callois' post-Foucaultian tentative sketch. Like Huizinga, I believe that Play expounds creatively the true *nomos* of Society in its formation, but like Callois, I see Games classified and sorted. Once I have gotten through following Callois through his fourfold doubleheader of *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *illinx*; and *ludus* vs. *paidia*, I have little energy left for ontological claims. I would nonetheless wish to affirm along with Callois that it is not only the Will-to-Power to which games answer—there is also the search for symmetry; for the subjective apperception of repetitive cultural motifs; for formulation and self-stylization; and for the buoying up of experience with the choral structures of call-and-response. If I follow Huizinga as far as in the first place seeing the domain of Law, for instance, as constituted by the game of “Rule,” I begin to feel a little out of my depths. But I still subscribe lightly along with him, if not to the Schillerian Freedom and formal non-seriousness of Game-playing, at least to the pervasive penetration of the (Spenglerian) meta-historical, trans-cultural Form of Play.

Essaying reconstructions of a fundamental stratum of human reality, while naturally subject to criticism, is (heuristically) admissible and can, moreover, inform us of the more general figurations of the human, or being-in-the-world. Huizinga is always suggestive and never narrow. While Callois is more in our 21<sup>st</sup>-century style (with somewhat of a lull of theory since, frankly), responding better to the noted Post-structural Aporias of Man, Huizinga—freely, seemingly without discipline, **playfully**—still says more on a gut-level

about the grand sweep of human history. He convinces most in his area of expertise: the Middle Ages. His covert argument,<sup>15</sup> however, relates—or so it appears, upon critical scrutiny—to Luddite/Romantic recusance from the sometimes genocidal rationality of modern states, evincing perhaps not-unwarranted nostalgia for organic “simpler times.” His explicatory relish, Callois, for his part, never feels, for War or Chivalry’s game of death, or even any idiotic soap-opera punctiliousness about the medieval installment of Courtly Love’s long-standing dangerous liaisons.

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<sup>15</sup> Just as above, with the Aries-thesis on the dangerous disciplinarity that follows upon the constitution of the category “Child.”

***To Dingo: “Get On With It.”***

After, in summary fashion, looking at the *Power play*<sup>16</sup> of Lancelot’s Chess-game, I take my cue from Huizinga, by examining an earlier (13<sup>th</sup>-century) *nederlands* example of Arthurian Chess literature: Penninc and Pieter Vostaert’s *Roman van Walewein*. I then zoom back to the XXIst Century and the aim of our inquiry at large: the M6 TV-show *Kaamelott*. Considering participatory options left open to armchair escape-artists (of escapist Arthurian genre-fiction), I dwell on the dimension suggested by Penninc and Vostaert’s *Roman*, of childhood’s default freedom (to play) emerging to re-conquer the freedom of adulthood, with now more complex patterns of behavior, finally finishing off by playfully<sup>17</sup> crossing all the cruciform T’s and dotting all the egotistical I’s.

But first, one more digression. Richard Eales (1986), canvassing and analysing the features of the practical pastimes of the Medieval knight and, especially, his preoccupation with the game of chess, demonstrates for us one of the telling and still curious confusions of the investigative philology of Arthurian texts, a confusion, if not recent, then at least not forgotten (Jones and Jones 1949, xxix). Assuming that *Peredur*, the derivative (for all its at times haunting originality) *Mabinogion* text, was the real original for Chretien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, he states that Chretien translates Welsh *gwyddbwyll*, which appears somewhere within the confines of the *Peredur* narrative, perhaps with the warrant of the contextual

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<sup>16</sup> In time, I will return to Adams (2006), which bears this title.

<sup>17</sup> To get as much mileage as possible out of this chapter’s object-lesson and, perhaps, to do justice to the lighthearted Dutchman and his more circumspect younger colleague from France!

popularity of the recently imported pastime, as 'chess.' Which translation was, according to this version of the account that I find recent cause to question, only echoed—actually, perplexingly, simply misread—by the intrepid early rendition of the *Mabinogion* by Lady Charlotte Guest (1838-49):

And he beheld a chessboard in the hall, and the chessmen were playing against each other, by themselves. And the side that he favoured lost the game, and thereupon the others set up a shout, as though they had been living men. And Peredur was wroth, and took the chessmen in his lap, and cast the chessboard into the lake (Guest 1906, 216).

It is an impressive translation, and beautiful. But not accurate. Eales, mistiming, I infer, the respective *termini* of the two texts, only increases the misapprehension. Apparently, the unknown Welsh poet(s), as elsewhere, perhaps as folk self-assertion, *localized* the element “chess,” which was the primary and original term used by Chretien, whom **he** adapts, as “gwyddbwyll.” In the same year as the Eales paper, Ann Martin volunteers her (1986) analysis of “enchanted” Celtic Games in the *Mabinogion*. With respect to gwyddbwyll, if my Welsh is not faulty, to be pronounced something like “quidditch,” she illuminates the significance of the self-playing war-game in *Peredur*; even before that time, but especially since, we have only grown in our advised sensitivity to the particularities of the Celtic text. For the sake of comparison, see Guest's inheritor, the charmingly precise Jones and Jones (1949):

And as he came inside he could see gwyddbwyll [no italics] in the hall, and each of the two sets playing against the other. And the one he would support



lost the game, and the other set up a shout just as though they were men. He grew angry, and caught up the pieces in his lap, and threw the board into the lake (224).

If I do not attend to particularities of this Welsh automaton, it is because Celticist divagations (on this multiply mistranslated *gwyddbwyll*, with the justification of 'Chinese chess', Celtic chess) would take me far afield. But as for chess proper, speckling Arthurian tradition in key sites of thematic disputation, from *Perceval* to *Peredur* (albeit, transmutedly), all the way to later *Perlesvaus*, by way of course of the intervening *Vulgate*, I have cited one—this Eales (1986), to whom I will return presently—and will cite another notable authority: Jenny Adams. Eales says that the medieval text distinguishes categorically, as Callois would, too, between *alea* (dice games) and *scachus* (28). I see deep meaning in chess' representing, fatefully, Skill and Virtue, rather than being arbitrary tool of chance. Moreover, the European world comes to adapt itself to a new self-understanding as stratified and coordinated, *qua* social, as well as gendered, body, condescendingly flirting with its sexual counterparts under the stimulation of chess's heady joys. Eales specifies further that the special corps, order, and estate of Knighthood takes on its playful sense of definitive 'dress-up' in response to the paradigm chess defines—that the intricate interactive display of situated, obligatory, died-in-the-wool class-identity answers to chess' aristocratic stipulation of role and rule. “Two steps one way, one the other” just as exhaustively defines the Knight as it hints at the complexity of the class-bound dance that Chivalry, the aestheticization of an ostensibly morally-progressive Violence, was—both to its promoters and to its performers.

### ***The Trojan Rabbit: General Considerations***

But this game plays itself, an automated move-making and goal-winning, and is therefore emblematic of the self-justified, autonomous Chivalric order. Chess becomes the essence of the Feudal State, Adams supplies: that it needs no players to win and lose at the same time an endless set of games only validates the State's auto-erotic vitality. Instead of the nomadic enstructuring *positionality* of Early Christian, Dark Age horizontal equality before God, chess specifies the *structured* hierarchies that the High Medieval world saw as mainstay: King, Queen, Bishop, Knight, even Rook (architecturally) are, taken altogether, allegorical of the post-Carolingian, logical (scholastically justified), pre-Modern Monarchical State. Each serves his or her purpose within the larger, God-given, natural, Ludic, role-invested directive of valuation.

Truitt (2005) tells us about the role of *automata* in the epistemology of 12<sup>th</sup>-century France, but their primary function is perhaps ontological and not ontic. They give letter and licence to the self-descriptive discourse of the subject, who himself or herself, like 'a poor player' and sometimes only a Pawn, is amongst the willful actors, occupants and legitimated invaders, of the complex contractual systems of Society. Adams<sup>18</sup> registers and records this relationship in the midst of its development in Western literature, from the book Caxton reprints in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century,<sup>19</sup> originally from 13<sup>th</sup> Century, de Cassolis' *Liber de Ludo Scachorum*, through *Les Echecs Amoureux*, to the brief mention in *Le Romaunt de la Rose*,

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<sup>18</sup> In her dissertation (2000), in an article (2004), and in her book (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Wilson 1947; Batt 1996.

arriving finally at Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*.<sup>20</sup> However, more than simply epitomizing the social order, all the more quintessentially as automaton,<sup>21</sup> the more *ideally*—parallel Jerusalem—chess (in the literature, in practice, preternaturally, an affair, in Sedgwick's famous phrase, *Between Men*) bodies forth, Adams claims, the convoluted homosocial triangle: men play, for women; in the place of women, they play, against other men—themselves supplanting the Object, in the male-centered and hetero-normative, patriarchal, prepubescent transference-equation—from *metaphor* to *identity*, thus an equation, no true relation. While Adams explores the metaphorical power of the gendering game of chess in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, I will consider the 12<sup>th</sup>-century prototype<sup>22</sup> of her male-games, wherein, standing as a borrowed erotic provocation, we can observe the travesty of the female player sidelined in her study (see Mostert 2001).

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<sup>20</sup> For more on Chaucer and Games, see Olmert 1984 and 1985; Schoeck 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Just as equally the order of the Clockwork God of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century is, in germ, already manifest in the early modern crusader/oriental technological transmission of the mechanical clock (12<sup>th</sup> Century). A fairy-tale, song-bird-bearing, jewel-tree automaton is a pivot of the *Roman van Walewain* (171), also, a robotic machine close in inspiration to this genre of chessboard, urban fantasy, and the contraption resembles nothing so much as inventions of the Arab al-Jazari (1136-1206), author of *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices: Kitáb fī ma 'rifat al-hiyal al-handasiyya*, trans. D. R. Hill. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974.

<sup>22</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> Century *Perlesvaus*, which turns upon another one of those ubiquitous Arthurian Magical Chessboards, perhaps because derivative (Weinberg 1935), merely receives a cursory footnote, in favor of more canonical Continuations.

### *A Møøse Once Bit My Sister...*

Skipping over multifarious incidents in the Continuations, we can arrive at the core *Vulgate's Lancelot*, to find our first object: the Magic Dance's Chessboard bi-purpose 'Prize-Gift.' It bears rehearsing: at a certain critical point in his eponymous romance, Lancelot enters a pathological obsessive-compulsive Magic Dance (Lacy III.151). Because he is the best knight in the world and the truest lover, he is able to free himself as well as half of Caameloth, from the corrosive grip of zombie, entertainment-culture, endless revel. He is told that even had he never done any other act of nobility, he would still deserve to go down in the history books for this single messianic act. In reward of his deed, he inherits the magical chessboard that amused the fickle lady for whom the prettified Dance Macabre was originally instigated. He plays against its automated minions and wins, thereby proving his worth. Tickled by his good luck or looks (with Lancelot, it is never clear to what he attributes his unremitting success), he dispatches forthwith the chessboard to Guinevere, as an *homage*. I wish to underline no less than three probably not immediately apparent features of the episode: 1. its uncanny proximity to the previous escapade with Pelles' daughter, who had disguised herself as Guinevere, thereby suborning Lancelot's seed:

...he desired her in a very different way, because he did not covet her for her beauty, but believed she was his lady the queen; and this inflamed him to know her as Adam knew his wife, but not in precisely the same manner, because Adam knew his wife faithfully and by the command of Our Lord, whereas Lancelot knew her in sin and adultery and in opposition to God and Holy Church (Lacy III.149, p. 164);

2. the unaccountable Phallic statue that falls, upon Lancelot's freeing the dancers and winning the Chessboard:

He looked about and saw a magnificently carved statue resembling a king fall from the top of a tower and shatter on the ground into many pieces. Then the enchantment was lifted immediately and all those who had long lost their minds and memories had them restored (Lacy III.154, p. 183);

3. Arthur's contemplated playing, before his expediting the gift to its *intended*, Guinevere:

Then the king said that he himself would play [however] He had the queen sit down to play [...] they began to snicker through the palace, seeing that the queen had lost the match, and began mocking the king; and the queen asked the knight who had brought the set whether Lancelot had played [...] “How did he do? Was he tricked?” — “No, my lady, he won his match” (Lacy III.154, p. 185).

I suggest that Lancelot does two coterminous things in freeing these dancers, through the undermining of the Phallic order, thanks to his imaginary self-identity as transcendental signifier (the greatest knight and truest lover). When he topples the statue, returning the Identity of the loving half of Caameloth to its 'scheduled broadcast,' he, at the same time, recapitulates the spermatozoic moment of messianic plenty that had, earlier in his one wild (but oh so wild) night, set awry the postlapsarian system of sin/innocence. Redemption is through Sin here, truly, in the following literal and circuitous way.

Lancelot loves the daughter of King Pelles, who looks like Guinevere, and gives her a child; he loves the Queen herself, and gives her a chessboard. In Guinevere being beaten by the game lies the secret of the antinomian act of adulterous sexual transgression. To ask again: 'was will das Weib?' It is the child that the queen wants. The child, born of sin, but incarnating the blossom of innocence, is the vengeance of Adultery, an impossible consummation of Courtly Love. In place of Lancelot, the Queen plays the game and loses; and in her place, the King reneges his primacy, and, by proxy, among snickering courtiers, himself loses. Lancelot, in his lamented loss of virginity, wins the carnal knowledge of Queen Guinevere that the game Courtly Love had held out as a prize. The love-child is abortive and only gestural, but the intention is pure. The illegitimacy of the child is the hazardous game-structure of the joint-stock venture of Sex (and not the common asexual rhetoric of troubadours). Arthur, the potential step-father of a virtual bastard not born of him, this time around, looks on, abstaining unwisely from playing even a traditional stabilizing role in the otherwise messy and multi-pronged game of Courtly Love. He is there only to be circumvented. But what, by the end of the transaction, has Guinevere won? A symbolic gain of fidelity by the unfaithful lover, who is yet true, according to his successful dancing moratorium, and more than that, nothing less than the magic of the feminine possession of the game of Men. Adams' analysis is apposite here: she says that chess as trope circumvents the Female contribution to the heterosexual gambit of sexuality (demanding Difference), encoding in hidden ways the dominant pattern of governing normative homosocial desire (2004). Significant about the game of chess in the *Vulgate* is context: the gift here parallels the insemination of the daughter of King Pelles that produces Galahad, restorative of the fecundity of the Wasteland. Lancelot is, therefore, a cheeky lover, if true, and the *morning*

*after*, he reminds his mate resumptively of the night before. The Patriarchal order, indulgent, is cuckolded, and the child is (according to an old Greek myth about the formative powers of the contemporary imagination of the conceiving parties) marked in his physique by his mother's temporary counterfeit of Queen Guinevere. When Lancelot submits to sleeping with the image of the Queen, he transgresses, fatefully, upon the sacral dominion of the King, and the legacy of this transgression—the anti-Mordred who never meets his counterpart to annul him—crystallizes in the chessboard. The game Guinevere loses is lost *to* her lover, Lancelot (who 'fucks', or in the changes rung on the pattern of automated opponents, “trick[s]” her, as he himself was not tricked by it), and lost *for* her husband, Arthur (who owns her). King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, the twin homosocial brotherly lovers, never meet over the board of a chess game, except through the body of the wife of one, and the lady of the other: the body of the beaten, and pleased, Queen Guinevere.

Attained in one complex transaction is the emblematic tragedy of the Arthurian narrative—the worm in the apple that serves as Caameloth's Fall. The innocence of the game, of the dance, of the patronage-relation that Lancelot enjoys with Guinevere, here altogether fail to conceal the more disturbing seriousness of the demanding actualities. Chess is a very serious, highly rule-bound, almost clerical, engagement, lost on the foppish (the aristocrats who see their schooling in it), misplaced among the lewd (the lounging *amorati* who use it to flirt over). Its role in the *Vulgate* should be treated as typologically esoteric—symbolic allegory, if you will—of the sclerotic force of the Absolute attraction of homosocial Adultery, metaphorical of gender and the system of power-exchange of Vassalage. The two parties who have almost all their interests in common cannot help but attempt—with insidious effects on both—to share also their utmost privacies of the possessed Feminine.

Woman is there originally to cause the disruption of the imago, the image of God in Man, the little King in the Knight, each causes jealousy, drawn off to serve the Other Sex. The idyll of knightly autonomy is made possible by Her approval. However, when this approval becomes possessive/reproductive, fulfilling the phallic, non-negotiable contract of lawful issue, which is itself self-sufficient, replicative of feminine power—when adventures errant enter, finally, into the question of kingly legacy and inheritance—then it becomes necessary for symbolism to take the place of speech. The surreptitious sedition of the symbolic exchange of authority present in the simple game is far less difficult to allow its autonomous winnings than to restrain by losing to it absolutely by playing in the first place.

Adams gradually stops speaking in depth of our forthcoming Dutch example, but in her dissertation (2000), the *Roman van Walewain* (trans. Johnson 1992) functions as a conceptual pivot, or diversion of some value. Sadly, we do not have Adams' comment on **most** of the history of this most Chivalrous game (see Truzzi 1975), but here, she allows herself to be theoretically *turned on* by the very good humor of this Post-Classical Experiment (Haug 1999) in romance writing.



***The Aptly-named Sir Not-Appearing-In-This-Thesis***

Losing ground under the progressive necessity of restricting the scope of her argument into its proper centuries, the need to specialize, the *Roman de Walewein* (13th century) earns only desultory comment in her book (2006), *Power play: the literature and politics of chess in the Late Middle Ages*, not really fitting comfortably within its announced period. The Late High Middle Ages is really its day: after the first, flourishing 12<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance, after the active pursuit—in several courtly and clerical settings (Chretien, Wolfram, Strassburg, Walther, Capellanus)—of newly discovered literary possibilities in the nascent vernacular tradition of verse and prose expression. The investment of the nation-building European world, from 12<sup>th</sup> century France to the Holy Roman Empire of that time, accorded with the propagandistic, identity-forming formula familiar from Rome's Augustan Age, an investment in the *cultural capital* that would leave models to the coming craftsmen of narrative and the social tapestry of cultural epitomizing. Subsequent to the Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229) and those less—though still—successful, in the East, the subsistence of Christendom, at least, was assured; the West expressed then (at its periodized *Height*), in the Arthur-myth and in that of his Round Table, its strident crusader sense of itself: as Chivalric and Heroic.

Epigones of the classical romance, Penninc and Pieter Vorstaet *toy* constitutively with this self-assurance, producing therewith a more ambiguous, ironic game of literary invention (“Experiment”), more attentive to the folk tradition of story-telling and far friendlier, in the course of adventurous jest, to the Feminine/Other (as well as the fantastic/quaint) than structurally typified by the *Vulgate's* misogynistic, xenophobic enmities. I would argue, were

there another thesis yet again to devote to the task, that the *Roman van Walewein* articulates early Feminist ideas, if self-contradictorily—even, at times, advocating instruction from the East (pervasive Orientalist motifs, viz. robotic bird-trees as supra), in place of the predatory visitation of the Crusaders. The doctrinal primacy of the Christian creed, nonetheless, dominates the scene, and although the fairy-tale ether is far more tangibly *queer* (challenging) than the *Vulgate's* play-statecraft, the ideological assumptions that the text subverts, it also re-inscribes. Compared to Wolfram's sincerely Christianized but residually rough Paganism, his vocal tolerance to the point of heresy of *another version* of the revealed world-view, here, Penninc and Vorstaet pick no bones with inquisitors and doxologists. Their concern is, rather, merely to tell a rousing and maybe, since the talk is of Walewein's escapades, an *arousing*, tale. However, concerned, for now,<sup>23</sup> exclusively with the symbolics of chess in Arthurian narrative, I omit lengthy investigation of their elaborate dynamic of narrative invention and focus more precisely on the type-scene of the chess-jeopardy, as well as the relevant substitutions, or moves.

With the landmark 1936 dissertation of Maartje Draak as authority, Bart Besamusca—prolific propagandist of Middle Dutch Arthurian text<sup>24</sup> and incidental contributor to the collective vision of holistic 'Arthur'—reiterates the derivation of the *Roman van Walewein* from a fairytale, namely Aarne-Thompson 550 (1999). He infers that, by addition of romance elements, the tale was, at length, nativized as Arthurian. He continues:

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<sup>23</sup> Wolfzettel 1981 details the descent of Gawain narratives into ribaldry.

<sup>24</sup> Cit. in Lacy 2006, p.160.

The romance is constructed round a three-fold quest. Our hero leaves the court to find for Arthur a chessboard that floats through the air, which, after having appeared briefly before the king and his knights, has disappeared again. After a perilous pursuit, Walewein tracks down the Floating Chessboard with King Wonder, who is only willing to hand it over in exchange for the Magic Sword with Two Rings. Walewein continues his quest, and eventually finds the sword. Its possessor, King Amoraen, only agrees to give Walewein the sword on the condition that he abduct a damsel, Ysebele, King Assentijn's daughter... (Besamusca 1999, p. 5).

I appreciate the broad outlines with which Besamusca sketches out the plot of the romance and prefer it to the more detailed schematics of Haug (in the same collection), because it brings out more clearly its skeleton qua triplicate substitution: Girl for Sword for Chessboard. Phallic undertones prevail—this is a story in part about the metaphoric power of the *objet petite-a*.<sup>25</sup> This trinity of desiderata inversely defines the motivation-function of Gawain-Walewein's quest. We will see in the following discussion how the final landing-spot of desire, Ysebele, the King Assentijn's daughter, the depicted Girl-the-Boy-Meets,<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Walters 2000 for discussions of transformation as a formative trope of the romance.

<sup>26</sup> Responding to Walewein's enstructuring Desire-with-a-capital-“D”, the narratogenetic desire, with coded, *ludic*, courtly Language—the natural language of Love-as-Constructed and, as indicated below in Chapter III, the only rules in town (for the motivational-“X” rating, see Johnson 1992, 7960).

standing in place of the magical weapon out of some Proppian taxonomy, the Sword with Two Rings, itself *sine-qua-non* of attaining possession of the coveted Chessboard—how she supplies (after a convoluted sequence of symbolic *plays*) the locus of purposefulness and justification for the challenge of the solitary, errant *agon* of this playful wager-quest.

### *Die Ritter der Kokosnuss*

I quote, therefore, from the Johnson translation of the Dutch text (1992), omitting its sensational, oft-remarked premise exposition,<sup>27</sup> concentrating on the section most interesting to me, hitherto in the blind-spot of the commentators:

When the barons were thus assembled, ... / they witnessed a great marvel; /  
they saw a chess set fly in through the window... (44, 47-48)

We are told in few words / that the pieces belonging to the chess-set / were,  
in truth, more valuable / than all of Arthur's kingdom. (59-62)

“...To whomsoever will mount without delay / and pursue and capture that  
chess-set/ and deliver it into my hands, / I will give all my land; / and my  
crown after I depart this life / by my will he for himself shall hold.” (71-76)

In my analysis, I omit the detour of the Roges-subplot,<sup>28</sup> but do not forget to vociferously denounce the insufficiency of English-language commentary in point of recording the full dimensions of this story. In fact, this quest is not really for the chessboard at all. It is about “Arthur's kingdom”—the chessboard may be more valuable than it, but **in hand**, and not as this fleeting and obscure object of desire. This barter of chessboard for kingdom, in principle (as the description enumerates the jewels that equate to Camelot) and in prediction (as Arthur

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<sup>27</sup> Janssen 1994; Riddy 1999; Meyer 1999 ; van Dalem-Oskam 2000; Jongen 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Variation on Potiphar’s wife tempting Joseph, but more clearly incestuously, the seductress being Roges’ stepmother, the imago of the lost Mother, in the first place, highly cathected photographic punctum.

stipulates the terms of the conditional 'rash boon' that Walewein hazards cheaply the travails of *aventure* to win), is the magic itself—Marx' magic of commodity-form. 'Kingdom=Big Toy' states the formula and, as always, what makes it happen is desire. The power of the equation is—to mystify temporarily—the exchange of wives. I expand: the primary economic holding is Woman (cf. Levi-Strauss). In possessing Her, private property is possessed, and in her “traffick” (Rubin 1975), the economy is founded. Sexual Difference, Gender, is the *voltage* of exchange. Gifts of wives are the glue of affinity, and clusters of affinity thus established consolidate into game-theoretic *coalitions*: families/dynasties. Arthur, on the margin of his kingdom and, certainly, without Guinevere's permission, trades—the meaning of money—on the power of trading.

What does this have to do with the 'rash boon' Walewein wins? Arthur promises him his land and, after his death, his kingdom: for the chess-set. Guinevere is tellingly absent from this agreement Between Men. What Arthur really wants is to exchange roles with *das Weib* and have for himself a baby. Walewein will be his baby, in the exchange of social gender-function Arthur's place as arbitrating ruler allows him. The King can gender-bend and get away with it. Although Asexual Desire is strong in the homosocial system, this promise of his transforms the magical chessboard into a small progenitive Wifey/Yoni of its own as, in the eventualities of the narrative, She<sup>29</sup> births Arthur's effective Son-to-Be. But, again, She does it without having to be a “she.” Through the by-ways of knight-errantry, Arthur *replicates*. So, what does Arthur possess, instead of Woman, privately and as his Kingdom, in the end? The Game. And, in traversing the Fundamental Fantasy of this

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<sup>29</sup> *Scaepel* and *scaec* are, however, Common Gender in Dutch.

*aventure*, starting from a vaginal-phallic stint in a “mountain-hole” (255) and passing along one later on (2955), for all the politics of its well-documented international errant diplomacy (between King Wonder, on the one hand, who wants the Sword, and King Amoraen, on the other, who wants Ysebele), Walewein, in the end, does get the Girl, creating an adequate (Hetero-)Sexual Standard for the upcoming generations of his thus-founded dynasty.

It is unclear from Pieter's “3300 verses” (11185) how the story really turns out, but from the opening gambit, for which Arthur is willingly emasculated, it seems foregone that the chess-set, won, is the far end of the Fundamental Fantasy: **kinging** his Knight, and—no longer anyone's pawn—leaving him “up” one nubile young Queen, worth the chessboard itself, by way of the several *bartering* Kings, equal once over, therefore, to the Kingdom that he wins through her.

***Kaamelott: It's Only a Model***

Pointing out the supernatural reference-points of the chessboard as object of an ultimate quest (something to chase/catch), van Dalem-Oskam calls it a worldly Grail (68); we have insinuated that it will become, the achieved captive of Walewein, through catalytic exchange-value, Caameloth's Next Generation Germ. This realizes the argument of Ch. I in a new setting: the Dutch Middle Ages, too, were cognizant of Arthur's "mulish" nature. In place of the patter of little feet, Arthur must content himself with Walewein's sword-swinging; the fertility drug of a medieval royal male, this secular Grail fulfills the Kingdom.

*Kaamelott* is well-apprised of this need, too. Starting off as daily "skits" (2005), the show graduates into seriousness, in Bks. III, IV (2006), finally re-emerging, in Bks. V (2007), IV (2009), as a Mini-series, or really, Cinematic Morality Play—with now comic relief, in place of the steady stream of Beckettian "jokes." In the earlier books, the full potential of Huizinga's "Playful Nature of Man" is given sway, but what is more essentially happening from out of its challenging experiments with televisual form is the extrapolation of the post-Roman Comedy Dark Ages dramatic tradition. Like Reich's daring *Mimus* (1903), using its textual sources closely, after the example of its dedicatee, von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931), this is the inspired divination of what, in actuality, must certainly have existed. Drama did not fall with Rome: if we only have the 12<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript of *Play* thanks to its emergent utility to the clerical crowd, that does not mean that, for centuries, audiences had lost touch with comedy or tragedy. The *Play*, or "Ludus" (Kolve 1966), perfects, in itself, socialized Game-structure; within the husk of these seemingly meager 21<sup>st</sup>-century existentialist 'skits,' the whole history of Performance is rehearsed.



Philosophical even in being funny, adopting a Socratic wryness to deal with the complications of Politics, both the traditional kind and the social, *Kaamelott* has found another source in the abundant literature of the Western Tradition of the Dialogue form. At times, it even seems to echo Capellanus' (c. 1170) 'Eight Dialogues' (from the *Art of Courtly Love*, trans. Parry 1941). I quote the sub-titles:

... *A man of the middle class speaks with a woman of the same class /*  
*Second Dialogue: A man of the middle class speaks with a woman of the*  
*nobility [...]* *Fourth Dialogue: A nobleman speaks with a woman of the*  
*middle class [...]* *Sixth Dialogue: A man of the higher nobility speaks*  
*with a woman of the middle class [...]* *Eighth Dialogue: A man of the*  
*higher nobility speaks with a woman of the same class (ix-x).*

From such crystallizations of the different **voices** of the Middle Ages, from such transcriptions of the patterns of socialization among the estates, left for the ages as a legacy of moral reflection and practical instruction, *Kaamelott* makes Drama. Why not allow the Past of Love, to take one example (and more importantly, the human element it involves), its little three-and-a-half minute ventriloquist show, in the give-and-take patter of one actor (Astier) from a long tradition of actors (biographically and literary-historically), in a technically proficient verbal Delecroze-short-hand figuration of dramatic interaction, with its goals, emotions, etc.—as laid out by Modern Drama theorists? Capellanus is, accordingly, to be rediscovered these days on French TV's Prime-Time, with all his sense of humor intact. Even with no written drama in the Medieval tradition until nearly that point, Capellanus anticipates in reflections in dialogue form (on the transactional value of Love) some of

Modernity's most fearless experimenters in characterological study (Strindberg, Shaw). To discover the “funerary rites” behind the Arthurian bones, Astier has cast his nets widely and does not neglect to consider the time-period's more prevalent written genres. The social 'script' of the Middle Ages is, thereby, made manifest to a new age, and the meaning of Time receives reinvigoration in this magician's trick, which denies history only to gratify its inner sense, of adaptation and small screen translation.

***“With footwork impeccable...”***

Barker parallels this in *The Tournament in England, 1100-1400* (1986), a social history of the Tournament as a cultural practice: the drama of Chivalry<sup>30</sup> evidently develops contemporaneously with the formative stages of Modern European drama. The important thing to notice about the drama, apart from the fact that, in this case, it is one of formalized Violence,<sup>3132</sup> is that it **is** a drama. In *Kaamelott*, characters continually talk of acting “comme

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<sup>30</sup> Which is the subject of a very well-written but almost pointless book that saw the light in Renaissance France: *Le vray théâtre d'honneur et de chevalerie ou le miroir héroïque de la noblesse* (1648) by Marc de Vulson. Twenty-six “hits” on my search within its two redundant parts and 1200-some pages for “Table Ronde!” Explaining Combat as “jeux sacrez [sic],” during Paix-time, for the display and inculcation of Nobility, his work, nonetheless, claims (in his epistolary dedication to one Monseigneur Le Cardinal Mazarin), to try to contribute to the perfection and reformation of “des Gentils-hommes,” and his work, therefore, reeks of an Early Modern spirit of Bourgeois Social-climbing, and for the Tournament in original significant actuality, is really a gilded-lily retrospective after Medieval Height.

<sup>31</sup> Martin comments (2009) on the game of violence in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. (Since some part of this chapter is devoted to Sir Walewein-Gawain, his *Lebensform* in England perhaps bears investigation). For its role in establishing the Order of the Garter, see: Savage 1938; Carruthers 2001; Ingledew 2006. Then Comparative Literature PhD-candidate at Indiana University, Volkova, examines (2007) the folklore-categoricity of Beheading Games in light of Yeats’ *The Green Helmet*, and square in the Huizingan tradition, Stevens outlines (1972) a SGGK-ian philology of “Laughter” and “Game.”

des Chevaliers.” The game of Chivalry proves to be not only, after Callois-terminology, an *agon* (or a competitive multi-party endeavor where with force of skill and not luck, one 'wins'), but also a *mimicry*. To be is to act, as the old saw affirms, but to be a knight should take someone's Authority—God's, according to the *Vulgate* and the expectations of Medieval Ideology, but at least, the King's. For Lancelot, of course, the *Vulgate* substitutes Guinevere's, but here, in 21<sup>st</sup> century France (later in Switzerland, Canada and for those cognizant of its species of humorous social commentary: Comedy of Manners), *Kaamelott* grounds itself in the Void. When knights have to act “just like real Knights,” then the story will end up by draining its blood into the basin of a suicide's bathtub: King Arthur's self-negativity. That the tub is enshrined by him after the fact as the True Holy Grail, or the basin into which the Christ empties his redemptive blood, allows 33-year-old Suicide Christ, supreme Symbol of Romantic Irony, to re-appear on the scene as a ghost to oversee *Kaamelott's* Knighthood. Irony will have defined Identity in “Post-Modernity”: always Simulacra of the Real, itself constituted on a Joke, we are prefigured in the dialectic of confusion presciently developed as the Diagnosis of Modernity. A equals not-A, by way of the Striving within the Heart of the Phenomenal World. There are symptoms of this Condition, such as Angst. And as the humor grows increasingly black, this will overwhelm rock-star/genius Astier's new *psychological* King Arthur. The comic plot, the play of the

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<sup>32</sup> As Arthur's Western Kempo/Tai-Chi ends up being parodied by the Dauntless Duo Perceval-and-Karadoc with their new Martial Art, *Unagi* (I.92, II.57, III.16, IV.51, V.7), of sushi fame: it means Eel.

teleplay, ultimately only explicates the essential vacuousness of appearances, and the comedy, via the diaphanous shell of negativity, is about the very mannerism of manners.

Instead of settling the function of the Grail on the closest thing that we have to human secular divinity (like Christ's Romantic God-Man), a born child, discussed above in this chapter and in Ch. I, Astier/Arthur resorts to the nearer byway of 'the Man he wants to be': the Hypothetically Future Day, the Perhaps-Coming, Messianic Moment of Identity—when all the words and all the appearances will have **equated** to all the things and all the realities; and this *kairos* is congealed in the moment of Death. Suicide is Authentic, which is the least that one can say about it, and it is this quality of authenticity and the authentication (Becoming What One Is, as Nietzsche puts it: Death, in principle) it precipitates, that *Kaamelott* elicits. Panacea for the Travesty of a child's chivalric aspiration (playing knight), the Will coming into its own, maturity is only reached when it is too late.

### ***Lego Knights—An Alternate Version***

Episode II.15 (*The World of Arthur*) is a good example of this. From the starting point of his bed (first with Guinevere beside him, then three minutes later, alone), Arthur *plays*, in a brilliant escalating sequence of rapid-fire virtuosity, at being himself. The first incident involves the nocturnal cup of wine, which, while drinking, he turns into a bubble-blown harmonium. Talking to Merlin over serious matters, luncheoning later on, he hollows out a half baguette and then turns it into a very funny puppet, which admonishes him about the Grail-Quest. At dinner, this pattern persists. He plays a virtual mad-cap spree of personification with his food, including *dragons* and fire-balls and princesses—and all the most accessible and colorful elements of Arthur's world. Climaxing, he is interrupted by the waitress, Angharad le Suivante—who as her title indicates is a lady-in-waiting and, in the Gallic oblivion of his heart (mind), Perceval's lady-love. Finally, rounding off the long day of royal play, he makes sound-effects for his elaborated narrative imaginations and fails to perfect one for Excalibur. He proceeds to take it out, listen, and mimic. After a few tries, he improves, and even gets the choral-chant-like under-hum.

Arthur is not playing at being a king, he is playing *away* from being a king. Then why does he choose to escape into his 'prison'? It might be because his subjectivity as king, superior even to reality, finds nothing more appropriate, or better, or more fantastical, to desire to become. Arthur is born to be a king—unlike in all the Oriental tales about the reconnoitering, concealed Sultan, during the early days of *Kaamelott*, he is not possessed of the negativity of wishing otherwise. His world can then only be—in utterly innocent surreality—complemented by the Dream-play of Childhood, at which time his destiny was

fixed. The world of God and his ordinations is implicitly revealed as a pleasant parody of itself: “Except ye become as little children...” (Mathew 18:3). *Kaamelott*-at-play is all-but-ready to be transfigured and assumed.

Role-playing and stories, formatively, occupy the long pause before Creation, subjectivizing as they narrativize. We play out stories (as children or actors—also as participants in the complexities of daily life, if only in contradictory Joycean symbolisms of transmutation). Stories are pragmatical, by nature; the sort of act comprising them is the Proppian move. Readers of the Arthur stories have for a long time wanted to participate in the story, to make it up as if from scratch, and bring their heroes to life through incarnating them (Corless 2002). Similarly, there is the phenomenon of Fan-Fiction, and for an incredibly popular TV-show (as *Kaamelott* was—we will see if interest wanes after the several-year wait for the first film), this can be creative, engrossing. The adventures of television characters like Karadoc and Perceval have a persistent force in the ear and eyes of the viewers, and they seem to need to put pen to paper—or rather finger to keyboard—either to prolong the pleasure or to exorcise the obsession. Under the aegis of a graphic of Merlin, or pretending to live in the same Tavern Karadoc and Perceval inhabit, fans enumerate obscure references and rave about their heroes, but more importantly, prolong the story—through new scenarios, new jokes, things they wished happened, things for which they can't wait for the movie, and so on. The resultant interactive nature of the TV-show (which, evidently, has become a Game-show—a role-playing-game show), the dimension of contemporary Reception, as an object of Media Anthropology, I single out, here, as in itself worthy of study.

### *Les Jeux de Kaamelott*

I will go into somewhat more depth for an example already cited, *Le Jeu de Caillou* (II.81). In this episode, Karadoc is baby-sitting Kadoc, his brother. Kadoc suffers from chronic insomnia, and that is the reason for his mental impairment, but nonetheless, this episode of procrastinatory paralysis takes place in the plain day of Kaamelott. What they are doing to amuse themselves is throwing stones at a target, the nearest one's throw, winning—an *agon* (ala Callois), but also a bit of an *alea*. And, as becomes apparent, there is a component of *illinx* wrapped up into the bargain. *Illinx* is the word Callois uses to describe games undertaken for the sheer thrill of it. One would not expect a *jeu de caillou* to provoke such a strong response, but we see, as Lancelot appears on the scene, that—man of contest that he is, withal of an usually serious demeanor—even he is drawn in by the challenge and piquant flavor of perhaps *le plus simple jeu* there is (short of *kick-the-can*). Instead of returning to his business, as he had arrived to request of Karadoc, he spends the next half a minute on screen, and half hour in its reality, throwing little stones just picked up, at a meaningless target. Arthur, frustrated with everyone's absence, appears, but soon he, too, is caught up in the attraction of the game's simplicity. No one can beat the retarded competitor, Kadoc, who breaks into random yells and twitters from time to time, but all the same, they can not stop playing. Now, the staid Pere Blaise arrives, and, as has become a little predictable by now, succumbs as well to the addiction, without really demonstrating any aptitude for its athletic rigors. The punch-line is, precisely, that Kadoc wins, typifying the productive limitations of the 3½ minute format: nothing is taught, nothing is learned, 'a tale told by an idiot'—all this granted, it is very funny, nonetheless, as a short examination of the quality of futility as such. Kaamelott is where *the game* means all, however tremendous its



idle quality of pointlessness. Tournaments on the show (III.2, eg.) are usually portrayed as far more boring, and with their intimations of *mimicry*, apparently, either far more effeminate (although this is France!) or, simply, too liberated from purposefulness.

At a rate of about one game per book (I.57, II.36, III.18, IV.56), *Kaamelott* also introduces several Gallic games. Taking place without fail at the Kaamelott tavern, these are games Perceval tries to impart to his friends Karadoc and le Tavernier, in a species of folkloric instruction, or nostalgia for the home of adoption (in Gaul) he is to leave behind him in book V. The colorful names—Quinze, Sirop, Sloubi and Pelican—represent equally colorful rules. All appear to be parodies of orthodox (*a la Aquitaine*) French games, like Cul de Chouette, invented on the show (catching on now as a real life game, supplies the game's French *Wiki*), or the standard drinking-song.<sup>33</sup> Usually the rules are outrageously intricate, and often involve bizarre associations of ideas. Every sirop has (as per the episode-title) its “Contre-Sirop,” as well as for that matter, “beau sirop, mi-sirop, siroté, gagne-sirop, sirop-grelot, passe-montagne, sirop au bon goût.” Writing approaches poetry in the descriptions of these games, rules hastily spat out in the short, sadistically articulate syllables of Perceval—the man-of-Gaul in question and ingénue of the show. A computer's complexity is indicated. Perceval is inevitably disappointed by his interlocutor's finding these games baffling at best, and at times even unappetizing. Finally, in Book IV, as Arthur is going through the love-upheavals to be discussed in the next chapter, our sincere, pure fool Perceval discovers an ally. Arthur goes to the trouble of learning Pelican. Again, the structure of centralized

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<sup>33</sup> “Sloubi 1... sloubi 2... sloubi 3...” as along with the homesick Perceval, any fan of the show can recite.

wisdom is cached in the fulcrum of all turning: King Arthur, 'the ruler of the civilized world' with the potential omniscience of a parental Ward Cleaver. The nature of authority, but also the deep affinity of king and clown are explored by this stylistic habit of the show: to represent the formal game-like structure of the mundane conversations of which each episode commonly consists within the inner shell of the thematized arithmetic (sloubi 1, sloubi 2, sloubi 3) of yet another game. Its skill belonging equally to the king and his jester, joking demands the strategic acuity of the comedic essence, in planning/designing the jeu/jeopardy, implementing its manifold patterns by decisive action in the glaring absence of *complete* knowledge, internalizing its value-system, at length achieving its set ends. Toward the beginning of its experimental phase (Books I-II, also in Books III-IV), before rejoining the narrative shaping of the typical feature film, or Cinematic Morality Play (God against Meleagant), *Kaamelott* insists that, serially and hierarchically, as well as in conception, it itself is somewhat like an odd game (over drinks). Allowing the ludic to devolve through shattering parody, in compensation for what structural complexities the intrinsic direction of the show provides, what we have, in the end, is more in the nature of a precocious child's game.

Acting in absence of complete knowledge is something King Arthur is good at—as leader and guide of his kingdom, even into labyrinthine wildernesses. *Agon* becomes *alea* in episode IV.62, *Le Jeu de Guerre*. In this episode, the Burgundian King<sup>34</sup> is at *Kaamelott* again—for either another peace treaty or alternatively, a vicious encounter of troops, as the

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<sup>34</sup> Known as early as I.24, but also seen in II.40, and III.20, and once again in his own early days in the prequel Book V.

case may be. He does not speak the spoken language, whatever that may be: French, most obviously, but this may stand in for Welsh, Anglo-Saxon, or Norman (however the pseudo-history works out). Always causing difficulties, which always cause humor (see I.24 *l'Interpret*), his incomprehension is profound and, additionally, marked by cultural clashes—witness his tendency to punctuate his most pithy Burgundian with a noisy expulsion of rearward gases. This time the two opponents reach a knotty deciding point and need, in absence of the traditional interpreting boy (in-between cultures, dedicated to the task of bringing together the two nations to which he is indebted for his upbringing), to pursue negotiations in more semantic resolution. Unfortunately, tested, the Burgundian King—and not the King of the Burgundians as he would really have been in the Middle Ages—means no more by his declaration of war (“Arthur, c'est le guerre!”) than he does by his announcement that he appreciates fruit in syrup (“J'**apprécie** les **fruits** au **sirop!**”). At length, he proposes a game. This involves sliding dozens and dozens of pretty Fabergé Eggs positioned on small stands across a table with sliders (as are used to bear up pool cues). The problem is that the **rules** of the game are **not** explained, and Arthur is, therefore, forced to persist in the confrontation for the sake of Peace, through the making of very random moves. A game seemingly without rules, seemingly a strategic reconfiguration of pieces to no end, and with no calculus of winning or losing, this game, strangely enough, fits in well enough into the havoc that is Kaamelott. It becomes a game of chance, an *alea*, from ostensibly being an *agon*, and suitably accommodates the mobile wisdom of this king of great improvisatory skill. All you need to do is make a move, and your enemy will make one too. War is chaotic and disorganized but does not match up with the showmanship of this Burgundian innovation in ways to waste time. Besides the farting, there are frequent repetitions of threats and

bravos. King Arthur seems to proceed splendidly enough—if only he knew what he was doing! There are mixed incidents of both *alea* and *agon* in Callois' taxonomy (poker). There are none, however, where the *agon* itself is precisely the same as the *alea*.

## *Conclusion*

In the early II.46 *The Game* (in English in the original), the main coterie of Arthur's men play a game in the court resembling Baseball or Cricket, but without bats, putting in question the status of the court-space, in evocation of the royal French confusion that gives us "Tennis Courts." In another show Karadoc, Perceval, and the King slug it out with fine cream cheese. *Kaamelott* continually plays on the ambiguities of the seriousness of Power. Arthur, liberal before his time, would have given the French Revolution no warrant. Softening enforcement, and acknowledging the "inner-child" (I say, tongue-in-cheek), Arthur allows for the dream-space to occur that even the Middle Ages, Celtic or not, would have found "Enchanting." The game is the motor of fantastic freedom, *pace* Callois, but when the game is a gamble or an enigma or a plain waste of time, this freedom is more fantastical than free. Readers of the Arthur tales, like Dante's Paolo and Francesca, themselves young, have found bracing air of liberation secreted within them. *Kaamelott's* viewers, too, have expressed their own youthful *joi de vivre* by persisting with the show through its baffling transmutations. Unlike that more mature Guinevere, not so long ago, in T. H. White's novelistic adaptation, *The Once and Future Knight* (1987), having read the book "which Dante mentions," "seven times," and "no longer [finding it] exciting" (p. 604), viewers of the show seem never to tire of the lines and ideas of the spritely comedy (memorizing, playing along), or of the ironic pathos of the tragic heroism. Perhaps the effectiveness of *Kaamelott* is determined by that clever trick of containing the attention-grabbing, analysis-inviting ludic (Quinze, Pelican, etc., equivalent to the magic chessboards of the Arthurian tradition) within the matrix of *paidia* (the bar, the food-fight, the magic dance), and framing that within the complex ludic structure. We can view the micro-plot-line of the few scenes of each show as

comparable to the grand architecture comprising the *Vulgate*, or even the remarkable game-like structure of Old French literature itself (Chumbley 1972).

### ***Chapter III. Loves***

Nathaniel Smith, in his *Games Troubadours Play* (1989), bridges these two chapters “Games” and “Loves,” analyzing tellingly the process and adventure of partly confessional poetical love-cycles of troubadour expression. He applies a compass explicitly borrowed from Huizinga and also, Eric Berne with his crude yet suggestive *Games People Play* (1964), citing in this substantial and not merely bibliographic paper an extensive literature that treats those early experimenters in Courtly Love as Game-players both in form and style, and in transactional content. Here, in this chapter, I allow the heterosexual relationship at the heart of all versions of the Arthur legend its stage for thematization and theorization—with perfunctory nods at the hints of Lancelot’s potential for homosexual attachments, viz. his night with Bohort (*Kaamelott* II.70), and recapping very briefly the string of homosocial rivalries and identifications his story involves. According to Nietzsche and what I call, in slight distinction from heteronormativity, heteroSexual logic, Woman is (to be) Man’s most dangerous plaything: in this chapter, I will try to trace the destiny of Lancelot and Arthur’s most dangerous game, which is also the general destiny of “Romance” as a genre.

The brunt of this chapter will be given over to a slightly tendentious line of exposition that conflates two separate episodes of the *Vulgate Lancelot*: the Double Guinevere episode and that of the Chevalier of the Cart (the abduction of Guinevere by Meleagant and her subsequent rescue by her champion Lancelot). This narrative syncretism reflects the recent *Kaamelott* ‘recension’ of Arthurian legend: in Books III and IV, Arthur conducts an incipient affair with the wife of Sir Karadoc, seeking amatory and matrimonial refuge with said wife (Mevannvi, propitiously regal). Guinevere, indignant, seeks the same, in the woody hideaway

with Knight-on-the-run (incipient madness, in effect, at the bottom of his flight) and her soon-to-be-erstwhile courtly lover, Lancelot. Aside from that, there will be sporadic commentary on the remaining element of Love-play in the episodes as it derives from the *Vulgate* core configurations.<sup>35</sup>

I posit that, on the one hand, there is the substitute queen, and on the other, the abduction of Guinevere. Meleagant himself puts in a much lauded/lamented appearance at the end of the latter sequence—as phantom of Lancelot’s madness, or satanic visitation of God’s vengeance for Arthur’s capital sin (in *Kaamelott*, the wife of a knight is sacrosanct). There does, all the same, seem to be yet something more rotten in the state of *Kaamelott*, whether it is aftershocks of Pendragon’s uncourtly love of Igerne,<sup>36</sup> or the possibly bigamous marriage to Guinevere,<sup>37</sup> or even the possibly long-term living in sin that Arthur’s decision involves, to not consummate his marriage with Guinevere, thanks to an earlier vow made to that pseudo-wife in Rome. Whatever the source of existential unrest might be, some deep, very likely Oedipal irritant, surely, plies the effects of its unwelcome stimulus at the heart of Arthur and his kingdom, in *Kaamelott*, like a grit of sand caught in the belly of an oyster,

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<sup>35</sup> With respect to Angharad and Perceval, originally joined in the *Peredur*, I extend the range of sources.

<sup>36</sup> Astier’s mother’s rival in real life, his brother Simon Astier’s mother—Astier himself plays Pendragon in a bizarre Oedipal twist.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur was previously married to a Roman wife, who herself was still married at the time of the marriage (VI.6).



generating the layers of its interlocking narrative strands. In this chapter, I will, therefore, attempt to outline the pertinent dimensions of the plot with sufficient clarity to permit venturing some explanation for the Grand Over-Arching narrative direction given by *Kaamelott*'s assumption of this mysterious motive of the Sin, and, courtesy of a jealous 21<sup>st</sup>-century God, its ominous Response: in the mysterious Meleagant and in Lancelot's regicidal madness.

### *The Personality of a Plot-device*

The vista of the variety of narrative transforms that confront the investigator into the breadth of the Arthurian tradition, across time and translations, is astounding in its profuseness and essential diversity. What is salient to this inspection is the degree to which the dendretic *entrelacements* are ornamented and closely detailed. The providential terminal illness that puts an end to the Double Guinevere is one example of this (Lacy II.78); their journey to Sorelois (Kennedy 1956) is another. Devices take on the cast of concrete necessity. *Kaamelott*, taking aim at the tastes of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience long-accustomed to piquant detail, poignant irony, the tight melodrama of a parting *twist*, prolongs the tradition of fulfilling and giving personality to the narrative through ‘color,’ in complex constellations, concocting—in the course of its metamorphosis from skits to epic—the plot with elements of striking relief and high flavor. Mevanvvi, the too-much protesting wife of Karadoc, is a long trip away from the Double Guinevere, but nonetheless shares with her the fundamental function of putting adulterous distance between Arthur and Guinevere, and sending the latter off into the arms of her *fin amant*, Lancelot. There are more spirited echoes of the two situations: God’s direct intervention, for instance. But even these are strained and changed beyond recognition, while the largest part of the two divergent versions of the one story (perhaps), is non-orthogonally, evolutionarily *re-confabulated*. Stitching the several weighty dramatic complications upon the very barebones Medieval source, the narrative line in *Kaamelott* skews significantly in the direction of the absurd asymptote—the toll the meta-principles of Comedy demand, or the outrageous wife-swap stipulated (as the solution to infidelity) by the bylaws of Karadoc and Mevanvvi’s Vannes. The role of Guinevere, here, is remarkable for not being in the first place that of a victim. She **chooses** to abandon Arthur for

Lancelot (III.100). Arthur only thereupon instigates the alternative to a duel to the death with the injured husband and knight Karadoc: that “wife-swap” legal remnant that tears so broad a breach in the serenity of Arthur’s relationship to God’s laws (IV.22-23). In the *Vulgate*, Arthur only meets his punishment in the *Mort*; but in *Kaamelott*, God evinces his anger earlier, if perhaps more capriciously.

The second of the two ingredient Vulgate-episodes that contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century re-mix, the *Knight of the Cart* (as Malory translates it) places Guinevere once again at the frame of the story, as Lancelot plays out in her service the drama (or game) of Courtly Love. I will return in the latter part of this chapter to the moral distortion introduced in Astier’s version by the romance of Arthur’s not-unprecedented adultery and the surreality (lent to Politics) of Lancelot’s madness—Meleagant’s now withheld, secondary motivation. Lancelot’s impersonation of Meleagant in madness will bear investigation. The changing role, across the ages and in between the idiolects, of Guinevere as locus for character-driven narratogenesis in Arthur-literature—instead of the formalistic obviation of the impetus to diversions, or focus, which defines this chapter’s treatment of Guinevere—has been amply treated in the scholarship: from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Layamon and Wace, to Chretien and his continuators, to the *Vulgate* and *Perlesvaus*, to Wolfram and Hartmann, and beyond, into the Renaissance and Victorian periods.<sup>38</sup> Instead of the historical evolution of an Idea

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<sup>38</sup> Two recent-ish dissertations (Gipson 1994; Hobbs 1997) put the figure of Guinevere in the context of the Western tradition and follow her developments through the ages and from one authorial conception to another. Wulf (1999) looks specifically and pointedly at how Wace, germinally, centralizes Guinevere, making her more sympathetic than does Geoffrey of Monmouth. Wood

(Guinevere), I posit *transformation* guided by the force of underlying *structures* of their own surface-level *manifestation*—put otherwise, changes in the air Guinevere displays, in differing narrative situations, are intrinsically justified. As the elements of narrative are fluid and intangible, this analytic approach will not be able without considerable dense and inter-reflective commentary to make its case perspicuous. I will try to indicate, in a summary fashion, the specific axes of rotation, borders of conjunction and landmarks of consistency, without going as far as the reduction of these elaborate descriptive efforts to the scheme of a simple *function*—which would in theory, further facilitate comprehension, while in practice, obfuscating.

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(1998) reveals numerous ironies in the after-life of Arthur's wife's mortal remains (if *coniunx secunda* means second wife, Arthur's second wife), at Glastonbury, and, ironically, allows the humorous pathos to emerge through the mass of carefully assembled facts. Samples (1989) similarly examines the early shifts of tenor in the treatment of Guinevere, while Jenkins (2002) jumps forward, up almost to our own 21<sup>st</sup>-century terminus, to treat of the New-Age Guinevere.

### *Distractions and Interventions*

Karadoc, whom we met in Ch. II as the bosom buddy of Perceval and the baby-sitter of Kadoc (his brother), blossoms in personality dramatically during Arthur's 'God-damned' affair. Even if sanctioned by the bizarre customs of Vannes, this affair falls short in that, instead of supplying Karadoc with the Guinevere-formerly-known-as-Queen in exchange for Queen Mevanvvi (once his Dame), it leaves him absolutely wifeless, whimpering for fear of the dark in a bed now empty of all but salami, ham and cheese and bread (for those long nights). We do not learn what happens to the aristocratic children of the marriage,<sup>39</sup> nor, finally, do we see the true end on screen of the relationship between Arthur and Mevanvvi, which peters out under pressure from God and the need to recover Guinevere and suppress rebellion. As Lancelot presses romantic advantage for military and allies himself in revolt to the plotting King Lot of Orkney, Guinevere increasingly seems Lancelot's hostage (instead of his true love, sharing utopia in their forest love nest). The plot is constantly on the move in the still short-format episodes; and were it not for one strand rushing to replace one flagging, the whole convoluted house of cards would collapse under the pressure of the new general 'seriousness' in the plot's direction. Sketchy stories formally resemble jokes. In the midst of all this dark humor, Karadoc the character grows tragic... appendages, since he is too absurd for tragedy proper. Thus planted are the seeds for what happens in Bk. V, after Arthur fails (or refuses) to extract the sword from the stone: between legal coups, Mevanvvi annuls her divorce and inherits, for the sake of her husband Karadoc, Arthur's kingdom. Immediately previous, by about a few long-form (45 minute) episodes, Perceval and Karadoc, with

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<sup>39</sup> In whom Arthur used to take a marked interest: see I.72; III.50.

Arthur's exculpatory permission, had succeeded into their tavern kingdom (they 'nationalize' their debt), but now, in a much more real way, Sir Karadoc becomes King Karadoc—England's Caligula, but only in good fun. The hectic pace of the comic developments that might be mistaken for tragedies, the truly black humor at the heart of the magical kingdom of Caameloith (as tradition knows it), the deposed or abdicated Arthur, transgressing on his own sanity as he is tormented by malign Meleagant, with Lancelot, in correspondence, homicidally out of his mind—all of this throws deep, mauve shadows on the features of the King Karadoc born of Mevanvvi's *raptus*.

Neuendorf (1993), ostensibly addressing "Feminist and Historicist" concerns in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regem Britanniae*, analyzes the structure of the system of royal lineage that Monmouth records for the history of Britain. Considered with these lenses, Karadoc and his predecessor king, Leodagan (father of the first queen), and their respective reigns of terror and confusion, themselves trespass on the sacred: the serially eternal *metonymy* of nation and king is subverted by these legitimate usurpers. Inheriting Arthur's kingdom through his doubled wives, the two makeshifts of the Good King Arthur elude the patriarchic balance of justice that assigns to him this moral evaluation. As he is a radical (ending slavery, torture, sexism, etc.), they, by contrast, both embody the conservative trend in Medieval rule, if not meeting Lancelot's reactionary stance, nonetheless, hardly living up to King Arthur's liberal precedent.

In her dissertation (1995), Neuendorf carries out a genetic study of Guinevere from Monmouth to Malory, expressing for purview how Guinevere mutates across the ages, both in response to the tradition (Virgil's Dido, Tragedy, the Bible, previous accounts of

Guinevere, etc.) and in creation of that tradition—in particular, tracing how, from the historical characterization of the Female, *modern* prose is born. This outlines yet another system of dynastic and anti-dynastic succession, reminiscent, for instance, of the inheritance of Judaism (though probably not in the Tanakh) through the matrilineal line. It parallels, furthermore, the way in which Guinevere knights Lancelot, as discussed in a dissertation by Longley. Longley suggests that in the *Vulgate*, at certain turning-points, female characters *replace* male ones, taking on roles normally reserved for the latter, and that these cases of gender-inversion constitute an important formal principle of the larger Arthurian meta-narrative—taking a cue, I suggest, from the Courtly Love tradition’s one stone to kill two birds: grounding the patriarchy in its **object** (or abject), Woman, while bearing up the Feudal Order’s power system by making her Lady. If man is essentially above man in the Middle Ages, this relation may never end, with always another superior man. The relation is capped neatly by stating that what is on top is also what is on bottom (woman), only essentially different by simple virtue of its supremacy. The tragedy at Caameloth may well derive from the irony of this formal principle: Longley’s “Female-Matrix” contains and is contained by its essential negative.

Harris (1995), by discussing the crime of treason contemporary with Malory’s works, describes the sort of revenge that the Patriarchy can take upon the twisting of its dictums. To be a woman is not a crime but, nonetheless, the prerogative of the King is uncontestable, even as the gift of Woman. In *Kaamelott*, it is as if Arthur had left behind two separate female queen regents (Elizabeth and Bloody Mary, eg.), unable, by the standards of Britain, to rule on their own accounts, and, with no heir to be protected, only predictable whimsy is

left to guide the choice of successor. In the “orthodox” Arthurian tradition, in the *Mort Artu*, Arthur loses first his Queen and then his Kingdom, through the activity of the child of his adulterous as well as incestuous sin, Mordred, an incident that had attracted the attention of scholars as early as the 1940s (Brown 1940). The abduction of Guinevere has become interesting to contemporary scholars by way, for instance, of its translation in Hartmann (Christoph 2000). Whereas recovery of Guinevere is simply the Chivalry for Lancelot, the Shame for Arthur following on the heels of her abduction will be hard for him to live up—Arthur lives in between the lines of infamy and pride, taking care (like that Model Christian King Hartmann mobilizes in his doctrinal rhetoric) not to cross onto either side, and to stay on the safe middle ground during his reign. Capricious Woman, therefore, exposes power to the possibility of impotence, and although an erection is Augustine’s sign of Original Sin, flaccidity signals—in the power-regime of patriarchy—yet more poignantly still, worldly damnation. Does Woman pay the price of her borrowed power? Does Love cost her anything? In Guinevere’s case, in the *Vulgate* and in *Kaamelott*, too, it nearly costs her her life and her position as Queen (Tollhurst 1998). Lancelot and Meleagant, the abductors—and even the rivals, Mevanvvi and Guinevere’s twisted sister and Double—look none too kindly upon her exposure to danger. Primal matriarchy is precarious, subject as it is to the foundational violence of nascent patriarchy; as the thrill of king-making is hers, so also is the risk of extinction as queen.



### *Patterns of Attraction*

The extreme degree of caprice involved in Love (of all kinds) leaves its proposers and participants open to experiencing the bittersweet pangs of sometimes profound heartache. The affair between Perceval and Angharad le Suivante, or perhaps I should say, between Angharad le Suivante and the place-holder of Perceval, puts into effect the love-sickness of romantic love famous in historical development. Angharad le Suivante, rather sensibly, considering Perceval's obliviousness to complex emotion and thought, stalks him over the course of a few years of air-time—evidently, without much success. It begins with a crush that she communicates to King Arthur, asking him to play intercessor, or perhaps with the encounter later in which she tries to be frank about her feelings. Whatever she tries, she fails to *get through* to Perceval, the knight she admires. It is a foreign language to him; he proves himself, in effect, sexless. Nonetheless, his intrepid seductress does not surrender her claim on his love—in Bk. IV, we see her introduce him to the goon guarding Lancelot's territory of succession, where she serves Guinevere her former mistress out of simple loyalty, as her affianced lover. The fabled love of Perceval from the *Peredur* (where he spends many years out of ardor achieving her arduous quest, having promised not to speak until she agrees that she loves him), Angharad is so easy probably on the basis of this tradition. Selected to fill out the show, the new role of Lady-in-waiting was one at which the actress who ended up playing Angharad may have initially chafed: in the pilot, she herself played a quite comical Guinevere. After being replaced, she was kept on in this new capacity as a female Sancho Panza to the queen's Quixote: she is the assiduous but grounded would-be lover of the abstract peasant-philosopher Perceval, while the queen loves her Dulcineo, Lancelot. In this role, she invokes Perceval's exclusively Platonic Eros, ending up puzzling him more than

arousing him. He maintains the inertness of a noble gas, the unreachable core of his emotions above mere passion, superior to (if too innocent even to actively suppress) Woman, which he does not bother to try to understand. Both the *Vulgate* and Chretien's *Chevalier de Charette* closely anticipate—in the perfection of an “Orgasm of Angels” (Accanie 1993)—Perceval in respect of his sexuality, which is approximated as a sort of chivalric standard, later on, by that other Galahad-figure, Lancelot.

Whether it is because of some contemporary Marian cult or the powerful influence of Courtly Love, the place of Woman in this one-sided ‘exchange’ and transference of affection (‘courting’) that *Kaamelott* cleverly inverts, by making the object a man, is, although liable to historical re-coding, nonetheless rather liberated. Fulton (1993) says that contemporary Welsh noble women, without causal factors like the Cistercians and Troubadours, do not have it so good. The irony of the Angharad-Perceval relation rests partially in the ambiguities of the class status of its members: Angharad is a Lady-in-Waiting, which is, on the show, when all is said and done, the status of a servant; Perceval is the adopted son of Gallic peasants Arthur takes on in his early search for allies and Grail-questers (Bk. VI), who goes undubbed until years have passed (I.40). Neither is truly noble, nor really—according to Capellanus’ standards—middle-class. Additional to class-ambiguities, for the Angharad-Perceval relation, there is generally the implicit contradiction intrinsic to the two factors already cited (Courtly Love and Marian cults), which, even if partially in parallel, in another dramatic way, differ in the degree of sublimation pertaining universally to their element. One is of this world, the other decidedly of the next—crudely, sex separates the two domains. For plot reasons and for reasons of character, Perceval is asexual; and in the still Catholic world

of *Kaamelott*, this lends him more than a hint of saintliness. The sexual relation puts in a more garish, morbid visitation in the ghost of King Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon, who, according to Morris (1985), in an incident of so-called 'Uncourtly Love,' raped Arthur's mother, Igerne. Lust and the desire for an heir, together, describe the itinerary of Love as Will-to-Power, with affection being replaced by possessiveness, in utter ignorance of either Courtly Love or the Mother of God. Both Arthur and Perceval, on *Kaamelott*, can wield Excalibur. The one is born of transgression, deceit and sin and destined to a difficult life; the other, of unknown parentage and persisting unchangeably throughout the show in the infantile bliss (beatitude) of his idiocy.

Practically half-way through the show, but earlier on in the chronology of airing, 'Arthur [is] in Love' (II.51). In accidental anonymity (the female in question does not recognize him), escaping the pressure of courtly divertissement for a spell, Arthur discovers a lady of the Lower Nobility (*per* Capellanus) in the gardens. Disillusioned with British barbarism and its boorish ignorance of the rules and rewards of the Courtly Love of his thorough Roman education (if theoretical), Arthur is now apparently on the prowl for an affair. The woman that he meets is a clean, young, attractive brunette (his type) who seems personable and free of the cruder tics. Struck by a romantic spirit, he takes a risk in the encounter, appealing beyond the newness and strangeness of this woman in white to her ultimate 'thou.' He delivers to her a flower of exquisite color and configuration, which she, after acknowledging gratefully, proceeds to consume—a damper on the higher flights of affection for the poor King. The episode cuts back to him at its end, with his child-strong strangulating grip wrapped bodily upon the woman's torso, asleep, having been asleep for

several hours. Nothing breaks the power of attraction, not miscommunication, nor miscegenated origins, but more even than the resilience of Arthur's instant Cathexis-at-first-sight, is the strength of his desperate neediness. Breaking the rules of Courtly Love, as his father breaks them with Igerne, not purely from a carnal cause, this is instead the desirous capture of female bodies, of his mother or this strange brunette unlettered in love.

### *Poise of Power Balance*

The delicate pervasion of sexuality in its essential infantile character through the text of the Romance (until Malory), as we have seen, invites the Hegelian diremption in the arena of truth-validation and the logical-ontic expression of its several inward-tending categorical contradictions (Moran 1991). It becomes hard to disentangle, past the interlocking concepts, Sex from Love, Woman as Object (aim and motive) from Woman as Subject (reminiscence and digression), Adultery from Authenticity, and so on. Steele (1994) prolongs consideration of the deconstructive dimension of Love in Chretien, in the precarious transcendence-with-a-small-‘T’ that is its insistence. Accordingly, the question of Marriage—what it consists in and what defines it—presses forward to our attention. Arthur is many times over adulterous, in whatever version of the story. In *Kaamelott*, additionally, he is possessed of numerous royal concubines (Demetra, the Kleptomaniac, Sefriane de Aquitaine, Twin Fisherman’s-Daughters). When doubt exists about Guinevere’s legitimacy as crowned queen, there is squabbling among them on the subject of which of them will take over. It is clear that the category of wife is at least temporally fluid, in principle, but one thing that a concubine is preferably not: a wife. There is an amusing episode (I.94, ‘Lacrimosa’) where Demetra advises Guinevere on how to get Arthur into bed, which involves drugging him with a depressant that makes him cry—the seductress is to comfort the wet-eyed king, and the obvious course is by probability to follow. What ends up happening is that the king turns infallibly to Demetra for comfort, to his concubine and not his wife. In VI.6, we see the actual youthful marriage of the doomed duo, Arthur and Guinevere. Whereas in the *Vulgate*, Guinevere is blessed by several skills and virtues (decency and beauty among them), in *Kaamelott*, these are taken as conventional expressions, and the marriage is political and of

convenience. A concubine is a step closer to Arthurian True Love than a wife, in the retrospective imagination of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it seems, and male-centered morality favors a relationship with fewer strings. When the concubines want to be promoted, Arthur's serenity is jeopardized.

Consequently, the question regarding **polygamy** (I.14) arises in the medieval world as *Kaamelott* conceives it. After perfunctory soul-searching, Arthur decides that he will not forbid it. Along with a limitless set of concubines in the royal bedchambers, polygamy, too, is just the sort of thing that fully obviates the need for adultery. In a funny punch-line to the episode, Guinevere queries if polygamy is equally legitimate for women (polyandry). The political style of Guinevere, although only barely articulated, suggests a vista of sexual freedom that does not equate to license and invites the loosening and overturning of hackneyed convention in the salutary direction of Arthur's generally liberalizing innovations: why not let women possess (if that is what it comes down to), as well as be possessed? Why cannot Super-Guinevere (Noble 2006), in Hyper-Courtly Love, as it were, legitimize her lovers and extend her romantic purview to include all soliciting parties (Lancelot included)? The suppressed reality of the Primal Mother, perhaps, is (from the perspective of a rather parochial 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western Freudianism) invoked. Although "royal self-determinism withal chattel-status" is a humbler inference, the option of grounding Arthurian narrative in the mythic, primordial foundations of, for instance, Celtic religion (fairies: Queen Mebh and the whole cast), is still attractive (Brouland 1995; Noble 1972). The further elaboration of Guinevere's authority and measure of self-determinism in the *Vulgate* and in Malory, as well, are supplied by Longley (2002) and Hodges (2005), respectively. There is a supreme irony,

furthermore, in the whole feminist-historicist balance of the sovereign rights of Wife, in Astier's Arthur's first polygamy: Aconia of Rome. Already married when he 'marries' her, she prevents the consummation of the marriage of Arthur and Guinevere and even hinders Arthur's comfort in his new home life. Had Aconia's marriage not been bigamous and invalid, this might have been justified, but as it is, Arthur is spiritually **single** and lives a pernicious lie.

### ***Pro-Choice of Abductions***

Whether Lancelot's desire for Guinevere is perhaps *sui causa*, as Courtly-Love-the-Game sometimes seems (for kicks, for the sake of being in love, etc.), or whether it is born of homosocial mimesis (emulate the King by sleeping with those he sleeps with), or whether, as Cawsey (2001) ingeniously suggests, it is really firstly a question of desiring the Kingdom and its king's dissolutions (in expression of Freud's Death-drive), is a question unanswerable without careful examination of the ambiguous evidence.<sup>40</sup> Each step/stage of the Arthurian "evolution" has its own Lancelot, its own Guinevere, its own King Arthur. With only some cursory retrospective glances, as the procedure has been in this chapter generally (in fear of being overwhelmed by the rowdy ghosts of the denizens of the many disparate Caameloths), I interrogate here mostly the text of *Kaamelott* the TV-show. Scala (2002), closely reading "the Fair Maid of Ascalot" from Malory, picking up where Lumianski (1953) leaves off, proves that it is not possible to universalize the analytic results of any particular version of the *discursively emergent* Arthurian plot. Malory may owe something to the English Arthur (Archibald 2004) and something to the "French book," but in the end, he tells his own story. One thing that changes from the *Vulgate* to Malory is that Lancelot, rather than simply fulfilling the contractual engagement of the noblest Courtly Love affair that pertains to his status as the Noblest Knight, appears, instead, to be genuinely 'into' Guinevere, and as Kennedy (2001) shows, the "trew love" Malory predicates of the Queen differs from Courtly Love in its perfect chastity. By the time of the *Vulgate*, Chretien has built a foundation for prose romance in postulating—claims Beltrami (2004)—that Love is that which exceeds the

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<sup>40</sup> Mott 1893 is an earlier scholarly observer of the motives behind Lancelot's love.



material of the narrative: it is the *sens*. In Malory, it has assumed perhaps the status of the *contre-sens*, but even in the *Vulgate*, there is inner strife at which dominates: Earthly Love, which dooms the Kingdom, or the Grail and Divine Love, which saves its immortality.

*Kaamelott* innovates profoundly in Bks. III/IV, which I call “*Adultery/Abduction*,” the core story intimately concerning the triangle of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere, extended to the square with Meleagant or Mevanvvi (Double Guinevere) at the fourth vertex (Holichek 1982 pursues this “moral polygon”). Interlocked narrative in discrete episodes (content at times extending beyond a single show) replaces the famous interlace of the *Vulgate*. But besides that, there is the formal *psychologism*, the already Freudianism, the Comic dialectic of the contradictory *slip* discussed in Ch. II. These new factors render the whole story in quite a new light and suggest yet another interpretation for Lancelot’s incorrigible Guinevere-ism. Lancelot, in the *Vulgate*, too, is an orphan. When he first sees Guinevere (VI.6), Lancelot, new recruit of Arthur’s prior to the donation of Leodagan’s Round Table, exclaims: “Quelle beauté!” In the relation of part-objects, Lancelot identifies wholeness in her face. He first feels the stirrings of urgency regarding Guinevere early (I.37), and confesses in the name of a “friend” love for an anonymous married woman. Guinevere, a true romantic, advises the “friend,” in hedged terms, to simply kill the husband. Grabbing his sword, Lancelot stalks off for Arthur’s tub (where later, the suicide attempt is to occur, the tub Arthur calls the Holy Grail itself for its reception of a Suicide’s blood), and alarming him with one of the concubines, apologizes and wanders off. Lancelot’s behavior—despite his being, even in the previous tradition, given to lover’s trances (Kennedy 1978) and love-madness (Neaman 1978)—is not truly psychotic or borderline; instead, it merely embodies

the Oedipality of the competent Man of War that he is (Janssens 1989), although magnified beyond the definitive norm. In reality, this *pseudo*-borderline set of symptoms indicates Anti-Oedipal intentions.

Later, when suicidal himself, and when ‘chaste’ love for Guinevere has been eroded into the naked lust for power against her husband, it is not clear he abandons his anti-establishmentarianism. Perhaps only Oedipal cooption of the story makes it into one of the noble lover who, tragically, is too noble to love, a story that, if cynical about the possibility of Transcendental Romance as such,<sup>41</sup> nonetheless is possessed of definite *via negativa* views on where precisely the eventual norm of romantic morality might lie—like a mirage in a desert of black comedic absurdity, or the ‘goal’ of the Death-drive. Sir Lancelot, unlike the attractive louts comprising Kaamelott’s vocal majority, is of heroic stature equal with Arthur—fatally, however, Lancelot, feigning ‘flawlessness,’ is an inhuman Knight-Machine that hunts when hungry and strategizes when thwarted; whereas Arthur (as Ch. I discusses) is stridently fallible but, since so forgiving, forgiveably so. When Guinevere is rescued from Lancelot’s camp after the ploy with Merlin’s invisible mirrors (IV.99-100), she seems genuinely grateful, and even if, after being tied up for several hours, she needs to pee, she is

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<sup>41</sup> E.g. Angharad le Suivante departing to the wilderness in order to assist the helpless Queen; Arthur’s countermeasures against civil threat; Leodagan, Guinevere’s father, and his wife disputing their fate: what to do if Guinevere returns from Lancelot with an heir.

<sup>41</sup> Bohort, who in all courtliness loves his beautiful wife, is thereby more unfashionable than any “fairy” has a right to be.

eager to get back to the domicile of which she is the dame, the castle of Kaamelott (Beal 2001).

Arthur, who in Bks. V and VI, after vocal complaints by avid fans, manifests a new 'mature' sexuality, is further humanized by being made the hero of sexual encounter. Practically the only person he does not sleep with is Guinevere (who imaginatively proposes he sleep with Mevanvvi until the point of *interruptus*, and then switch to her). Lancelot, who loves none other than her, and who has his chance, amply and for months of cohabiting exile, chooses, out of unearthly innocence about the sexual 'relation,' a deep repression, or the violent ban on incest, to also forgo even the modest joy he enjoys in Malory (Taylor 1989). Menaced virgin, poor sad Lancelot, undifferentiated, that is, in principle neither yet homo- nor hetero-sexual, confessing his love (for Guinevere) to Bohort, in bed (II.70), is without recourse when it comes to the gambit of intercourse. Not only is Lancelot's love incestuous, but also, his confession of it to Bohort, seeking the confirmation of a peer, disburdens a troubled heart, ostensibly, but really, brags. His publicity in love smacks of a desire to claim that he has a mother (orphan that he was), that he loves his mother, and after he lays claim to her, that his mother loves him. An infantile desire lies screened behind of the usual Oedipus of romantic attachment: his desire is, in fact, to be in complete possession of his 'wholeness,' without acknowledging that that unlikely possibility could only be the mediated outcome of an accession to castration and an assumption of the apparatus of the Symbolic (that is, Love in its reality) and not this futile regression into the Identity of the Imaginary. He impossibly tries to perfect the minus-one, the essential absence, dislodged by the parallax of perspective,

the disavowed *gap* part and parcel of any re-enactment (in slow motion replay) of the Mirror-stage, formerly flubbed, with Guinevere's comforting face as object.

### *Completing Berne's Typology*

Having assigned childhood to the first of Berne's disreputably crude ego-states, Child, and games to the second, Adult (because even children playing Kick-the-can rely on the Adult for effective play), I hereby assign some curious part of this chapter's loves, to Parent, the third of his ego-states. In fact, each theme involves all three ego-states, but one will dominate in each. The Parent is required when the Child is lonely and needs comforting, auto-affectively. The Child is the cause of the game, whereas the Adult is its **method**, and when it needs an umpire, it is the Parent that steps in to manage. Why, then, exactly do I try to argue that the Parent is the ego-state most relevant to this chapter? What part of "Loves" is Parental? The Revenge of God cannot be dislodged from the actuality of Love in Arthur's story. Sin is the token revenged by God, and sin is the outcome of love. In that sense, Love is partly—the "curious part" mentioned above—a question of Parental reprisal for Love. What role God has in the *Vulgate* is a difficult question, posed as it must be on the backs of many other difficult questions (What is the Grail? What is Divine Chivalry? etc.), but *Kaamelott* is simpler in this respect. Arthur in Rome, along with the rest of the military class, worships Mars,<sup>42</sup> until God's angel, the Lady of the Lake, appears to him (VI.3), although his is hardly the inspirational conversion experience, considering that he continues in his Paganism well into the precedent Bks. 1 and II. And perhaps this is why the direct role God will come to play in the plot is so surprising and disturbing: we 21<sup>st</sup>-century viewers did not know there even was one!

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<sup>42</sup> In III.92, is he secretly consistent to his former faith?

The Inquisitor's depositions (II.62) on this subject are hardly reassuring, nor even is the report of the discommoded gay Bishop (I.33). The only thing in God's favor, then, is the naïve faith of prayerful Guinevere<sup>43</sup> (I.97), but since she is a goose,<sup>44</sup> in any case, this is no clear commendation of his Existence in principle. Arthur probes the Heavens for signs of life but, until the disasters of Books *Adultery/Abduction*, without any success. The Lady of the Lake had always been a cipher; no one could tell for a certainty that she was not even human-with-special-powers, before she was **made** human (IV.28), in the infinite wisdom of God's designing—as punishment for not preventing Arthur's adultery with the wife of a knight. The only sign of the Parent is his or her Punishment. God will not appear except in Sin. (If Berne simply translates Freudianism into a Transactional frame-work, then this is how his Parent parallels the Super-Ego, differing from it and Kant's Understanding in being less strictly negative). The role that God-the-Parent takes in upholding the institution of marriage is, in this respect, signal. God's intervention is, also, not particularly forgiving, outlasting the rift in the marriages. Is something else wrong here in *Kaamelott*, or does Lancelot simply get his shot at the throne, in the grips of God's villainous Response to Arthur's villainy?

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<sup>43</sup> See Kennedy 2001 for some discussion of Guinevere as efficient Savior of Lancelot. And Hill 1996 recovers Guinevere from the negative reading of some readers of Malory, arguing for her solid strength as leading character, even if barren of child (as one might express it), not of all good.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. her dignity and piety in Malory, Hart 1995.

## *Conclusion*

*Kaamelott*'s Grail is absurd and only incidental to God's plan, active involvement of the Lady of the Lake is ambiguous, the anti-hero status of Perceval, baptized by Father Blaise and Merlin **both** (at the close of Bk. IV) is contradictory—all this leaves the story hinging on so many **enigmas** that God's eventual intentions (“Astier's directions for the movies”)—even with much pondering—remain impossible to discern. Whence the following question: was the *Vulgate*, too, in the course of its being written (conceived and emplotted; measured and balanced; finally, recorded), a mystery to its writers? Ultimately, that is how *Kaamelott* seems—probably even Astier, with all the marks of an improviser, has no idea where in the name of Arthur the plot is going. Eddies of extreme significance mined for the *dramatic* potential, from episode to episode, carried the story forward through its first four Books: this seems to parallel the folkloric pre-literate sources of “Arthur.” At that point, large-scale architectonic designing seems to have taken over, and a *plot* was born of the most logical configuration of the highest concentrations of significance. Still, the habit was to follow the *theatre* where it led; that ends up leaving even more threads unfinished. There are examples in the *Vulgate* of the demands of potentially open-ended macro-logic ending up being met by the *Morte* and the English works (Hanks 1992); one only hopes—as an eager viewer—that the future outcome of the minor and major story-lines of Astier's *Kaamelott*, will be worth the several-year wait.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Very recently, Astier announced (or at least, so it came to me) that the TV-series returns as such—before the movie is made, and its two planned sequels—in order to resolve some more loose ends.*

Meleagant, Chretien's malign abductor of the Queen and nemesis of Lancelot (Soudek 1971), decades later, in the *Vulgate*, takes on a well-crafted back-story involving Uther Pendragon cruelly chastising his grandfather Urien of Gorre's pretensions to independence. Distinct from Iago's motiveless malignancy, Meleagant is then justified in plaguing Caameloth's king and his subjects (whom he imprisons interminably in his country). In *Kaamelott*, he is less historical and much more metaphysical, like some black magic specter: it is not even clear—as with God's similar murkiness—whether he exists or not. He is simply Kaamelott's worst nightmare, without stimulating more than an intellectual horror. Moral judgment, while suspended, is abraded painfully by his behavior, reminiscent of Chretien's pathological royal tormentor. In *Kaamelott*, too, the obscure prophecy Arthur discovers in an ancient tome one day, while certainly frightful, does not appear to exhaust the multifaceted malice of Meleagant of Gorre, the Man in Black.

In analysis so predominantly Freudian, it is inevitable that the unanalyzed “wild” analyst produce a text, if not necessarily glaring with symptomatic gaps, at least marked by the limitations of perspectivalism. Furthermore, the endurance of analysis, short of a ‘cure,’ whose relevance to an inert cultural artifact is questionable, in any case, is effectively without limit. Theoretically, this can be inspiring, but the endless vistas of new understanding the assumption of the Freudian hermeneutics opens up is, at the same time, potentially daunting. Moreover, formlessness plagues the amateur analyst of fictional subjectivities. There is always so much, and so much more, to say: without the requisite confirmation of the much sought-after, insight-producing fit of analytic description, to its respective case, no limit can be given, no logical shape constituted. It is likely, however, that were the analysts in



question *on-the-couch*, they would even be hopeless cases (in light of the vagaries of Freud's method). If the inch of metaphysical magnification allows the ell of literary analysis, nevertheless, the over-reaching of boundaries will still need its productivity plugged. I end here then with that modest apology, too abruptly perhaps for some, by quoting the atomic germ of the central action of *Kaamelott*, Arthur's discovered excerpt:

*“Siècle des larmes, hurlements*  
*Au jour dieux, roi de Logres fait affront*  
*Du Lac combattant frère à l'épée*  
*Femme de Vannes épousée commet faute*  
*Panique, ruine, fin d'un monde*  
*Sur Terre sans démon ni sorcière*  
*Vient dieu des Morts<sup>46</sup> solitaire des frayeurs*  
*Du ciel à l'insulte la Réponse” (IV.49).*

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<sup>46</sup> My curiosity is piqued by the line about “dieu / des Morts;” it intriguingly suggests that Meleagant is the god of the Dead. There is something quite Celtic about the osmotic flow between the worlds; if Lancelot and Arthur in their own lives cross over, summoning the sleeping spirits, that increases still more the excitement recently supplanting the former exquisite comedy of Alexandre Astier—who is more than simply a great actor and director. He is also an indubitably great story-teller and, it turns out, something of an amateur Nostradamus—let us only hope that his predictions for this epic sweep of *Kaamelott* have more substance to them than mediumistic hysteria and hype.

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