WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH: DIALECTICAL "HOMO LUDENS"

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by Robert Levine

A firm sense of the sacred can generate a playfulness that readers with few transcendant impulses may easily misinterpret; nonbelievers have particular difficulty with the techniques of the *spoudogelaios* in Christian medieval texts. Earlier twentieth-century readers, for example, accounted for comic routines in medieval sacred drama by proposing that the texts had been corrupted by impulsive actors.[1] Later critics have had less difficulty accepting and accounting for the comic routines and obscenity as integral parts of the doctrine as well as the pleasures afforded by medieval drama. However, the more elaborately literary texts, like *Parzival* and the *Roman de la rose*, in which the sacred and the profane are compelled by relentlessly playful authors to share the same domain, continue to generate considerable anxiety among their readers. Wolfram von Eschenbach's poem is the earliest vernacular narrative to generate such anxiety, mostly because of its violent oscillations between jest and earnest. To help reduce some of the discomfort readers have experienced with the gaudy complexity of the Middle High German epic, I propose resorting to some of the intuitions and strategies developed by critics who have focused much of their attention on medieval literature, but none of it on Wolfram specifically.

The poem should emerge from this exercise not as an idiosyncratic *hapax legomenon* in the body of medieval literature, but rather as perhaps the most complex manifestation of a certain kind of medieval sensibility, called "Ambrosian" by Leo Spitzer, "gothic" by Paul Zumthor, and with elements derived from a mode called "grotesque realism" by Mikhail Bakhtin. The exercise should also provide answers to more limited questions: for example, why does Parzival's entrance provoke Cunneware's laughter?

Joachim Bumke, among Wolfram's most persistent and sympathetic modern readers, attributes to the text of *Parzival* a potentially catastrophic subjectivity,

[1]See Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "Comedy in the English Mystery Cycles," in *Versions of Medieval Comedy*, ed. Paul Ruggiers (Norman 1977). See also Jean Charles Payen, "Le comique de l'énormité etc.," *L'esprit créateur* 16 (1976) 46–60, in which he remarks, "La présence universelle d'un christianisme intégré à toutes les structures psychologiques ou sociales autorisait une familiarité souvent insolente avec le sacré."

an apparently chaotic narrative, humor and wit that threaten to establish absolute hegemony over the world of the poem, and—perhaps most radical of all—a destructive comic sense that thrives on opposites, tearing apart normal connections and refashioning grotesque ones. These extremely lively, volatile qualities—which may remind some readers of Rabelais, Sterne, and Joyce—threaten the coherence of Bumke's reading of the poem.[2] Most of the qualities isolated by Bumke are integrated into a less anxious set of remarks by Max Wehrli, who argues that Wolfram's humor is a springboard that permits the poet to establish toward his story and its sources an ironic distance that binds poet, story, and audience into a community that is authenticated and verified by the experience of participating in the "poetic adventure" of the poem.[3] According to Wehrli, one of the objects of Wolfram's irony is his source, Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, a text that Wolfram deliberately "decomposes," initially destroying the coherence of the poem. The initial "decomposition," however, is ultimately creative, permitting Wolfram to establish what Wehrli regards as new premises from which new relations and dimensions may proceed, with what Wehrli calls Augustinian resolution.[4]

At least two problems arise out of the remarks of Bumke and Wehrli: Does an author who relentlessly delights in antitheses have any purpose beyond rhetorical display to which he intends to apply this habit? Is not Wehrli's term "Augustinian" troublesome? The second problem is a typical example of the kinds of difficulties generated by invoking theological figures as models for medieval perspectives. Not only are Wolfram's interests not clearly those of a theologian, but Leo Spitzer has already made a distinction between Augustine and Ambrose for which he has demonstrated comprehensive use in his book on harmony:

> Whereas it is the practise of Ambrose to show the ordered richness and plenitude of the world, and his choirs are the polyphonic responses of a spatially immense universe filled with grace, with Augustine the emphasis is on the monodic, on the one pervading *order* of the richness as it reveals itself in the linear succession of *time*.[5]

[2]Joachim Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (Stuttgart 1964) 15. In his later version of this work, Bumke changes his perspective (*Die Wolfram von Eschenbach-Forschung seit 1945* [Munich 1970] 94ff.).

[3]Max Wehrli, "Wolfram von Eschenbach: Erzählstil und Sinn seines *Parzival*," *Deutschunterricht* 6 (1954) 28.

[4]Ibid. 23.

[5]Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony* (Baltimore 1963) 28; Spitzer intensifies the contrast later in the book (25, 40): "The *lied* that rises from the Augustinian soul is linear and strives straightforward up to God; more of the lonely struggle of the soul ridding itself from the earth as in a Beethoven *largo*, than of the world-embracing Jesuitic Baroque. Wherever Christians shall live in the cell of meditation (Pascal, Kierkegaard, Rilke), the 'one clear harp of diverse tones' of Augustine . . . will resound; wherever, on the contrary, the 'great theatre of the world' is displayed . . . we will meet with Ambrosian choirs and synthetics . . . . Two ways open to Christianity: the one, inherited from Plato, turning its back on the *saeculum*, aspiring toward monotheistic monody; the other transforming pantheistic fullness into Catholic polyphony."

Spitzer establishes, as a major contrastive premise of his book, the proposition that Augustine's vision is monodic and exclusive, while Ambrose's vision is polyphonic and inclusive.

Hugo Rahner offers another patristic model for the inclusive sensibility, arguing that Thomas Aquinas demonstrates a remarkable ability to tolerate opposites simultaneously in his remarks on the propriety of games and humor for a devout Christian.[6] According to Rahner, Aquinas transmits the ideal of Greek humanism, *'ανὴρ σπουδογέλαιος*, to Christian asceticism, making a Christian, moreover, the only possible *homo ludens*. Aquinas's own remarks do not easily sustain the weight of Rahner's interpretation, as Joachim Suchomski recently demonstrated; but the impulse on the part of Wehrli, Spitzer, and Rahner to look to a patristic exegete for an authoritative validation of the possibility of an inclusive sensibility is a significant one.[7] Modern readers tend to associate Christianity with grim, ascetic repression, and are surprised to find medieval Christians who are neither puritanical nor Victorian. Unless they can find a playful medieval Christian within the orthodox structure of the Catholic church, they may be tempted to dismiss the phenomenon as an exceptional case.

However, instead of trying to find a single patristic exegete to offer as a type of *spoudogelaios*, we might better consider the extent to which such a paradoxical posture was prevalent among Christian writers who precede Wolfram, keeping in mind the unfortunate fact that the texts upon which to base our judgments are not abundant.

In an excursus devoted to the problem of literary decorum, Ernst Curtius offers a stanza of Prudentius's *Peristephanon* as an "example of grotesque humor within a sacred genre."[8] The stanza offers, significantly, an example of what Curtius calls, in his next section, "Kitchen Humor" (a kind of humor in which Wolfram specializes). Prudentius's Saint Lawrence composes a valedictory speech to his tormentors, in which the broiling martyr envisions himself both as a potential meal, and as an anxious cook:

> Praefectus inverti iubet.
> Tunc ille: "Coctum est devora
> Et experimentum cape
> sit crudum an assum suavius!"
> Haec ludibundus dixerat.

[6]See the article "Eutrapélie," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 4.2 (Paris 1960) 1728: "Par cet enseignement saint Thomas transmet a l'ascèse chrétienne l'idéal de l'humanisme grec, de *'ανὴρ σπουδογέλαιος* que seul le chrétien est à même de saisir et de réaliser parfaitement, parce que seul il a la conscience exacte de la situation entre le ciel et la terre, entre le Christ et le monde, entre l'esprit et la chair, entre l'espoir et le désespoir. Seul le chrétien est un *homo ludens*: fondé sur Dieu, il peut être *eutrapelos*"; quoted in Joachim Suchomski, *Delectatio und utilitas* (Bern 1975) 60.

[7]See Suchomski 55–61.

[8]Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York 1963) 425–426.

(The prefect bade him be turned, Then Lawrence spoke: I am well baked,
And whether better cooked or raw, Make trial by a taste of me. He said
these words by way of jest.)[9]

Curtius concludes, on the basis of this passage, that "humanistic elements are a part of the medieval *vita sancti*," advising us also that "the mixture of jest and earnest was among the stylistic norms which were known and practiced by the medieval poet."[10]

Ioca seriis miscere is an aesthetic principle which permits opposites to exist simultaneously and therefore, in Spitzer's sense, inclusively, although Curtius resists accepting the possibility that such a principle might permit combining sacred and profane matter: "The sacred and the profane—that is the fundamental division in the medieval intellectual world. Within the realm of the profane the *ludicra* have their place."[11]

That such a division was categorically maintained throughout the Middle Ages is partly contradicted by the passage from Prudentius on which Curtius himself comments, and strenuously contradicted by the texts commented upon by Huizinga, Rahner, Suchomski, and others. Huizinga takes the most confident position on the problem: "The playground of the saints and mystics is far beyond the sphere of ordinary mortals, and still further from the rational thinking that is bound to logic. Holiness and play always tend to overlap."[12] Less extravagantly, Hugo Rahner supplies several examples from patristic sources to illustrate an intimate connection between play and doctrine. God himself, in a poem by Gregory of Nazianzus, *plays* with the world:

παίζει γὰρ λόγος αἰπὺς ἐν εἴδεσι παντοδαποῖσι
κίρνας ὡς ἐθέλει κόσμον ὅλον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα.

(The Holy Word plays; with colored pictures he decorates the whole world).[13]

However, the most elaborate examples supplied by Rahner are exegetical readings of Genesis 26.8, by Philo the Jew, Clement of Alexandria, and Saint Augustine.

Philo composes an elaborate Platonic allegory in his comments on Abimelech's discovery of the true nature of the relationship between Isaac and Rebecca:

κατὰ γοῦν
τὸν ἱερώτατον Μωυσῆν τέλος ἐστὶ σοφίας παιδιὰ καὶ γέλως, ἀλλ'
οὐχ ἃ τοῖς νηπίοις ἄνευ φρονήσεως πᾶσι μελετᾶται, ἀλλ' ἃ τοῖς

[9]Latin text from *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina*, ed. M. P. Cunningham, Corpus Christianorum 126 (Turnhout 1961) 271; translation from Sister M. Clement Eagan, *Poems of Prudentius* (Washington 1962) 121.

[10]Curtius (n. 10 above) 428, 424.

[11]Ibid. 430.

[12]Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens* (New York 1970) 153.

[13]Hugo Rahner, "Der spielende Mensch," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 16 (1949) 29.

ἤδη πολιοῖς οὐ χρόνῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ βουλαῖς ἀγαθαῖς γεγονόσιν. οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅτι τὸν αὐτηκόου καὶ αὐτομαθοῦς καὶ αυτουργοῦ της ἐπιστήμης ἀρυσάμενον οὐ μετέχοντα γέλωτος, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν γέλωτα εἶναί φησιν; οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰσαάκ, ὅς ἑρμηνεύεται γέλως, ᾧ παίζειν μετὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς, ἣν Ῥεβέκκαν Ἑβραῖοι καλοῦσιν, ἁρμόττει. XLI. τὴν δὲ | θείαν παιδιὰν τῆς ψυχῆς ἰδιώτη μὲν οὐ θέμις ἰδεῖν, βασιλεῖ δὲ ἔξεστιν, ᾧ πάμπολυν χρόνον παρώκησεν, εἰ. καὶ μὴ πάντ' ἐνῴκησε τὸν αἰῶνα, σοφία. προσαγορεύεται οὗτος Ἀβιμέλεχ, ὃς διακύψας τῇ θυρίδι, τῷ διοιχθέντι καὶ φωσφόρῳ τῆς διανοίας ὄμματι, τὸν Ἰσαὰκ εἶδε παίζοντα μετὰ Ῥεβέκκας τῆς γυναικος αὐτοῦ.

τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἐμπρεπὲς ἔργον
σοφῷ ἢ τὸ παίζειν καὶ γανουσθαι καὶ συνευφραίνεσθαι τῇ τῶν καλῶν ὑπομονῇ;

(Moses, at all events, holiest of men, shews us that sport and merriment is the height of wisdom, not the sport which children of all sorts indulge in, paying no heed to good sense, but such as is seen in those who are now becoming grey-headed not only in respect of age but of thoughtfulness. Do you not observe that when he is speaking of the man who drew directly from the well of knowledge, listening to no other, learning through no other, resorting to no agency whatever, he does not say that he had a part in laughter, but that he was laughter itself? I am speaking of Isaac, whose name means "laughter," and whom it well befits to sport with "patient waiting," who is called in Hebrew "Rebecca." For the sacred sporting of the soul is a sight not permissible to an ordinary citizen, but it is open to a king, with whom wisdom was for a very long time a guest, if indeed she did not make him her permanent abode. The name of this king is Abimelech. He looked out at the window, the mind's eye wide-opened and admitting light, and saw Isaac sporting with Rebecca his wife. What other occupation is seemly for a wise man rather than bright sportiveness and making merry in the company of one who waits patiently for all that is beautiful?)[14]

The transaction among Isaac, Rebecca, and Abimelech provoked Clement of Alexandria to compose some verses in which the allegorical, or at least figural, potential is Christianized:

ὦ τῆς φρονίμου παιδιᾶς.
γέλως δι' ὑπομονῆς βοηθούμενος
καὶ ἔφορος ὁ βασιλεύς.
ἀγαλλιᾶται τὸ πνεῦμα
τῶν ἐν Χριστῷ παίδίων
ἐν ὑπομονῇ πολιτευομένων
καὶ αὕτη ἡ θεία παιδιά.

[14]F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, eds., *Philo* 3 (London 1954) 301 (Loeb Classical Library).

> (Oh, what wise child's-play. It is laughter supported by patience, and the king is the onlooker. Happy is the spirit of those who are patient children in Christ. That is holy play.)[15]

The paradoxical combination of youth and wisdom articulated by Clement seems analogous with the rhetorical *topos* of *puer/senex* to which Curtius devotes considerable attention, and which reappears vividly, though as *puella/senex*, in the transactions which Wolfram composes for Gawan and little Obilot.[16]

A different paradox, however, is at the center of Saint Augustine's meditations on Isaac and Rebecca, although his monodic sensibility seems to transcend itself in exegetical sympathy for sacred playfulness:

> Quid autem sibi velit in sacramento Christi et Ecclesia, quod tantus Patriarcha cum conjuge luserit, conjugiumque illud inde sit cognitum, videt profecto quisquis, ne aliquid errando in Ecclesiam peccet, secretum viri ejus in Scripturis sanctis diligenter intuetur: et invenit eum majestatem suam, qua in forma Dei aequalis est Patri, paulisper abscondisse in forma servi (Philipp. 2.6,7), ut ejus capax esse humana infirmitas posset, eoque modo se conjugi congruenter aptaret. Quid enim absurdum, imo quid non convenienter futurorum praenuntiationi accommodatum, si Propheta Dei carnale aliquid lusit, ut eum caperet affectus uxoris; cum ipsum Verbum Dei caro factum sit, ut habitaret in nobis (Joan. 1.14)?
>
> (The typical meaning, as regards Christ and his Church, which is to be found in this great patriarch playing with his wife, and in the conjugal relation being thus discovered, will be seen by every one who, to avoid offending the Church by erroneous doctrine, carefully studies in Scripture the secret of the Church's Bridegroom. He will find that the Husband of the Church concealed for a time in the form of a servant the majesty in which He was equal to the Father, as being in the form of God, that feeble humanity might be capable of union with Him, and that so He might accommodate Himself to His spouse. So far from being absurd, it has a symbolic suitableness that the prophet of God should use a playfulness which is the flesh to meet the affection of his wife, as the Word of God himself became flesh that He might dwell among us).[17]

Here Augustine characteristically invokes the paradox of *verbum/caro* (word/flesh) to account for the paradox of jest/earnest, as he uses *verbum/caro* elsewhere to account for what he conceives to be a paradoxical combination of sublime subject matter and humble rhetoric in the Vulgate Bible. A paradoxical juxta-

[15]Rahner (n. 13 above) 47.

[16]See below.

[17]Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, PL 42.428; trans. R. Stothert in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 4, ed. P. Schaff (Buffalo 1887) 289.

position of style and subject matter is certainly an important phenomenon, since much of the anxiety expressed towards Wolfram's *Parzival* has been generated by his deliberately indecorous style.

Thus far, the examples justifying holy play have come from works of less deliberate literary complexity than *Parzival*. Among the other texts regularly cited as examples of an inclusive sensibility, perhaps the most frequent is the *Cena Cypriani*, which Paul Lehmann argues is a text that indicates the ability of learned Carolingian clerics to tolerate a combination that modern critics find either foolish or blasphemous.[18] However, the *Cena* is an uninspired didactic exercise in Latin verse (a prose version also exists, of no higher quality), in which characters from the Old and the New Testaments are invited to a marriage feast in Galilee. The author attaches a biblical phrase or image to each character, often producing an intentionally comic effect. According to the prologue of the versified version, the purpose of the *Cena* is to display the rhetorical skill of Saint Cyprian, who is able to deal playfully with sacred events, without satiric or vulgar comic intentions.[19] Although the author proclaims Cyprian to have been *sophista verax*, the poem itself was described by its first editor as *libellus ineptissimus*, and its latest editor performed his task *quamvis invitus*, perhaps as a penitential task.

Therefore, we are still left without an example of an inclusive sensibility expressing itself in a sophisticated literary form. In his *Delectatio et utilitas*, Joachim Suchomski gives a number of examples, from material previously considered merely obscene or pornographic, of twelfth-century Latin poems of a higher degree of literary complexity than that of the *Cena*, or of the poems of Prudentius, Gregory, and Clement, although the *Comoedia* which he analyzes seem uncomfortably often to have only the remotest interest in Christian doctrine. They also do not compete in magnitude and complexity with *Parzival*.[20]

Wolfram's diction, for example, is unusually comprehensive; Bumke points out the use of unpoetic, everyday speech in the poem, but also asserts that the linguistic effect of using "volkstümlich-mündlichen Stilelementen" is not an every-day one. Oscillating from high style to low style and back again, Wolfram's style certainly seems to be inclusive, blithely violating what Auerbach describes as classical decorum:

> In the most widespread view the low style implied sharp realism and home-spun vigor. The style levels are particularly evident in the theater; in comedy, persons and events of daily life are treated in the low, and occasionally in the intermediate, style; in tragedy, legendary figures,

[18]Paul Lehmann, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart 1963) 14.
[19]MGH *Poetae latini medii aevi* 4.2, ed. Karl Strecker (Berlin 1964) 871.
[20]Suchomski (n. 6 above) passim.

> princes and heroes in extraordinary situations are made to speak with lofty dignity.[21]

The most authoritative precedent for violating rhetorical decorum in the Middle Ages is also the most extreme example: the *sermo humilis* of the Vulgate Bible:

> Most educated pagans regarded the early Christian writings as ludicrous, confused and abhorrent . . . . The content struck them as childish and absurd superstition, and the form as an affront to good taste.[22]

The style of the Bible, however, according to Auerbach's reading of Augustine, does not proceed from an ignorant misunderstanding of rhetorical decorum, but rather from the necessity to find a medium in which to represent a deeply paradoxical, otherwise unrepresentable, incomprehensible fact; *Logos*, by definition timeless and boundless, at one point in time and space appeared incarnate:

> *Humilis* became the most important adjective characterizing the Incarnation . . . . The humility of the Incarnation derives its full force from the contrast with Christ's divine nature; man and God, lowly and sublime, *humilis et sublimis* . . . . The lowly or humble style is the only medium in which such sublime mysteries can be brought within the reach of men. It constitutes a parallel to the Incarnation, which was also a *humilitas* in the same sense, for men could not have endured the splendor of Christ's divinity.[23]

Certainly Wolfram would not have considered the text of his *Parzival* in any sense the equivalent of the Bible; nevertheless the Bible did offer him an example of a text whose subject matter is sublime, as Wolfram's is, and whose style was *volkstümlich-mündlich*, as Wolfram's frequently is.

What began, then, as an aesthetic contrast between inclusive and exclusive sensibilities, can be extended to a metaphysical contrast between human and divine natures; the contrast also generates social, political, and even economic contrast, for Auerbach as well as for others. For example, in his remarks on Chrétien's *Yvain*, Auerbach concludes that "courtly culture was decidedly unfavorable to the development of a literary art which should apprehend reality in its full breadth and depth."[24] The source of vitality for medieval literature had to come from a lower social class, Auerbach suggests, when he expresses a preference for the representation of reality in the *Mystère d'Adam*:

> In contrast to the feudal literature of the courtly romance, which leads away from the reality of the life of its class into a world of heroic fable and

[21]Eric Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (New York 1965) 37–38. See also Bumke, *Seit 1945* (n. 2 above) 97.
[22]Auerbach 45.
[23]Ibid 40–41
[24]Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Garden City 1957) 124.

> adventure, there is here a movement in the opposite direction, from distant legend and figural interpretation into everyday reality.[25]

The technique that Auerbach admires here involves treating sacred subject matter, like the question of Joseph's paternity, more "realistically," even playfully; the mark of such realism and playfulness seems to be colloquial diction and syntax.

In *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, Charles Muscatine modifies Auerbach's remarks by contrasting what he calls a "courtly tradition" with a "bourgeois tradition," without giving preferential status to either, but instead suggesting that Chaucer's vitality depends on the constant play between these formal opposites. But the most elaborate attempt to distinguish between opposite impulses in medieval literature is a socially, politically, and economically partisan argument by Mikhail Bakhtin, who applies a Marxist grid to Rabelais, focusing upon formal elements that also permeate Wolfram's poem.

Bakhtin establishes a polarity between what he conceives of as "classical" aesthetics and grotesque realism. After the Renaissance, he insists,

> In the new official culture there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one tone of seriousness. The ambivalence of the grotesque can no longer be admitted. The exalted genres of classicism are freed from the influence of the grotesque tradition of laughter.[26]

According to Bakhtin, classicism vitiates the awareness of the body; grotesque realism insists upon the body and the physical nature of reality by deliberately exaggerating and profaning whatever high culture has established as sacred:

> Debasement is the fundamental principle of grotesque realism; all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed together with its images.[27]

As Bakhtin conceives of it, the classical aesthetic is one of exclusion; the excluded elements are the ones that grotesque realism, as a kind of *vox populi*, reintroduces and insistently magnifies:

> The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The opaque surface and the body's "valleys" acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world. All attributes of the unfin-

[25]Ibid. 138.
[26]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge 1968) 101.
[27]Ibid. 370.

> ished world are carefully removed, as well as all the signs of its inner life. The verbal norms of official and literary language, determined by the canon, prohibit all that is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth. There is a sharp line of division between familiar speech and "correct" language.[28]

Bakhtin also includes banquet imagery (related to what Curtius calls "Kitchen Humor"), games and riddles as part of the paraphernalia of grotesque realism: "the images of games were seen as a condensed formula of life and the historic process; fortune, misfortune, gain and loss, crowning and uncrowning."[29] Riddles, according to Bakhtin, enable man to approach the world, "not as a somber mystery play, but as a satyrical drama."[30]

The major short-coming of Bakhtin's work, however, lies in his attempt to describe a medieval tradition of grotesque realism by referring enthusiastically, but with suspicious vagueness, to the *Cena Cypriani* (or perhaps merely to Paul Lehmann's description of the poem), as well as to carnivals and banquets in general, with none of the attention to detail that makes C. L. Barber's examination of approximately the same tradition so much more useful.[31] In his haste to establish grotesque realism as the exclusive province of folk-culture, he overlooked the abundant illustrations to be found in *Parzival* and in the *Roman de la rose* of that tradition deeply embedded not merely in *fabliaux* and *comoedia*, but in the major literary genres of the Middle Ages.

Before trying to apply some of the polarizing schemes I have been describing to the poem itself, I would like to sketch one more—Paul Zumthor's *roman et gothique*—which may help to account for a major peculiarity of Wolfram's *Parzival*.

Contrasting Thibaut de Champagne's "Contre le temps que devise" with the first half of Rutebeuf's "La griesche d'hiver," Zumthor calls upon the opposition *chant/verbe* to clarify his use of *roman/gothique*:

> Le chant est moins harmonie que pure parole mélodique, close, sphère sonore parfaite, totalement absorbée par sa seule function d'être, épanouissement de rythmes tirant d'eux-memes leurs valeurs allusives, sans référence—sinon fortuite—au monde de l'expérience. Le verbe en revanche, liberé (ou presque liberé) de sa fonction mélodique, comporte une harmonie mouvante, où prédominent de plus en plus ses valeurs de signification et de référence . . . au point de rencontrer peut-être la personalité du poète en ce qu'elle a d'incomparable. Au chant tend à se substituer l'aveu.[32]

[28]Ibid. 320.
[29]Ibid. 235
[30]Ibid. 233.
[31]C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton 1959).
[32] Paul Zumthor, "'Roman' et'gothique': Deux aspects de la poésie médiévale," in *Studi in onore di Italo Siciliano* 2 (Florence 1966) 1227.

Zumthor makes a number of formal contrasts between the two poems, including one between Thibaut's use of the first person as subject and Rutebeuf's use of the first person as object, eventually making a distinction between the sensibilities of the two poets which resembles Spitzer's antithetic use of Augustine and Ambrose: Thibaut denies, Rutebeuf accepts: "Au fond de la chanson de Thibaut, il y a une volonté (consciente ou non, peu importe) de refus. Le poème de Rutebeuf implique une acceptation."[33] Thibaut's qualities would then correspond to those of the courtly mode, resulting from the techniques of "idealization and formulation,"[34] while Rutebeuf would seem, at least in the first half of "La griesche d'hiver," to be Ambrosian, or "gothic," and closer to representing reality in a way of which Auerbach might approve.

Zumthor also assigns a technique to the gothic mode that manifests itself relentlessly in *Parzival*: the *sortie*. In its attempt to shatter the closed and potentially constricting universe of the fictional world of the poem, the gothic poem tries to break through to the world of actual life, resorting to the *sortie* to separate the poet deliberately from his poem. Consequently we may expect to find the poet "leaving" his poem, and the poem in a sense "leaving" the poet; and in fact we do find such a process going on constantly in *Parzival*, as Wolfram continually breaks into and out of his poem, establishing an effect Bumke and Wehrli recognize when they speak of "subjectivity" and "distance" created by the constant comings and goings of Wolfram's idiosyncratic narrator or persona.

Wolfram in fact opens his poem with an extensive *sortie*, packed with riddles and antitheses, displaying some of the elements of the gothic mode, and of grotesque realism:

> Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr,
> daz muoz der sêle werden sûr.
> gesmaehet unde gezieret
> ist, swâ sich parrieret
> unverzaget mannes muot,
> als agelstern varwe tuot.
> der mac dennoch wesen geil:
> wand an im sint beidiu teil,
> des himels und der helle.
> der unstaete geselle
> hât die swarzen varwe gar,
> und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
> so habet sich an die blanken
> der mit staeten gedanken. (1.1–14)

(If inconstancy is the heart's neighbor, the soul will not fail to find it bitter. Blame and praise alike befall when a dauntless man's spirit is

[33]Ibid. 1233.

[34]Charles Muscatine's formulation in *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley 1957) 17.

> black-and-white mixed like the magpie's plumage. Yet he may see blessedness after all, for both colors have a share in him, the color of heaven and the color of hell. Inconstancy's companion is all black and takes on the hue of darkness, while he of steadfast thought clings to white. [p. 3])[35]

Wolfram's insistence that black and white are not mutually exclusive, even in the best of men, remains a major premise throughout the poem; Herzeloyde's categorical determination that black and white are opposites is therefore clearly misleading advice for her to give to her son Parzival, and certainly contributes to some of his subsequent difficulties.[36]

Wolfram describes God later in the poem as "he who created the crooked and the straight," certainly presenting exclusive sensibilities with a difficulty; but the most dramatic representation of an inclusive strategy occurs at the end of the poem, when Parzival is united with his half-brother Feirefiz, who is black and white, spotted like a magpie: *wander truoc agelstern mal* (748.7). East and West, pagan and Christian are thus reconciled at the end of the poem, when apparent opposites discover their profound, genetic identity.[37]

In the prologue, however, Wolfram continues to mock, provoke, and play with his audience, challenging them to match wits with them, firing at them a dazzling burst of images, metaphors, and conundrums:

> diz vliegende bîspel
> ist tumben liuten gar ze snel,
> sine mugens niht erdenden:
> wand ez kan vor in wenden
> rehte alsam ein schellec hase.
> zin anderhalp ame glase
> geleichet, und des blinden troum.
> die gebent antlützes roum,
> doch mac mit staet niht gesîn
> dirre trüebe lihte schîn:
> er machet kurze fröude alwâr.
> wer roufet mich dâ nie kein hâr
> gewouhs, inne an mîner hant?
> der hât vil nâhe griffe erkant.
> sprich ich gein den verhten och,
> daz glîchet mîner witze doch.
> Wil ich triwe finden

[35]All references to the text of *Parzival* are to the edition of Karl Lachmann (Berlin 1926; repr. Berlin 1965). English translations are from Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage, *Parzival* (New York 1961).

[36]See 119.18ff.

[37]The image of the magpie as a symbol of the true complexity of human nature would seem to be a significant reversal of its conventional use among the troubadours and trouveres, for whom it was a symbol of falseness. See *Les Chansons de Conon de Béthune*, ed. A. Wallenskold (Paris 1921) 12.

aldâ si kan verswinden,
als fiur in dem brunnen
unt daz tou von der sunnen? (1.15–2.4)

(This flying metaphor will be much too swift for dullards. They will not be able to think it through because it will run from them like a startled rabbit. Mirrors coated on the back with tin, and blind men's dreams, these catch only the surface of the face, and that dim light cannot steadfastly endure even though it may make fleeting joy real. Anyone who grasps the hair in the palm of my hand, where there isn't any, has indeed learned how to grab close. And if I cry Ouch!, it will only show what kind of a mind I have. Shall I look for loyalty precisely where it vanishes, as fire in running water, dew in the sun? [p. 3])

In the passage that immediately follows, Wolfram continues his attack on falseness, focusing his attention particularly on appropriate and inappropriate behavior in women, concluding with a rhetorical gesture in keeping with the provocative posture of the prologue as a whole:

nu lat min eines wesen dri,
des ieslîche sunder phlege
daz mîner künste widerwege:
dar zuo gehôrte wilder funt,
ob si iu gerne taeten kunt
daz ich iu eine kunden wil,
si heten arbeite vil. (4.2–8)

(Assuming there were three men instead of me alone, each possessed of ability equal to mine, it would still be fantastic skill if they set forth to you what I, singlehanded, mean to set forth. [p. 5])

This playful reversal of the modesty-topos, as Curtius calls it, suggests that literature was (*inter alia*) a game of skill for Wolfram, *sophista verax*, who, like the classical rhetorician, was eager to "exhibit his amazing knowledge, the mysteries of his craft, and at the same time to defeat his rival in public contest."[38] However, unlike the classical rhetorician, Wolfram includes sacred elements in his game; for example, his boast of being equal to three others seems a playful foreshadowing of the game he plays earnestly with the idea of the Trinity, as Feirefiz begins to apprehend it, at the conclusion of the poem.[39]

Wolfram's holy play leads him to draw upon the vocabulary, images, and metaphors of games throughout the poem. Bakhtin's discussion of games as "a condensed formula of life and the historic process" leads to a meditation on Ponocrates and Gargantua shooting dice;[40] although Wolfram's characters do

[38]Curtius (n. 8 above) 170.
[39]752.1–14; see discussion below.
[40]Bakhtin (n. 26 above) 235.

not handle dice, images from the game recur regularly, and at moments of great intensity. Early in the poem Wolfram compares fighting after sunset with shooting dice in the dark, without a stakes-holding innkeeper to furnish light (82.16–20). Such a comparison seems to debase a conventionally idealized activity; however, the object of the debasing may equally well be the sensibility of the narrator or his persona. The result, therefore, may very well be to heighten the ideal drawn from the past, at the expense of the "real," less worthy present—a point of view explicit both in Chrétien and in Wolfram. In any case, the juxtaposition of idealized knightly combat and a dice game creates an ambiguity, an openness that is one of the characteristics both of grotesque realism and of gothic form.

Love is the other major secular activity conventionally idealized in courtly literature; Wolfram, however, uses dice only once in an erotic context. The messengers of Amplise, the queen of France, convey her proposal of marriage in the language of gaming, offering him, in effect, loaded dice:

> si sprachen "hêrre, hâstu sin
> (dir zelt regin de Franze
> der werden minne schanze),
> so mahtu spilen sunder phant:
> din freude ist kumbers ledec zehant." (88.2–6)

> (Lord, *la reine de France* will deal you winning dice-throws of worthy love, if you are wise, and you can play without stakes; joy will be yours at once, without any worries. [p. 50])

Parzival's birth also provokes Wolfram to resort to dice, in this case the dice by means of which the story is initiated:

> hiest der âventiure wurf gespilt,
> und ir begin ist gezilt:
> wand er ist alêrst geborn,
> dem diz maere wart erkorn. (112.9–12)

> (Herewith this adventure's dice are cast and its beginning determined, for only now has he been born to whom this tale is devoted. [p. 63])

In these two passages Wolfram uses dice to represent a positive potential; in the first passage love may begin, in the second the story may begin. The other two passages in which Wolfram resorts to dice represent moments of great loss.

In response to Gurnemanz's grief at Parzival's departure, Wolfram chooses to play with the number of eyes on the dice:

> urloup nam der junge man
> von dem getriwen fursten sân
> unt zal der massenie.
> der fürsten jâmers drîe

was riwic an daz quater komn:
die vierden flust het der genomm. (179.7–12)

(Then the young man took his leave of that loyal prince and of all his retinue. With that, the prince's trey of sorrow was sadly raised to a four. He had just suffered his fourth bereavement. [p. 98])

His first three losses were three of his sons; nevertheless, Wolfram plays with the old man's loss.

The most significant moment of loss in the poem, however, takes place at the Grail Castle, when Parzival fails to ask the right question, or any question for that matter. To represent the significance of that error, Wolfram again draws upon the language of dice, punning on the eyes of the dice and those of his protagonist:

umbe den wurf der sorgen
wart getoppelt, do er den grâl vant,
min sinen ougen, âne hant
und âne würfels ecke.
ob in nu kumber wecke,
des was er dâ vor niht gewent:
ern hete sich niht vil gesent. (248.10–16)

(The dice had been thrown when he found the Grail, with sorrow as the stake, but it was a throw with *his* eyes, without dice and without a hand to throw them. Grief may arouse him now, but it is a thing he has not been accustomed to, nor did he much long for it [p. 135])

At this point, Wolfram tells us a few lines later, the story truly begins (*alerst nu aventiurt ez sich* 249.4), reinforcing the connection between dice and *aventiure* established in the earlier "true beginning of the story" (112.9–12).

The other game that provides Wolfram with significant figures of speech is chess, a game whose pieces seem to reflect feudal social reality, and which depends less on fortune and misfortune, and more on human intellect and imagination. As we might expect, Wolfram finds an application for the game in describing an erotic transaction; after Amplise's messengers have proposed loading the erotic dice for Gahmuret, Herzeloyde takes up the challenge in the language of chess:

oder sol mir gein iu schade sîn
der Franzoyser künegîn?
der bôten sprachen süeziu wort,
si spiltn ir maere unz an den ort. (94.17–20)

(Or am I to be done injustice because of the French queen? Her messengers spoke sweet words and they played out their story to the last move on the board. [p. 53])

Herzeloyde, of course, wins Gahmuret.

However, the most elaborate, indeed extravagant use of the game of chess occurs when Gawan and Antikonie are interrupted at their love-play, and defend themselves with a chess-board and chess pieces:

dô vant diu maget reine
ein schâchzabelgesteine,
unt ein bret, wol erleit, wît:
daz brâht si Gâwâne in den strît.
an eim îsenînem ringez hienc,
dâ mit ez Gâwân empfienc.
ûf disen vierecken schilt
was schâchzabels vil gespilt:
der wart im sêr zerhouwen. (408.19–27)

(Then that maiden pure found a set of chess pieces and a chessboard, broad and beautifully inlaid, and this she brought to Gawan in the battle. It had been hanging on an iron ring, with which Gawan grasped it now. On this square board a great deal of chess had been played, but now it was sorely riddled. [p. 220])

The battle then becomes a playful image of social disorder, as well as one of sexual reversal, as Antikonie enthusiastically throws herself into the fray, hurling large, heavy kings and rooks down upon the enemy, provoking Wolfram to compare her first to a man, then to a woman selling wares at a carnival:

diu küneginne rîche
streit dâ ritterliche,
bî Gâwân si werlîche schein,
daz diu koufwîp ze Tolenstein
an der vasnaht nie baz gestrîten:
wan si tuontz von gampelsiten
unde müent ân nôt ir lîp. (409.5–11)

(Like a knight that mighty queen fought there, and at Gawan's side showed herself so war-like that the huckster-woman in Dollnstein never fought better on Carnival—only they do it for sport and work themselves up over nothing. [p. 220])

Having established Antikonie as an unconventional aristocratic woman, Wolfram feels that perhaps he has gone too far, if only rhetorically, and he qualifies his remarks, insisting that her behavior was appropriate, because she wept throughout the battle, and therefore showed her true figurative nobility. A noble woman may humble herself to demonstrate her *triuwe*, and the *staete* of her *friwentlich liebe* (409.15; 409.21).

Antikonie's transgressions involve abstract notions of decorum; far clearer, more vivid transgressions enrich the poem in physical manifestations. Perhaps the most vivid assault against what Bakhtin considers the classical aesthetic is Wolfram's emphasis on "that which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches

off," and consequently on the process of "fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth." For example, when Herzeloyde hears of her husband's death, she bares her breasts unselfconsciously:

diu frouwe enruochte wer daz sach.
daz hemde von der brust si brach.
ir brüstel linde unde wîz
dar an kêrte si ir vlîz,
si ructes an ir rôten munt.
si tet wîplîche fuore kunt. (110.23–28)

(Unconcerned as to who might see it, she tore the garments away from her bosom, clasped her soft, white breasts, and pressed them to her red mouth with the wisdom of mother-wit. [p. 62]

At this moment of extreme anguish, Herzeloyde instinctively connects her breast and her mouth in an emblematic gesture of feeding that asserts the paradoxical nature of her identity, or rather identities. Gahmuret's identity now lies within her body, and all her roles are now one. Having established the most urgent aspect of her bodily identity by focusing upon her breasts, she then apostrophizes them and their milk, connecting the "material bodily stratum" with the domain of the sacred, as milk and tears mingle in her imagination with baptismal water:

alsus sprach diu wîse.
"du bist kaste eins kindes spîse:
die hât ez vor im her gesant,
sît ichz lebende im lîbe vant."
Diu frouwe ir willen dar an sach,
daz diu spîse was ir herzen dach,
diu milch in ir tütelîn:
die ructe drûz diu künegîn.
si sprach "du bist von triwen komn.
het ich des toufes niht genomn,
du waerest vol mîns toufes zil.
ich sol mich begiezen vil
mit dir und mit den ougen,
offenlîch und tougen:
wande ich wil Gahmureten klagn." (110.28–111.13)

("You are the holders of an infant's nourishment," that wise woman said, "the infant has been filling you in advance ever since I felt him alive within my body." The lady found satisfaction in seeing that nourishment lying above her heart, that milk in her breasts, and pressing some of it out, the queen said, "You come from faithful love. If I had never received baptism, I would want you to be my baptismal water. I shall anoint myself with you and with my tears, both in public and in private—for I shall mourn for Gahmuret." [p. 62])

By connecting feeding and baptism, Herzeloyde seems to anticipate the transcendant feeding powers of the Grail, which Feirefiz will not be able to see until he is baptized. Feeding the body and feeding the soul, then, are not mutually exclusive activities.

A few lines later, Herzeloyde gives birth to Parzival, whose maleness Wolfram emphasizes by focusing on another protrusion of the lower bodily stratum:

> dô diu küngîn sich versan
> und ir kindel wider zir gewan,
> si under ander frouwen
> begunde betalle schouwen
> zwischen beinn sîn visellîn.
> er muose vil getriutet sîn,
> do er hete manlîchiu lit. (112.21–27)

(When the queen recovered consciousness and took her baby into her arms, then she and the other ladies intently observed the tiny pizzle between his legs. He could not be other than fondled and cherished, for he was possessed of the organ of a man. [p. 63])

Wolfram is still not through with protrusions, however, and he now returns to Herzeloyde's breasts, focusing on a protrusion of a protrusion—the nipples of the nursing mother:

> Diu küngîn nam dô sunder twâl
> diu rôten välwelohten mâl:
> ich meine ir tüttels gränsel:
> daz schoup sim in sîn vlänsel.
> selbe was sîn amme
> diu in truoc in ir wamme:
> an ir brüste si in zôch,
> die wîbes missewende vlôch. (113.5–12)

(Directly the queen took the little brownish buds of hers—I mean the tips of her little breasts—and pressed them into his tiny mouth, for she who had borne him in her womb was also his nurse. She who fled from all womanly misconduct clasped him to her bosom. [p. 63])

Having established her identity first by a physical gesture and not by speaking, Herzeloyde now, as in the earlier passage, connects the physical gesture with the domain of the sacred, this time offering Mary as her model:

> frou Herzeloyde sprach mit sinne
> "diu hoehste küneginne
> Jesus ir brüste bôt,
> der sît durch uns vil scharpfen tot
> ame kriuze mennischlîche enphienc
> und sîne trîwe an uns begienc." (113.17–22)

(Wisely the lady Herzeloyde said, "The supreme queen gave her breasts to Jesus, Who afterwards for our sake met a bitter death in human form upon the cross and Who kept faith with us." [p. 63])

Courtly literature devotes little attention to the breasts; when they are described they bring no suggestions of procreation. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, for example, devotes only two lines to an account of the breasts of his paradigmatic woman:

> Pectus, imago nivis, quasi quasdam collaterales
> Gemmas virgineas producat utrimque papillas.[41]

For Geoffrey, then, the ideal female breasts are cold, hard, and symmetrical.

We need not, however, postulate a folk tradition of carnival and banquets to find precedents for procreative breasts. A close parallel for Herzeloyde's imaginative connections can be found in Saint Bernard's remarks on the breasts sweeter than wine in the *Song of Songs*; among his extensive remarks on the passage, Bernard finds particular application for its figurative significance in cases of incipient spiritual dryness:

> Saepe corde tepido et arido accedimus ad altare, orationi incumbimus. Persistentibus autem repente infunditur gratia, pingescit pectus, replet viscera inundatio pietatis; et si sit qui premat, lac conceptae dulcedinis ubertim fundere non tardabunt. Dicat ergo: Habes, sponsa, quod petiisti, et hoc tibi signum, quia meliora facta sunt ubera tibi intumerunt, facta in ubertate lacis meliora vino scientiae saecularis, quae quidem inebriat, sed curiositate, non charitate; implens, non nutriens; inflans, non aedificans; ingurgitans, non confortans.
>
> (Often we approach the altar and begin to pray with a heart lukewarm and dry. But if we steadily persist, grace comes suddenly in a flood upon us, our breast grows full of increase, a wave of piety fills our inward heart; and if we press on, the milk of sweetness conceived in us will spread over us in fruitful flood. The Bridegroom then speaks thus: Thou hast, O my Spouse, that which thou prayedst for; and this is a sign to thee that thy breasts have become more precious than wine. Thence shalt thou know that thou hast received it because thou hast become fruitful. Therefore have thy breasts filled with abundance of milk better than the wine of worldly knowledge, which inebriates indeed, but with curiosity, not with charity, which fills but does not nourish; which puffs up instead of edifying; which gluts but strengthens not.)[42]

What Wolfram has contributed in his extensive description of Herzeloyde's breasts, then, is not an original imaginative connection between body and

[41]Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 591–592, ed. Edmond Faral, in *Les arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle* (Paris 1962).

[42]Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica*, PL 183.818; translation by S. J. Eales (London 1895) 47. For other patristic exertions on these breasts, see M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (Garden City 1977) 471.

spirit, since that had already been fashioned by theologians of a relatively inclusive habit of mind, but rather an extension of that habit of mind from the domain of theology into the domain of a normally secular, if not profane, literary genre. In addition, Wolfram contributed a ludic tone, derived partly from the troubadours, partly from poets like those who contributed to the *Carmina Burana*, perhaps partly from a folk tradition of grotesque realism, and partly from Wolfram's own spontaneously playful nature.

Not every woman in *Parzival* generates carnal and spiritual resonances simultaneously; some seem to remain clearly in the carnal realm, although without necessarily profane overtones. Jeschute, for instance, the first woman whom Parzival meets after leaving his mother, has considerable physical presence in the poem. In Chrétien's text, the comparable figure is an anonymous *pucelete endormi* (line 671), who receives no *effictio*, and has little physical presence in the poem. Wolfram, however, goes to some trouble to generate a sense of Jeschute's carnal appeal, beginning by transforming Chrétien's *pucelete* into a *frouwe*, and proceeding to an extensive encomium of her mouth, and then of the part of her body left uncovered, from the hips up. Having built up considerable erotic intensity by his description of the sleeping, partially nude, and extremely lovely Jeschute, Wolfram proceeds to generate a comic scene, based on a confusion of appetites, dependent upon a contrast between the narrator's perspective and that of his hero, who at this moment of erotic intensity hastily and with no appreciation of the action he is taking, embraces Jeschute, snatches her brooch, and complains of hunger. Chrétien's Percival at this point simply eats the food he finds near him, but Wolfram provides an exchange between the boy and the woman that comically compounds food and sex:

> der knappe klageten hunger sân.
> diu frouwe was ir lîbes lieht:
> si sprach "ir solt mîn ezzen niecht
> waert ir ze frumen wîse,
> ir naemt iu ander spîse." (131.22–26)

> (Then the lad complained of hunger. The lady's body was radiantly lovely. "You shan't eat *me*!" she said. "If you were sensible, you would take some other food." [p. 74])

Here Jeschute is associated momentarily with banquet imagery, or kitchen-humor, but she manages to escape Saint Lawrence's fate, when Parzival, much to her relief and his as well, chooses to feast on bread, wine, and two partridges.

Perhaps the most striking example of indecorous connections between food and sex occurs in the midst of the chess-battle, where Gawan, despite the difficulties of the battle, finds equally great difficulties in keeping his eyes from devouring Antikonie's body:

> swenne im diu muoze geschach,
> daz er die maget reht ersach;
> ir munt, ir ougen, under ir nasen.

baz geschict an spizze hasen,
ich waene den gesâht ir nie,
dan si war dort unde hie,
zwischen der hüffe unde ir brust.
minne gerende lust
kunde ir lîp vil wol gereizen.
irn gesaht nie âmeizen,
Diu bezzers gelenkes pflac,
dan si was dâ der gürtel lac. (409.23–410.4)

(Whenever he had a free moment so that he could catch a glimpse of the girl, her lips, her eyes, her nose—a better shape I doubt you ever saw on a spitted rabbit than she had here and there between her hips and her bosom; well might her body rouse love's desire! You never saw an ant with a slimmer waist than she had where her belt went around. [p. 221])

Linking Antikonie's hips, bosoms, and a cooked rabbit combines protrusions, procreation, fecundity, and food, in a passage framed by the game of chess, and modified by the ironic perspective of a Goliard-like narrator, who performs *sorties*—exists and entrances—at will.

The object of all these strategies, however, is to expand the concept of human identity, questioning the tendency to draw sharp lines of division in defining ideals, and attacking what Bakhtin describes as "a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world."[43] Transactions between Gawan and Obilot, between Gawan and Parzival, and between Parzival and Feirefiz show Wolfram deliberately confusing conventional notions of identity to suggest the transcendant nature of sexual, fraternal, and divine love, as well as the useful ambiguities that they generate among themselves.

When Gawan thanks Obilot for defending his good name against the scurrilous remarks of her older sister, Obilot's response is that of a child playing the game of *courtoisie*, simultaneously earnest and absurd in her plea to be granted the role of his *amie*. After an elegant presentation of her training in decorum, she calls upon what Friedrich Ohly calls the *mystische Identitätsformel*, transgressing against conventional notions of personal and sexual identities in an attempt to forge a transcendant identity:[44]

habet ir mich ihtes deste wirs,
ich var doch ûf der mâze phat,
wande ich dâ ziu mîn selber bat.

[43]See n. 28 above.

[44]Friedrich Ohly, "Du bist mein, ich bin dein," in *Kritische Bewahrung: Festschrift für Werner Schröder* (Berlin 1974) 371–433; see 410–411 for a brief glance at this passage. This paradox is classified by Wiebke Freytag as "Das Oxymoron der erweiterten Identität," the second of nine types he categorizes in *Das Oxymoron bei Wolfram, Gottfried und andern Dichtern des Mittelalters* (Munich 1972). See also (111–120) his discussion of oxymoron, *coincidentia oppositorum*, and Wolfram's theme. Further useful discussion of balanced opposites may be found in Peter Elbow, *Oppositions in Chaucer* (Middletown 1975), and Earl Wasserman, *The Subtler Language* (Baltimore 1959).

ir sît mit der wârheit ich.
swie die namen teilen sich,
mîns lîbes namen sult ir hân:
nû sît maget unde man. (369.14–20)

(And if you think the worst of me for it, I know nonetheless that I walk the path of decorum, for when I was pleading with you, I was pleading with myself. In reality you are me, even if our names are different. You shall now bear my name and be both maid and man. [p. 198])

After some initial reluctance, Gawan agrees to bear arms in Obilot's honor, playfully and courteously picking up the paradox she has thrown him, returning it gently into her own court:

in iwerre hende sî mîn swert.
ob iemen tjoste gein mir gert,
den poynder müezt ir rîten,
ir sult dâ für mich strîten.
man mac mich dâ in strîten sehn:
der muoz mînhalp von iu geschehn. (370.25–30)

(Into your hands I give my sword. If anyone challenge me to a joust, it is you who must ride to meet him and do the fighting for me. Others may think they see *me* in the battle, but I shall know it was you who did it. [p. 199])

By the end of Book Seven, Gawan and Obilot have played out an erotic transaction, paradoxically chaste and successful, culminating in an embrace:

Gâwânn man kuss ouch niht erliez,
und daz er naem sîn frouwen dar.
er dructez kint wol gevar
als ein tockn an sîne brust:
des twang in friwentlîch gelust. (395.20–24)

(Nor did Gawan fail to receive a kiss, and they asked him to take his lady in his arms. He pressed the pretty child like a doll to his breast as affectionate delight impelled him. [p. 212])

Paradoxically *frouwe*, as well as *kint* and *tockn*, Obilot then proceeds to assume the role of *magister ludi*, resolving the erotic and political difficulties of her land by instructing her sister and her lover Meljanz to marry forthwith. That they unhesitatingly follow her directions further reinforces the figure of Obilot as *puella-senex*, an archetypal figure which, like Nature, resolves antinomies.

The mystical formula of identity makes an appearance in each of the two most strenuous battles in the poem. At one point Parzival and Gawan battle each other, each ignorant of the other's identity; when they finally recognize each other, Parzival acknowledges the irony involved in attempting to overcome a kinsman: *ich han mich selben uberstriten* (689.5): "It is myself I have vanquished" (p. 361). Gawan proceeds to agree with him: *Du hast dir selben an gesigt* (690.1): "It is yourself you have vanquished" (p. 361).

A more extensive use of the paradox, and one towards which the entire poem builds, occurs in the final battle, when West and East, represented respectively by Parzival and by his half-brother Feirefiz, are united, ironically in battle. Significantly, Wolfram boasts, in the passage that immediately precedes the introduction of Feirefiz, that the "key to this adventure," *daz sloz dirre aventiure* (734.7), is about to be revealed; the riddle, then, will presumably be solved by the battle and its consequences.

As Parzival, for the first time in the poem the lesser warrior, and Feirefiz, his older, stronger brother, battle, unaware that they are brothers, Wolfram indulges in a brief *sortie*, emphasizing the irony of human perception, which turns substantive identities into formal opposites:

> der heiden warf daz swert ûf hôch.
> manec sin slac sich sus gezôch,
> daz Parzivâl kom ûf diu knie.
> man mac wol jehn, sus striten sie,
> der se bêde nennen wil ze zwein.
> si wârn doch bêde niht wan ein.
> mîn bruodr und ich daz ist ein lîp,
> als ist guot man unt des guot wîp. (740.23–30)

> (The heathen swung his sword aloft, and many of his blows were so dealt that Parzival sank to his knees. One may say that "they" were fighting this way if one wants to speak of them as two, but they were indeed only one, for "my brother and I," that is one flesh, just as is good man and good wife. [p. 386])

Fraternal and marital love thus mingle in Wolfram's imagination, as he watches his protagonists participate in an action which violates not only their own identities, but universal human identity. A few lines later Wolfram reiterates the irony:

> got ner dâ Gahmuretes kint.
> der wunsch wirt in beiden,
> dem getouften unt dem heiden:
> die nante ich ê für einen.
> sus begunden siz ouch meinen,
> waern se ein ander baz bekant. (742.14–19)

> (God shield Gahmuret's son! That is my wish for both of them, the baptized man and the heathen. I have already termed them *one*, and they would think so too if they were better acquainted. [p. 387])

To perceive two where there is only one is then a symptom of human fallibility. The Christian doctrine toward which Wolfram is conducting us through this riddling game now begins to materialize before us.

Before any permanent damage is done, the brothers identify themselves to each other, and Parzival tells Feirefiz of their father's death; the speckled heathen proceeds to lament his father, combining the conventional paradoxes of

joy and sorrow to be found passim in medieval romance, with the *mystische Identitätsformel*, now expanded to include a third element:

> "Ôwe der unregezten nôt!"
> sprach der heiden, "ist mîn vater tôt?
> ich mac wol freuden vlüste jehn
> und freuden funt mit wârheit spehn.
> ich hân an disen stunden
> freude vlorn unde freude funden
> wil ich der wârheit grîfen zuo,
> beidiu mîn vater unde ouch duo
> und ich, wir wâren gar al ein,
> doch ez an drîen stücken schein." (752.1–10)

> ("Alas for sorrow unavenged!" said the heathen. "Is my father dead? I can rightly say I have seen joy's loss and seen the finding of joy. In this hour I have both lost and found my joy. If I am to grasp the truth, my father and you and I, we are all one, but this one appeared in three parts." [pp. 391–392])

Through his own personal experience, the pagan Feirefiz has began to anticipate the mystery of the Trinity, in preparation for his imminent conversion. Clearly, a man who can understand that mortal relatives are more than related will not long resist the proposition that three divine persons share the same substance.

Through kinship, normally a limiting or excluding principle, Feirefiz develops a more inclusive perception of identity. His concluding remarks on the subject of identity echo the earlier comments of Gawan and Parzival, with an additional ejaculation to be expected of a pagan:

> mit dir selbn hâstu hie gestritn.
> gein mir selbn ich kom ûf strît geritn,
> mich selben het ich gern erslagn:
> done kundestu des niht verzagn,
> dune.wertest mir mîn selbes lîp.
> Jupiter, diz wunder schrîp:
> dîn kraft tet uns helfe kuont,
> daz se unser sterben understuont. (752.15–22)

> (You have fought here against yourself; against *my*self I rode into combat here and would gladly have killed my very self; you could not help but defend my own self in fighting me. Jupiter, write this miracle down! Your strength helped us so that it prevented our deaths! [p. 392])

Feirefiz's perception of the miraculous paradox by means of which an act of violence is turned into an act of preservation—both of the self and of the other—provokes him to call upon a transcendant power, pagan in name, but an anticipation if not a prefiguration of the Christian God whom he will shortly accept. Laughing and crying simultaneously, Feirefiz gives Wolfram an oppor-

tunity to transpose the pagan's responses into a Christian domain, in an anticipation of conversion that recalls Herzeloyde's linking of tears and baptism:

> er lachte unde weinde tougen.
> sîn heidenschiu ougen
> begunden wazzer rêren
> al nâch des toufes eren.
> der touf sol lêren triuwe,
> sît unser ê diu niuwe
> nâch Kriste wart genennet.
> an Kriste ist triwe erkennet. (752.23–30)

> (He laughed and wept, though he tried to conceal it, and his heathen eyes shed tears as in honor of baptism. Baptism must teach fidelity since our new covenant was named for Christ: in Christ may fidelity be seen. [p. 392])

Feirefiz's laughter, like Cunneware's, signals a release; Cunneware's laughter anticipates the release of Arthur's court from bondage to a purely secular vision, while Feirefiz's laughter signals the beginning of his release from a narrow, pagan religious vision. His conversion and marriage to Repanse de Schoye follow quickly; the two events represent the successful combination of opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum* embodied in one man, black and white, pagan turned Christian, in the course of a game put together by Wolfram, *magister ludi*.

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