

Perceval and the Hermit: guilt, confession, and internalization in *Perceval; or, The Story of the Grail* by Chrétien de Troyes

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Abstract :

The last tale about Perceval in *Perceval; or, The Story of the Grail*, by Chrétien de Troyes, narrates a process in which guilt, confession and communion – the essential elements of a new system of practices and beliefs that were at the time in the process of adoption and diffusion by Western Christian clergy – combine in a complementary way. In this model, the relationship of the Christian with himself, with his inner self, would assume a fundamental place in his constitution. The purpose of this paper is to present and analyze the episode regarding the confession of Perceval to the hermit, based on the assumption that this narrative was one of the many vectors through which this model spread through the medieval West. The emphasis being on the elements that allow us to apprehend the mechanisms of the internalization process of its protagonist, besides placing its possible readings within the doctrinal context related to sin in the twelfth century.

Keywords : Perceval, penitence, interlization.

In *Perceval; or, The Story of the Grail*¹, by Chrétien de Troyes, there is a long passage where its first leading character, Perceval, encounters a group of penitents on Good Friday. Moved by their testimony, he experiences an internalization process marked by a feeling of guilt, by confession, consummated by communion and, after that, by penance. It all happens with the guidance of a Hermit living in a forest (vv. 6217-6518)². One can read this passage as a very clear affirmation of important innovations in the practices and conceptions of Western European societies that occurred along the 12th century.

Jerôme Baschet summarized these practices and conceptions through the image of a “triptych” composed by the articulated and combined practices of preaching, confession, and communion. Let us make a brief description of this mechanism and of its functioning, even though it is already familiar to those who study the medieval West – not only due to the circulation of Baschet’s book, but also because of studies prior to it, that inspired it.³

He considers the year of 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council occurred, a fundamental chronological marker. This council made mandatory, for all Christians, the practice of annual communion. To take communion, however, the faithful must purify themselves of their sins. From this, we can ascertain that mandatory communion brought with it the practice of confession, which became the necessary preparation for the Eucharist.⁴

More than communion, the greatest, farthest reaching, and deepest innovation of this system might have been the popularization of the practice of oral confession. It imposed transformations in the conscience of the Christians, on the manner they related to sin and, most importantly, to themselves. To help understand this adequately, Baschet reminds us that the systems of penance that were dominant before were based on exterior acts and practices that did not demand, for its efficacy, a prior inner conversion, marked by regret about the committed sin. The efficacy of confession, on the other hand, depended on the sinner’s sincere repentance, a demand that relates to a view of sin centered more on the intention than on the act. This would open a wide road for the exploration of the nuances and intricacies of the conscience, an attitude that would mark Western consciousness for many centuries.⁵

This innovation transferred to personal conscience and will the weight of and responsibility for sin, therefore bringing to the forefront the feelings of guilt and

consequent regret and, with them, the need for forgiveness in the one who considers himself sinful, whether or not this is true. Certainly, a higher torment in a society that already shared the belief that sinful bodies and souls were destined, after death, to most terrible suffering.⁶

This need for internalization became, more than ever, the clerical tool to mobilize the conscience of the faithful – a key element for the acceptance and naturalization of these new practices and conceptions. Thus, the need for the third element, preaching. During the 12th century – and even more so in the 13th, with the advent of the Franciscans and Dominicans – the speeches of the clergy were no longer limited to Mass and destined mainly to themselves: they became ever more popular and present in the everyday experience of the laity. They were an essential and very efficient instrument to transmit Christian moral values, create a feeling of dread and unrest due to wrongdoing, and finally to conduct the faithful to the now priority practice of confession.

We should place Perceval's passage with the Hermit in *The Story of the Grail*, by Chrétien de Troyes, therefore, in this wider context. However, even if historians can read the passage as a testimony of this process, we must highlight it is not subordinate to it, but compels it, when it makes the concepts circulate and precedes the institutionalization of its fundamental notions and practices.

In this sense, we can see this passage and the whole narrative of the book as a particular form of preaching. This intention was expressed by Chrétien de Troyes himself in the Prologue, when he invoked the biblical parable of The Sower to describe the effect the story he is about to tell will have on its immediate recipient, Philip, Count of Flanders:⁷

Following the narrative closely along its singular ways, examining with attention its details and its construction will finally allow us to imprint life on the necessarily generic and abstract model of historiographic syntheses.

The passage starts with a description of Perceval's total negligence of his Christian duties: attending, in a place consecrated by the clergy, the religious cults of God and his saints. It also gives a precise temporal allusion to the five years he lived in this state. We can start by observing the strict association between individual cult or adoration and the places consecrated by the clergy (*eglise* and *mostier* – church and

monastery), and the association of his neglect to a loss of memory. Both point out the field where the narrative places itself: a deeper clerical control over the personal experience of practices associated to Christianity.⁸

<i>Percevaux, ce conte l'estoire,</i>	<i>The story tells us Perceval,</i>	6216
<i>A si perdue la memoire</i>	<i>had lost his memory of all</i>	
<i>Que de Deu ne li sovient mais.</i>	<i>that had occurred before,</i>	
<i>Cinc fois passa avrix et mais,</i>	<i>so he remembered God no more.</i>	
<i>Ce sont cinc anz trestuit antier,</i>	<i>The months of April and of May</i>	
<i>Qu'an eglise ne an mostier</i>	<i>had come five times and gone away;</i>	
<i>Ne Deu ne ses sainz n'aora.</i>	<i>yes, five entire years had passed</i>	
	<i>since he had been to chapel last</i>	
	<i>or prayed to God or to His cross.</i>	

In contrast to this omission, the narrator emphasizes what he did not stop doing during that time: (...) *requerre chevalerie* (v. 6226), i.e., look for and perform deeds of war. The text emphasizes the negative standing of chivalry in this opposition – outlined in this confrontation between the omission of pious acts and the multiplication of brave chivalry deeds – by the fact that, along the years, Perceval had been a flawless knight in all senses. Besides defeating the most valorous opponents, he sent them as prisoners to King Arthur's court.

However, this flawless behavior in chivalry did not free him from pain and anguish; on the contrary, they were so intense, they made him lose completely the notion of the passage of time. It is in this disoriented state, full of pain, that Perceval encounters a group of penitent knights and ladies, all of them wearing simple tunics and going barefoot by a desert road in the outskirts of a wood. In consonance with the already centuries-old precepts of movements known as "Peace and Truce of God", the penitent are surprised and scold Perceval for bearing arms during Good Friday, the day Christ was crucified:

<i>Certes, il n'est reisons ne biens</i>	<i>It is not good or righteous, then,</i>	6258
<i>D'armes porter, einz est granz torz,</i>	<i>but very wrong," he testified,</i>	
<i>Au jor que Jhesu Criz fu morz."</i>	<i>"to bear arms on the day Christ died."</i>	
<i>Et cil qui n'avoit nul porpans</i>	<i>Since Perceval had in no way</i>	
<i>De jor ne d'ore ne de tans,</i>	<i>considered time or hour or day,</i>	
<i>Tant avoir a son cuer enui,</i>	<i>his heart was so dispirited,</i>	
<i>A dit: "Quex jorz est il donc hui?"</i>	<i>"What day is it today?" he said.</i>	

Here, knights and ladies from Perceval's own social group manifest disapproval and surprise at his behavior, not any member of the clergy. This alters one of the poles of the initial opposition and therefore places the contraries within chivalry itself. This shift leads us to believe in the naturalization of the precepts originated in the peace assemblies of the middle of the 10th century. At the same time, it weakens the impression of a general condemnation of warring activity, when disapproval is restricted to the disrespect of truce on those days sanctified by the clergy.⁹

One of the penitents amplifies this naturalization of clerical precept by giving a veritable sermon in answer to Perceval's manifested ignorance about the exceptionality of that day. This "sermon" is educational and summarizes, in its assertiveness and its imperviousness to any questioning or doubt, the reasons for the observance of this day called Good Friday. It mentions the betrayal of Judas and Christ's crucifixion; the description of the dual nature of Jesus – the divine soul and the human body; and makes brief mention of his descent to the human sphere, to save humans from sin. This speech also presents the Jews as collectively responsible for the sacrificial death of Christ: *Aus perdirent et nos salverent* ("they saved us and ensured their loss." – v. 6296).¹⁰

After listening to the explanation of the penitent knight, laid out along thirty-five verses (vv. 6265-6300), Perceval inquires where they were coming from and what they had done. In the same educational manner of the knight, one of the women answers that they were coming from a hermitage, where they had confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness for them. These words will take Perceval to the peak of his interior transformation, to regret:

<i>De nos pechiez i demandames</i>	<i>We sought the hermit to confer</i>	6310
<i>Consoil, et confesse i preïsmes</i>	<i>about our sins and make confession,</i>	
<i>La greignor besoigne i feïsmes</i>	<i>a task that is the chief profession</i>	
<i>Que nus crestïens puisse feire,</i>	<i>of faith a Christian can accord,</i>	
<i>Qui bien voelle a Damedeu pleire.”</i>	<i>who would draw nearer to Our Lord.”</i>	
<i>Ce que Percevox oï ot</i>	<i>Then Perceval began to cry.</i>	
<i>Le fist plorer, et si li plot</i>	<i>Their words had made him want to try</i>	
<i>Que au bon home alast parler.</i>	<i>to go and talk with that good man.</i>	

The last verses of the passage take us to the already mentioned, most important and lasting consequence of the new clerical practices and concepts: the consequence to the relation between the subject and his conscience and acts. The act of repenting implies a conscious judgement based in the inner examination of a certain action. Therefore, when the text describes the moment in which something occurs in the character's conscience –that makes him cry and decide to go to the Hermit and ask help with what he considers his mistakes – that brings to the surface of the narrative all the elements involved in the act of repentance. For this reason, these verses are the starting point for the analysis of the manner in which it represents the internalization of the character.

These investigations must start, naturally, by the consideration that the essential inner movement was the awakening of a certain feeling of guilt in Perceval, unleashed by the penitents' speeches and responsible for his conscience's sudden awakening. To make the reach of this “preaching” inside our text quite clear, we need to highlight that the suffering of Perceval was prior to the encounter with the penitents. This meeting only gave a meaning and a cause for his pain, besides opening a possibility to end it through confession. The external judgement of the narrator, expressed in the beginning of the episode, is now internalized by the character himself and is the determining cause of repentance, as we can observe in the verses that describe his state of mind on the way to the hermitage:

<i>Et Percevox el santier antre,</i>	<i>He found the path, and made a start,</i>	6333
<i>Qui sopire del cuer del vandre</i>	<i>and sighed from deep within his</i>	

<i>Por ce que mesfez se savoit</i>	<i>heart,</i>
<i>Vers Deu et si s'an repantoit.</i>	<i>for Perceval felt he had sinned</i>
	<i>and was repentant and chagrined.</i>

Here, the fundamental factor is – besides the internalization of guilt – the admission that the suffering comes from a specific action or, to be more precise, the absence of a certain action. The verses that follow emphasize the persuasive characteristic contained in this movement of the narrative, which suggest to the reader/audience the existence of a metaphoric interplay between the inner and outer road that Perceval will follow. The artifice created by the penitents to guide all those who wish to find the hermitage reinforces this:

<i>"La voldroie, fet il, aler,</i>	<i>So Perceval said, "If I can,</i>	6318
<i>A l'ermite, se ge savoie</i>	<i>I wish to go to his abode,</i>	
<i>Tenir le santier et la voie."</i>	<i>if I could learn the path or road."</i>	
<i>- Sire, qui aler i voldroit,</i>	<i>"Whoever wants to go there, sir,</i>	
<i>Si tenist le santier tot droit</i>	<i>should take the path on which we were,</i>	
<i>Ensi con nos somes venu</i>	<i>go straight on through this forest thick,</i>	
<i>Parmi cest bois espés, menu</i>	<i>and watch for every branch and stick</i>	
<i>Et se preist garde des rains</i>	<i>which we have knotted, which we bent</i>	
<i>Que nos noames a noz mains</i>	<i>with our own hands, because we meant</i>	
<i>Qant nos par ilueques venismes.</i>	<i>each knotted branch to show the way,</i>	
<i>Tex antresaignes i feismes</i>	<i>so nobody would go astray</i>	
<i>Por ce que nus n'i esgarast,</i>	<i>who sought the holy hermit's dwelling."</i>	
<i>Qui a ce saint hermite alast."</i>		

To make quite clear that the importance this emphasis in orientation, and on the right path to take, has for the structure of the narrative, we can contrast it with the

omnipresence of chance in the decisive encounters Perceval has along his progression inside the text. This kind of precise orientation of the path to follow is exceptional, and only appeared once, years before, when the character, still in the beginning of his quest, searched for Carduel Castle, where the court of Arthur was gathered.¹¹ This contrast acquires even more meaning when compared with the fruitless wandering of Perceval for five years prior to this encounter, rendered incapable of finding the castle of the Fisher King.

Naturally, Perceval's confession will allow us to examine more closely and with greater number of elements the relation of the subject, his conscience, and his acts. Before we do this, however, let us read the account of the first encounter of Perceval and the Hermit, to observe the coordinated presence of sin, regret, guilt, and forgiveness – central elements in this new practice:

<i>A l'ermite par le pié pris,</i>	<i>the hermit by the foot, and clasped</i>	6356
<i>Si l'anclina et les mains joint</i>	<i>his hands, and bent down low,</i>	
<i>Et li prie que il li doint</i>	<i>and prayed the hermit for advice and aid</i>	
<i>Consoil, que grant mestier en a.</i>	<i>of which he was in urgent need.</i>	
<i>Et li boens hom li comanda</i>	<i>The good man told him to proceed,</i>	
<i>A dire sa confession,</i>	<i>because the youth could not be blessed</i>	
<i>Que nus n'avra ja remission</i>	<i>and pardoned till he had confessed</i>	
<i>Se n'est confés et repantanz.</i>	<i>and signs of his repentance shown.</i>	

After the hermit's exhortation, Perceval begins his confession. It will be guided through a series of linked actions where his most recent and visible sin – the act of forgetting God – will connect through a causal chain to two prior actions, one of them designated expressly as a sin and the other treated as, if not expressly designated as, a culpable action. We will examine the degree of intention involved in all three situations, and realize they are uneven. This will be the main element on the analysis we will make.

The first situation is the already mentioned "forgetting God": *Ne Deu n'amai ne ne le crui* (did not believe in God or love God. - v. 6366). In an initial evaluation, we can affirm, in this case, his intention concurs fully with his actions, or the lack of them

as seems to be the case. Both his mother – when she was finally convinced that his leaving was inevitable – and Gornemont de Goort, the knight who initiated him in chivalry, had warned him about the need of constantly remembering God through the attendance of places of worship, churches and monasteries (vv. 567-594; vv. 1665-1670).

However, as the Hermit questions him on the reason for this negligence, Perceval tells him what caused it was the pain resulting from his silence in the face of the mysteries of the Grail. This pain, caused by the perception of the terrible consequences of his omission, was the main cause of his behavior. This fact could be considered a mitigating circumstance in his guilt, by diminishing or even ceasing the control he might have had on his actions.¹²

- Sire, chiés le Roi Pescheor	"Sir, at the Fisher King's, at dinner,	6372
Fui un foiz, et vi la Lance	I saw the lance and that, indeed,	
Don li fers sainne sanz dotance,	its white point did not cease to bleed.	
Et de cele gote de sanc	I did not ask about the drop	
Que a la pointe de fer blanc	of blood suspended from the top	
Vi pandre, rien n'an demandai;	against the steel of shining white.	
Onques puis, certes, n'amandai.	I've done no better since that night.	
Et del Graal que ge i vi	I don't know who was being served	
Ge ne sai cui l'an an servi,	out of the grail that I observed.	
S'an ai puis eü si grant duel	Since then I've been so sorely tried	
Que morz eüsse esté mon vuel	that I would willingly have died,	
Et Damedeu an obliai,	and I forgot about Our Lord.	
Qu'ainz puis merci ne li criai	His mercy I've not once implored	
Ne ne fis rien que ge seüsse	nor done one deed that I can see	
Par coi merci avoir deüsse.	would make Him merciful to me."	

However, despite the mitigating factor, the fact mentioned in his explanation has nuances that demand deeper analyses. Initially, even though he treated Perceval's

omission as a grave and guilt-inducing fault, the Hermit does not mention the word sin at any moment. He never broke any kind of clerical interdiction. Besides, even if it was the case, if we consider intention as a determinant element for guilt, we cannot affirm he committed a sin. In the night he spent at the Fisher King castle, Perceval did not yet know the devastating consequences of his silence. Above all, besides not being an intentional transgression, the motivation to keep silent before the Grail was due to an excessively literal interpretation of the advice given him by Gornemant, of not over speaking (vv. 1648-1656)¹³. However, even though God can eliminate the sins of Perceval, as the Hermit had observed in the beginning of confession, he does not mention, at any moment, that the consequences of his silence, surpassing by far the personal sphere, could be erased.

This lack of connection between intention and consequence seems to defy the new kind of practice described above. Even if it does not occur in a strictly clerical context, it still unbalances a system based on the control of yourself and your actions. After all, how to repent of something done involuntarily?

The lack of connection between those two elements, and to the bewilderment brought by it, will seem to diminish when the Hermit, who had not yet asked the name of his confident, discovers it is Perceval. He tells him his suffering comes from a sin he ignores: the death of his mother, caused by the pain brought by his leaving, when he decided to look for King Arthur's court to become a knight:

<i>Et dit: "Frere, mout t'a neü</i>	<i>"A sin for which you feel no shame</i>	6392
<i>Uns pechiez don tu ne sez mot:</i>	<i>has brought misfortune on you,</i>	
<i>Ce est li diax que ta mere ot</i>	<i>brother.</i>	
<i>De toi quant tu partis de li,</i>	<i>It was the grief you caused your</i>	
<i>Que pasmee a terre cheï</i>	<i>mother the day you left; a grief so</i>	
<i>Au chief del pont, delez la porte,</i>	<i>great</i>	
<i>Et de ce duel fu ele morte.</i>	<i>she swooned and fell before her gate</i>	
<i>Por le pechié que tu en as</i>	<i>next to the drawbridge, on her side,</i>	
<i>Avint que tu ne demandas</i>	<i>in so much anguish that she died.</i>	
<i>De la Lance ne del Graal,</i>	<i>It was this sin that made you fail</i>	

Si t'an sont avenu li mal.

to ask about the lance and grail.

Then your misfortunes came along.

The revelation made by the Hermit will conduct the confession of Perceval to its closure. In the sequence initiated after Perceval revealed his name, the Hermit will clarify the meaning of a series of elements present in the evening when the mysteries of the Fisher King castle paraded before the young knight: the identity of the characters involved in the scene, their relation to Perceval. An information that is fundamental for the global understanding of the narrative – the Grail held a Host, such an extraordinary substance that it had kept alive for fifteen years King Fisher's father.¹⁴ After that, the Hermit will ask Perceval to repent and start his penance, divided in two parts: the actions he must perform for the rest of his life and the two days he must live and eat like the Hermit. After the utterance of the penances, the Hermit celebrates Mass, and Perceval “prayed when it was over to the cross, and wept and mourned his sins and loss”.¹⁵

The conclusion of the episode, besides reinforcing the central role of communion, could not be more revealing about the text's suggested meaning for the interpretation of the inner transformation experienced by Perceval during his days at the hermitage.¹⁶

<i>Ensi Percevox reconut</i>	<i>And so it was that Perceval</i>	6509
<i>Que Dex au vanredi reçut</i>	<i>found out that God was crucified</i>	
<i>Mort et si fu crocefiez.</i>	<i>upon a Friday, and He died.</i>	
<i>A la Pasque comeniez</i>	<i>At Easter, worthily, he took</i>	
<i>Fu Percevox mout simplement</i>	<i>communion.</i>	

The Hermit's revelations and the present and future penances imposed on the knight intend to be conclusive and take the episode of Perceval to a logical end. However, they do not seem to lessen the sense of bewilderment created by the connection between the involuntary character of Perceval's fault, its terrible consequences, and the feeling of guilt that afflicted him. Besides that, they do not eliminate the confusion caused by considering a mistake the action without which he

would never had become a Knight and arrived at the castle of the Grail. How to interpret, then, the succession of acts that seem to exempt Perceval from any culpability and, more than that, seem to be arranged in a circular manner that would take from him, from the beginning, any possibility of acting any different than he did, consequently making it impossible for him to have a guilty conscience? How to interpret these dilemmas raised by Perceval's confession in the context of a system of penance that brought intention and motivation to the center of its practices and conceptions?

The interpretation using a "non-intentional" key presents itself as a logical and reasonable possibility of solving these dilemmas. Through this key – based on the defense of a Cistercian inspiration in Chrétien de Troyes' theology – Perceval should be accountable for his mother's death, even if he did not have the intention to do her harm. The causes of this sin, with consequences that would manifest themselves in his failure in the castle of the Grail, would have been a set of attitudes marked by selfishness and pride. In this case, there would be no impasse in the narrative: the confession would be an opportunity of redemption and self-knowledge that would allow Perceval to give meaning to his path and his adventures, and fulfill the salvationist mission that was destined to him.¹⁷

This interpretation key, which insists on the existence of a kind of original sin that is responsible for Perceval's failure in the castle of the Grail, does not solve, however, the essential paradox of the narrative: if he did not leave, he would never have had the opportunity to become a knight and find the castle of the Grail. The inconclusive characteristic of Chrétien de Troyes' narrative being considered, the affirmation that the character would fulfill his salvationist mission would be no more than a hypothesis, even if one not without logical foundation. Through this perspective, we see this paradox, if not as a condemnation of chivalry as a whole – when we suggest that failure was already inserted on the origin of the adventures of a knight destined to restore order to the world –, at least as an affirmation of its limits compared to the higher spiritual dimension represented by the clergy. Let us remind ourselves, like the Hermit, that Perceval will never have forgiveness if he does not confess and repent,¹⁸ a remission that will depend, however, on the unescapable mediation of the Hermit.¹⁹

Perceval's communion will be his last act in *Perceval; or, The Story of the Grail* by Chrétien de Troyes. The narrative focuses, after that, on the character Gawain. He

seems to induce the reader to a closed conclusion where the communion forcibly appears as the final act of a journey begun by a primordial sin and concluded by its remission. The impasse resulting from the subjugation of the character to an imperious superior force, as well as the inconclusive characteristic of the narrative make the breath of this transformation something that we can never assess precisely.²⁰

To the modern reader and historian – surprised by the longevity of a text that seems to escape his attempts of methodical, detached apprehension – all that is left is pleasure and the serene acceptance of watching the object become a subject as well, and project on the reader its diffuse and yet still very vivid lights. What else could be the desire of one that lives in search of beings and objects that were supposed to be lost or inert forever?

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¹ TRANSLATOR NOTE – The English version of *Perceval; or The Story of the Grail*, by Chrétien de Troyes is the translation by Ruth Harwood Cline, published by The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1985, downloaded in PDF format from JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46nkpq.1>

² For the citations of Chrétien de Troyes’ narrative, as well as the numbering of his verses, I used Daniel Poirion’s edition for the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*, which I translated into Portuguese.

³ We can observe that the general scheme of the transformations followed by Baschet is not substantially different from the one found in Andre Vauchez’s summary of “medieval spirituality”. It is important, however, to stress a major difference in the interpretation of these two historians. To Vauchez, the transformations of Christianity point in a direction of spiritual progress, initiated by the “domestication” of the rude and barbaric population of the High Middle Ages and consummated by the emergence of an inner Christianity, more inclusive of the laity. Baschet sees these two processes, internalization and inclusion, as signs of deeper clerical control over Western populations and societies. BASCHET (2006) e VAUCHEZ (1995).

⁴ There is still a need of more studies about confession before 1215 to enhance our understanding of the changes in this practice after the Fourth Lateran Council. Alexander Murray published an important article about the subject in which he analyses the relationship between internal and external practices, and the historians’ understandings about these, MURRAY (1993).

⁵ Jacques Le Goff, for instance, will consider the mandatory character of oral confession as a “revolution”, responsible for the start of a movement that would lead to Western conscience, centuries

later, and to the development of psychology and psychoanalysis. LE GOFF (2008), p. 76. Extending even more this temporal arch, Jean Delumeau places the development of self-conscience stimulated by confession, "(...) with the 'know thyself' of Socrates and Freud". DELUMEAU (1991), p. 8. Jean.

⁶ In Baschet's book, the chapter "The Logic of Salvation" shortly describes the articulations between medieval expectancy on the destiny of the souls and bodies after death, the notion of sin, and the places of both inside clerical action on the society. BASCHET, *Op. cit.*, p. 374-408

⁷ Philip of Alsace became Count of Flanders after the death of his father, Thierry of Alsace, in 1168, keeping that position until his death in 1191. Philip visited the court of Champagne in 1181, to propose marriage to Maria, recently widowed wife of Henri, the Liberal – occasion that might have been his first contact with Chrétien de Troyes. The year of this visit and the years of 1190 – when Phillip left to Jerusalem as a crusade – or the year of 1191 – year of his death – are normally accepted as the boundaries for the composition period of the narrative of *Perceval; or, The Story of the Grail*. The oldest registered manuscripts, however, are from the beginning of the next century. On the patrons of Chrétien de Troyes, see HALL McCASH (2008). For a panorama of manuscript tradition, see MICHA (1966) BUSBY, Keith. NIXON, Terry. STONES, Alison... [et al.] (1993).

⁸ It is worth observing, even if this fact does not substantially alters this characteristic, the detachment established by the narrator in the initial verse of the episode: *Perceval, ce conte l'estoire* (The story tells us Perceval, v. 6217).

⁹ We can observe this new opposition places the warring activity, both in its general and the more specific situation of Perceval, inside a context controlled by the clergy.

¹⁰ We can apprehend this passage, in its rude and hard concreteness, as an expression of growingly intolerant attitudes towards Jews in Western Christianity, when the narrator affirms they should be "slain like dogs" (*Qu'an devoit tuer come chiens* – v. 6293). According to Baschet, attitudes would start to have this inflexion after the 1120s (cf, p. 237).

¹¹ It is significant, in this case, the reappearance of the words used by Perceval on the occasion when he asked a charcoal burner how he found on the way directions to *La plus droite voie* (give me directions now, and tell the quickest way to Carduel, v. 839). It is also significant that the whole narrative will start from a kind of detour, when Perceval meets the knights on his way to his mother's oat fields.

¹² Actually, the consciousness of his error was not sudden, as his words seem to suggest. The analysis of the moment in which it occurred, however, would be an unnecessary digression at this time. Now, we must declare its cause was a posterior accusation, due to the consequences of his silence. The accusation occurred in two distinct moments, made by two separate characters. Only on the second time did it cause the impact mentioned by him in his confession. We can also note that this insight involved a feeling of guilt, in this case totally disconnected from any religious motivation. Here lies the importance of the meeting with the penitents, shifting the character's conscience into the field of clerical precepts.

¹³ It is important to observe that, on both occasions when Perceval was accused for his silence, the adjectives used reinforce the involuntary character of his fault. *Chietis* (v. 3582), *maleüreus* (vv. 3583, 4662, 4665), *mesavantareus* (v. 3584), *mescheü* (v.3603), *mal eür* (vv. 4668 e 4669), words that point, even with their different nuances (*chietis* can also mean prisoner, for instance) to an unhappy condition of the one designated by them, one that we can see as an object of destiny, a wretch.

¹⁴ We cannot avoid emphasizing, in this explanation of the Hermit, a probable, very opportune echo for the diffusion of clerical precepts, of a "greater sacralization" acquired by the sacrament of the Eucharist in this context of theological innovations of the 12th century. The revelations of the Hermit are, naturally, fundamental for the global comprehension of the narrative. That is not, however, the objective of this article, so I will not expand on this. Still on this subject, we must observe that the Hermit said nothing about the lance that bled, certainly due to issues connected to the construction of the narrative. This lance had become the object Gawain searched in the episode immediately before the one we are analyzing (vv. 5656-6218).

¹⁵ *Après le servise aora/La croiz et ses pechiez plora* – vv. 6495-6496. We must focus on the use of the word *servisse* (service), placing the divine cult in the category of obligations – including the feudal ones. By doing this through the narrator's objective speech, the author reinforces the fairness of Perceval's perception about his error.

¹⁶ The perception of a chronological and thematic coincidence between the experience of Perceval with the Hermit and the narrative of the Passion of the Christ is intensified by the very similar descriptions. First, the one by Perceval's mother, when she explained to him what was done in a monastery (vs. 580-591). Second, closer to us, the explanation by the penitents in the beginning of the episode we analyze.

¹⁷ See TAN (2014)

¹⁸ (...) *n'avra ja remission/ Se n'est confés et repantanz* – vv. 6362-6363.

¹⁹ This observation on the mediating role of the Hermit would suggest another development for our analysis, a development that would escape the limits of this article. It should examine the role of the narrative in the construction of subjectivity. Here we are no longer analyzing its internal organization and extra-textual connections; we are abandoning deliberately references and presumptions to assume it as an artifact conditioned by time and circumstances of its composition. In other words, we would stop taking for a fact Perceval's sin, and start analyzing the narrative means that made it look like one.

²⁰ The last verses of the episode seem to point to a return of Perceval's narrative, and therefore to a solution to all impasse and uncertainty on the fate of Perceval. This return, however, could not escape certain limits to the narrative, established before its interruption. This would obviously limit the possibility of completely eliminating its open and unstable elements. Beyond continuations and overflowing into other narrative cycles, this opening is supported by the long lineage of studies that search for the origins of the Grail motif. For a panorama of these studies, see BARBER (2006).