

The Cup of Mercy: Figuration in Sir Thomas Malory's "Sankgreal" and the Medieval Popular Bible

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for
the Degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia
May, 2018



"Sir Galahad," Arthur Rackham, 1917

*Then move the trees, the copses nod,
Wings flutter, voices hover clear:
"O just and faithful knight of God!
Ride on! the prize is near."
So pass I hostel, hall, and grange;
By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
All-arm'd I ride, whate'er betide,
Until I find the holy Grail.
—Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

This thesis is dedicated with gratitude to my advisor, Elizabeth Fowler, for her unfailing support and incisive critiques; to Esther Quinn and Brian Murdoch, from whose shoulders I glimpsed a little further; to Will, my sounding board; and to Ben, Penn, and Nancy Hagood for twenty-seven years of encouragement.

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* is an enigmatic work. The nature of the material as compilation and translation and redaction has confounded scholars as to what Malory's primary motives were for creating the text. The text does not seem to be religiously-motivated, and yet why is there so much material of devotion found throughout? Perhaps Malory was critiquing the political atmosphere of his own time by harkening back to an idyllic period of kingship and knightly valor. And yet, why then does the tale end with the death of Arthur and the breaking of the fellowship of the Round Table? Why also are Lancelot and Guinevere allowed the hope of redemption, to such an extent that even Lancelot's corpse carries the sweet smell of a saint's? Why is Galahad—the most virtuous knight—able to succeed in finding the Grail and healing the Maimed King but not able to return with the Grail to Arthur's court? Why is it the pursuit for this most holy object that is the beginning of the end for the Round Table, the fracturing of knightly bonds?

To answer these questions, one must understand the literary culture in which Malory was writing *Le Morte Darthur*, especially the literary culture of the medieval world that dealt with religious material. For the medieval imagination, the Bible and its surrounding narratives were deeply historical and deeply narratively significant. The medieval imagination entwined biblical stories into the fabric of its being, and this rich, textual culture was everywhere in the vernacular literature of Western Europe. Brian Murdoch, who has written masterfully about biblical material in the medieval world, coined the phrase “the medieval popular bible” to account for the significant amount of extra-biblical legends, the non-canonical material that nevertheless saturated the stories and poems and drama of the medieval period. This medieval popular bible covered

literature that was meant for the lay audience, written not as exegesis or for those within the clerical realm, but for the questions that would come for any curious reader of the Book of Genesis and its characters. What happened to Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the Garden? What were Cain's motivations for slaying Abel? What was Cain's life like after he slew his brother Abel? Who is this third son, this overlooked and almost anonymous man named Seth? The stories of the medieval popular bible offered answers and narratives for these 'plot holes,' developing a rich tradition of apocryphal Adam-lives and material that served to connect the characters of the Hebrew Scriptures to the characters of the New Testament. These apocryphal writings "offer the first bridge between the theological and the literary" (Murdoch 2000, 5), and it is into this whirlpool of literature and theology, narrative and faith, that the author of Malory's "Sankgreal" source text, the Cistercian-influenced composer of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, decided to dip his pen. With the creation of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the world of Arthurian literature suddenly found itself within the realm of the medieval popular bible, and the Grail Quest was forever altered.

This paper aims to look at the innovations of character work accomplished by both Malory and the *Queste* author, which served to place the Grail Quest of Arthur's knights firmly within the realm of the medieval popular bible. In looking at the newly-created Galahad, the women of the story of the three spindles, and the background literature of the legends of Seth and the Tree of Life, I argue that Malory and the *Queste* author helped continue a tradition of medieval heroism that had roots in pre-Christian texts and helped preserve the cycle of legends surrounding the Tree of Life in a post-Reformation world. A study of the figuration in Malory's "Sankgreal" and the *Queste* can

help to provide answers to those lingering questions of Malory's motivations and to imbue the Arthurian Grail Quest with a historical authority that connects the knights of the Round Table to the genesis of humanity.

I. Figuration in the *Queste del Saint Graal*: The Male Quester

Before looking at the innovations of Malory's own version of the "Sankgreal" and the story of the three spindles, we must trace the origins of the image of the spindles back through Malory's source text, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and its own recreation of a very popular cycle of legends that was circulating throughout the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries in medieval Europe and, especially, in England. These legends began before the birth of Christ, with the quest of Seth for the Oil of Mercy, and developed throughout the centuries to create a new kind of medieval hero—the male quester.

The legend cycle, which will be referred to in its complete form as the legend of Seth and the Tree of Life, formed the basis of "The Legend of the Tree of Life" section within the *Queste*. To appreciate the *Queste* author's truly radical innovations, however, we must return to early Hebraic literature to uncover the beginning of the story. Adam and Eve's son Seth arrives on the scene in the book of Genesis, but he is granted only a brief mention as the son born after Abel's death, who originates the genealogical line from which Noah descends (Genesis 4:25-6). Sometime in the first century, however, an apocryphal tale is written down, one that most likely came from an earlier and extensive tradition of apocalyptic literature that included books such as *1 and 2 Enoch*, *3 Baruch*, *Daniel*, and many others (Quinn 1962, 28). This apocryphal tale was titled the *Apocalypse of Moses* and contained the first form of the legend of Seth.

In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, Seth and Eve are sent by Adam to retrieve some “of the tree out of which the oil flows,” so that he may “anoint [himself] and shall have rest” (Anderson 9.4). They journey back to the Garden of Eden and are met by the Archangel Michael, who tells Seth “[do] not weary yourself with prayers and entreaties concerning the tree . . . For it shall not be yours now, but in the end of the times. Then shall all flesh be raised up from Adam till that great day” (Anderson 13.2b-13.3). Seth and Eve return to Adam bearing the angel’s message, and Adam dies three days after their return.

Seth’s quest, in essence, is a failure. Without the healing oil of mercy, his father, the first created man, dies and passes into an unknown world. The figure of Seth is one who is sent out on a mission, a quest for mercy, and one who returns with only an angel’s guarantee that that mercy will only come in the end of times. There will be no earthly relief. In comparing Seth’s quest in the *Apocalypse* to a similar group of fairy tales (Grimm No. 97), Esther Quinn writes that “the Seth legend is a story about death; it seeks to show that death came into the world through sin and that only in the hereafter can man enjoy eternal life. It is entirely religious in tone” (1962, 20). She perceptively writes that this fixation on both death and the life of the hereafter is “the most characteristically Jewish element of the story . . . [Seth’s journey] reflects the troubled but hopeful spirit of the Jew in the years preceding and following the advent of Christianity. To the Jew of this era death was inevitable” (ibid). The apocalyptic literature of the period, out of which the *Apocalypse* came, had to grapple with the disjunction between the message of Daniel and other prophets—that God’s kingdom will be established on earth through the Jewish people—and the Roman occupation of Jerusalem. Michael’s message to Seth that the oil

of mercy will be received at the end of the times speaks to this tension between expectation and disappointment, the promise of prophecy and the immediacy of death.

It is in this role of Seth's, as messenger of an angelic prophecy, that we see the beginning of the transformation of his role as a character. He is no longer simply a patriarch of Noah's line but a hero of great theological import for the Judaic tradition; his message is one of healing redemption that will come, no matter the extent of death and destruction and occupation that may exist within the earthly life of the Jewish people. The thematic origins of this story, of death and disillusionment and glimmers of hope, will carry through all the way to 1469, when Sir Thomas Malory puts ink to paper to copy his "Sankgreal" from the *Queste's* own interpretation of Seth's story.

Seth's journey as a heroic figure next appears within a Christian context in *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, which includes a text known as the *Descensus Christi ad Infernos*. In the *Descensus*, Adam asks Seth to recount the tale of his journey to the Garden and Michael's message now that Christ, after his crucifixion, has come to harrow hell (Book XIV). In this context, Seth's journey explicitly links Christ to the oil of mercy, and the text of the *Descensus* became so popular that it lent its narrative to a fourth century Latin text known as the *Vita Adae et Evae* (Quinn 1962, 38, 45). The *Vita Adae et Evae* belongs to a textual tradition that scholars have termed Adambooks, which are apocryphal lives of Adam and Eve that focus on their 'lives,' or their time as mortals—the journey of their time after the expulsion from the Garden. Brian Murdoch, whose research on this subject is prolific, puts the Adambooks in a periodic range of the first few centuries of Christianity up to the Reformation and finds them throughout Near- and Middle-Eastern and Western-European vernacular languages as well (Murdoch 2003, 42). Because of the

proliferation of vernacular texts and their popularity, Murdoch concludes that “what we may think of as the medieval Genesis depends for the Adam and Eve story just as greatly upon them as upon the Bible” (ibid). For the medieval imagination, Genesis included not only the canonical book as it is known today but the many vernacular expansions upon that story. The medieval imagination included our hero Seth.

The popularity of the *Descensus* was especially prevalent in England, appearing there almost as soon as Christianity took hold, and reaching the height of its popularity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Hulme lxvii-i). During the same period, another legend cycle was reaching the heights of its own popularity: the legend of the Holy Rood. This body of legend focused on the wood of the cross as a temporal witness to the history of biblical humanity, a symbol of redemption throughout the ages, from the first fall of man to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Quinn hypothesized that it was the dispersal of alleged fragments of the True Cross throughout Western Europe which helped to fuel the development of the legend, showing that the cross “was made of no ordinary wood” (1962, 49), but another key element was the ease with which vernacular literature embraced both the legend of the Holy Rood and the legend of Seth.

It is within the medieval vernacular literature, “a living and developing apocryphal tradition” (Murdoch 2000, 30), where the quest of Seth and the legend of the Holy Rood come together in their most vibrant form. The legend of Seth and the Tree of Life appeared in prose, poetry, and drama throughout the medieval world, but it thrived especially in England, in works such as *The South English Legendary*, the Auchinleck *Life of Adam*, the *Canticum de Creatione*, and the Cornish dramatic cycle known as the *Ordinalia*. One of the most widely known and most developed accounts is preserved in

the *Cursor mundi*, an immensely popular poem written in Middle English during the early 1300s and surviving in at least ten different manuscripts (Thurston).

In the text of the *Cursor mundi*, Adam sends Seth alone to the Garden, following the withered ground where his parents' first footfalls from Eden had scorched the earth, and Seth arrives at the gates to find Michael. Michael bids him look into the Garden, where he sees a vision of a tree that has roots in hell and branches reaching all the way into the sky. Within these branches lies a newborn babe, and Michael explains Seth's vision to him: "þis barn," he said, "þat þou has sene, / Is goddes sun wit-uten wene; / þi fader sin now wepes he / þat he sal clens sum time sal be, / Quen þe plente³ sal cum o time; / þis is þe oile þat was hight him" (1355-1360). Michael then gives Seth three pippins from the tree of which Adam and Eve ate, and tells Seth to plant them under Adam's tongue after he dies: "Bot þou sal tak þis pepins thre, / þat I toke o þat appel tre, / And do þam vnder his tong rote, / þai sal til mani man be bote" (1373-1376).

Throughout the remainder of the almost 30,000 line poem, the tree that sprouts from the pippins, a tree of cedar, cypress, and pine, blossoms throughout the ages. Moses encounters the tree in a dream vision and receives three wands of the tree, which he plants again before his death, ensuring that David, Solomon, and many others will have encounters with the tree. Finally the tree is cut, shorn, hammered, and nailed into an instrument of execution on which the body of Jesus Christ is crucified. The legend of the cross continues through its discovery by Constantine's mother, Saint Helena, and subsequent veneration. Thus the connective tissue between the two literary cycles—the Adambooks and the True Cross—is Seth's quest, and the drama of death and redemption is still at its center. As both the end of the Adambook cycles and the beginning of the

True Cross legends, Seth's quest lies at the heart of the connection between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

Seth's evolution as a figure from an apocryphal Jewish hero to a medieval Christian hero traces the story of the growth of Christianity and its enduring effect on vernacular literature. Murdoch writes persuasively of how Seth's quest fits the two cycles of literary legends together so precisely, both narratively and theologically:

The idea of divine forgiveness is developed at the end of the story, when the dying Adam sends Seth and Eve for the oil of mercy, which in the earliest forms is interpreted as the promise of redemption. In the development of the story with the gradual integration of the Holy Rood legends, we move towards a very concrete illustration of the redemption in that the first and second Adam, in Pauline terms, are linked by the physical presence of the Holy Rood. (Murdoch 2009, 25)

Murdoch's analysis is pivotal to the idea that the eschatological promise of redemption becomes a concrete symbol in the fitting together of the two legends: the promise becomes the seed and thence the tree. The physicality of the wood links Adam—whose body becomes the very soil, the nutrients, from which the tree of the cross will grow—to Christ, the second Adam. Murdoch's allusion to Paul's first and second Adam trope comes from Romans: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:12-19). This is made more evident in versions of the legend in which Adam's burial place is moved to Golgatha, where Christ's blood from the cross becomes a literal oil of mercy which falls eucharistically into the mouth of Adam and washes his body clean (Murdoch 2009, 26). Death and blood continue to be important elements of the narrative of Seth and the Tree of Life, even as the symbol of redemption grows more concrete.

The evolution of these legends, becoming more and more complex both narratively and theologically, places Seth as an interesting hero type within the medieval imagination. As both the inheritor of Adam's sin and the harbinger of Christ's grace, Seth is nevertheless known only for his role as a quester. He is given no personal motives or complications of character, even as the narrative with which he is entwined grows more intricate. Quinn succinctly describes this character type that Seth embodies: "Seth is neither a warrior nor a lover; he has no conflicts, no passion. He is a simple, almost an abstract figure . . . Single-minded, he exists only to perform his mission, and it is a momentous one . . . Seth seeks mercy not only for his father but for all men" (1962, 4). It is this heroic type—the simple, abstract figure who exists solely to perform a duty for all mankind—who will grow in stature within the medieval imagination until he eventually finds his way in the making of the *Queste*.

The legends of Seth help to establish a full history of the tree of the cross in the medieval imagination. From its popularity in vernacular literature, to the emphasis on the embodiment of theological themes of passion and redemption within physical objects, to the archetypal, abstract figure who becomes "a new kind of medieval hero," (Quinn 1962, 4), the literature of Seth and the Tree of Life seems to have found a way to survive into the modern day with the help of Arthurian literature. Though Murdoch and Quinn note different reasons for the decline of Seth's story—Murdoch pointing to the Reformation and the erasure of extra-biblical writings (Murdoch and Tasioulas 13) and Quinn to the value of the story's symbolism but not its narrative (1962, 135)—the author of the *Queste* was writing at exactly the right moment to be familiar with Seth at his most fully-formed. The *Queste*'s author takes on this new kind of medieval hero, one with no characteristic

passions, whose very simplicity is the key to access the symbol of redemption, acting for the benefit of all, existing only to fulfill a quest, and then vanishing from the literature once the action is complete, and creates a new Arthurian figure to fulfill Seth's role. This hero, however, is not named Seth. The *Queste*'s hero goes by the name of Galahad.

“The Legend of the Tree of Life” is a radical reinvention of the story of Seth and the Tree of Life by the author of the *Queste del Saint Graal*. In the text of the *Queste*, Galahad and three companions—Perceval, Bors, and a maiden known only as Perceval's sister—embark upon a mysterious ship that is filled with magnificent objects: costly fabric, a sumptuous bed, a golden crown, a sword of burnished beauty, a scabbard of bright red rose (*Quest* 213-6). When they move closer to inspect the bed, they:

saw that it was made of timber hewn from the living tree. In the centre of the side that faced them there was a post let into the wooden beam that extended the length of the bed, in such a way that it was perpendicular to the frame. And on the far side in the other truss there was another post, exactly opposite the first. These posts were separated by the width of the bed, and on them lay a slender cross-piece, squared and bolted to the two uprights. The post on the nearer side was whiter than fallen snow; while the further one was as red as drops of bright red blood; and the one which joined them overhead was emerald green. Of these three hues were the three posts over the bed; and it is the undoubted truth that these were natural colours, not painted on, for they owed naught to any human hand. (*Quest* 221)

The story of the Grail quest breaks at this moment for a thirteen and a half page interlude in which “The Legend of the Tree of Life” is explained (*Quest* 222-235). And it is here that the author of the *Queste* shows the true extent of his power of revision and creation, to a high degree of both artistry and theology (Quinn 1965, 191).

Eve, after she and Adam eat of the tree in the Garden, unconsciously carries the branch from the tree with her as they are exiled from Eden. Once she realizes that the

branch she carries is still “as fresh and green as if it had just been picked,” (*Quest* 223), she decides to plant it in the earth, where it grows into a tree “charged with meaning” (*ibid*). The tree is first “as white as snow ... the mark of virginity,” (*Quest* 224), and Adam and Eve take many branches from the tree that they replant, which flourish and retain the white color. Then God commands Adam and Eve to know each other as man and wife, and Abel is conceived. “The tree which had been white till then in all its parts, became forthwith as green as the grass of the field ... but those that had sprung from it retained their original hue” (*Quest* 226). After Abel’s tragic death at the hand of his brother, underneath the Tree’s branches, “its green tints veered to scarlet in remembrance of the blood poured out beneath it. And there was an end, too, of its issue, for all the slips that were taken afterwards shriveled and died” (*Quest* 229).

The white, green, and red offshoots of the Tree of Life survive through the flood that covers the earth until the time of Solomon. Solomon dreams of two figures who will be born of his issue: a woman who will bring joy to all mankind and a knight, the last of his lineage, “rooted in ... virtue and high valour” (*Quest* 231). Solomon’s wife, to solve the problem of Solomon’s desire to communicate with this knight who is to come, builds a magnificent ship, which she fills with all of the wondrous objects, including three posts cut from each of the colored issues of the Tree. Afterwards, Solomon dreams that a man from heaven inscribes markings on the ship, and the ship slides out into the sea, never to be seen by Solomon again (*Quest* 233-5).

Knowing the development of Seth and the rood-tree as we do, it is easy to see the remarkable changes which the *Queste* author made. Seth is no longer even mentioned in the family of Adam and Eve, nor are Moses and David a part of the history of the Tree’s

temporal journey. The posts are made of three colors, rather than three different types of wood, and Solomon's wife plays a pivotal role in the new version. Once the posts are carved for the ship, the Tree retreats from the story, only to be mentioned once again when it is revealed that the sword's red sheath is made from the same wood of the Tree, stained by Abel's blood. Quinn explores this rewriting of Seth's quest and the rood-tree legend in a definitive essay on "The Quest of Seth, Solomon's Ship and the Grail" and shows decisively that the small segment of rood-tree legends which does not include Seth cannot be seriously considered as source texts (190). The *Queste* author, then, made the decision to remove the figure of Seth for very specific reasons, and it is this removal which is our primary focus. Several shifts happen once Seth is removed, granting greater primacy to other Genesis figures. Eve takes over the role of planter, and her unconscious taking of the branch from the Garden shifts the story from a quest narrative to the realm of an origin tale—the origin of the bedposts on the ship. The Tree comes into the world unknowingly, through no definitive action of humanity, and the emphasis of the quest narrative shifts to Galahad and his own quest for an object of mercy.

The *Queste* also elevates Abel as the primary figure of the sons of Adam and Eve. The description of Abel's death within the *Queste* is violent and lengthy, and Abel is compared directly with Christ, as Cain is with Judas (*Quest* 228). Rather than focusing on the redemptive, healing aspects of an object of mercy and Christ's coming, which had developed as the primary focus of Seth's narrative, Abel's death and blood reorient the legend of the Tree back to its roots in death and emphasize the newer relationship to

Christ's passion¹. This connection is further heightened when Solomon's wife has the posts cut from the tree, and "drops of blood as bright as the reddest rose exud[ed] from the wood" (*Quest* 233). Though the cross is not explicitly mentioned in this version of the narrative of the Tree of Life, the wood's blood is a striking reminder that the Tree is a symbol of violence and death as well as redemption.

Within the *Queste* narrative, this thematic emphasis connects Abel and Christ to Perceval's sister, who will shed her own blood and die to heal another shortly after the episode on Solomon's ship. She is also the one who names the sword's scabbard the "Memory of Blood ... For no man of understanding will be able to look at that part of the scabbard which was made from the Tree of Life without recalling to mind the blood of Abel" (*Quest* 237). Jennifer Looper rightly notes that the scabbard's symbolism shows that "even the lowest state to which humankind falls contains the seeds of redemption" (57). Much like Seth's return to the Garden, the origin of the Fall, Galahad's scabbard is a constant reminder of the blood of the original fratricide, but both the return to the Garden and the red sheath situate signs of redemption within violence. Galahad's quest for the cup that holds Christ's merciful blood takes place within the downfall of an Edenic court, a world in which knightly chivalry cannot mitigate the sins of fallen humanity.

Several critics have noticed the ways in which Galahad has assumed Seth's mantle as the medieval questing hero². Like Seth's, Galahad's significance as a figure

¹ Esther Quinn notes that this was a purposeful shift for the author because "the primal act of violence in the world was more appropriate than the Journey to Paradise" (1965, 190).

² Quinn (1965, 219) and Dean (121) both suggest a connection between Galahad and Seth but do not explore the full scope. Matarasso alludes to allegations that Galahad is "a

comes not through elaborate characterization or motivations but through his position as a heroic quester and through his inheritance. What connects Galahad and Seth more intimately than their quests for mercy is their shared position as the outcome of sin. The first chapter of the Hebrew Scriptures, Genesis, firmly establishes the importance of genealogy. The authors of the early texts of the Scriptures took pains to record the genealogies of the patriarchs, and this is mirrored in the very first sentences of the New Testament, in which Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus. This genealogical tree is a literary technique that grants Jesus authority not only as the son of God, but as the inheritor of the promises of the patriarchs who came before. Similarly, Galahad is established through his genealogy, which includes a ninth “mythical” generation of Nascien and Joseph of Arimathea (Looper 52). Seth’s significance in Genesis comes primarily through his role as progenitor of the Noahic genealogy. The physical presence of the wooden posts of the Tree of Life is a material symbol of the genealogical theme³, and the emphasis on the red wood in particular brings the genealogy of violence to the forefront. The position of the posts as a canopy or arbor-like structure over the bed—the symbol of eros and inception—emphasizes the tree’s physical presence as a fragment of the ages-old lineage. This stained and sinful legacy comes down to Seth through his father, Adam and to Galahad through his father, Lancelot.

Lancelot and Guinevere’s love affair is the infamous cause of the downfall for Edenic Camelot and the reason that Lancelot fails in the Grail Quest where Galahad

cardboard saint” (17), McShane notes that “Galahad’s perfection ... makes him both admirable and irksome to modern adaptors,” and Looper writes that “Galahad is present as a new redeemer” (49) but concludes that he is unsuccessful.

³ “The spindles have witnessed much in their long existence ... events [which] span the six ages” (Dean 120).

succeeds. This love affair, however, is the impetus for Galahad's own conception. Lancelot's desire for Guinevere allows Elaine and her father to trick Lancelot into sleeping with her, and through this treachery Galahad is conceived. Galahad is, from the beginning, a son of sin⁴. Why then is he granted access to the Grail? Why is Seth, also a son of sin, granted a glimpse of the Garden? Seth's seeds and Galahad's wooden posts are both "vestiges of paradise" (Dean 120) which enable them to approach the truth of a redemption encoded in violence. As sons of sin, Seth and Galahad are unable to truly fulfill the quests that they seek. Seth is given the seeds of redemption but no immediate healing for Adam; Galahad achieves the Grail for himself but is unable to return to Arthur's court with the vessel. There will be no earthly healing for Adam or Arthur. Where Seth and Galahad do succeed, however, is in their ability to access the story of redemption, even if only for a brief moment, and to receive the physical objects of that story of redemption. The figures of Seth and Galahad, as sons of sin who glimpse mercy, recapitulate the paradox of the Christian story, the dying God. Violence begets—not more violence—but mercy and grace. Through the characters of Seth and Galahad, the reader is also able to glimpse those vestiges of paradise, to receive the story of redemption, and thus it is extremely important that Seth and Galahad, despite their sinful origins, are able to access to mercy. Their quests are stories of hope for the rest of humanity.

⁴ Quinn suggests a parallel between Adam and the Maimed King (1965, 220), but a connection between Adam and Lancelot more clearly illuminates the parallels between Seth and Galahad. These echoes reach even to the 1960 musical *Camelot*, where Lancelot sings—in a moment of dramatic irony—"I'm blessed with an iron will. / Had I been made / The partner of Eve, / We'd be in Eden still."

The “extremely earthly origins” (Whetter 145) for Galahad as well as Seth illuminate their role as naught but questers. Seth and Galahad receive their vestiges of paradise, but their own role in the workings of human redemption is limited. Seth can plant the seeds, but he cannot die upon the cross. Galahad may receive the Grail, but he cannot bring it to the Round Table. These parallel figures allow us to see how the author of the *Queste* elevates the Arthurian Grail Quest to the level of the Quest for the Oil of Mercy, thereby granting a new authority to Arthurian legend. These are no longer romances of knights and ladies fair. The creation of Galahad, of the pure quester who is granted but a glimpse, and the inclusion of a new version of the rood-tree legend place the Arthurian Grail Quest securely within the realm of the medieval popular bible. The Book of Genesis now extends throughout history to the Arthurian age, where its pages find completion when Galahad steps onto the ship of Solomon’s wife’s construction and takes up the sword with the red scabbard. The innovation of the *Queste*’s author—the primacy of blood, of Abel’s character, of violence—means that the Arthurian Grail Quest is tied intimately into the story of death and redemption that is the story of the life of Christ and the link between the Hebraic Scriptures and the New Testament.

Now that we understand the critical evolution of the legend of the Tree that happens within the *Queste* and the evolution of the medieval quester in the change from Seth to Galahad, we can more easily trace Malory’s own innovations. Malory’s “Sankgreal” brings the innovations of the *Queste* into *Le Morte Darthur*, but his own redactions and translation choices create another new medieval hero in turn—the figure of the female guardian of history.

II. Figuration in Malory's "Sankgreal": The Female Guardian

In the same way that the innovations by the author of the *Queste* opened the door to a new realm of literary and biblical connections through Seth and Galahad, so Malory's incorporation and revision of the *Queste* material created a new realm for the female figure in his story of the three spindles. Eve, Solomon's wife, and Percyvale's sister became keepers of cultural memory through objects: Eve's branch, Solomon's wife's ship, and Percyvale's sister's girdle. The innovations of Malory's text, however, shifted the role of the woman from simply that of a vessel of culture to a fully-fledged guardian. There is agency in the role of all three women, agency in their planting and building and crafting, and agency in their passing down of knowledge through different methods of storytelling. Malory built upon the choices that the *Queste* author had already made of replacing Seth not only with Galahad but also with Eve and made conscious textual revisions that downplay the evilness and weakness of women that are found within the *Queste*.

One of the primary shifts in Malory's revision is, in fact, the translation of the French into the word "spyndyls." As James Dean cleverly points out, the Middle French "fuissel" used by the *Queste* author has a number of possible translations including "wand," "rod," "small piece of wood," "post," or "bedpost." He notes that the translation of "fuissel" as posts or rods would likely make more sense (118), and we also see Matarasso making this choice in her translation of the *Queste*, where she translates "fuissel" as "posts" in phrases like "the three posts over the bed" (221). Because the *Queste* author is so familiar with the legend of Seth and the Tree, one can easily see the connection of these three posts to the three wands of the Tree of Life that Moses dreams

of when the Israelites are searching for water in the wilderness: “At his heued þar sagh he stand / Wexen o cipres, a wand; / On his left hand loked he, / An-oþer he sagh o cedre tre; / He loked als on his righthand, / O pine tre þe thrid he fand” (*Cursor mundi*, 6321-6).

Eventually, Moses uproots these wands and uses them to create miraculous water for the Israelites. Before his own death, Moses replants the three wands where they remain until the time of David. The physicality of the rood-tree as three wands or rods is a significant part of the legendary tradition⁵, and the *Queste* author maintains and expands this by shifting the three wands of different woods into three posts of different colors, which Malory then preserves in his translation. The *Queste* author’s description of the situated posts also serves to create a canopy or arbor-like structure over the bed, once again drawing on the imagery of the positions of the wands around Moses as he sleeps.

Malory’s description of the positions of the wood and the bed, however, is less precise, and the spindles seem to somehow hang above the bed, with the only specificity in the description of the green spindle as “othir abovyn” (Malory 564). The focus, then, rather than on the spatial structure of the bed, is on the spindles themselves as objects, “objects intimately identified with medieval womanhood and woman’s fall” (Dean 119). This identification of female work with the rood-tree is not accidental for Malory, for it is the woman who do the work in this story of Solomon’s ship and the rood-tree: Eve plants the branch, Solomon’s wife builds the ship, and Percyvale’s sister fashions the girdle. In looking at the ways in which Malory subtly shifts the feminine role from that in his

⁵ For the legend of the rood, especially within the *Cursor mundi*, three is an important number which reminds readers of the Trinity. The tree grows from three pips that Seth receives, Adam dies three days after hearing Seth’s news, and after his death, “þar ras o þam thre wandes yong” (1418). We see both the *Queste* author and Malory continue this numerical symbolism with the three posts and three spindles.

source material, we can see how his stress upon women's work and women's power fits within Malory's larger project of creating a cycle of Arthurian legends in which the figures of Lancelot and Guinevere are not solely responsible for the downfall of the Round Table.

The figure of Guinevere becomes more complex when looked at through the inclusion of the women of the three spindles, just as the figures of Lancelot and Galahad become more fully realized when placed against the background of Adam and Seth. For Malory, the realm of Arthurian literature is not quite as simple as the historical binary between the evil, sinning woman who instigates the Fall and the perfectly chaste mother of God. "The message of the story of the three spindles ... does not rely on the traditional Eve-Mary binary to explain the full circle of redemption ... rather, it functions to destabilize this very binary by introducing Solomon's wife and Perceval's sister" (Looper 57). The elaborations on the rood-tree legend help to complicate this binary and reveal a more thorough gradation of womanly sin and virtue, in which Guinevere now finds a place. The tale, of course, begins with Eve.

For both Malory and the author of the *Queste*, Eve's name cannot even be introduced without the epithet of "sinful" (*Quest* 222, Malory 564). For the *Queste* author, however, there is much more to be said about Eve. She "had taken counsel of the mortal enemy," an interesting phrase which brings to mind the language used around the failure of late medieval kings to heed proper counsel. Though the language of royalty, it is the language of failed royalty, and the *Queste* author's description of Eve as a failed queen fits with further elaborations on her position. God calls to Adam first, "and it was right that he should be held more culpable than his wife, for she was of a frailer nature,

having been fashioned from the rib of man; and it was right that she should obey him, but not he her” (*Quest* 222-3). Intriguingly, none of this description makes it into Malory. Eve is certainly sinful, yes, but all of the language that sets Adam above her is taken out of the narrative, and there is no reference to her failure in heeding bad counsel.

If Eve and Adam are on more equal footing in Malory’s account, it is of even greater importance that Eve herself enacts the planting of the tree rather than her son Seth. She is the first sinner and the first planter. The branch of the Tree of Knowledge, the tree of prohibition and sin, when planted by Eve becomes the Tree of Life and a symbol of the promise of redemption. For the *Queste* author, there is an intriguing element of Eve’s story in which she takes the branch unconsciously from the Garden, not even knowing that it is in her hand. Lisa Cooper analyzes Eve’s state of consciousness within the *Queste* narrative:

It is just this sort of absentminded distraction . . . that characterizes Eve in the *Queste*’s version of the Fall. At first existing only in a kind of shell-shocked state, entirely absorbed in the experience of her shame and physical ejection from Eden, Eve finally takes notice of the twig *only* when she observes the difference between her body, now subject to decay and death, and the twig’s continued vitality. (L. Cooper 36)

For Malory, however, Eve’s act is not unconscious: “She toke with her the bowgh which the appyll hyng on” (Malory 564). In the *Queste*, it is an action of Adam’s that causes the branch to remain in Eve’s hand: “When he had torn it from the stem . . . this branch by chance stayed in the woman’s hand, as one may sometimes hold an object in one’s hand without remarking it” (*Quest* 222). Eve is absolutely passive in the *Queste*, not even realizing that the branch is in her hand: “Eve still had hold of the little branch, but never marked its presence in her hand” (*Quest* 223). In Malory’s text, it is Eve’s taking of the

branch, without the aid of Adam or Seth, that creates the possibility of redemption for the sin she herself introduced.

The *Queste* author directly alludes to the Eve-Mary binary in another passage that shows the inferior position of Eve: “As for him who might ask of the book why it was not the man rather than the woman who carried the branch ... since he is her superior ... it signified that through a woman life was lost, and through a woman life would be regained” (*Quest* 224). The allusion to two different women illustrates that the *Queste*’s primary reason for Eve’s ability to carry the branch out of the Garden is simply because of her position as Mary’s foil. There is no active role for Eve, and the *Queste* author even admits that the reader should expect that Adam (or Seth) would be the one to have taken the branch. Thus we see even more strikingly how the omission of this material in Malory already begins to complicate that very Eve-Mary binary, which will in turn be further complicated by the two women who proceed Eve in this tale of the three spindles.

The most mysterious figure in the story of the three spindles is the character of Solomon’s wife. Critics disagree⁶ on whether she should actually be characterized as “evyll” (Malory 564). Whether or not Malory characterizes Solomon’s wife as truly “evyll” is up for debate, as we shall see, but the *Queste* author leaves little doubt about what type of woman she was:

All [Solomon’s] sagacity could not combat the cunning of his wife, nor prevent her from deceiving him as frequently as she took pains to do so. Nor is this anything to wonder at; for without a doubt, when woman gives her mind and heart to guile, no mere man’s wit can prove a match for her; and this is nothing new,

⁶ Dean writes that “Solomon’s wife is wicked, although her handiwork, the spindles, find their way onto the ship of Faith as symbolic ornamentation” (118). Quinn argues that the *Queste* author’s characterization is not actually “the central clue to her character, but merely a surviving trace of a traditional conception” (1965, 200), the same literary tradition that besmirched Eve.

but dates back to the mother of us all ... These words expressed Solomon's anger that he could not get the better of his wife. He strove by different means to wean her from her ways, but all in vain. (*Quest* 230)

Once again, Malory's culling and selection from his source material means that we have no description like this one. Instead, from the introduction of Solomon's wife to Solomon's own complaints to the chastisement of Solomon by an angelic voice, all of the material is collapsed in a brief paragraph. The characterization of women moves quickly from evildoers to the bearer of "gretter joy to a man an hondred tymes than thys heavynesse" (Malory 564-5). Malory's selections from his source highlight the connection between Solomon's wife and Eve but also her connection to Mary: she is an "evyll" wife but also it is through Solomon's lineage—and thus Solomon's wife's lineage—that the woman shall be born who will bring great joy.

Unlike the biblical account, there is only one wife for Solomon in this version of the legend, and so Solomon's wife becomes the vessel for the lineage of the woman who is to come. "So whan Solomon harde thes wordis, he hylde himself but a foole ... the Holy Goste shewed hym the commynge of the glorious Virgyne Mary" (Malory 565). In both sources, Solomon is chastised and holds himself a fool for thinking evil of women. In the *Queste*, however, the voice goes on to declare that the man who will be the last of Solomon's lineage will "pass in valour Josiah, thy step-brother, by as much as that Virgin shall surpass thy wife" (*Quest* 231). Solomon may be a fool for thinking that all women are evil, but according to the *Queste* his wife is still far behind in virtue. Malory once again omits this. For Malory, Eve and Solomon's wife are more connected in their role as planters of trees than in their evildoing. Eve plants the physical branch that will grow into the wood of the cross, while Solomon's wife's seed will grow into the woman who will

bring Christ into the world. This emphasis on lineage connects back to the genealogical theme discussed earlier and how “[Eve] brings eternal life to humans by planting their ‘family tree’” (Looper 56). Though I suspect the *Queste* author might chafe against the idea that Eve brings eternal life herself, she certainly brings into the fallen world the physical analogue to the human genealogy; the branches of the Tree and the branches of Christ’s and Galahad’s lineage are representations of each other, one and the same.

The most intriguing aspect of Solomon’s wife, however, is her creation of the spindles. Once she sees that Solomon is wrestling with his vision, it is her own idea to build and decorate the ship, gathering the sword and girdle and other objects, as well as the three spindles from the wood of the Tree. This is again an innovative moment for the author of the *Queste* with respect to the rood-tree legend: “Instead of the proud king who directs that the tree is to be cut down for use in the building of the temple, we have a humble king who watches in admiration as his wife directs that the spindles be cut from the trees and placed on the ship” (Quinn 1965, 193). Much as the replacement of Seth’s planting with Eve’s action lends Eve narrative power, so does the replacement of Solomon as a builder with his wife.

A humble king might watch in admiration, but how do we explain the moment of the cutting of the spindles as an “admirable” action? The scene is much the same in both Malory and the *Queste*:

Than thys lady wente and made a carpynter to com to the tre whych Abelle was slayne undir. ‘Now,’ seyde she, ‘carve me oute of thys tre as much woode as woll make me a spyndill.’ ‘A, madam,’ seyde he, ‘thys ys the tre which oure firste modir planted.’

‘Do hit,’ sayd she, ‘other ellis I shall destroy the.’ Anone as he began to worke, there com oute droppis of blood; and than wolde he a leffte, but she wolde nat suffir hym. And so he toke as muche woode as myght make a spyndyll, and so she

made hym to take as muche of the grene tre, and so of the whyght tre. (Malory 565-6)

For an admirable wife and “sympathetic figure,” Solomon’s wife does finally appear to earn her “evyll” epithet here. The forced cutting of the precious tree is so violent that blood actually drips from the wood. And once again we return to the primacy of violence in this particular version of the rood-tree legend. Just as the *Queste* revisions highlight Abel’s character, thereby anointing the legend with his blood in a much more vivid way, so the blood continues to flow from the tree, symbolically pooling to connect Abel’s murder to the Tree’s bark to Christ’s sacrifice to Percival’s sister’s bloodletting and, finally, to the Grail itself, the vessel of Christ’s blood.

The episode of Solomon’s wife further illustrates the theme that salvific blood cannot be shed without violence. The paradox of the crucified God, the God who dies in blood, is epitomized in the statement that follows just after the cutting of the spindles: “So whan Solomon saw thys, he seyde to hys wyff, ‘Ye have done mervaylously, for thoughe all the worlde were here ryght now, they cowed nat devise wherefore all thys was made but Oure Lorde Hymself’” (Malory 566). The violent act that Solomon’s wife wrought upon the tree becomes “marvelous” once the wood is fashioned into spindles. Just as Eve’s violent wrenching of the branch from the Tree of Knowledge becomes fair and beautiful once she replants the branch “by the wylle of Oure Lorde” (Malory 564), so the refashioned wood becomes marvelous once placed on the ship in the form of the three spindles. Violence will always be enacted against creation, but it is through the workings of the Lord in that violent history that the injury of blood can become a marvelous receptacle in which the story of humanity is passed on. Within this version of the rood-tree legend, the Lord’s will works through the hands of women who plant and craft.

Following the story of Solomon's wife, both a new 'Eve' and the ancestor of Mary, we come to Percyvale's sister. Solomon's wife and Percyvale's sister are connected to each other through their role as storytellers. Solomon's wife fashions the ship in order to signify to her husband's final descendent the role that he will play, and it is Percyvale's sister who reveals the meaning of these signifiers to Galahad, thereby becoming the "grail counterpart" (Quinn 1965, 198) to Solomon's wife. This historical narrative that Percyvale's sister relates is only possible because of the object-crafted storytelling of the women who came before her. Eve plants the branch as a remembrance "of the losse which cam of the tre" (Malory 564), and Solomon's wife crafts the spindles as the reminders of that Tree that—by the time of Galahad and Percyvale's sister—had long ago been fashioned into the cross. Malory's departures from the *Queste* in relation to Percyvale's sister also help dramatize her role as a guardian of history.

In the *Queste*, the history of the spindles is given as an aside to the reader before it is revealed to Galahad, Bors, and Percival. The three knights and Percival's sister are only able to recognize that the colors of the wood are natural and not painted (*Quest* 235), but they are not given the story of the wood until Percival discovers a purse with a letter which he reads aloud, "describing to them bit by bit the origin of the posts and of the ship exactly as the story has narrated" (ibid). Though elsewhere in the *Queste* Percival's sister has historical knowledge of the other objects on the ship, she does not know the origin of the posts, and only Percival, through his reading of the letter, can narrate the tale. In Malory, however, Percyvale's sister is the guardian of knowledge. She narrates the whole tale, from the beginning of the planting of the Tree through the building of the ship by Solomon's wife. Though Malory does include the episode of Percyvale's discovery of the

letter from the *Queste*, it is now a gratuitous moment. His sister has already done the work of storytelling for him. Malory's revisions create a female lineage of guardians of human history, from Eve to Solomon's wife to Percyvale's sister. Through their actions and narration, they preserve and pass down a story of violence and redemption that the male figures can only act within; the male figures cannot be active vessels of storytelling in the same way that the women are.

Percyvale's sister not only completes the cycle of narration begun by Eve, but she also acts as a maker in her own crafting of the new girdle for the "Swerde with the Straunge Gurdyls" (Malory 567). When Solomon's wife places the objects on the ship, she weaves a girdle for King David's marvelous sword made of hemp, "and therwith the kyng was ryght angry" (Malory 565). Solomon's wife justifies her hempen girdle by saying that she has "none so hyghe a thyng whych were worthy to susteyene [soo hye a suerd. And a mayde shall bryng other knyghtes thereto, but I wote not whanne hit shalle be, ne what tyme]⁷" (ibid). The girdles thus intimately link the crafting of Solomon's wife and Percyvale's sister and reveal even more powerfully the foreknowledge that Solomon's wife had in building the ship. The girdle that Percyvale's sister crafts, as she tells the knights, is "wrought with goldyn thredys ... the grettist parte of thys gurdyll was made of my hayre, whych somme tyme I loved well, whyle that I was woman of the worlde" (Malory 567). While the making of the girdle seems to signify that Percyvale's sister is a worthier woman than Solomon's wife, the new girdle primarily works as a

⁷ The text in brackets is found in Caxton's revision but not the Winchester manuscript. The fact that there is a very similar passage, in which Solomon's wife foretells the coming of the maiden, in the *Queste* perhaps suggests that this text is not a revision by Caxton but may have been included in another manuscript of Malory's from which Caxton was working. For more on the manuscripts in Caxton's print shop, see the Preface of the Norton Critical Edition of *Le Morte Darthur* by Stephen H.A. Shepherd.

physical link between Percyvale's sister, Abel, and Galahad. Percyvale's sister uses the new girdle to hang the Sword of the Strange Girdles from Galahad's waist, and the sheath of that sword is the red wood of Abel's blood (*ibid*). Here, then, is the connection between Galahad's sword, the girdle of Percyvale's sister, and the spindles of Solomon's wife: the red wood of fratricide.

Once again, the blood and violence of Abel's death, the cutting of the tree, and the crucifixion come together, this time to foreshadow the death of Percyvale's sister through her own self-sacrifice. Her initial sacrifice of the hair that she cherished most while she was a woman of the world is put a prequel to the sacrifice she will make shortly after the fellowship of knights leaves the ship to come upon the castle of the leprous woman (Malory 572). Percyvale's sister lets her blood into a dish to heal the woman, thereby dying to heal another. Looper characterizes her as "a new Jesus, filling a new Grail with her blood" (62), and this Christological allegory continues with the destruction of the leprous woman's castle in a tempest just after the death of Percyvale's sister, much like the destruction of the temple curtain as Christ breathed his last (Matthew 27:51). There may have been physical, earthly healing for the leprous woman through the sacrifice, but it is unstable and short-lived. The leprous woman and her castle are destroyed "by the vengeance of Oure Lorde . . . for bloode-shedyng of maydyns" (Malory 573). Looper rightly points out that it is the community, not Percyvale's sister, that is flawed (59), but this episode also shows the inefficacy of redemption through anyone's blood but Christ's. Just as Galahad is unable to bring the Grail back to Arthur, so Percyvale's sister is unable to redeem the leprous woman and her castle.

These failures of redemption by both Galahad and Percyvale's sister work against Looper's conclusion that the story of the spindles "represents a humanistic dream that all the members of the fragmented community may reunite around the famous Tree ... that redemption may yet come to the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve by means of the strengths of their own social structure, formed through the collaboration of male and female" (62). There is no route shown in which this "humanistic dream" could come to pass and, in fact, the Tree is planted as a remembrance "of the losse which came of the tre" (Malory 564). Malory's revisions to the *Queste* help to balance the scales of humanity and unite the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, but not through their social structure. Instead, the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are bound together by their failure to redeem their world and by the physical vestiges of paradise that are stained with a narrative of blood and violence. Both the figures of the male quester and the female guardian are linked by their inability to recapitulate Christ's sacrifice, and it is this very failure that places the male and female figure on equal footing.

The three women of the three spindles, the white and pure Percyvale's sister, the green and fruitful Eve, and the red and forceful Solomon's wife, break open the Eve-Mary binary to create a gradation of figures of female virtue and holiness. Through their role as guardians of history and emblems of genealogy, as makers and narrators, the women of Malory's version of the rood-tree legend realign and elevate the female heroic figure to the same level as the male. The male and female figures share in the limits of their redemptive powers, however. As questers and guardians, these characters may approach and receive objects of mercy, but they cannot act as redeemers themselves. Malory's revisions to the rood-tree legend of the *Queste* align with his own project of

creating a narrative in which Arthur's kingdom must fall and violence must come and no gentlewoman or knight can succeed in diverting the disaster. For Malory, it is the fellowship of knights, the oath of chivalry in both the religious world and the secular realm that undergirds his work (H. Cooper 160-1). The fellowship of the three women, woven together throughout history by the three spindles, aligns with this fellowship of knights. The women's forceful snapping of the Eve-Mary binary creates a background narrative in which Guinevere, the primary focal point for *Le Morte's* female figure, can take her place within an earthly and historical realm where women are both sinful and good, both enact violence—and by the will of the Lord—work to mitigate that violence. The narrative of Guinevere and of these three women places *Le Morte Darthur* securely within a version of the rood-tree legend that extends to cover not only the Arthurian Grail Quest but the entirety of the cycle of the fellowship of the Round Table. Through the actions of the women, the objects that they create and narrate, the narrative of the Round Table becomes a new fixture of the medieval popular bible, all bound together by the themes of violence, death, and a redemption that happens beyond this world.

The story of fallen humanity begins with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and spreads its branches out from there to encompass the quest of their son, Seth, the wanderings of Moses and the Israelites, the age of Solomon, and the crucifixion of Christ on the cross. For the medieval popular bible, however, the story no longer ends there. The vestiges of that fallen Paradise—the spindles hewn from the Tree—make their way through the ages to intersect with Galahad during his quest for the Grail. These three symbols of life, death, and generation tie Galahad and the other characters of the

Arthurian court across the epochs to the first father and mother, the first sinners, and the first quester. It is through the questing of the male heroic figure and the narrative guardianship of the female heroic figure that this temporal space collapses and Seth and Galahad become one and the same. Adam's family and Arthur's court are literary counterparts, and the story of redemption weaves its way through history to connect these two fellowships.

In looking at *Le Morte Darthur* and the *Queste del Saint Graal* against the background of the legend of Seth and the Tree of Life, the evolution of the biblical figures into grail counterparts becomes strikingly apparent. The *Queste* author's innovations to the rood-tree legend create a new form of the cycle, which preserves the Christian message of redemption but brings the original Judaic themes of death and sin back to the forefront. Malory's subsequent translation and redactions preserve these Judaic themes while also highlighting the role of the female figure in its relation to the male hero. Malory then shifts the focus onto a court whose redemption cannot come from either male or female figure. Nevertheless, the message of Malory's "Sankgreal" in this context shows that even fallen humanity can glimpse vestiges of paradise, and though Lancelot may not have succeeded in the Grail Quest where Galahad did, he is nevertheless granted the mercy and grace of a saint's death⁸.

This context of counterpart figures and a redemption story that intersects each era of history also illuminates the literary culture in which Malory composed *Le Morte Darthur*. We can see more clearly how the influence of Seth's legend imbues the Arthurian Grail Quest with a sense of divine purpose, enlisting the characters of Arthur's

⁸ "Lancelot proceeds to die, not only being heaved up into heaven by angels, but in the odour of sanctity" (H. Cooper 162)

court into the pages of the medieval popular bible, but we can also see how this affects Malory's own composition. "The Sankgreal" becomes the lens with which we can understand the ending of *Le Morte* and the death of Arthur. Earthly chivalry may aspire to the highest reaches of humanity and—like Seth and Galahad—may achieve vestiges of that lost Paradise. Arthur's fellowship is no worse than others for the sins that it contains, for all human fellowships contain the sins of their own unmaking. Lancelot and Guinevere, instigators of sin and violence, may still receive their own vestiges of mercy at the end of their tales. Lancelot can still remain the most chivalrous of knights, even in the midst of his transgression. These vestiges, however, will always remain vestiges. Even Seth and Galahad, our cardboard saints, are granted only glimpses and cannot halt death's coming. The search for the holy object breaks the fellowship of the Round Table because these vestigial glimpses cannot sustain redemption on their own. The promise of Seth's quest and of Galahad's is that the spindles of the Tree are a synecdoche for everlasting life, for Christ's shed blood—the only blood that redeems. Healing for Adam's family and for Arthur's court will come not through human aid but in the fullness of time. Seth's legend may have dissipated in the centuries after the Reformation and may have been lost to our knowledge, but through the narratives of Malory and the author of the *Queste*, Galahad and his Grail figures have preserved the elements of Seth's story and have carried the message of redemption encoded in violence into the modern age.

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