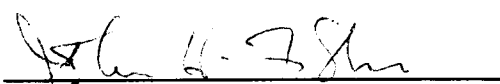


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jerry L. Ball entitled "Joseph of Arimathea and the Arthurian Tradition." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Mary P. Richards, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


Accepted for the Council:


Vice Provost and
Dean of the Graduate School

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA AND THE ARTHURIAN TRADITION

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jerry L. Ball

December 1986

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ABSTRACT

One of the most intriguing figures in the Arthurian literature is Joseph of Arimathea who supposedly brought the Holy Grail and the Christian faith to Britain. Although Joseph figures directly in only a small portion of the Arthurian material, he is ever present in the background, and it is this presence that helps to tie the Arthurian history into a coherent whole and legitimizes the chivalric material, giving a spiritual direction to an otherwise secular story, and transforming the saga into a complex Christian allegory.

In this study, the figure of Joseph of Arimathea is traced from every available viewpoint. Chapter I deals with the development of the figure of Joseph in Biblical and apocryphal tradition and demonstrates why he of all the possible Biblical personages was the logical choice for bearer of the Holy Grail and first evangelist to Britain. Chapter II traces his development through the pseudo-history of the romances and suggests that his history closely corresponds to that of Arthur and that it is the merging of these two histories which provides the Arthurian story with its peculiar vitality. Chapter III examines Joseph of Arimathea in the individual romances and attempts to outline the process by which the standard version of this figure was derived. Chapter IV then discusses the effect of Joseph upon the Arthurian romances as a whole, with special emphasis upon the cycles, and concludes that what unity and spiritual thrust the romances possess is largely a result

of his presence. Chapter V traces his development after Malory's Morte Darthur and demonstrates the steadily increasing influence of the Glastonbury legends of Joseph, which downplay his association with the Grail, upon later Arthurian literature. Ultimately, it is the Glastonbury version of Joseph's story which shows the greatest vitality, for after he ceases to play a dominant role in later versions of the Arthurian story, Joseph's alternate Glastonbury legend has enjoyed a steadily increasing popularity. In fact, his legend is accepted as truth by many who regard that of Arthur as myth.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest legacies of the Middle Ages is the story of King Arthur. It has enjoyed revival after revival and provided material for over a century of scholarship, juvenile adaptations, and scores of motion picture treatments. It has become a part of our very culture, and there are few today who have not been touched by it in some way. Indeed Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot, and Galahad have become household names, and whole volumes of study have been devoted to these figures; yet one of the central figures in the saga has been largely ignored.

This is Joseph of Arimathea who brought the Holy Grail to Britain and established the quest par excellence, that of the Grail. Joseph of Arimathea is one of the most intriguing and perplexing figures in the whole Arthurian tradition, and yet his role in the saga has been largely ignored or misunderstood.

His appearance in the Gospels provides him with far better historical credentials than King Arthur himself, but the Joseph that has come down to us is perhaps more a creation of pure fantasy than Arthur himself. Joseph is the custodian of the body of Christ; guardian of the Holy Grail and the precious blood; founder of the order of the Grail Knights; premier evangelist to Britain, and, at times, the Maimed King himself. The authors of the romances cast him in several and sometimes all of these roles. What is one to make of such a complex hybrid of history and romance?

Despite his historical association with the body of Christ, it is Joseph of Arimathea's connection with the Holy Grail which has given him his widest currency. Studies by critics and scholars have tended to split into two camps--those who deny the historical Joseph and his traditional association with Glastonbury and those who deal with the more legendary Joseph because of his connection with the Holy Grail. In short, Joseph of Arimathea has most often been considered of less importance than the place or object with which he is associated. This is especially true of the Holy Grail.

In my study, I have narrowed the focus as much as possible to Joseph himself and his development throughout the Middle Ages, with emphasis on his representation in English literature. At times this has been difficult, for once Joseph of Arimathea became the subject of the romances, his association with the Holy Grail became so close that it is often impossible to separate the two. I do not pretend to provide the definitive solution to the problem of the Holy Grail. Much study has been expended upon that topic, and the mystery remains. The Grail is always elusive and those who attempt to explain it usually explain more about themselves than the Grail itself. Let it suffice to say that the attainment of the Grail is a transcendental mystical experience. The writers of the romances have left it a mystery, and so have I.

Similarly I have avoided the problem of the sources of the Grail legend as much as possible. Once the Grail became associated with Joseph of Arimathea it became the Holy Grail, the vessel that

Joseph used to collect the holiest relic of all, the precious blood of Jesus Christ. This is how the majority of the romancers perceived it, and I have satisfied myself with that perception.

In this study I have attempted to examine the figure of Joseph from every available perspective, and each of my chapters is devoted to one of these viewpoints. Frequently these viewpoints overlap. For instance, the Joseph of pseudo-history and that of the romances are difficult to separate because much of Joseph's history is derived from the romances. However, I have attempted to keep such overlapping to a minimum.

In the first section I discuss the development of the Biblical Joseph of Arimathea through the apocryphal traditions. My principal emphasis is upon his development in the Acts of Pilate, the traditional first segment of the Gospel of Nicodemus, for this was the source of all subsequent development of the Joseph legend. The Gospel of Nicodemus was an immensely popular and influential work in the Middle Ages and nearly achieved the status of Scripture. And it was this work that Robert de Boron used as the basis for the first Grail romance, Joseph d'Armathie. I end my discussion with the 1509 Wynkyn de Worde version of the Gospel of Nicodemus, for it represents the work in its most highly developed form.

The second section of my study treats the development of the pseudo-history of Joseph and his line and argues that it corresponds closely to Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the British Kings. This history of Joseph is interwoven with that of Arthur in the romance,

and the final result is a larger history of the Holy Grail, a spiritual framework upon which the stories of Joseph and Arthur may be interpreted. For convenience I provide a summary reconstruction of this history.

My third chapter is a survey of the Grail romances with emphasis on the figure of Joseph as he appears in each. In this way it is possible to trace the development of the figure of Joseph and discover the romancers' attitudes towards this intriguing character. Step by step I demonstrate the process by which the romance writers arrived at the "standard" figure of Joseph and show that the strength of this figure was such that it was able to take root in Germany and supplant that country's own native Grail tradition.

In my fourth section I examine the effect of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea upon the romances as a whole and especially upon the cycles. The presence of Joseph in these romances provides a unity of storyline and symbolism which would have been impossible without him. Without Joseph and the Grail, the Arthurian saga would have been merely another de casibus tragedy lacking the spiritual direction and allegorical force that are often noted in it. It is the presence of Joseph that Christianized and legitimized the story of Arthur and imbued it with much of the force that keeps it alive and meaningful today.

The final section of my study reconstructs the "popular" version of the Joseph story, that represented in the chronicles and the cycles of mystery plays of the Middle ages. I attempt to

demonstrate the way in which Joseph was probably viewed by the common man who was not necessarily acquainted with his romance history. I then trace the development of this figure through English literary history after Malory and show how he was viewed by the major writers of the subsequent periods, and how this version was affected by the revival of Malory's Morte Darthur in the nineteenth century.

I do not pretend to have answered all the questions which have been posed about Joseph and the Grail, but to present the evidence as I have found it and indicate directions of study which may eventually lead to the answers to some of these questions. At the very least I have provided Joseph of Arimathea with a volume of study all his own.

CHAPTER I

THE JOSEPH OF BIBLICAL AND APOCRYPHAL TRADITION

The development of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea in literature, especially Arthurian literature, was a long and complex process, owing as much to artistic confusion as to design. To trace properly such a development, one must go back to its very beginning. Although the subject has been treated frequently before by historians and literary critics alike, my purpose is not simply to establish Joseph's historicity or to show that his role in medieval literature was the result of a compounding of errors. Rather, I intend to trace his development as a character, an historic figure like King Arthur or Robin Hood, who had a special attraction for the imagination of writers and romancers who developed him as far as they could without absolutely changing his identity.

Before discussing the legendary or traditional versions of Joseph of Arimathea, I must first draw attention to one of the barest accounts of him available, one over which there can be little controversy. The following version, from the New Catholic Encyclopedia, is a sober and reliable one:

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA, disciple of Jesus who took a prominent role in His burial. He was named after his birthplace, but at the time of Christ's death he was apparently a resident of Jerusalem, where he had a tomb prepared for himself (Mt 27.60). He was a man of standing and wealth and was a member of the Sanhedrin (Mk 15.43). With Nicodemus (Jn 19.38-42) he assumed the task of burying Jesus in his own tomb (Mt 27.57-60; Mk 15.46; Lk 23.53). He had not agreed to the Sanhedrin's condemnation of Jesus

(Lk 23.51). In Mt 27.57 he is called a disciple, but he was one in secret (Jn 19.38). His former timid behavior stands in contrast to his boldness in asking for the body of Jesus. Legendary details concerning his life are found in the Gospel of Nicodemus (early 5th century). He is the patron of Glastonbury, England, having been sent there from Gaul by the apostle Philip, according to legend. Later he was associated with the Holy Grail. He first appears in the Roman Martyrology in 1595. The Western Church observes his feast on March 17; the Eastern, on July 31.

One of the notable qualities of the above account is the carefully guarded tone of the writing. For the most part it is restricted to bald statement of Scriptural fact, and for the rest it is careful to add qualifying statements like "according to legend." Indeed the Arthurian association is so softened as to be virtually absent. Joseph is admitted to be the "patron of Glastonbury," with only an implied reference to the popular legend of his role as its founder and first apostle to England. As well, he is merely "associated with the Holy Grail," a far cry from his being its guardian. Beyond the statement that his "former timid behavior stands in contrast to his boldness in asking for the body of Jesus," nothing whatever of his character is implied. Another approved account also mentions Joseph's legendary association with Glastonbury and adds: "in the sacristy of San Lorenzo, Genoa, is the Sacro Catino, in which Joseph is said to have caught the blood of Christ at the crucifixion," but ends with the warning: "None of these legends have any evidence to support them" (Book of Saints 406).¹

¹ Joseph is a controversial figure even among those who do not concern themselves with his Grail associations. Works as basic

When one examines such restrained accounts, the Joseph of Arimathea who has come down through the Arthurian tradition seems the result of wild imagination. How does one account for the development of such a figure? To Arthurian scholars and enthusiasts, Joseph is not only the custodian of the body of Christ, but also the guardian of the Holy Grail; founding evangelist of Britain; founder of the Order of the Grail Knights; and, at times, the maimed king himself. How could such a complex popular image possibly evolve from the accepted accounts cited above?

This problem is an intriguing one, and few Arthurian scholars have failed to take notice of it. Unfortunately, most critical treatments are far from satisfactory. Some are general or simple-minded while others combine brilliant research and insight with sheer extravagance.² By far the best and most exhaustive of

as Bible dictionaries vary considerably in their descriptions of him. For a sampling of these accounts, one may consult the various dictionaries either written or edited by James Hastings, especially his two-volume Dictionary of the Bible. Although the reference form restricts one considerably, Hastings cannot refrain from speculation: "The spectacle of the crucified Saviour had quickened his faith and love, and combined, doubtless, with his shame for past faint-heartedness, to raise him above the fear of man" (2: 777). William Smith, in his Dictionary, reaches similar conclusions, and the more recent Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible pauses to conjecture why a man of Arimathea would have his tomb in Jerusalem (980). Works which consider Joseph's legendary associations include the Oxford Dictionary of Saints and, of course, Baring-Gould's Lives of the Saints. The latter handles them rather curtly: "Many strange traditions have attached themselves to Joseph of Arimathea, as that he came to Britain, and planted his staff at Glastonbury; but as these legends are wholly worthless, they must be here passed over" (3:284). The account quoted above was chosen for its conservative treatment and its formal status.

²One can virtually take his pick of such treatments, and it is possible here only to mention some of the most notable. Those

modern Joseph scholars is Valerie Lagorio, who views the Arthurian Joseph as a result of sacred biography transformed into romance ("Transition" passim). She demonstrates that the selection of Joseph as Grail guardian was no accident or whim, but rather the selection of the most likely of several candidates ("Vita" 67-8). She concludes that Joseph's final romance image is the result of the expansion of three of these traditional roles:

1) a person of consequence in Pilate's court, in a position to ask favors of the governor; 2) a favored disciple of Christ and zealous apostle; and 3) the collector and preserver of the Precious Blood. Furthermore, [the Estoire] adds the fourth dimension of membership in the prestigious House of David, worthy to be the progenitor of the Grail guardians and the leading knights of the Round Table ("Vita" 56).

However, she follows this valid observation with the misleading remark: "Apart from references to Joseph's discipleship, the canonical accounts provide none of these attributes" ("Vita" 56). It is this statement that I wish to challenge. Are the canonical accounts quite as bare as Lagorio and the "official" versions claim them to be?

fond of the historical approach will find D. D. R. Owen's Evolution of the Grail Legend of interest; Celtophiles will lean toward R. S. Loomis' The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol; devotees of the poetry of T. S. Eliot and anthropologists will favor Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance; Jungians will appreciate the [Emma] Jung-von Franz treatment in The Grail Legend; and occultist mystics will find satisfaction in A. E. Waite's The Holy Grail. In spite of the countless more modern treatments, I find two of the oldest to be the most satisfactory. For sanity, scholarship, and sheer utility J. D. Bruce's Evolution of the Arthurian Romance and Alfred Nutt's Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail can hardly be bettered.

To answer this question, it is necessary to examine closely the references to Joseph of Arimathea which actually appear in the Bible. To provide a clear focus and to avoid repetition, I have reduced the four Gospel accounts into one; and for the sake of an important term and to add flavor, I quote from the second of the Wycliffite versions:³

- Mk 15.42-43 And whanne euentid was come, for it was the euentid which is bifor the sabat, Joseph of Arimathie, the noble decurioun,⁴ cam.
- Lk 23.50 He was a good man and a iust,
- Mt 27.57 and he was a disciple of Jhesu,
- Jn 19.38 but priui for drede of the Jewis.
- Lk 23.51 This man concentide not to the counseil and to the dedis of him; and he abood the kyngdom of God.
- Mk 15.43-45 Booldli he entride to Pilat, and axide the bodi of Jhesu. But Pilat wondride, if he were now deed. And whanne the cenutrion was clepid, he axide hym, if he were deed; and whanne he knewe of the centurion, he grauntide the bodi of Jhesu to Joseph.
- Jn 19.38-40 And so he cam, and took awei the bodi of Jhesu. And Nychodeme cam also, that hadde come to hym first bi nyȝt, and brouȝte a meddlynge of myrre and aloes, as it were an hundrid pound. And thei token the bodi of Jhesu
- Mk 15.46 down

³This handling is not original with me. Geoffrey Ashe does the same thing on a smaller scale in King Arthur's Avalon (36-37), but anyone acquainted with Holy Week services will hardly find this procedure remarkable.

⁴The earlier Wycliffite version incorporates this gloss: "ether hauynge ten vndir him," reflecting the notion that Joseph had Roman status approaching something like knighthood.

- Mt 27.59 and lappede it in a clene sendel
- Jn 19.40 with swete smellynge oynementis, as it is custom to
Jewis for to birie.
- Mt 27.60 And Joseph leide it in his newe briel, that he
hadde hewun in a stoon,
- Lk 23.53 in which not ₃it any man hadde be leid,
- Mt 27.60 and he walewide a greet stoon to the dore of the
briel, and wente awei.
- Mk 15.47 And Marie Maudeleyne and Marie of Joseph bihelden,
where he was leid.
- Jn 19.42 Therfor there their putten Jhesu, for the vigilie
of Jewis feeste, for the sepulcre was ni₃ (Forshall
and Madden 4:82, 137, 228, 292).⁵

Such is the Scriptural account. Although it may seem rather bare, a close analysis reveals at least four roles for Joseph of Arimathea:

- 1) Disciple of Christ
- 2) Member of the Jewish council
- 3) Petitioner for Christ
- 4) Guardian and burier of Christ.⁶

Disciple of Christ

This role may not at first seem to be especially significant since, technically, any proper follower of Christ could be legitimately called a "disciple," but even on such an elementary level, Joseph may be allowed at least one important duty which would be

⁵Compared to other and more modern translations, this version holds up quite well, as far as accuracy is concerned.

⁶The listing and explanation of various roles I have borrowed from Lagorio.

later developed extensively in the Grail stories. Like all disciples, Joseph would be bound to obey the Great Commission: Go forth and preach the Gospel unto all nations (Mt 28.19-20). But here a problem arises. After the gospel references, there is no further mention of Joseph in the Bible. The Acts, Epistles, and the writings of the early church trace the ministries of many of the disciples, but there is nothing more of Joseph. What is more, he is not among those to whom Christ appeared after the Resurrection--and who could have more deserved to see the risen Christ than he who had laid Him in his own tomb?⁷ Yet Joseph is simply dropped.

The oddity of this lack of reference is increased when one considers other evidence in the Gospels which could be interpreted

⁷The recorded appearances of Christ between the resurrection and the ascension are as follows:

1. To Mary Magdalene at the tomb (Mk. 16.9, Jn 20.14).
2. To some other women between the tomb and Jerusalem (Mt. 28.9).
3. To two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mk 16.12, Lk 24.13).
4. To Simon Peter (Lk 24.34, I Cor 15.5).
5. To ten apostles and some others in Jerusalem (Lk 24.36, Jn 20.19).
6. To eleven apostles in Jerusalem (Mk 16.14, Jn 20.26).
7. To the eleven apostles at the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 21).
8. To the eleven on a mountain near Galilee (Mt 28.16).
9. To five hundred people at an unspecified location (I Cor 15.6).
10. To James (I Cor 15.7).
11. To the eleven at Mount Olivet (Mk 16.19, Lk 24.50-51).

It must also be added that Christ appeared to Paul after the ascension (I Cor 15. 8-9). Christ before the ascension appears eleven times, often to eleven apostles. For the sake of completeness, this may have suggested to some interpreters of the Scriptures an unmentioned twelfth appearance to an unmentioned twelfth apostle, and who better than Joseph?

as adding to Joseph's status as a disciple. One possibility is that his increased status may simply be an accident of textual proximity. Joseph is the first man named as a disciple after the death of Judas (Mt 27.57). Early interpreters may well have felt that this implied that Joseph was intended to take Judas' place among the twelve.⁸ Also significant is the Joseph passages appear almost immediately after the accounts of Peter's denial (Mt 26-69-75, Mk 14.66-72, Lk 22.65-62, and Jn 18.15-27). While the other disciples are hiding in fear for their lives, Joseph, who had feared to announce himself a follower of Christ during His life, is the first to do so after His death.

Here it may be argued that Joseph does not actually affirm his belief in Christ, but merely requests the body of a fellow Jew to spare it the supreme indignity of lying exposed during the Sabbath. Possibly, but he need not have made the request himself (especially since he had previously stood in fear of the Jews), and he certainly need not have placed Jesus in his own tomb nor have helped prepare the body for burial with his own hands and risked ceremonial pollution on the eve of the Sabbath! Thus, it seems clear that Joseph's action may easily be interpreted as the same as declaring himself a follower of Christ. With such evidence, it

⁸ Acts 1.23-26 indicates that Matthias was chosen after the ascension to replace Judas as one of the twelve. However, he was chosen by lot. Some early interpreters may have felt this unfair to Joseph who had done so much for Jesus. Matthias seems to have been shortchanged by history. There is still argument that Paul was really the replacement for Judas.

is not difficult to see how a case could be built for making him an important disciple indeed--the one chosen to replace Judas as one of the twelve and the first of all to have the courage to affirm his Lord.

Member of the Jewish Council

Joseph's membership on the council presents a problem, the solution to which only adds to his status as a disciple. As a member, Joseph would have been expected to vote on Jesus' fate. The problem lies in apparently conflicting accounts. Scripture states both that the vote was unanimous (Mk 14.64), and that Joseph disagreed with the council's ruling on Jesus (Lk 23.50-51). The only way the vote could have been unanimous was if Joseph had absented himself or abstained from voting at all, either action being enough to show the Jews that he was at least sympathetic with a dangerous heretic and blasphemer. One might object that Joseph could have voted for Jesus' death and then later repented and asked Pilate for the body. But as Haim Cohn has pointed out, such could hardly have been the case. If Joseph had been one of the Jews who had requested Jesus' execution, he certainly could not have expected to receive a favorable decision when he later asked for the body (Trial and Death of Jesus 230-39). Thus Joseph could have had no part in the death of Christ.⁹

⁹The Trial of Jesus has been the subject of numerous studies. Most of the modern ones concern themselves with the apparent fact that the trials (Jewish and Roman) could not have occurred as

The next point to make on Joseph's role as a member of the Jewish council results from a curiosity in the Vulgate translation of Mk 15.43. There, he is referred to as a nobilis decurio, which is rendered as "noble decurioun" in the version above. According to Lagorio, this ambiguous translation probably helps to account for the tradition of Joseph as a "person of consequence in Pilate's court" ("Vita" 56-57). Since this term implies Roman preferment, it could also easily imply to the uncritical mind the reason Joseph could dare to go before an angry Pilate, make an unusual request, and receive a favorable decision. It is no great step to move from nobilis decurio to a knight of Pilate, the role which he plays in many of the medieval romances.

Petitioner for the Body of Christ

It is difficult to stress sufficiently the importance of this role. In asking for the body of Christ, Joseph is doing far more than simply asking Pilate's permission to bury Him. Part of the punishment of crucifixion was that the body remain exposed to

represented in the Scriptural accounts. One should note, however, that such skeptical assessments would have been nearly impossible among medieval writers. They would simply have assumed that the trials did take place because the Scriptures said they did. Their primary concern would have been to account for the apparent conflicts in the received accounts. And, as will be seen later in this study, this tendency may explain many of the apocryphal writings about Joseph of Arimathea.

On the trial of Jesus consult, in addition to Cohn, S. G. F. Brandon, The Trial of Jesus; Mm. Lémann, Jesus before the Sanhedrin; and Paul Winter, On the Trial of Jesus.

be subjected to the elements and the depredations of birds and other scavengers. To a Jew this exposure was by far the worst part of the punishment, for Deut. 21.22-23 clearly states that man whose body is hung on a tree is cursed by God and must be buried on the same day as his death or the curse will pollute the very land itself.¹⁰

At first glance, this Jewish law might seem to render Joseph's petitioning the body of Jesus almost an act of self-preservation, lest his land and people be polluted by its continued exposure. Indeed, shouldn't any Jew have felt it his duty to have done the same? That the Jews had always been diligent in such matters is attested to by Josephus in the Jewish Wars (Works 755), and Cohn demonstrates that during the time of Pilate, Jews were occasionally allowed to remove the bodies of their crucified dead in accordance with custom even though this was a technical violation of Roman law (Trial and Death of Jesus 238-39). Wherein then lies any special credit for Joseph's actions?

The answer to this question is so simple that one could easily fail to see it: No one else came forward. Where were the apostles and the many followers of Jesus? It is true that

¹⁰Some readers may be surprised at this because, technically speaking, Jesus came under the "curse of God." That this is far from contrary to doctrine is seen in Gal 3.13-14. Furthermore, an example of one cursed by God passing the curse on to the land itself can be seen in the case of Judas (Mt 27.5-10 and Acts 1.18-19); the site of his death and implied exposure is ever afterwards known as the "Field of Blood."

Nicodemus did help with the burial, but this was only after Joseph's request had been granted.¹¹ It is without exaggeration that our text above states "booldli he entride to Pilat, and axide the bodi of Jhesu." Such an action was indeed bold; it took courage for a Jew to face Pilate, who had been pressured by other Jews into condemning Jesus, a man he had wanted to acquit. Pilate, recorded by Josephus to be a harsh and nearly sadistic governor,¹² would be a dangerous person to face on the best of days; and he would certainly be in no mood to grant favors to Jews under the recorded circumstances. That he could have had time to have simply "gotten over" his bad temper is refuted by the Scriptural account that, upon hearing Joseph's petition, he was amazed that Jesus could have died so quickly (Mk 15.44-45). Even if such requests for waiver of the exposure part of the punishment were routine, it is clear that in the case of Jesus, conditions were far from routine. That Joseph of Arimathea could dare to intercede for Jesus in such an hour shows great heroism on his part, and the fact that Pilate would actually grant his request could be taken to imply that Joseph must have been in Pilate's favor.

¹¹That the tendency for commentators to view Joseph as an actual hero continues can be verified if one consults even so basic a work as Halley's Bible Handbook: "Joseph and Nicodemus, both members of the Sanhedrin, secret disciples--secret in the hour of Jesus' popularity,--now, in the hour of his humiliation, came out boldly to share with Jesus the shame of his cross. All hail, Joseph! All hail, Nicodemus!" (491)

¹²Josephus, Antiquities 534-35.

From a religious standpoint, Joseph's action is crucial to the resurrection. To meet the requirement of the unblemished sacrifice, Jesus must remain whole, the only marks permissible being those which brought about His death. This is why it is necessary that He die before the soldiers come to hasten His death by breaking His legs and that He be taken from the cross before the advent of the Sabbath when He, and those who might touch Him, would become unclean through His exposure on a sacred festival.¹³ What Joseph does is to insure the quality of the sacrifice which can redeem all mankind.

One other point must be considered. Usually it was a member of the family of the deceased who would request a body for burial (Cohn 238), and thus custom is probably responsible in part for the later tradition that Joseph was related by blood to the Holy Family. Although there is no evidence to support such a view, there is nothing in the accounts to the contrary, and his actions are certainly in accord with it. Thus, a connection with the Holy Family is implied, and the later figure of Joseph of Arimathea is very much the product of such implications.

Guardian and Burier of the Body of Christ

For my purposes, this last role is the most significant in the development of the Joseph of Arthurian tradition. First of

¹³A useful and concise study of sacrifice and sacrificial requirements is Robert S. Daly's Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice. Among passages relevant to the discussion above are pp. 25-34 and pp. 54-58.

all, this role provides him with the opportunity to collect the holiest of all relics, those directly associated with the body and crucifixion of Christ. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that Joseph, at one time or another, has been associated with virtually all of them. Various traditions place in his keeping the nails that pierced Christ's hands and feet; the lance that pierced His side; the blood of Christ, the cleanser of the sins of all mankind; the sweat, the sign of Christ's agony on behalf of humanity; the shroud that wrapped His body; and finally, the Holy Grail. The only relic of great importance that is not associated with him is the Cross.¹⁴ But opportunity, no matter how significant, is not enough upon which to build a case. There must have also been motivation. Given the opportunity, why would Joseph have collected such relics, especially before Christ's promise of the resurrection had been kept? The answers to this question are not far to seek. At the bottom is human nature. It would be only natural for Joseph to collect mementoes of his beloved Master. Add to this the tradition that Joseph was the first to stand up for Christ after His death, and the implication from this that he believed while the other disciples doubted and cowered in fear for their lives, and such a collecting of relics takes on the significance of sacred duty.¹⁵

¹⁴The reason for this omission is apparent. Early tradition had already associated St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, with the discovery of the cross. For a brief account, see Golden Legend (1:268-76).

¹⁵The sheer strength of Joseph's implied faith can be suggested by the "Doubting Thomas" episode in the Gospel of John

Assuming that Joseph truly believed the promised resurrection would occur, his selection of relics is a matter of course: the nails because they bound Jesus to the instrument of His physical death (and because Joseph would have simply had to have removed them in order to have released Christ from the cross), the sweat because it symbolized the intensity of Christ's suffering (and because he and Nicodemus must have wiped it away in preparing the body for burial), and the blood because it was the most important of all.

The importance of the Holy Blood as a relic may seem obvious, but a discussion is necessary to elucidate its full significance. Clearly the role of the blood at the Last Supper would have made it precious to Joseph even though he had not been present. The blood was a part of the "remembrance" that Christ had gently commanded His followers to observe for Him (Lk 22.17-21), and upon His death it had become the blood of sacrifice which had washed away the sins of the world. Early New Testament interpreters must have felt that one as faithful as Joseph and one who had such an opportunity would certainly not have failed to preserve it. Such an act would seem obvious, and it would seem even more so as the

(20.26-29. For convenience I am using the New International Version (NIV) translation). After Jesus convinces Thomas by permitting him to see and touch the five wounds, he says: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20.29). And even more blessed Joseph, because he apparently believed even before Christ had risen. Those familiar with the Gospel of Nicodemus may point out that Joseph there does express doubt when Jesus appears to him; and that problem will be solved when I discuss that work.

Church became more and more relic-conscious. Joseph must have collected some of the blood simply because it was inconceivable that he would not have done so, given such an opportunity.¹⁶

However great the sacramental significance of the blood, that significance is only incidental to a much greater one. As is clear in the Old Testament (Lv 7.22-27 and elsewhere), all blood is sacred and is reserved for God Himself. In the blood was Life, and in the blood of Christ was the blood of God Himself. To a believer like Joseph of Arimathea, this blood would have even greater significance because it would also represent the putting aside of the old law. Under the old law, the consumption of blood was absolutely forbidden, but at the Last Supper, Jesus had instructed His followers to partake of His blood, to partake of His very life which He was about to give up on their behalf, and in doing so to partake of the new life which was to be eternal. His introduction of this sacrament had the effect of putting aside the old law and setting in its place a new one which would take effect upon His promised resurrection.

It was also part of the ritual of sacrifice that the blood be removed from the sacrifice before offering.¹⁷ Since Joseph in

¹⁶That such assumptions were being made is attested by the tradition that Nicodemus, who also had the opportunity to do so, collected some of the blood which was eventually conveyed to Europe (Lagorio, "Vita" 61-62 and Waite Holy Grail 334-6).

¹⁷This blood was usually reserved and symbolically returned to God, the source of all life. For a full discussion, see Daly 25-39.

preparing the body of Christ for the tomb was in effect preparing the ultimate sacrifice for the altar, it is unthinkable that he would not collect the blood. Thus, Joseph did collect the blood because it was contrary to law, tradition, and good sense to have done otherwise.

Another implication of Joseph's role as guardian and burier of the body of Christ is that by doing so, he was acting as a member of the Holy Family. He did what a family member, usually the father, had the responsibility to do; and since the husband of Mary disappears early in the Gospels, it is easy to see how Joseph of Arimathea might well be considered as a sort of replacement. In fact, Valerie Lagorio has demonstrated that in several cases early Church writers actually confused the two Josephs ("Vita" 65). Furthermore, since a father usually dies before his son, Joseph's placing Jesus in his own tomb is exactly the sort of thing a father would have done. Such an action could easily lead one to believe that Joseph had some real connection with the Holy Family. Deny him such an association, and his selfless deed becomes even more commendable.

Needless to say, Joseph's action would have brought him in close contact with the Holy Virgin and possibly even made him her protector, and certainly her comforter, a role which is developed extensively in later tradition and the Middle English Passion Plays.¹⁸ That none of these implications was missed in

¹⁸See especially the Digby Burial of Christ, passim.

later tradition will be seen as my discussion develops. Furthermore, the whole is wrapped in a symbolic parallelism. Just as Mary provided a pure vessel for Christ's coming into the world, Joseph through his tomb "in which not ₃it any man hadde be leid" provided one for His going out.

From the above it should be clear that Joseph's role in the Scriptures is far more complex than one might at first imagine. All the seeds of his later development are present there. But this tradition offers no connection with Arthur. However, even that is prepared for in Joseph's duty to carry the good news even to foreign shores. The Grail itself is no problem because Joseph must have had some container for the holy blood and what could be more suitable than the vessel used by Christ when he instituted the sacrament at the Last Supper? And what of the spear of Longinus? Is it not reasonable to assume that Joseph, one of the very first collectors of holy relics, would seek out such an item?

In addition, to the medieval mind which so avidly sought out "harmonies" in the great drama of salvation, Joseph of Arimathea must have seemed very much the stage manager of the most crucial event. Clearly a divinely appointed agent of God, he literally sets up the resurrection. He insures the perfection of the sacrifice and provides a proper setting. He is also the first to affirm Christ after His death. Thus, it should not be surprising that the later "gospellers" of the apocryphal writings allotted him a special position. Indeed, it must have seemed that God owed

him a favor. That this was exactly how Robert de Boron viewed the matter will be seen in a later chapter.¹⁹

And yet, much as may be made from the Scriptural accounts themselves, problems remain. The biggest of these is that in the New Testament Joseph simply drops out of sight after the passages cited. Why is he not listed as one of those to whom the resurrected Christ appeared during His forty days on earth? Had not Joseph done more for Christ than any other disciple? Why is there no record of his later ministry? Why is there no account of the martyrdom of such a worthy?

These are some of the gaps, but they lose their seriousness when one realizes that the Scriptures contain many such gaps. Later tradition evolved to account for and fill these blanks. A single example will show how well it did so.

One of the supreme examples of religious art is Michelangelo's Pieta, which depicts the grieving Virgin cradling the dead Christ in her lap as if He were a babe again; and the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are full of Mary's laments and complaints before the cross. George R. Keiser lists scores of examples of the Planctus Mariae in English alone. Such images and laments are simply taken for granted, and yet nothing like these is mentioned in the Bible. Mary simply disappears after she is consigned to the care of John in Jn 19.27-27. If the fact that there is no reference to Jesus'

¹⁹See also Adolf "Robert de Boron's Joseph," 266.

appearing to her after the resurrection has been so successfully obscured, then the similar omission of Joseph is but a small matter. The answer lies in the status of the two figures. Mary's is so great that one simply accepts that she must have paid her last respects to her beloved son and that He must have appeared to her, if to anyone. While Mary has always been regarded as a central personage in Christianity, Joseph is now looked upon as a minor figure by all but those who take part in the annual Glastonbury processions and those who delve deeply into Arthurian literature. But in the Middle Ages, Joseph was a figure of considerable importance (whether the Church actually granted him real status or not), and a rather large body of material was generated to account for parts of his history missing in the Scriptures.

This body of material is found in the New Testament Apocrypha, a varied and truly odd mingling of scripture, philosophy and fancy.²⁰ A number of these works are attempts of varying degrees of subtlety to promote a particular heresy by supplanting or diluting the canonical gospels. Others, particularly the spurious Acts of the apostles, merely seem intent upon telling a good story about a well-known figure.²¹ Still other works are records of visions and

²⁰For a full description of apocryphal literature of the New Testament, see James xi-xxvii and Hennecke-Schneemelcher 1: 80-84.

²¹Examples are the Acts of John, Peter, Andrew, Thomas, Philip, Paul and Thecla, etc. The sheer romantic character of these works is well illustrated in the old English Andreas.

prophecies which often seem to owe as much to delirium as to inspiration. Among the works, there is a group of writings which seem primarily to be intended to fill in some of the gaps in the New Testament. These apocryphal works vary greatly in age and quality and seem designed to answer such questions as:

What kind of childhood did Jesus have?²²

What were the names of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus?²³

What happened to Jesus between his death and resurrection?²⁴

What happened to the Virgin Mary after Jn 19.27?²⁵

It is this last group of New Testament apocrypha which concerns me in this study, for some of the writings, either intentionally or incidentally, furthered the career of Joseph of Arimathea in literature.

²²This question is fancifully answered in the so-called "Infancy Gospels," the most notable being the Book of James (Protevangelium) and the Gospel of Thomas.

²³The Gospel of Nicodemus identifies them as Dysmas and Gestas, Dysmas being the one who believed in Christ and received the promise of salvation (James 104). The fullest account of them can be found in the Story of Joseph of Arimathea (James 163-165).

²⁴Providing an answer to this question was the purpose of the second part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Descent into Hell. The best full-length treatment in English of this part of the Gospel is still J. A. MacCulloch's The Harrowing of Hell.

²⁵See the various "Assumptions of Mary," many of which made their way into Middle English.

The earliest of these and, according to M. R. James, the "earliest uncanonical account of the Passion that exists" (90), is the Gospel of Peter (ca. A. D. 150). Since only fragments of this gospel exist, it is difficult to arrive at many firm conclusions about its specific nature and purpose; but, fortunately for my purposes, the portion concerning Joseph of Arimathea appears to be complete. The primary purposes of this portion of the gospel seem to be to clear away two problems which critics ancient and modern have had with the Scriptural accounts of Joseph: (1) the seeming speed with which Joseph's request was granted (especially since he should have sought permission through Jewish authorities as well), and (2) Pilate's willingness to grant such a request, considering how much the whole affair had annoyed him. The pertinent passage is as follows:

II. (3) Now there stood there Joseph the friend of Pilate and of the Lord, and he, knowing that they were about to crucify him, came unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus for (4) burial. And Pilate sending unto Herod, begged his body. (5) and Herod said: Brother Pilate, even if none had begged for him, we should have buried him, since also the sabbath dawneth; for it is written in the law that the sun should not set upon one that hath been slain (murdered) (James, 90-91).²⁶

This is not all of the Joseph account in the Gospel of Peter; but the rest is basically the same as that recorded in the Scriptures, so it need not be quoted here.

²⁶The influence of this work is impossible to trace. Although the existing fragments were discovered around the turn of the last century, the early fathers were well acquainted with the work and mentioned it several times.

Thus, the ill temper of Pilate, magnified earlier in this fragment, is diminished on two counts. First, Joseph of Arimathea is identified as a friend of Pilate, so he would be inclined to grant Joseph's request. Second, coming at this point, the request is probably a welcome one, for Pilate having been scandalized by being asked to condone the execution of an innocent man might be happy to mitigate the unjust punishment by being able to save Jesus the indignity of being exposed after death. The early timing of the request also shows Joseph as a man of greater foresight and boldness than in the Scriptures. Thus, he had time to arrange for the burial, a matter which takes place with unlikely speed in the Gospel accounts. In addition, there is time for the request to go through proper channels--to Herod, whose approval and legal explanation account for why there is no mention in the Scriptures of Joseph's being harassed or even criticized by other Jews.

Although this passage may not have been written expressly for the purpose of clearing up the above mentioned problems, it is at least an indication that as early as A. D. 150, Christian writers were concerned with Joseph of Arimathea and the credibility of the account of him in the Scriptures.

Although Joseph appears in a number of other apocryphal writings, he owes most of his popularity to a single work, the Gospel of Nicodemus. This work as we know it now, and more importantly as it was known in the Middle Ages, is actually a fusion of two independent apocryphal writings, the Acts of Pilate (more

properly the Commentaries of Nicodemus) and the Descent into Hell.²⁷

Although the traditions that these two works set down are mentioned by the Fathers as early as the second or third century A. D., the earliest rescension which has survived could have been in circulation no earlier than ca. 555 A. D. (O'Ceallaigh). The textual history of the composite Gospel of Nicodemus is a nightmare of complexity, and to this day there is no text which can truly claim to be the standard one (James, 94-95). Versions exist in Greek, Latin, and Syriac, but, by observing a peculiar sequence of events in the narrative, I have been able to establish that a single version, what Tischendorf calls Latin A, was the single parent of virtually all of the medieval European versions of this highly popular and influential work.²⁸ Because these later versions were those which were linked to the Arthurian tradition, I have used Latin A as my base text.

²⁷For opinions on how this came about, see James 94-95, 117-18; Hennecke-Schneemelcher 1: 444-49; MacCulloch 152-173; and O'Ceallaigh 22-25.

²⁸There is considerable variation in the order of events in the established versions of the Gospel of Nicodemus. For a parallel listing of the events in the main versions of the Descent, one may consult James 118. The Acts of Pilate is subject to less variation in order and most of the differences are matters of compression or expansion. However in Latin A, there is one very striking variation which is unique to it: Here Longinus pierces Christ's side before death and not after as in the other versions and the Scriptures. This premature piercing of Christ is the rule for the medieval versions. (Of course, there are some exceptions. The third of the three rhyming versions edited by Gaston Paris makes the piercing follow the Scripture, but this is possibly a bit of pedantry on the part of the anonymous author. The most telling

Before dealing with the development of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea in the Gospel of Nicodemus, I must add that I believe that much of his later popularity owes much to the fortunate and possibly haphazard appending of the Descent into Hell (where he has no real significance) to the Acts of Pilate where he functions as one of the earliest of Christian heroes.

One of the great Christian theological questions of all time is: If salvation depends on faith in and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and atonement for the sins of all mankind, then what is the eternal fate of the righteous ancients like Moses, David, and Abraham who died before His advent? The Scriptures themselves supply only the merest hints--God's promises to the faithful in the Old Testament and St. Peter's comments that Christ "went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet 3.19) and "preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit" (NIV, 1 Pet 4.6). These references added to the perfectly natural question of Christ's activities between His death and resurrection resulted in considerable speculation, and finally to the

version of all is probably the late Middle English version edited from British Museum MS Harley 149 by Bengt Lindström. There, the author begins the piercing scene as it appears in Latin A, but stops, marks through what he has written, and places it later in his text in accordance with the Bible.) This point is noted by H. C. Kim who has recently edited the earliest (and best) existing manuscript of Latin A, the 9th-10th century Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek, MS 326 (4). Phrasing and clause placement among the medieval versions also strongly suggest Latin A as their source.

clause in the Apostle's Creed: "He descended into Hell." To the early Christian and medieval mind, as to our own, saving those who were technically beyond salvation must have seemed only fair. Thus, any non-heretical work dealing with a "harrowing of Hell" was certain to be very popular, and any work attached to such an account would be the object of considerable attention. I believe that this is what happened to the Acts of Pilate. For whatever reason, the two works were linked, and since Joseph of Arimathea is clearly the hero of the Acts, his status could only be greatly increased by his connection with the Descent.

Since Latin A, of all versions, best links the two traditions, and was the version followed by medieval writers and romancers, Joseph's status could only be increased by associated with a satisfactory answer to such an important theological question. Such a linking would also (for the sake of smoothness) necessarily give Joseph a vital role in the revelation of the salvation of the righteous dead and serve further to increase his general importance.

Thus, when one examines Latin A, he finds that in addition to the information given in the Gospel accounts, Joseph's roles have been either magnified or added in the following manner:

1. He is the champion of Christ.
2. He must suffer the fate of Jesus because he interfered.
3. He is the first witness of the resurrected Christ.
4. He is the protector of the other disciples.
5. He adds an additional testimony to Jesus' miraculous resurrection.

6. He draws attention to Christ's harrowing of Hell.

Champion of Christ

One of the most striking (and perhaps unsatisfactory) things about the Scriptural accounts of the Trial and Passion of Jesus is that there is no reference to anyone's speaking on his behalf or trying to help him in any way. Peter does attempt to prevent his arrest, but later he is able only to deny him. Just as readers do now, early ones must have felt that surely some of Jesus' many followers must have come forward to speak out on his behalf. As matters stand, only Pilate, an unbeliever, was willing to assist Jesus in the least.²⁹ Surely one of his disciples must have come forward--and who more likely than Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? After all, they were wealthy and influential.

Such speculation was (and is) only natural, and it is just such reasoning and questioning that result in the composition of works like the Gospel of Nicodemus. The apocryphal writer probably felt that he was recording what surely must have happened during the Trial of Christ and afterward. Thus, the Gospel of Nicodemus produces the specific charges brought against Christ and gives a detailed listing of witnesses who must have come forward and attempted to defend him. Adding missing information, however, was

²⁹This seemingly small point is probably responsible for a positive tradition about Pilate which has come down to us. Indeed, as James notes (156), Eastern Christians looked upon him as both saint and martyr.

not enough--such a book must have a hero. Clearly Joseph did more for Jesus than anyone else mentioned in the Gospels, showed more boldness before Pilate and the Jews. Therefore, he would be given first place in the narrative, and Nicodemus (who was Joseph's assistant in the Scriptures) would be given the second, that of witness and recorder. True, much of the first part of the Gospel of Nicodemus is not about Joseph, but once he does enter the picture, the Gospel becomes his book (O'Ceallaigh 24). Technically, Nicodemus makes the first significant defense of Christ, but he speaks more for the sake of law than on behalf of Jesus (James 101). But he cleverly evades the issue of whether or not he is a disciple of Christ: "The Jews say unto Nicodemus: Thou didst become his disciple and thou speakest on his behalf. Nicodemus saith unto them: Is the governor also become his disciple, that he speakest on his behalf?" (James 101). Nicodemus in his defense limits himself to appeals to law and reason, and then hides behind Pilate.

Joseph of Arimathea, however, acts first, requesting and burying the body of Christ, and then confronts the angry Jews. He does not quibble or hide behind authority. He does not defend his actions; he takes the offensive and does not concern himself with the probable consequences:

Likewise Joseph also came forth and said unto them: Why is it that ye are vexed against me, for that I begged the body of Jesus? Behold I have laid it in my new tomb, having wrapped it in clean linen, and I rolled a stone over the door of the cave. And ye have not dealt well with the just one, for ye repented not when ye had crucified him, but ye also pierced him with a spear (James 105).

When the Jews seize and threaten him, Joseph only becomes bolder:

Joseph saith unto them: This is the word of Goliath the boastful which reproached the living God and the holy David. For God saith by the prophet: Vengeance is mine, and I will recompense, saith the Lord. And now, lo, one that was uncircumcised, but circumcised in heart, took water and washed his hands before the sun, saying: I am innocent of the blood this just person: see ye to it. And ye answered Pilate and said: His blood be upon us and upon our children. And now I fear lest the wrath of the Lord come upon you and upon your children, as ye have said (James 105-6).

These are the words of no cringer, but of a bold champion. The version cited here is relatively conservative. Others strengthen Joseph's language and greatly expand the section in which Joseph begs for the body of Christ.³⁰

Sufferer of a Fate Similar to That of Jesus

This role can be stated briefly. Just as part of Jesus' punishment was to be lack of a proper burial, so Joseph is threatened with a similar fate: [The Jews said]: "Know thou that the time alloweth us not to do anything against thee, because the sabbath dawneth: but know that thou shalt not obtain burial, but we will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the heaven" (James 105). Joseph is then locked away: "[They] shut him up in a house wherein was no window, and guards were set at the door: and they sealed the door of the place where Joseph was shut up" (James 106). Thus, Joseph

³⁰For example, Greek B greatly expands Joseph's request into a dramatic scene (Hennecke-Schneemelcher 1: 448).

is the first of the disciples to suffer for his faith in Christ and he is sealed up for the same period of time that Jesus was in the grave. The parallels, even if not intentional, are certainly present and would have been noticed by later readers.

First Witness of the Resurrected Christ

This important addition to the role of Joseph of Arimathea may be no more than a fortunate accident required by the course of the narrative. If O'Cellaigh is right and the purpose of the Gospel of Nicodemus was to supply additional testimony of the resurrection of Christ, then Joseph would have to witness the glorified form of Jesus and be released early enough to supply his testimony. Thus, there was no other course than for the writer to have Jesus appear to Joseph before appearing to anyone else.³¹ Joseph's account is both dramatic and miraculous:

6 And Joseph said: On the preparation day about the tenth hour ye did shut me up, and I continued there the whole sabbath. And at midnight as I stood and prayed the house wherein ye shut me up was taken up by the four corners, and I saw as it were a flashing of light in mine eyes, and being filled with fear I fell to the earth. And one took me by the hand and removed me from the place whereon I had fallen; and moisture of water was shed on me from my head unto my feet, and an odour of ointment came about my nostrils. And he wiped my face and kissed me and said unto me: Fear not, Joseph: open thine eyes and see who it is that speaketh with thee. And I looked up and saw Jesus and I trembled, and supposed that it was a spirit: and I said the commandments: and he said them with me. And ye are not ignorant that a spirit, if it meet any

³¹There is a tradition in the Catholic Church that Jesus appeared first to the Virgin, but this is hardly surprising, considering her great status in the Roman Church.

man and hear the commandments, straightway fleeth. And when I perceived that he said them with me, I said unto him: Rabbi Elias? And he said unto me: I am not Elias. And I said unto him: Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me: I am Jesus, whose body thou didst beg of Pilate, and didst clothe me in clean linen and cover my face with a napkin, and lay me in thy new cave and roll a great stone upon the door of the cave. And I said to him that spake with me: Show me the place where I laid thee. And he brought me and showed me the place where I laid him, and the linen cloth lay therein, and the napkin that was upon his face. And I knew that it was Jesus. And he took me by the hand and set me in the midst of mine house, the doors being shut, and laid me upon my bed and said unto me: Peace be unto thee. And he kissed me and said unto me: Until forty days be ended go not out of thine house: for behold I go unto my brethren into Galilee (James 110-11).

If Joseph had stated briefly that Jesus had simply appeared to him and released him, it would be impressive enough and certainly sufficient to establish his role as the first to whom Christ appeared; but the account above contains far more than a bare statement of Jesus' visit. Rather, the passage is carefully worked out to magnify the figure of Joseph as much as is reasonably possible. For example, the account itself has the imagery and ring of a prophetic vision, so much so that Joseph's account is often mistakenly referred to as a "vision," even though it must be clear that the whole point of releasing Joseph from prison and miraculously transporting him with impossible swiftness to his home in Arimathea was to prove beyond question that the appearance of Christ to Joseph was an actual, physical event, and not a vision. Still, it is difficult to read Joseph's account and not be reminded of Daniel 7-9. Joseph falls to the ground; is unable to comprehend

what he sees; and is aided by a mysterious "one" who reveals the truth to him, praises him for his faithfulness, and takes leave of him after making reference to a specific period of time which is to pass before Joseph can do anything further. Daniel merely has a series of dreams or visions which eventually promise the dominion of Christ, and these visions are interpreted by an at first unnamed "one" who is later identified as Gabriel. Joseph, however, has a miraculous experience, witnesses the fulfillment of the most important phase of the advent of Christ only promised to Daniel, and receives the proof and testimony of Christ himself.

Interesting as this may be, there is far more to this role than a likely parallel to Daniel. A loose strand of prophecy is being picked up here to strengthen Jesus' claim that he was the fulfillment of all law and prophecy. The passage: "And one took me by the hand and removed me from the place whereon I had fallen; and the moisture of water was shed on me from my head unto my feet, and an odour of ointment came about my nostrils" quite probably refers to the prophecy in Ezekiel 36.24-25: "I will . . . bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. . . ." ³² This notion is borne out by the

³²I have taken the passage from Ezekiel out of context. In Ezekiel 36, God is talking to the whole nation of Israel and promising to draw the scattered peoples back together again and wash away all their sins if only they will turn from their evil ways. Although transferring a prophecy intended for a nation to a single individual is inappropriate, the practice was and is quite common; and I feel that the writer of the "gospel" has fallen into this error. However, one must also consider the possibility that the

fact that the allusion to Ezekiel in the text quote above (which closely matches Latin A) has in the later Middle Ages been transformed into an actual baptism of Joseph by Jesus.³³ However that may be, the suggestion of such an event and the allusion to (if not a partial fulfillment of) the Ezekiel prophecy are certainly present. But even the suggestion of baptism by the newly resurrected Christ singles out Joseph for special distinction.

Even so, the account of Joseph contains still more allusions and parallels to the Scriptures. Joseph's failure to recognize Jesus and inability to believe probably reflect the Scriptural account of Thomas. Joseph, however, fares better than his counterpart. Thomas had every reason to believe that Christ had risen. He had heard the repeated promises of Jesus himself during his lifetime and the testimony of all the other disciples. Joseph had every reason to doubt. Because of his former secret status, he had less opportunity to be with Christ and to hear his promises. He had no testimony from the others to convince him. Yet, he wanted to believe and the first bit of confirmation convinced him completely.

author may have regarded Joseph as a type or reflection of the converted Jewish nation through whom the prophecy might be partially fulfilled.

³³The version in British Museum MS Harley 149 has the following:

Than Jhesu toke me by the honde / and lyfte me vp from the
erthe, and wyth a sweete dewe / be bedewed my vysage, and
forth-wyth-al he wyped yt. Than / he kyssed me and seyde to
me thys wyse: Brothyr Joseph, / thou art made clene by the
watyr of thy feythe, and thy / synnes be for-yeuen the
(Lindström's ed. 92).

Similarly, one can build an argument to the effect that Jesus is here selecting Joseph as the replacement for Judas. The kiss is especially suggestive. Can this mean that Jesus is replacing the false kiss by which Judas betrayed him and cancelled his own discipleship with a true one to Joseph, who stood by him when no others would? A final parallel seems to be the simple repayment of a favor. Joseph states that Jesus put him to bed. Surely this can only be a parallel to Joseph's laying Jesus in the tomb, putting him to bed, as it were. Thus, just as Joseph carries Christ from the cross and lays him in his tomb that he might return to life, so Jesus in the Gospel of Nicodemus carries Joseph to his home in Arimathea and puts him to bed to save his life. Furthermore, Jesus' warning him not to come out for forty days not only helps to preserve his life, but conveniently puts him out of the way for precisely the same period of time, covered by the Gospels--without mention of Joseph--that Jesus walks again on the earth and appeared to his followers.³⁴ By implication, Joseph is very special to Jesus, for frequently in the Scriptures, Jesus promises his disciples only persecution and death in this life, while he makes no such ominous statements to Joseph and works only to preserve his life. Can this be why there is no solid tradition of Joseph's martyrdom--

³⁴Refer again to the last lines of the account of Joseph. Hennecke-Schneemelcher claims that the original number of days was four (445-47), but later versions settled on forty quite possibly for the reason that I have stated. One should also note that the term of Joseph's second imprisonment in later traditions is forty years.

why some traditions have him still alive even until the time of King Arthur?³⁵

Protector of the Other Disciples

This minor addition to the role of Joseph of Arimathea needs only to be stated. When the hostile Jews hear of Joseph's miraculous deliverance from prison, "they durst not any more lay hands upon them that had spoken in the behalf of Jesus before Pilate" (James 106), which by extension would include the disciples.

Provider of Additional Testimony to Jesus' Resurrection

This role coincides with that of Joseph's being the first witness of the resurrected Christ, but a few points remain to be considered. Since O'Cellaigh, the best and most objective recent scholar of the Commentaries of Nicodemus (the original of the first half of the Gospel of Nicodemus), has established that the primary purpose of the work was to provide the testimony of three "objective" witnesses, the previously non-Christian Rabbis Addas, Phinees,

³⁵ A similar example is St. John. Near the closing of his Gospel, Jesus says (of John) to Peter: "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (Jn 21.22). And even though the gospel-writer immediately makes it clear that this did not mean that John would remain alive until the Second Coming, nevertheless, probably because there is no fully accepted account of his death, the tradition of John's "tarrying in the flesh" until Jesus' return has persisted to this very day and is actually part of the scriptures of the Mormon Church (Joseph Smith, Doctrine and Covenants Section 7:1-8).

and Aggaeus to the resurrection of Christ (44-45),³⁶ then it is reasonable to postulate that the later Gospel of Nicodemus will reflect this purpose of providing testimony. A simple glance at the text of Latin A--or any of the versions--quickly reveals that the Gospel of Nicodemus is little else than testimony. The first part, the Acts of Pilate, provides the general account of the "author" Nicodemus, the testimony of the witnesses at the trial of Jesus, Joseph's story of the visit of Christ, and the witness of the three rabbis--all testimonies. Similarly, the second part, the Descent into Hell, provides the accounts of Karinus and Leucius of Christ's harrowing of Hell, including the statements of the righteous dead, and ends with the letters of Pilate to various Jewish and Roman rulers (in some versions), again all testimonies. Thus, the Gospel of Nicodemus is a series of testimonies; and

³⁶O'Cellaigh gives a full discussion of this central element: "Anyone who will seriously consider the matter will consent readily that these three witnesses favorable to the chief tenets of the Christian faith form the very raison d'etre for the writing of the whole work of 'Nicodemus.' The rest of the material [in the Commentaries or Acta section], in c. 1 through c. xiii, is either unimportant or a mere expansion upon the story of the Passion as presented in the Gospels. On the contrary, this element of the three Rabbis is new, original, and absolutely essential to the purpose of the writer. He wrote for one reason: to create a document that would command belief, on a par with the Gospels, supplementing them at their weakest point, the Resurrection; and adding to them what they entirely lacked: authoritative witnesses to the Ascension. The three Rabbis were created by our author to fill a sorely felt demand. Without them, this writing were a purposeless and pallid replica of what had already been canonized" (45).

since Joseph of Arimathea is the hero of the work, his testimony would carry great weight.

Director of the Account of the Harrowing of Hell

Since Joseph is the hero of the first part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, it is only reasonable that he is the one to provide the bridge between the Acts and the Descent, and this is exactly what he does. All versions connecting the Acts to the Descent provide this bridge, but I follow Latin A because it provides the smoothest transition and is the source of the medieval versions. Joseph says:

Truly and of right do ye marvel because that Jesus hath been seen alive after death, and that he hath ascended into heaven. Nevertheless, it is more marvellous that he arose not alone from the dead, but did raise up alive many other dead out of their sepulchres, and they have been seen of many in Jerusalem. And now hearken unto me; for we all know the blessed Simeon, the high priest which received the child Jesus in his hands in the temple. And this Simeon had two sons, brothers in blood, and we were all at their falling asleep and at their burial. Go therefore and look upon their sepulchres: for they are open, because they have risen, and behold they are in the city of Arimathea dwelling together in prayer. And indeed men hear them crying out, yet they speak with no man, but are silent as dead men. But come, let us go unto them and with all honour and gentleness bring them unto us, and if we adjure them, perchance they will tell us concerning the mystery of their rising again (James 120-21).

Thus, the Joseph who sets up the resurrection in the Scriptures also sets up the harrowing of Hell in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Although the Gospel of Nicodemus represents the fullest development of the Joseph figure, other (and usually later apocryphal) writings add some significant details. For continuity, I will consider two of the minor works chronologically.

The most striking and fanciful of the two is the Story of Joseph of Arimathea (ca. twelfth century) which amounts to a "gospel" of Joseph since it recounts the trial, passion, and resurrection of Jesus.³⁷ The primary purpose of this work is to provide an answer to an important theological question--how could Jesus promise the righteous thief Demas paradise that very day when everyone else would have to wait until the Second Coming? Much of Joseph's narrative deals with the histories of the two thieves and their speeches from their crosses to Jesus. Demas' great profession of faith, in spite of a situation (being crucified) which would drive many to despair, so impresses Jesus that he grants Demas a special pardon and allows him to enter heaven while all others must wait. Needless to say, the author of this confused and often foolish work blunders into heresy by being very unclear about whether or not Jesus actually descended into Hell and, by his giving Demas such special status, virtually denies the "harrowing" itself and the salvation of the righteous dead.

In spite of the primary purpose of glorifying the righteous thief, the author of the Story of Joseph of Arimathea cannot help adding to the figure of Joseph himself. First, the choice of

³⁷The Story of Joseph of Arimathea also provides an account of Judas, depicting him as a traitor from first to last. Apparently he only pretended to be a disciple in order to betray Christ. Thus, he was not truly one of the twelve, and this certainly makes room for Joseph who is chosen by Jesus himself. This linking of the story of Judas with that of Joseph, prominent in the Greek B Gospel of Nicodemus, eventually creeps into the medieval translations of Latin A.

Joseph as narrator gives him distinction. Why not choose one of the remaining apostles who had not had gospels attributed to them? If James is correct that this document can be dated no earlier than the twelfth century,³⁸ the period in which the first Grail romances were being written, then perhaps Joseph of Arimathea was enjoying such a position of prestige and popularity that he would have seemed an obvious choice for such an addition to the gospels; but it is important to note that there is no hint here of his role as collector of the precious blood, etc. The Joseph of the Story is still that of the Gospel of Nicodemus, but his significance is increased. Not only is he the first to whom the resurrected Christ appears, but the period in which he enjoys the presence of Jesus is considerably expanded: "And as I went with Jesus and the robber to Galilee, the form of Jesus was changed and he became wholly light, and angels ministered to him and he conversed with them. I stayed with him three days, and none of the disciples were there" (James 164). Although little subsequent influence can be claimed for the Story of Joseph of Arimathea, one can argue that it demonstrates that Joseph of Arimathea commanded prestige as late as the twelfth century, quite apart from the Grail romances.

³⁸This late date possibly accounts for many of the blunders that appear in this work. As James puts it: "[N]one of the picturesque detail, however, can be called antique, . . . The ignorance of Jewish customs which it betrays is colossal" (165).

While it is possible that the work just discussed may have been an isolated freak of literature which was known to few, such is hardly the case with the Assumption of the Virgin, an important version of which features Joseph.³⁹ There are numerous versions of this apocryphal story; but the most influential one which James calls the standard Latin version, is that which is attributed to Melito, the bishop of Sardis (195).⁴⁰ A late redaction, the Narrative by Joseph of Arimathea, closely follows that of pseudo-Melito but presents one very significant variation: Joseph of Arimathea is the narrator. As Lagorio has pointed out ("Vita" 59), however, Joseph is far more than a detached narrator: he represents himself as a close friend of the Virgin, who sends for him and the other disciples when she realizes that she is soon to be called into eternity by her son. Further, the narrative ends with a passage (which Lagorio also cites) which "testifies to Joseph's close association with the Holy Family and to his apostolic career" (Lagorio "Vita" 59):

I am that Joseph who laid the body of the Lord in my tomb and saw him rise again, and always watched over his most holy temple, even the blessed Mary, ever virgin, before the ascension of the Lord and after it: and upon this page and in my heart have I written the things that

³⁹James supplies an overview of the variety of these versions (194).

⁴⁰The best version is probably the Greek Discourse of St. John the Divine Concerning the Falling Asleep of the Holy Mother of God (James 201-09); but the pseudo-Melito version's being in Latin, a far more accessible language, helped to make it the version followed by medieval translators and redactors.

came out of the mouth of God, and how the aforesaid matters came to pass, and I have made known to all the Jews and Gentiles what I saw with my eyes and heard with my ears, and as long as I live I shall not cease to proclaim them (James 218).

Lagorio argues that this association of Joseph of Arimathea develops to such a point that he may be seen not only as a replacement for Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, but as actually confused with him ("Vita" 64-65).⁴¹ Despite the close association with the Virgin implied here, there is an important point still to be noted. This intimacy with the Virgin must have been a reasonably well-established tradition for the author to have felt safe in attributing such a narrative to him. In addition, the fact that all extant manuscripts are late Italian copies is witness to Joseph's steadily increasing status and popularity throughout the middle ages.

The two apocryphal works just discussed develop the figure of Joseph considerably, but only so far as reasonable inference allows. Indeed, the second does not even presuppose knowledge of the Gospel of Nicodemus. In these two and in the Gospel of Nicodemus, the writers, however wildly and often foolishly they may expand their material, keep within the boundaries set by the

⁴¹ However, Lagorio weakens the force of this observation by accompanying it with less well-grounded points. For example, she claims that Joseph of Arimathea is linked to Joseph the carpenter by his also being "endowed with carpenter skills" because in de Boron and in the Vulgate he builds a wooden Grail ark and eventually the Grail table ("Vita" 65). This is a very weak point because Joseph built these things at the command of God. Noah was certainly no ship-builder until God commanded him to build an ark and told him how to do it. The greatest weakness of this point is that it goes nowhere. Even the medieval writers who developed and expanded everything of note failed to enlarge upon Joseph's wood-working skills.

Scriptures. Little material is drawn from outside. The cast of characters remains relatively stable--a few minor characters are introduced out of necessity, but no new major ones are invented. Imagination of the sort one finds present in romance is held in check, and wonders are limited to those which could or must have happened. True, Joseph is miraculously delivered from prison, but this was accomplished by the power of God, as were the Scriptural deliverances of Peter and Paul. Thus, Joseph's release and transportation to Arimathea are wondrous, but are reasonable within context.

The first work featuring Joseph which truly breaks the Scriptural boundaries and leans toward romance is the Avenging of the Savior (MS ca. 10-11th centuries). It retells much of the Healing of Tiberius (ca. 8th century), a healing and conversion tale which remains true to the Scriptural time-frame and cast of characters, but also adds new characters and depicts far more action. Joseph and Nicodemus appear as suppliers of testimony, and Veronica performs her traditional miracle; but the most significant additions are the heroic figures of Titus and Vespasian who strike down the murderers of Christ by the thousands and sell others as slaves at the rate of thirty per penny.⁴² The author apparently thought that Vespasian sacked Jerusalem almost immediately after the death of Christ, and that Tiberius could have ruled years after his historical

⁴²James 160.

death. James' supposition that this tradition originated in Aquitaine helps to explain how the author could have been so completely confused about Roman history (159). As ill-conceived as the work may seem, it accomplishes two important things: It tells a ripping good story albeit one decidedly anti-Semitic; and it links Joseph of Arimathea with heroic battles and the conversion of a ruler (here Tiberius), the very materials which are later developed and endlessly repeated with little variation in the first branch of the Arthurian Vulgate Cycle, the Estoire del Saint Graal. It is, in effect, a short prose romance, and only its traditional classification as a pious legend and Tischendorf's including it in his collection of New Testament Apocrypha keep it from being considered a romance today.

The most important development in the Joseph tradition is found in the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, one of the most widely known works during the Middle Ages.⁴³ In his handling of the feast of St. James the Less, he supplies a composite of the Healing of Tiberius and the Avenging of the Savior. After giving a brief account of the destruction of Jerusalem, de Voragine recounts a tale of Joseph of Arimathea:

It is also said that Titus, going through Jerusalem, saw a wall which was thicker than the others. He had an opening broken through it, and an old man of venerable aspect was found behind the wall. Upon being questioned, the old man said that he was called Joseph of Arimathea, and that

⁴³See Ryan and Ripperger's introduction to their translation of the Golden Legend.

the Jews had immured him because he had buried the body of Christ. He added that thereafter he had been fed and cared for by angels who came down from heaven (1: 268).

Never an innovator, Jacobus merely sets down long current traditions and attempts to tie them into a connected story; and where there is a logical or chronological discrepancy, he supplies some speculative patchwork, as he does in this case:

But on the other hand, the gospel of Nicodemus tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, after being immured by the Jews, was freed by Christ and brought back to his native city. Yet nothing forbids us to suppose that when he returned to Arimathea, Joseph continued to preach Christ, and was immured a second time by the Jews (1: 268).

Such is Jacobus' account, but how does it add to the figure of Joseph? First, it assumes that he became a fearless evangelist, and, second, it depicts Joseph as one who is protected by and receives special favors from God. It also supplies that leap of the imagination mentioned above. Joseph was already most likely an elderly man at the time of the Resurrection, yet here he is, none the worse for wear, at the fall of Jerusalem over forty years later! If Joseph's life and career as evangelist could be miraculously extended this much, then why not even further? And this was exactly what the authors of the Arthurian romances did.⁴⁴

The preceding pages trace the development of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea through Scriptural and apocryphal traditions. I have ended with the Golden Legend because it consolidates long-

⁴⁴Why not make him the founder of Christianity in England? Why not let him live until the time of Arthur since there is no accepted account of his death?

current and widely accepted traditions into a form that was to become the standard. As full, and perhaps tedious, as my tracing may seem, it doesn't quite tell the whole story. The remainder can perhaps be best supplied by a brief summary of the development through the Middle Ages of the work in which Joseph figures most prominently, the late Latin version of the Gospel of Nicodemus. For the sake of brevity, I shall confine my discussion to those versions produced in the countries which made the most notable contributions to the corpus of the Arthurian romance, namely England, France, and Germany.

One of the most obvious methods of studying the development of a literary work is to examine the significant additions and deletions which were made in its translations throughout the centuries. As already noted, the Gospel of Nicodemus was particularly subject to additions during its early history, and this remains true through the Middle Ages even though only a single version, late Latin A, was widely used as a text for translation.

The most extreme expansion of the Gospel of Nicodemus still recognizable as late Latin A is the "translation" of Heinrich von Hesler (ca. 1285). Strangely enough, it is also one of the least significant versions as far as development of the Joseph figure is concerned. Hesler's additions are most often homiletic interruptions, but he also adds a prologue and epilogue, and rounds out his story by including a brief preliminary Biblical history of Old Testament events, and a continuation which incorporates the

Healing of Tiberius and the Avenging of the Savior.⁴⁵ However, upon removing the additions, one is rather startled to discover that Hesler translates his actual text about as closely as his metrical form will allow. As one might expect, since Hesler's method is expansion, there are no deletions except those probably required by metrical translation. Indeed, the most significant aspect of Hesler's version is the form he chose, a point which will be discussed shortly.

A greater abundance of manuscripts of the Gospel of Nicodemus is found in France which produced a number of translations in prose and verse.⁴⁶ Despite the many manuscripts, the versions reveal a remarkable degree of agreement, even if one allows for their all coming from the same late Latin A source. Indeed, the wording is so close in many that one often suspects that the metrical versions are mere versifications of the prose texts, and that most versions come from a single translated ancestor. Additions are few and are usually confined to internal glosses and clarifications of the texts and inflation of some of the speeches, especially those of the thieves and Jesus during the crucifixion. Deletions are another matter, especially in some of the metrical versions. Of the three metrical versions edited by Gaston Paris, the one by André de Coutances is of special interest. In his

⁴⁵This is not uncommon. Many medieval MS follow the Gospel of Nicodemus with these additions.

⁴⁶For the range of these, see Ford 9-32 and Paris i-1.

version (ca. 1204), André focuses on the Resurrection and the Harrowing of Hell. Indeed, he deletes the first nine sections of the Gospel of Nicodemus, foregoing even the crucifixion. Thus, Joseph of Arimathea quickly becomes the leading figure and maintains this role until his story is supplanted by the account of the Descent into Hell. Still, once André starts his narrative, he, like the rest of the French redactors, keeps close to his source.

It is a curious fact of literary history that the French who so expanded the Joseph of Arimathea story when it became the subject of actual romance were so conservative in their versions of the Gospel of Nicodemus. Even more curious is the fact that the English writers who generally tended to condense and simplify their versions of the French romances were so free in their redactions of the Gospel of Nicodemus.

As Jackson J. Campbell's recent study has indicated, the Descent into Hell theme exerted considerable influence upon Old English poetry and prose, and one has merely to glance at Wells' Manual to see the even greater influence of the actual Gospel of Nicodemus upon writings in Middle English. In fact, one of the oldest versions of the late Latin A Gospel is in West Saxon.

English additions to the Gospel are few but significant. The late Middle English version preserved in British Museum MS Harley 149 contains three major additions. One of these, Joseph's baptism by the resurrected Jesus has already been noted (Lindström 92). Another is the account of Judas:

Than Judas Skaryoth, the falce dyssyple / of Jhesu
 Cryst, whyche betrayed hym and solde hym / to the
 Jewes, seyde yn thys wyse: Y haue synned / yn
 betrayenge of the ryghtwys bloode. And so yn /
 dyspeyre of the mercy of God hynge hym-self / wyth
 a corde (Lindström 75).

Intentional or not, this addition opens the position of one of the twelve, and the next person who appears to fill such a position adequately is Joseph of Arimathea. Interesting as this may be, a more striking addition is that of the legend of Longinus in its most advanced state of development:

Than the Jewes toke a speere / to a blynde knyght,
 named Longeus, and sette yt to the / ryght syde of
 Jhesu and comaunded hym for to putt. And / so he
 dyd. And oute of that wownde ranne bloode and /
 watyr, whych aualed downe by the speere and touched /
 hys hone, wher-wyth he rubbed hys yghen. And forth-
 wyth-al / he sawe clerely and bare wytnes of trouthe
 (Lindström 75).

Thus, the spear of Longinus, by textual proximity, is placed close to the first mention of Joseph of Arimathea. Here the emphasis is on the blood running down the shaft of the spear; in the Arthurian tradition, the spear is inverted and the blood which issues from its point is preserved in the Grail guarded by Joseph.

The most extensive addition of all occurs in the version printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1509. Too long to be reprinted in this paper, it recounts Joseph's purchase of the shroud in which to bury Jesus. It has little significance to the Arthurian tradition, but it clearly demonstrates how even trifles could gain importance by association with Joseph.

In the English versions, the deletions are even more suggestive than the additions. The earliest English text (West-Saxon) provides an example. The text opens with a close translation of the late Latin A trial of Jesus and suddenly drops it--without any manuscript pages missing--and resumes abruptly with the entrance of Joseph of Arimathea. A single instance means little, but according to W. H. Hulme, many of the English versions concentrate on the part of the Gospel which deals with Joseph of Arimathea (EETS, ES 100, xxxii-iv). Such evidence cannot be considered conclusive, but it seems that the English versions place special emphasis upon Joseph of Arimathea.

Another consideration in the development of a work throughout an extensive period of time is its form. As can be seen from the above, the Gospel of Nicodemus tended to lend itself to metrical treatments, and in every instance these were in the same octosyllabic couplet as the romances that were being produced during the same period. Hesler's version is in the same metrical form as Wolfram's Parzival and Gottfried's Tristan; André's is in the same form as Chrétien's Arthurian romances; and the metrical English versions of the Gospel in tail-rhyme stanzas. Thus, one can see that the translations of Gospel of Nicodemus frequently looked and sounded like the romances. Mixture of the two was inevitable. Indeed, the Gospel of Nicodemus was destined to become the subject of romance writings, with Joseph of Arimathea as its hero. Thus, it is only natural that André de Coutances called his vernacular

version the Roman de la Résurrection (Paris xxv). Only one more step was needed to turn the Gospel of Nicodemus popular tradition into imaginative fiction, and Robert de Boron took that step.

CHAPTER II

THE JOSEPH OF PSEUDO-HISTORY

In the preceding chapter I have described the major traditions concerning the Joseph figure and examined the process of its development into the early Middle Ages. Although this development was considerable and the traditions popular, they are only a loosely connected set of stories. They fall far short of an formal history. Joseph of Arimathea, in spite of his Biblical authority, never quite moves beyond the shadowy outlines of any other legendary figure. The reason for this is the traditions never received treatment as history and thus never condensed into a clear outline.

The importance of a connected, coherent history has been pointed out by Geoffrey Ashe in his Discovery of King Arthur. Ashe argues that it is his official history that distinguishes Arthur from other similar legendary figures:

[Geoffrey's Historia] is not the earliest setting where he appears; it follows on from centuries of growing renown, but it gives that renown a fully articulated form, with a rare completeness. Arthur's history is more than just a medley of yarns, more than just a saga of the "dream time of myth." It puts him within a definite period. It names definite places and takes him to definite countries. All the further legend weaving presupposes this history. Romancers add to it and enlarge it; they change its emphasis and the order of events; they draw in matter from other sources, sometimes to a point where they lose sight of it. But in substance they accept it. Their own stories assume it as a backdrop, and fit, more or less, into the scene structure it creates (3).

The "history" of which Ashe is speaking is of course that supplied by Geoffrey of Monmouth which had the rare distinction of supplanting more accurate historical accounts for several centuries. Searches for the historical Arthur, even when partially successful, have yielded disappointing results. Researchers like E. K. Chambers in Arthur of England and Ashe in the work cited above have located and examined all known references to Arthur prior to Geoffrey (and after, to some extent) and have suggested various historical figures that might have inspired the notion of King Arthur, but they have found no such Arthur that the later romancers would even recognize. The "real" Arthur is that of Geoffrey. Arthur's history is secure, and it is this solid core which made the extensive romance development possible.

If Arthur's history is secure, Joseph's is far from being so. Ironically, Joseph's Biblical authority makes him more firmly historical than Arthur, but he still lacks that distinctness that Geoffrey's history gives Arthur. And yet, as one reads through the romances, especially those in or corresponding to those in the Vulgate Cycle, one senses the same sort of distinction that Ashe claims for Arthur. The tradition is clear and strong, but the official history is missing as if one had been written and lost.

Reclaiming such a history is next to impossible, just as it was close to impossible for Chambers and Ashe to piece together anything resembling the history that Geoffrey gives Arthur. No

medieval saint's life, as such, has survived, if one was ever actually composed.¹ The closest thing we have is the alliterative fragment Joseph of Arimathie (ca. 1350), which Lagorio claims is closer to saint's life than romance ("Transition"), but it is much later than the majority of the Grail romances, and deals only with a single event in the saint's career, the conversion of Evelac. If one follows the methods of Chambers and Ashe and examines the chronicles and other legitimate historical documents in an attempt to reclaim the history of Joseph,² he will find no early reference linking Joseph to England or the Grail. Even if one accepts the discredited account of Bede that the Britons first received Christianity in 156 A.D. (History 42), that date is still much too late for Joseph of Arimathea, an elder contemporary of Christ.

The earliest reference to Joseph in what is now considered an actual historical document occurs in William of Malmsbury's Early History of Glastonbury:

¹The "lives" of Joseph reprinted by Skeat in his edition of the alliterative Joseph of Arimathie are products of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and are derived in main from the Chronicle of John of Glastonbury, and can not be properly considered saints' lives in the usual sense.

²Chambers gives extracts of the principal documents in his Arthur of Britain. Another important work, with wider range and more commentary, is Robert H. Fletcher's Arthurian Material in the Chronicles.

Desiring to spread the word of Christ further, [St. Philip] sent twelve of his disciples into Britain to teach the word of life. It is said that he appointed as their leader his very dear friend, Joseph of Arimathea, who had buried the Lord. They came to Britain in 63 AD . . . and confidently began to teach the faith of Christ. The barbarian king and his people, hearing this new and unfamiliar preaching, refused absolutely to agree with it and would not alter the teachings of their forefathers; yet because they had come from afar, and because the sobriety of their life demanded it of him, the king granted them a certain island on the outskirts of his territory . . . called . . . Yniswitrin. After living in that wilderness for a short time the saints were incited by a vision of the archangel Gabriel to build a church in honor of the Virgin Mary . . . They were not slow to obey this divine command and . . . they completed a chapel as they had been instructed, making the lower part of all its walls of twisted wattle, an unsightly construction no doubt but one adorned by God with many miracles. Since it was the first one in that territory the Son of God dignified it with a greater honor by dedicating it in honour of his mother (45).

At first this seems the very thing, even though the Holy Grail is not mentioned, but examination of the manuscripts has proven this passage to be a later interpolation.³ The information therein is cautiously derived from the romances. A later passage in the Early History (47) does mention Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail--though not together--but it gives itself away as a forgery by alluding the "book of the deeds of the famous King Arthur." It has been established that the purpose of this forgery was to give priority to

³The definitive study remains Armitage Robinson's Two Glastonbury Legends. R. F. Treharne in his The Glastonbury Legends: Joseph of Arimathea: King Arthur and the Holy Grail provides some modern insights, but his work is mainly a brief restatement of Robinson's. A recent work of great value is John Scott's edition and translation of William of Malmesbury's Early History of Glastonbury. His introductory materials are especially good.

Glastonbury and to make it more attractive as a target for pilgrims.⁴

The closest approach to an authentic reference to Joseph of Arimathea in the Early History is that concerning a church-like structure discovered at Glastonbury by St. Phagan and Deruvian (ca. 166):

Then they travelled through the realm of Britain . . . [until] they came to the island of Avalon where . . . they found an old church built by the hands of the disciples of Christ and prepared by God for man's salvation; later the Architect of Heaven showed by many miracles and sacred mysteries that He had consecrated it to Himself and Mary, the holy mother of God. One hundred and three years had passed between the arrival in Britain of the disciples of St. Philip and the coming of these two saints. . . . They also found in some old documents a complete account of how, when the holy apostles were scattered all over the world, St. Philip the apostle, who had come into France with a crowd of disciples, sent twelve of them into Britain to preach. . . . They constructed the chapel of which we have been speaking and which later the son of the Highest dedicated to His mother. (49)⁵

Since no names of the original twelve are mentioned, Joseph of Arimathea could be inserted without any danger of contradiction.

⁴Again one should consult Robinson, Treharne, and Scott. Stimulating studies on these "forgeries" can be found in R. S. Loomis' The Grail 249-70 and Valerie Lagorio's the "Evolving Legend of Joseph of Arimathea."

⁵With this typical caution, William of Malmsbury is unable to allow this account to simply stand, and shortly afterward, he adds this qualifying statement: "Nor is this inconsistent with the truth, . . . because if the Philip preached to the Gauls, as Freculph says in chapter four of his second book, it can be believed that he also cast the seeds of the Word across the ocean" (51). Of course, this opens the door to further speculation. Since the apostles are not named, why couldn't one of them have been Joseph of Arimathea?

Add that to the notion of the Holy Grail in Britain, and the identification must have seemed reasonable if not certain to those who wanted to believe it.⁶ Even if one assumes Joseph was one of the twelve, this passage hardly compares to the sort of history Geoffrey of Monmouth provided Arthur. A fuller account occurs in a later history of Glastonbury, John's Chronica, but it is much too late to be of any use and clearly derives from the by then well-known Vulgate Estoire.⁷

Since there was little genuine historical data available, it was up to the romancers to provide Joseph of Arimathea with a continuous biographical account paralleling and merging with that of Arthur. The main problem was to provide a systematic linking of two basically separate traditions. Almost six centuries intervened between the time of Joseph and that of Arthur. The way in which the romancers filled such a gap seems fairly clear. As I argued in the

⁶Apparently thousands still do since there are annual religious festivals at Glastonbury. In fact, a recent writer H. R. Williamson in Flowering Hawthorn fully accepts the tradition that both Joseph and Jesus came to England. The fact that Blake's lyric from Milton, "And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times," has achieved the status of a second national anthem in Britain shows just how attractive such a notion can be. Even so careful a critic as Valerie Lagorio in her "Evolving Legend of Joseph of Arimathea" feels that such a visit was not entirely impossible (230-31).

⁷This work has recently been edited and translated by James P. Carley. The passage in question is an odd combination of the William of Malmsbury passages quoted above and information lifted from the romances and gives away its romance source in the following phrase: "as is read in the book called The Holy Grail" (49).

preceding chapter, the Joseph of the romances is an extension of the Biblical figure. If a tradition of the Holy Grail's being in Britain existed, then someone must have brought it [the Grail] there. Who is more likely than Joseph, the man who buried Christ? And why did he bring the Grail to England? Clearly, to obey the Great Commission and carry the gospel to distant lands. Eventually the romancers succeeded not only in filling the gap between Joseph and Arthur, but in fully merging the two legends by establishing a genealogical link between saint and hero, setting up something akin to an apostolic succession for Joseph and his line, and making the Grail quest the greatest achievement of Arthur's court, indeed, almost the very reason for its being.

The first attempt--that of Robert de Boron--to write the history of Joseph of Arimathea is also the most significant. However clumsily, he accomplished for Joseph what Geoffrey had for Arthur. He collected the available Joseph material and imaginatively developed it into a coherent whole, just as Geoffrey had. His seemingly modest production, a planned trilogy (possibly a tetralogy) of short romances set up the basic framework which the later writers would develop at great length: the bringing of the Grail to Britain, the mingling of the legends of Joseph and Arthur, and the establishing of the Grail quest. Although one may question de Boron's contribution upon minor issues, the greater ones listed

above are beyond dispute.⁸ Only the first part of his trilogy, Joseph d'Aramathie, has survived in its original verse form, but the second segment exists in a prose rendering preserved in the Vulgate Cycle, and his Perceval is thought to lie somewhere between two prose versions which disagree in a number of important details.⁹ But no matter how much critics may denigrate the quality of Robert's work or declare his authorship of portions of it uncertain, there is one supremely important point on which nearly all agree: He was the one to link Joseph of Arimathea with the Holy Grail and make them both central to the Arthurian tradition.¹⁰ Without this this linkage Arthur and Joseph would have remained separate traditions, neither of which would have developed the immense vitality which has enabled the Arthurian story to maintain an almost undiminished popularity for nearly a thousand years.

That de Boron used Geoffrey's history of Arthur as a model is also certain as my discussion of the parallels between the Joseph/Grail and Arthur histories will demonstrate later in this

⁸The de Boron issue is a matter of considerable controversy which I will address fully in chapters to come. Despite the extent of disagreement among the critics, I feel that none would challenge what I have claimed for him here.

⁹They are those preserved in the Didot and Modena MSS. These have been edited together in one volume by William Roach whose introduction is the most thorough treatment of the de Boron problem.

¹⁰I am assuming that Chrétien de Troyes had no plans to do so even if he had completed Perceval. Again this is a matter which I will address in the next chapter.

chapter. Romancers after de Boron followed his lead and fleshed out the skeleton that he provided. It is true that these romancers were concerned with different issues and often seem to be working at cross purposes. But all contributed to the coherent history of Joseph, just as they contributed to Geoffrey's history of Arthur.

Before proceeding to an examination of parallels that exist between the Joseph history of the romancers and Geoffrey's Historia, it is useful to briefly examine just what it was that Geoffrey did.¹¹ Simply stated, he composed a coherent and unbroken historical account which provided Britain with the noblest of pedigrees--a link to the house of Priam--and a stock of heroes and kings to match that of any other nation. Although his stimulus was not original, his history was. As A. E. Parsons notes in his "The Trojan Legend in England," the same sort of history-making was going on throughout Europe, with France producing such a work as early as the sixth century (153).¹² While Geoffrey may not have been familiar with all

¹¹The best single study is still Tatlock's Legendary History of Britain. A brief and useful account of Geoffrey and his work may be found in R. S. Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 72-93. Although Evans' translation of Historia still pleases, it has been superseded by that of Lewis Thorpe with its valuable introductory material and notes. For information on early British historiography in general, one should consult Antonia Gransden and Robert W. Hanning.

¹²This work is the Latin history of France written by Hunnibaldus Francus in which Priam's son Francio founds the French nation, much in the way that Brutus establishes Britain. There were a number of later versions as well.

of the legendary histories being composed on the continent, it is virtually certain that he was well acquainted with Virgil, and possibly Livy, especially the former, since much of the early part of his book seems modeled on the Aeneid.¹³ While it is doubtful that the poet Virgil expected his Aeneid to be read as history, Geoffrey of Monmouth clearly had such an expectation for his own work. He intended to be believed and was pleased to trample over rival historians, as his concluding comments make clear:

The task of describing [the later Welsh] kings, . . . I leave to my contemporary Caradoc of Llancarfan. The kings of the Saxons I leave to William of Malmsbury and Henry of Huntingdon. I recommend to these last to say nothing at all about the kings of the Britons, seeing that they do not have in their possession the book in the British language which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, brought from Wales (284).

If Geoffrey's "sources" are ephemeral, the common annalistic form he chose for his history is not. In fact, such a form seems almost inevitable. That was simply the way histories were written in his time. Though an obvious one, this form was probably borrowed from Tacitus, the most outstanding Latin example. However, Geoffrey of Monmouth did not need to go back to the classics for a model. Much closer was Bede's History of the English Church and People, also in annalistic form. There were a number of advantages to such a form.

¹³The early wanderings and the decisive battles of Brutus resemble those of Aeneas too closely to be the result of coincidence. Also, in both works there is a strong sense of national destiny. See Tatlock 111-115, 116-119, and passim. See also Parsons 253ff.

First, it was probably the easiest; one simply needed to pad existing chronicle material to produce annals. Much of Geoffrey's accomplishment lay in his ability to add such padding and to create even many of the events upon which to elaborate. His method was, according to Robert W. Hanning, to compose "with considerable consciousness and purpose, working not with historical material but with legends and with his own fertile imagination, in filling out the great unrecorded gaps in the British past" (Vision of History 124).

Another advantage of the form was that the necessarily brief entries relieved Geoffrey of the task of supplying an abundance of troublesome detail. Relatively rapid chronological narrative was the goal, and particular events rarely require more than a couple of pages. And where additional detail is given--especially if it is the type which Geoffrey often cleverly provided: real locations; familiar or familiar sounding names; and references to appropriate, established historical events elsewhere in the world--it only increases the sense of verisimilitude.

Geoffrey's Historia, and ingenious bonding of imaginative content and solid form, succeeded, probably beyond his highest expectations. Although sharply criticized by William of Newburgh and other chroniclers, Geoffrey's Historia was not only widely accepted, but had actually achieved a sort of textbook status within fifteen years of its production (Kendrick 7). And what is more, its central character, Arthur, became the model of British kings, even though he probably never had any objective existence.

If Arthur is Britain's quintessential king, then the Joseph of Arimathea of the romances is its quintessential saint. This fact is chiefly the result of the deliberate attempts of the Grail romancers to make his history parallel and merge with that of Arthur. I have claimed the romancers' attempts were deliberate because when one compares Geoffrey's Historia with those of the Grail romancers, parallels emerge which are so numerous and striking that they cannot be ascribed to coincidence. As in the preceding chapter, for clarity I treat these topics separately under individual headings.

Sources

As stated above, genuine historical sources for both Arthur and Joseph of Arimathea are very scanty. Of the two Joseph is the more historical, with at least four citations in the scriptures; whereas Arthur remains vague until he is taken up by Geoffrey.¹⁴ Aside from written histories, both figures undoubtedly owe much to oral legend and tradition. Tatlock (3-6) and Griscom (99-113) have established that King Arthur was already a popular folk figure when Geoffrey wrote his Historia, and C. Grant Loomis has collected treatments of Arthur in the saints' legends, so it seems clear that Geoffrey was not working wholly from imagination. Joseph, as

¹⁴One needs only to compare the accounts supplied by Chambers, Fletcher, and Ashe. Most of the chronicle material itself can be found conveniently translated in Giles ed. Six Old English Chronicles.

discussed in the last chapter seems to have enjoyed a continuous development in apocryphal New Testament literature up to the point where Robert de Boron made the imaginative linkage with the Grail which provided him with yet a new basis for even further development.

For both Arthur and Joseph, the most significant sources lie in mysterious books, now lost if they ever existed, which Geoffrey and the Grail historians claimed to have followed closely. Geoffrey's "certain very ancient book written in the British language" has received critical attention since the first appearance of the Historia.¹⁵ The mysterious Grail book(or books), however, has been little discussed.

The most elaborate account of the mysterious book occurs in the Estoire del Saint Graal where it is claimed that it was written by none other than Jesus Christ (5)! The writer of the Estoire is commanded by Jesus to read the book and learn not only about the Grail, but about his own lineage. He does so, but the book is mysteriously withdrawn, and the recovery of the book becomes a quest obviously paralleling that for the Grail itself. The anonymous author is commanded to seek the book in Norway, and during his travels, he encounters various wonders, mythical beasts, and demons. Eventually he does find the book again, and Christ commands him to copy it before Ascension Day. The scribe sets to work to complete

¹⁵See Tatlock 3-6, Griscom 99-113, and Thorpe 14-19.

his task before the miraculous book is withdrawn again, and the Estoire del Saint Grael is thus preserved for posterity (8-12). It is, of course, the history of Joseph of Arimathea and his line.

A lesser, but still impressive, source is similarly claimed by the author of the Perlesvaus. This time the author seems to be the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus:

Josephus recorded it at the behest of an angel, so that by his writing and testimony the truth might be known of how knights and worthy men were willing to suffer toil and hardship to exalt the Law of Jesus Christ, which He had aimed to renew by His death and crucifixion (High Book 19).¹⁶

Needless to say, no one has taken these claims seriously, and R. S. Loomis was so offended by the latter that he wrote:

What could be more preposterous than the claim that the Jewish historian Josephus of the first century A.D. recorded at the prompting of an angel the sufferings of the knights of King Arthur's court four hundred years later? If the author were living today, one might suspect that he was a victim of paranoia, for he displays several of the typical symptoms (The Grail 97).

While such a claim certainly does seem preposterous, it could simply be the result of the romancer's confusion about who Josephus was. Anyone who reads very much of the Grail literature will certainly be aware of this type of confusion. Within a few pages the romancers write of Joseph (of Arimathea); Josaphe or Josephes, his son, Josephes, sometimes Josephus, the historian; and

¹⁶I have chosen the new translation of Nigel Bryant over that of Sebastian Evans because of Bryant's better text and his access to scholarship which was unavailable to Evans.

and St. Joseph, the husband of Mary; and these spellings are so confused throughout the romances that only context makes the reference clear, and that far more rarely than one would wish.¹⁷ And even if the Perlesvaus author did have Josephus in mind, it is likely that he knew of him only indirectly and could have been mistaken about his dates.

The last of the mysterious sources to be considered here--and in many ways the most important--is that claimed by Robert de Boron for his Le Roman du Saint-Graal or Joseph d'Arimathie. He writes that he found his story in a "grant livre" and breaks off when this source is exhausted; however, he promises to continue his tale if he possibly can:

But I let it be known to all those who would have this book, that if God gives me health and life, well-being and will to assemble all these parts, it shall be done if I can find them writ in books (trans. in Schlauch 195).

Here the pretense to a source is modest and it has been seriously considered before being generally rejected.¹⁸ The parallel to Geoffrey's claim is striking here both in what it claims and in the critical response. Such pretenses were common in medieval

¹⁷Such confusion may have been responsible for the latter part of the Joseph legend. The following occurs in Suetonius' life of Vespasian: "[A]nd one of his high-born prisoners, Josephus by name, as he was being put in chains, declared most confidently that he would soon be released by the same man, who would then, however, be emperor" (2: 293), Bruce (1: 234) and Taylor 101) feel this is how Joseph of Arimathea may have been thought present at the destruction of Jerusalem. Suetonius was frequently used as a model of history and biography writing in the middle ages.

¹⁸For this, see Nitze, "Messire Robert de Boron" Loomis; The Grail 227-35, and Le Gentil in Loomis Arthurian Tradition 251-62.

literature, but Geoffrey's and those of the Grail romancers stand out among them, the first for the influence the Historia had on subsequent literature and the critical concern over it, and the latter for the sheer audacity of their claims.

Central Figures

Both Geoffrey and the Grail romancers, though claiming to write history, become so enamoured of a few central figures that they give them a disproportionate amount of space in what should be a continuous account. Geoffrey records the history of all the British kings, but much of his text is devoted to Brutus, Merlin, and Arthur. Other figures, some of unusual interest, like King Lear, receive relatively skimpy treatment, and the overall effect of Geoffrey's Historia is lop-sidedness.

This disproportion is carried to an almost ridiculous extreme by the Grail romancers and is especially glaring in the Vulgate cycle. The romances are about the adventures of Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, and Galahad; and although the resultant composite story seems to be a continuous history, the actual passage of time is reflected in very brief sections when one of these "stars" is not the immediate subject. The best example of this meager transition occurs at the close of the Estoire where four hundred years' worth Grail guardians between Josaphe and the Maimed King--are accounted for in a very few pages (288-94). But the fact that such a passage is present at all argues for the

romancers' wish to present at least the illusion of a complete history.

Following Geoffrey's example, the romancers devote most of their time to the triumphs of their heroes in battle. The campaigns of Brutus and Arthur in the Historia find their counterpart in those of Joseph and his followers in the Estoire. Although champions like Mordrains and Nasciens are brought in to do most of the actual fighting, Joseph and Josaphe are represented as the real heroes and have more to do with carnage than befits saints.¹⁹

While Lagorio argues convincingly that their warrior roles are necessary for the transition from sacred legend to romance ("Pan-Brittonic Hagiography" 53), it nevertheless seems odd that figures who routinely rely on miracles for their needs must resort to weapons so frequently. But if the Grail romancers were attempting to produce something to correspond to Geoffrey's battles of Arthur, they could do so by having Joseph and his followers both conquer and convert the various pagan nations, as they do in the Estoire.²⁰

¹⁹De Boron's original Joseph is no warrior but merely a saint carrying out the Great Commission.

²⁰The tendency to expand Geoffrey's battle passages has been often noted in both Wace and Layaman, with the later frequently criticized for his apparent delight in brutal detail. Perhaps these helped establish the precedent for the endless battles in the romances.

Prophecies

One of the most curious of the similarities between the histories of Geoffrey and the Grail romancers is the heavy reliance upon prophecy to give their works a sense of inevitability and strike a chord of destiny at work. Although Geoffrey probably composed the Historia originally without the Prophetiae Merlini, he eventually placed them near the center of his history with little modification, and they became probably the most studied part of his work (Parry, in Loomis Arthurian Tradition 78-79).²¹ As Tatlock has observed, Geoffrey, by including the prophesies, "carries the blood of his own present into the withered past, gives it actuality and sweep, and links the whole of insular history together" (Legendary History 403). This greatly increased the interest in his history, for it was no longer merely a record of the past, but it became a mirror of the present and a presumed glimpse into the future. And like all good prophecy-writers who expected to be taken seriously, Geoffrey made his predictions almost hopelessly obscure so that they would seem to have almost endless applications to his readers of whatever era.

The Grail romancers, especially those who composed the Estoire, also indulged heavily in prophecy, but they were careful to avoid Geoffrey's obscurity. From Robert de Boron to the writers of the

²¹Wace omitted these, but they were restored in other versions and eventually added to Wace as well.

Vulgate Cycle, the Grail romancers are careful to "predict" only such events as they have already recorded in an extant romance or are planning to write.²² Most of the prophecies deal with the attainment of the Grail or of lesser challenges, such as who will be able to sit in the Perilous Seat, join the broken sword, or bear the sacred shield. Needless to say, these simply refer to the coming of Galahad/Perceval, the best knight in the world. But the Grail romancers' predictions also serve a more practical purpose: they help to fill in the gaps of the Grail history. By predicting what will come to pass and later stating that it has come to pass, the Grail romancers provide the necessary historical bridge and relieve themselves of the responsibility of dealing with matters of little interest. The best example of this sort of prophecy is found in the account of Nasciens' dream of the line of Celidoine in the Estoire, which includes an account of everyone from Celidoine to Galahad (202-4). The advantage of such a prophecy is that it adds the illusion of structure to a diffuse and disorganized composition. The disparate elements and extraneous tales appear to belong because they are acknowledged in the prophecies.²³

²²It is generally believed that the Queste was written before the Estoire and is its primary source. In this sense the Vulgate may be said to have been written backwards.

²³One must not forget the popularity of the envelope story that is used most notably by Chaucer in the Canterbury Tales and Boccaccio in the Decameron. The Vulgate cycle sometimes seems to be such a work with the Grail as its wrapper and core.

Genealogy

One of the thorniest problems in composing a continuous history based largely upon imagination is filling in the space between the principal characters of the main episodes. This usually involves concocting a plausible-sounding genealogy to establish verisimilitude between principal figures and to establish a system of nobility. It is not enough simply to call someone a king and put him on a throne to rule wisely or otherwise. His right to the throne must be spelled out and his lineage clearly established. The importance of this can be seen in the number of literary works that owe their existence largely or solely to the question of a king's right to his throne.

Geoffrey in composing a history of the British kings was careful to establish a clear and relatively unbroken line between Brutus and Arthur, and the quality of his work is attested by the fact that later genuine British nobility continued to trace their ancestry through the Historia to Brutus and beyond. History supplied a few names, but much of Geoffrey's genealogy is his own invention. However, as Tatlock (116-70) and others have demonstrated, Geoffrey did all in his power to make the individual names ring true. Creative eponymy could locate a hero or historical figure in any place name, and skillful alteration of names from classical history would produce names that had a believable look and sound and implied a possible link to one or more of those figures. Geoffrey usually created his genealogy with restraint, taking care to mention who was

the son of whom, and so on, but he was occasionally carried away and produced a long list of names, like the fifty sons and daughters of Ebrauchus (79).

The Grail historians, although they did manage to link Arthur to Joseph of Arimathea and trace the line of Grail kings and guardians, just as Geoffrey had linked Arthur to Brutus, they did so with less success and generated some truly bizarre names. A list of the Grail keepers is sufficient to illustrate the romancers' fancy: Joseph, Josaphe (or Josephes), Alain, Galaad (or Galahad), Josue, Aminidap, Catheloy, Manaal, Lambor, Pelleans, Pelles, etc.

Often, the romancers are so eager to supply their heroes with appropriate ancestors, one of the most popular epithets being "kin of Joseph of Arimathea," that in the end most of the major characters, and many of the minor ones, are related to one another through several lines of descent. Even if one allows for zeal, the romancers are often clumsy and produce genuine absurdities, the most notorious of which is de Boron's setting up a line of Grail-keepers through Brons' celibate son Alain.²⁴ Part of their problem undoubtedly lay in trying to mingle the Hebrew names of Joseph's line with the Roman and British ones in Geoffrey's Historia which produced some unlikely hybrids. But ultimately the romancers did succeed in producing a Joseph genealogy equal to Geoffrey's Arthur genealogy in numbers, if not in quality.

²⁴Loomis feels this may be the result of Robert's attempting to make a condensed translation of a longer work. His eye may have slipped here and there (The Grail 233-36).

Purpose

Perhaps the most impressive parallel between Geoffrey's history and that of the Grail romancers is that of purpose. Although there has been critical speculation about Geoffrey's motives, there has been little doubt of his purpose. Parry states the matter well:

Geoffrey's avowed purpose in composing his magnum opus was to provide the descendants of the Britons with a history of their race from the earliest times. The French, the Normans, and the Saxons had theirs, but the Welsh and the Bretons had only the meagre scraps provided by Nennius and the hostile narratives of the Anglo-Saxons and Romans, before whom there was only a blank. Here was an opportunity which a man with Geoffrey's gifts--and lack of historical conscience--could hardly miss. If the account was not true, something like it was--or should have been (86).

Geoffrey not only succeeded, but succeeded so well that his was the most highly regarded historical work of its time. Numerous translations and adaptations followed. And as Kendrick puts it, "even before the twelfth century was over the hero of the Britons [Arthur] had emerged from the shadowy world of mythology and become an unchallengeable historical personage" (14).

The Historia seemed to be a complete success, but there was one area in which it was clearly deficient--the spiritual. There can be little doubt of the strong secular emphasis of Geoffrey's work. Although one need not go as far as Hanning and claim that he deliberately ignored Christian matters as much as possible (124), it is clearly true that Geoffrey gives very scant attention to saints or events of religious significance in Britain, his accounts

averaging a few hundred words when he touches upon such matters. And when Geoffrey's Historia became the subject matter for romances, the secular emphasis became so pronounced that the tales of Arthur's court were widely denounced as "frivolous" if not actually harmful.²⁵

From de Boron forward, the Grail historians attempted to compensate for Geoffrey's lack of spiritual concerns. They simply added another branch to the history of the Britons--the history of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail. Just as Brutus provided a link to the high point of pagan history, so Joseph of Arimathea linked Britain and Arthur to the supreme moment of Christian history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And by freely appropriating Geoffrey's materials, the Grail historians caused the secular and spiritual branches to intersect with Arthur and his court as the center point and noblest flowering of both. Here was the rest of the story. It is true that their attempts were often crude, but they did succeed; and like Geoffrey's, their work supplanted actual history.²⁶

²⁵Wace continued the process of secularization by condensing Geoffrey's already brief notices of religious events (Foulon, in Loomis Arthurian Tradition 96). When love became a major theme, even a romancer like Chrétien himself spoke out against the moral danger of works celebrating improper relationships (Cliges, in Arthurian Romances 159-60).

²⁶See Williamson 13-43 and Treharne 1-10.

That the Grail historians were attempting to fill a gap and write history through romance is clear if one examines their work. As I have pointed out before, the Grail historians' usual claim is either to supply a pressing historical need or to obey a direct divine command--they must tell the history of Joseph. However, they are not content to leave Joseph of Arimathea to the romances which bear his name. Throughout the other romances again and again the action stops so that the reader may be reminded of the all-important history of Joseph and the Grail. An instance in point is Robert de Boron's cycle. Joseph d'Arimathie is hardly over before de Boron feels the need to tell the story of Joseph again. In Merlin one of the wizard's first mature acts is to seek out the clerk Blayse and compell him to record the history of Joseph and the Grail:

And I shall telle the suche thynges that thow woldest trowe
no creature myght sey vnto the; and therefore make a boke,
and alle the thate this boke shul se, sholde the rather
kepe hem from synne." . . . Blase sought all that hym
mystered to write with, and when he was all redy, Merlyn
be-gan to telle lovyng of Ihesu Criste, and of Iosep of
Abaramathie, like as they hadden ben of the slayn; and of
Pieron, and of othir felowes like as they weren departed,
and the fynyshment of Ioseph and of alle other.²⁷

From this point on, throughout de Boron's cycle, the Vulgate, and elsewhere, the history of Joseph and the need to tell it becomes a continuing feature of the romances, even by those that are not

²⁷For flavor I have chosen the fifteenth century English prose translation, edited by Wheatley 22-23. It is a close version of the French original.

particularly concerned with the Grail. A typical version is found in the Modena Perceval, told by Brons at the order of none other than the Holy Ghost:

[He told] how his brother-in-law who had the name of Joseph had asked for His body, and how Pilate had given it to him, and how he had removed Him from the cross, and how when he had lain Him upon the earth he saw His blood run upon the earth and how he felt pity of this, and how he caught it in a vessel, "in this same one that you see there, and in its fellowship can no sinner be seen." And he recounted all the life that his good ancestors had led, and Perceval listened to him most willingly and soon was filled with the grace of the Holy Ghost (Skeels trans. 68).

So important is Joseph of Arimathea to the Grail romancers that when such passages are clearly inappropriate, they keep him before the reader's eyes by mentioning quite frequently that some character or other is "kin of Joseph of Arimathia." Such references are not restricted to characters alone. Joseph's sword, shield, and incredibly long-lived donkey are deemed worthy of mention.

One of the difficulties of many different people working on a story is variants, and the Grail romances are plagued with them. Just what the Grail is, when the blood was collected, who came with Joseph to Britian, and what happened when he got there--or even if he got there--are some of the matters on which the romancers disagree. The Vulgate Cycle as a whole gives what can be called the "standard" version, although some difficulties remain.

For convenience I here provide a concise history of Joseph and his line.²⁸ I have used the Estoire (Sommer's edition of the short version) for the first part of my reconstruction because it is the most developed version of the early history of the Grail, but I have supplemented it with material from the High Book of the Grail, or Perlesvaus (Bryant's translation of the edition of Nitze and Jenkins), and the long version of the Estoire (partially represented in Furnivall's edition of Lovelich's History of the Holy Grail). The second part of my history is based on the Queste (Matarasso's translation of Pauphilet's edition). For the transition between the two parts I depend upon Malory (Vinaver's edition) whose work I also use to supplement my summary of the Queste. For convenience, these sources are indicated in brackets.

The History of Joseph and the Grail

Joseph of Arimathea, a good and just man and a secret believer in Christ, lives in Jerusalem with his wife and his son Josephes, and immediately after the death of his beloved Lord, he longs to reveal his devotion to Christ and seek out some ^ememento of Him. He goes to the scene of the Last Supper and takes the dish from which Jesus had eaten. Then he goes before Pilate and requests the body of Christ. Pilate grants the request because Joseph has served him well as a knight for seven years, [and because he thinks Joseph plans

²⁸Available summaries are either far too long, like Nutt's (Studies 38-64), or much too brief, like Lagorio's ("Vita" 55-6).

to defile the body, instead of bury it (High Book 19)]. Joseph, with the help of Nicodemus, takes Jesus from the cross and places Him in his own tomb, and while doing so, he collects some of the precious blood in the dish which he had saved as a ^em~~p~~emento of the Last Supper.

When the Jews hear of what he has done, they are outraged and confront Joseph, only to be rebuked by him for unjustly accusing and killing Christ. Further enraged, the Jews throw him into the most dismal prison in Jerusalem, allowing him to have only bread and water. However, when they hear reports that Christ has risen, the Jews deny Joseph even his bread and water. But Christ does not forget His faithful disciple, and He appears to Joseph in prison, bringing him the dish containing His blood and promising him that he will be delivered from prison and that he has been chosen to carry the Gospel to distant lands.

Ministered to by angels and sustained by the dish, or Grail, Joseph spends forty years in his horrid prison, but to him they are years of bliss because of the presence of the Grail. In the meantime, on the outside, Joseph's wife refuses many suitors and remains true to her husband. His son Josephes dedicates himself to the Church and remains chaste, vowing to have no wife but it.

Vespasian comes to power but is stricken with leprosy. All doctors and magicians fail him, but he is at last healed, and subsequently converted, by merely looking upon the likeness of Christ imprinted upon a cloth provided by St. Veronica. Vespasian learns

more of Christ and enraged by the treachery of the Jews during the Trial and Crucifixion, he vows to avenge the Savior. He immediately goes to Jerusalem and begins slaughtering the Jews. During his conquest Vespasian hears of Joseph of Arimathea and frees him, and all are amazed to discover that Joseph thinks that his incarceration has lasted only three days, instead of forty years. At first Joseph is unable to locate the Grail, but a divine voice assures him that it is safe at his home. Joseph then goes with Vespasian and points out the killers of Christ who are promptly burned.

Joseph then returns home and Christ appears to him, commanding him and his line to go forth and spread the Gospel. Joseph is baptised by St. Philip and quickly converts a number of his friends. He constructs an ark for the Grail, which only he and his son Josephes may touch, and Joseph and his followers go forth to fulfill their commission, taking with them no supplies except the Grail which furnishes all their spiritual and physical needs.

They eventually come to Sarras where they find King Evelac at war with Tholomes, a neighboring king. Joseph attempts, without success, to convert Evelac, who is mainly concerned with preserving his kingdom and finds the mystery of the Trinity contrary to reason. The coming of night ends the argument, and the disputants seek their beds. Evelac has a strange dream which prepares him for acceptance of the notion of the Trinity.

[Obeying a divine command, Joseph sleeps with his wife for the sole and chaste purpose of begetting the first Galahad, from whose

line would spring the best knight in the world, the later Galahad who would achieve the Grail in Arthur's time (Longer Estoire 72 for sequence)].

The next day the Lord appears to Joseph and Josephes and grants them visions which explain the mysteries of the Sacrament. Then Josephes, because of his chastity, is consecrated supreme bishop over all.²⁹ He is properly invested and celebrates the Sacrament. Thus strengthened in faith, Joseph and Josephes return to Evelac, explain his vision, and utterly confound his wise men. They give Evelac a shield with which he is able to rout his enemies. This miraculous victory converts Evelac and his brother-in-law Seraphe, who return to Joseph for baptism and are renamed Mordrains and Nasciens.

After various adventures and conversions, Joseph and his followers come to Britain where they are attacked and imprisoned by King Crudel. Mordrains and Nasciens hear of this and invade England where they slay King Crudel and release the Christians.

While in England Joseph builds a round table like the one the romancers claim was used at the Last Supper. At this table is a seat which no one but Josephes can occupy, but the unworthy Moyses dares to sit there and is carried away by demons. Afterwards the

²⁹Since Christ chooses him, he technically has greater status than the Pope. That the romancers routinely refer to him as "bishop" indicates that they were trying to avoid too glaring a historical contradiction.

seat is known as the Perilous Seat, and no one can occupy it until the coming of the best knight in the world.

Joseph and his companions continue their conversion of England, and Alain the son of Brons is appointed Grail Guardian. Since the Grail feeds only those free of sin, most of Joseph's followers hunger. Josephes solves the problem by having Alain catch a fish which is miraculously divided to feed all. Alain is then called the Rich Fisher, as are all Grail Guardians after him.

Later Mordrains foolishly attempts to look at the Grail in the ark and is stricken blind and helpless. Accepting his punishment as just, Mordrains asks only that he be allowed to remain alive until the coming of the best knight in the world. A divine voice grants his prayer and he becomes a hermit.

Time takes its toll. Nasciens dies and Josephes realizes that his death is near. He crowns Joseph's last son Galahad king of Galafort. Then Joseph dies, and Josephes on his death bed takes Mordrains' shield and marks it with a cross, using blood which streams from his nose. This shield is reserved for the best knight in the world and will hang untouched on Nasciens' tomb until the advent of that knight who will also be the last of Nasciens' line. Josephes then dies.

Alain is now responsible for the Grail. He houses it at Corbenic where he makes his brother Josue king and establishes the line of Grail Guardians. The line continues with Aminidap, Catheloy, Manaal, and Lambor.

Lambor quarrels with his enemy Bruillant, and in the fight that ensues Bruillant violates the sanctity of the Ship of Solomon, and taking the sword that he finds there slays Lambor. This dolorous stroke turns the surrounding area into a Waste Land. Bruillant is struck dead for his sacrilege.

Pelleans then becomes King and Grail Guardian, but he is wounded through the thighs in a battle with Rome and becomes known as the Maimed King and may not be healed until the coming of the best knight of the world.

[His son Pelles succeeds him, and his daughter Elaine is destined to be the mother of the promised knight. Arthur comes to power and draws the finest knights in the world about him. Chief among these is Lancelot, but he is not the promised knight because of his adulterous love for Guinevere. This affair, however, has a positive result. Lancelot, eager to seize any opportunity to be with Guinevere, while at the castle of Pelles is deceived into thinking Elaine is his real love, and the result of this union is Galahad (Malory 477-506)].

[Queste followed from here to end.] When Galahad is of age, he comes to the court of Arthur where he immediately distinguishes himself in chivalry, virtue, and chastity. All the principal heroes of the Round Table undertake the quest of the Holy Grail, for all wish to be acclaimed the "best knight in the world." The Grail manifests itself at Corbenic as a veiled vessel carried by invisible hands. It is capable of supplying spiritual and physical sustenance

to those before whom it appears, and in it lies the power to heal the Maimed King and restore the Wasteland. But this healing and restoration cannot take place until the best knight in the world finds his way to Corbenic and passes a series of tests.³⁰

Most prominent among the knights on the Grail quest are Gawain, Lancelot, Bors, Perceval, and Galahad. The first two are too worldly to achieve the quest and partake in the Grail's full mystical significance: Gawain is disqualified because he refuses to repent of his worldly concerns, and Lancelot fails because although he is able to repent of his love for Guinevere, he cannot give it up. But after a number of trials, Bors, Perceval, and Galahad reach the Grail Castle where they are honored according to degree of individual worth. Only Galahad is without physical or spiritual failing, and he is acknowledged as the best knight in the world. Josephes descends from heaven to administer the Sacrament to the worthy knights, but Galahad is fed by Jesus who issues from the Grail.

The Sacrament over, Galahad heals the Maimed King with some of the precious blood, and the Wasteland is restored to its former state. All of the Grail prophecies are thus fulfilled. Galahad and his companions are led to the Holy City of Sarras where Galahad is

³⁰Missing is the "Grail question" so important in the early romances. Galahad achieves the Grail because of who and what he is--the best knight in the world, the one destined even before birth to achieve the Grail.

permitted to partake of the full glory of the Grail and is released from the burden of earthly life. The Grail is then withdrawn from the sight of men. Perceval becomes a hermit, and Bors returns to Arthur's court to tell of the Grail adventures.

The sacred and true quest--the quest of which all other ventures and noble conflicts are but types--is now over. With the goal of the Grail no longer before them, Arthur and the members of his court resume their worldly pursuits and are destroyed from within. Such is the history of Joseph and his line in the version that was the source for the Glastonbury legends and the one Malory crystallized into an enduring monument of world literature.

While it is unlikely that the Grail romancers who were spread over several centuries and countries were actually motivated by the common goal of producing a history equal to that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the fact is that such a coherent history was produced, whether consciously or not. But clearly, they did borrow from and attempt to improve upon one another while also sharing a common set of subjects: Joseph, the Grail, and the court of Arthur. Although no corporate effort to produce a single history can be proven, it is significant to note that most of the Grail romancers looked upon themselves as writers of "histories." Robert de Boron and the writers of the Estoire flatly stated that they were revealing divine history to mankind, a history of Joseph and the Grail which incorporates Arthur and his court. The less loftily motivated romancers contributed to this creative process simply by adding more material upon

Grail subjects. Ultimately, the result is what matters, and that is the emergence of a cohesive legend, a history which frequently does parallel and eventually merges with that which Geoffrey of Monmouth provided for Arthur.

If history was their goal, it may seem odd that the Grail writers apparently chose the romance form to accomplish it. The truth of the matter is probably that writing when they did, the form that they chose was inevitable. In fact, there was probably no "choice" involved. More likely, they were simply responding to and naturally imitating the form and manner of the version of Geoffrey's Historia which they most frequently encountered and had the widest popularity, Wace's verse translation Brut. Recounting Geoffrey's material and adding an emphasis on courtly matters, Wace's version of the Historia was by far the most popular of its time. It is so graceful in its verse and manner and so creative in itself that Norris J. Lacy has called it the "first French Arthurian romance" (157. See also Charles Foulon in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 94-103). It was inevitable that the Grail romancers chose so attractive and popular a model for their own stories and only natural that they attempted to incorporate as much of its matter as possible into their own work.

Robert W. Hanning in his Vision of History in Early Britain has concluded that the triumph of romance was due to "a change in literary taste which, in an age that did not make sharp distinctions

between history and literature, affected ways of thinking and writing about the past" (173). This seems almost certainly what happened. The Grail romancers did not set out to write what we know as "romances." Their probable goal was merely to produce popular literature, thus their choice of the vernacular over Latin. The models that they had at hand were Wace's Brut, the romances of Chrétien, and the metrical versions of the Gospel of Nicodemus, among others; and the Grail writers, largely viewing all of these as histories, imitated their manner, form, and content as the most natural and efficient means of composing their own histories. This is borne out by the fact that the Grail romancers invariably reflected literary trends of their time. When verse dominated romance writing, they wrote in verse; and when other romance writers changed to prose, so did they. The result was a happy one. They not only incorporated the story of Arthur; they improved it and added a new spiritual and mystical dimension which deepened Arthur's story and increased its vitality. The Grail story is the culmination of the development of the Arthurian tradition. And even today there are few who would wish Arthur without the Grail or the Grail without Arthur.

CHAPTER III

THE JOSEPH OF THE ROMANCES

Although there is a general consensus among the romancers about the character of Joseph of Arimathea and his religious and legendary history, there is an astonishing amount of variation in their treatment of him in the individual romances. Certainly a number of these variations are simply the result of confusion of similar characters and events, and even miscopying seems to have played a significant role. As mentioned earlier, such confusion is almost inevitable when so many characters have similar names, as in the case of the various Josephs, Josaphes, and Josephus's that one encounters in the romances; and such problems can only increase when major characters like Evelac and Seraphe receive new baptismal names (Mordrains and Nasciens, respectively) midway through a romance and yet are later occasionally referred to by their former designations. True, such errors are often found in the manuscripts and even in the edited texts, but when one considers the number of the Grail romances, the general accuracy of their translations, and the agreement between the manuscripts which record the originals and their translations, such mistakes can hardly be considered common; and the claims of critics like R. S. Loomis that scribal blunders are often the key to

problems in the Grail story seem to me weakly based.¹ Although scribal error does account for some of the inconsistencies between (and within) the Grail romances, many of the discrepancies cannot be so easily explained away, and others seem to be deliberate, for reasons which are often difficult to determine. Perhaps the most useful approach is to call these problems and inconsistencies "variations," study them, and attempt to determine a pattern or series of patterns.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider a large number of the Grail romances and examine these variations. Obviously I can not treat every romance that mentions the Grail, and occasionally I must dismiss entire groups (like the Spanish/Portuguese romances) with a few generalizations drawn from the work of others who have covered the subject; but enough of the romances are treated here to indicate some clear lines of development among the Joseph figures and in the romancers' attitudes toward them.

In examining the romances, I have held as much to chronological order as possible. Some departures from this order, however, are necessary to keep the cycles together and to place some of the miscellaneous romances in appropriate groupings.

¹The most famous of these is Loomis' claim that the Grail became associated with the body of Christ through the similarity of cors (body) and corn (horn). Loomis goes on to make such errors and misreadings account for many of the inconsistencies in Robert de Boron's Joseph d'Arimathie and elsewhere ("Joseph of Arimathea, an Evangelist by Error," in The Grail 223-48).

Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval, or Le Conte du Graal (ca. 1180)

Although it may seem odd to begin a discussion of Joseph of Arimathea in the romances with two in which he does not appear, much can be gained by examining them. The first of these, Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval, or Le Conte du Graal, was the first of a long line of the Grail romances and was attractive to imitators for two main reasons--Chrétien's artistic gifts made his work worthy of imitation, and the incomplete state of his last romance made it worth of completion. Since some of the continuations include Joseph of Arimathea, many readers assume that Chrétien would have included him if he had lived to complete Perceval. I feel that this assumption is mistaken. There is no evidence whatsoever that Chrétien had any intention of mentioning Joseph of Arimathea in his romance.

One of the most striking things about Perceval is the fact that Chrétien never implies that his Graal is the Grail.² It is a wonder and a mystery, like the other items in the Grail procession, and there is no reason to believe that Chrétien would have treated it differently from the many other wonders that appear elsewhere in his work. In Erec et Enide, we learn the identity of the knight who fights in the mysterious region of the "Joy of the Court" and why he is there, but the enclosed garden of the "Joy" is never explained,

²His Grail is a golden, bejeweled dish, the finest of its kind in the world, but still only a dish. A mass wafer placed in it is enough to sustain the old man in the inner room, but the power lies in the host, rather than the dish.

and it is the greatest mystery of all. How could such a thing be? There is no mention of enchantment; the lady wishes to bind her knight to a promise to stay with her, and the magic garden is simply handy. The Sword Bridge and imaginary lions of Lancelot and the Magic Fountain of Yvain are other examples of Chrétien's wonders which remain unexplained mysteries. However specific their functions, they are enigmas. Indeed, as Lucienne Carasso-Bulow suggests, Chrétien's usual practice is to deliberately confound his readers, to infuse the real with the fantastic and the fantastic with the real, to deepen mystery, instead of dispelling it (137-44). Is it likely that such an artist would spoil the mystery and ambiguity of his Grail procession by explaining which grail, which lance, and which sword are involved? Chrétien does not even define the nature of Fisher King's crime which resulted in his prolonged punishment (something which Wolfram is careful to do). Here, too, Chrétien is simply following his usual practice of mystifying his reader. In his careful and insightful study of the Grail procession, The Grail Castle and Its Mysteries, Leonardo Olsecki observes that the "bleeding lance, the luminous vessel, and the silver platter are all mere appearances which have no practical role to play and are not used for any form of worship" (30-31). Another critic, L. T. Topsfield, while he claims that Chrétien would have expected his audience to automatically associate the Graal with the cup of the Last Supper and the bleeding lance with the spear of Longinus, admits

that Chrétien "carefully avoids all overt Christian references" (210). From the above it should seem reasonable that Chrétien would have not spoiled his suggestive effect by concretely identifying his mysterious vessel as the specific Holy Grail which Joseph of Arimathea preserved and brought to Britain.

Another point that makes it unlikely that Joseph of Arimathea was in Chrétien's plans is the poet's relative lack of emphasis upon religious matters. Although Chrétien was working in a Christian context, as Holmes and Klenke have noted, his main concern was for social problems of his time (83). Again and again in his romances, Chrétien's themes are duty, personal integrity, conduct in love, and finding one's proper place in chivalric society. No specific religious doctrine is ever stressed. Compared to other writers of his period, Chrétien draws surprisingly little material from Biblical sources and is unlearned enough in Scripture to confuse a parable in John with the writings of St. Paul in his prologue to Perceval (Frappier, in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 160). Chrétien's hesitance to use (or ignorance of) Biblical material can be illustrated in another way. In his total extant output of roughly 40,000 lines of verse, Chrétien makes approximately fifty references to Biblical figures, and all but a handful of these are the stock "Lady" references, oaths, and identifications of feast days. The few references that remain are not significant, being of the "wise as Solomon" and the "strong as Samson" variety. And

nowhere does any of these Biblical figures begin to approach anything suggestive of the sort of active role that Joseph of Arimathea takes in the later Grail romances.³

Where then did the later Grail romancers, and especially the Perceval continuators, get the notion of Joseph of Arimathea as Grail-Keeper? The generally accepted view is that it originated with Robert de Boron.⁴ But is there anything in Chrétien's poem that might have suggested Joseph of Arimathea to the later writers? I think that there is. In the "Good Friday" portion of the romance, Perceval's hermit uncle tells him of mysterious personage at the Grail Castle that Perceval has not yet seen:

The man they [the Grail, etc.] serve is my own brother;
my sister, and his, was your mother;
and also the rich Fisherman
is that king's son, son of the man
who has himself served with the grail.
Now do not let the thought prevail
that from the grail he takes food like

³I am not implying that Chrétien was irreligious, but that he had his own way of doing things. His probable clerical training would certainly have rendered him capable of making more use of Biblical material if he had chosen to do so. Chrétien invariably chose to people his romances with fictional or invented characters. Even if one believes Geoffrey's History, he would immediately realize that Chrétien did not pretend that his Arthur, Gawain, etc. should be taken as representations of actual historical figures.

⁴For discussions, see Nitze's "Messire Robert de Boron" 279 and the introduction to his edition of Robert's Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal; Le Gentil in Loomis, ed. Arthurian Literature 251-62; and Bruce (2: 114-35).

a salmon, lamprey, or a pike,
 because from it the king obtains
 one mass wafer, and it sustains
 his life, borne in the grail they bring;
 the grail is such a holy thing.
 He is so very spiritual
 that he's required no food at all
 except the host the grail contained;
 the last twelve years he has remained
 inside the little room wherein
 you saw the grail borne (Cline trans. ll. 6415-32).

It is just possible that a romancer like Robert de Boron would have read this passage or heard of it and associated the man who is sustained by the Grail for twelve years in that "little room" with Joseph of Arimathea who in one of the versions of the Avenging of the Savior was sustained, apparently by the power of Jesus, in prison for forty years.⁵ This is not to say that he thought the mystery man was Joseph of Arimathea, but that the passage reminded him of the Joseph story and the special distinction of being sustained solely by the Grail may have suggested that he was at least of the line of Joseph.⁶ It is even possible that more than one romancer may have made the association, which would account for the amount of variation one finds in the romances; but this is sheer speculation, impossible of proof. Still, if anything resembling

⁵The difference between the twelve years in the Perceval and forty in the Joseph story is a stumbling block unless Robert was satisfied with the fact either duration would require miracles.

⁶Some apparently thought the man was Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph is probably still alive in the time of Arthur in the Perlesvaus and certainly is in the Sone de Nausay.

Joseph of Arimathea is to be found in Chrétien's romance, it is in this passage.

Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival (ca. 1200)

Of all the Grail romances, Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival is the most complete and aesthetically satisfying. It is little marred by the inconsistencies that so plague all of the other romances. It is well-structured, pleasing and convincing on both physical and mystical levels, and written in graceful, witty, and melodious verse--it is the only Grail romance which can be, beyond serious dispute, called high art.⁷ Yet, like Chrétien's romance, it contains no mention of Joseph of Arimathea; and unlike Perceval, there is no passage which can be construed, even by the most imaginative reader, as a possible allusion to him. The Grail King who is kept alive and youthful by the Grail is clearly identified as Titurel, the first of the Grail Kings. Joseph simply has no place here. Therefore, it is not true, as L. T. Topsfield claims, that a medieval audience would necessarily have associated the Grail with Joseph of Arimathea and the lance with the spear of Longinus.⁸ Wolfram does what Chrétien is careful to avoid; he

⁷For studies of Wolfram and his art, see especially Henry Kratz's Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival which treats every aspect of the author and his work and Margaret F. Richey's Studies of Wolfram von Eschenbach.

⁸Yet both of these, due to the influence of the Vulgate Cycle, were later introduced into redactions of the Parzival.

explains. The Grail is a stone of great power which has been brought to earth by the neutral angels and is recharged each Good Friday by the Holy Spirit who descends in the form of a dove and places a divinely sanctified host upon it. It was placed in the keeping of Titurel, who established the order of Grail Knights and Kings, who has passed it on and yet who remains alive by its presence and grace. The lance is that which wounded the sexually incontinent Anfortas in the groin, and the lance bleeds because it must be frequently thrust into his incurable wound to relieve his constant pain. The nature of the Grail is decidedly odd, but it is reasonable within the context of this romance.⁹ The all-important Grail question is not a mysterious formula, but a simple and moving expression of compassion: "Dear Uncle, what aileth thee?" Herein is what another Longinus called the "sublime," and of the other Grail romances, only certain passages in the Queste approach it. Malory, too, touches upon it in his account of the healing of Sir Urry, but it is only a touch, a whisper.

Although Wolfram claims the work of a mysterious Kyot of Provence as his source and derides Chrétien's version of the story,

⁹Wolfram's curious and contradictory references to Arabic and Hebrew influences on his "source" suggest that his "Gral" may well be an ultimate version of the Philosopher's Stone, the achievement of which leads to material and spiritual perfection. Interest in alchemy was especially great in Germany, a country which produced men like Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme.

scholars generally agree that the latter was his principal source.¹⁰ So Wolfram's failure to bring Joseph of Arimathea into his completed adaptation of Chrétien's romance is indirect confirmation of my claim that Joseph would have had no place in the original Perceval even if it had been completed.

Robert de Boron's Grail Trilogy (ca. 1200)

With the work of Robert de Boron, we first encounter the Joseph figure in Arthurian romance. He is clearly recognizable as the Joseph of the "standard" history of my preceding chapter.

Robert's Joseph is the Joseph of Arimathea of the Bible, the Gospel of Nicodemus, and the Grail romances; but he is roughly drawn.

Although clearly recognizable, Robert's saint/hero varies from the standard Joseph on a number of points. The most important is that he is not the premier evangelist to Britain, nor the bringer of the Holy Grail. That role is given to his son Brons for reasons which are far from clear.¹¹ Joseph remains in his homeland and lives out his days in happiness and grace. Nor is he the warrior saint of the

¹⁰See Kratz 144-71 and 472-83; Richey 51-72; and Springer in Loomis, ed. Arthurian Literature 218-50.

¹¹Brons is not celibate either. But what Robert may have had in mind was a parallel to Moses whom Joseph frequently resembles, leading his folk through the desert, sustaining them through miracles, etc. Moses was not allowed to see the promised land, either. However, Moses was guilty of disobedience to God, and Joseph clearly is not.

Estoire. Rather, the Joseph of Robert's Joseph d'Arimathie goes through a reversed process. He begins as a bold and arrogant knight of Pilate who demands the body of Jesus as payment for his service. When soldiers prevent him from taking the body, he complains to Pilate who issues the appropriate orders and throws in the Holy Grail as a bonus, presumably to pacify Joseph.¹² After Joseph accomplishes the burial of Christ, the angry Jews throw Joseph into prison. There he receives the Holy Grail from Jesus and he is ministered to by angels until he is released by Vespasian more than forty years later. The Joseph who emerges from prison is cheerful, mellowed, and perfectly pious. He does not go forth to convert and conquer but merely retires to the desert with his followers, and like a medieval Moses leads his people on a wandering course until they are relatively free of sin and fit to go with Brons and the Grail to the promised "vales of Avaron."¹³ And in the process of doing so, he sets up the second round table, the first being that of the Last Supper. Apparently the lives of Joseph and his followers are greatly extended, for Perceval is Joseph's great grandson!¹⁴

¹²Helen Adolf in her "Robert de Boron's Joseph and the Privilegium Fori" sees this as a result of Robert's alleged legal training, and she concludes: "So Pilate's scrupulousness as a judge causes him to hand over the Grail to Joseph" (266).

¹³Of course, this has been universally been declared a mistake for Avalon.

¹⁴The Vulgate Cycle attempts to rectify this impossibility by naming a full line of Grail Kings. However, Mordrains through a special request of God is allowed to remain alive until the coming of Galahad.

Allowing Joseph to remain in his homeland restricts him from the sort of developments that one finds in the Estoire; however, Robert de Boron manages to keep Joseph before the reader of Merlin and Perceval by means of an occasionally tiresome series of allusions to him and the Grail history, a technique later made even more tedious by the other Grail romancers. Robert also uses the structure and contents of his romances in an ingenious fashion, wherein one reflects the other. Pierre Le Gentil comments on this technique:

While the Joseph begins with expounding God's scheme to thwart the Fiend through the gift of His Son, the Merlin begins with a similar exposition of the infernal plot to undo the work of the Messiah. Moreover, the two poems were connected by Merlin's retelling the history of Joseph and by his causing King Uther to establish a third table on the model of the table of the Last Supper and the table of the Grail. Thus the continuity between the two works is maintained (in Loomis, ed. Arthurian Tradition 257).

Although Le Gentil does not see this same continuity in the garbled and corrupt Perceval that has come down to us in two widely variant versions,¹⁵ it is nonetheless present. Now Perceval is to be the wonderchild; Merlin again retells the Joseph history, stressing Perceval's direct descent and his destiny to achieve the Grail, heal the infirm king, and to remove the vague "enchantment of Britain"; and the romance ends, as do the other two, with a crowning.

¹⁵Both versions are available in Roach's superb edition of the Didot-Perceval. See pp. 2-11.

Thus, each romance reminds the reader of the other, and most of the content stems from Joseph's actions in the first segment, actions which are kept before the reader in the remaining segments.¹⁶ Despite the corrupt state of the Perceval and Robert's notorious blundering in matters of detail, the figure of Joseph of Arimathea is consistent throughout. Regardless of what one may think of his art, it was Robert, who, as Richard O'Gorman maintains, first brought * "the mysterious Grail into a clear and unmistakable relationship with the events of the Last Supper and which links existing elements of the Grail story with Biblical and pseudo-Biblical tradition" (Prose Version of Robert de Boron's Joseph d'Armathie 453). It was also Robert who firmly established the figure of Joseph of Arimathea in the Arthurian romance for all time.

Additions to Chrétien's Perceval (ca. 1190-1230)

Of the six extant additions of Chrétien's Perceval, the first two, the Elucidation and the Bliocadran, both composed in early thirteenth century, may be disregarded here because neither of them makes any mention of Joseph of Arimathea. Curiously, the former does refer to the Grail and the lance of Longinus, but nothing is made of them and the references only add to the enigmatic quality of this strange little work which elucidates nothing.

¹⁶See my Chapter Two for quotations of characteristic passages from Merlin and Perceval.

According to William Roach, the leading authority on the continuations, the first two continuaters apparently knew nothing of the Joseph legend. The first and oldest continuation's Grail passage is "an entirely pagan story, in which the Grail has no connection with a religious motif at all" ("Transformations" 163). The Grail is simply a horn of plenty, and the poet has apparently forgotten that Chrétien's Grail contained a host. Similarly, the second continuator (ca. 1190) forgets details of the Grail procession found in Chrétien's work and confuses matters even further by attempting, as Roach puts it, "to combine the two conflicting accounts of the Grail that had been given by his more talented predecessors" (163). The possibility of an inferred Joseph connection is even weaker in the first two continuations than in Chrétien's original romance because both forget the mysterious man in the inner room mentioned above. In what one can presume to be their original forms, the first two continuations show no evidence of their authors' knowledge of Joseph and the Holy Grail. Unfortunately both continuations, especially the first, are so plagued by interpolations that even Roach despairs of definitely identifying their original versions, and one of these additions which is inserted almost randomly in several manuscripts, tells a version of the story of Joseph of Arimathea, based on de Boron's trilogy but also contains elements of the Estoire. It, too, may be passed over except for a couple of interesting variations. Here Joseph has the Grail made

to hold the holy blood; therefore, it can hardly have been the cup/dish used at the Last Supper. Also, Joseph is accompanied by Nicodemus' sister who like St. Veronica, possesses a cloth imprinted with the image of the Lord. Another but probably earlier interpolation (because it contains no elements of the Estoire written ca. 1230) hastily concludes the second continuation in some manuscripts. The fact that these additions exist indicates that copyists considered Joseph such an essential part of the Grail story that it could not be told properly without him.

The third continuation, usually attributed to Manessier, tells basically the same Joseph story as the Queste, which makes its composition relatively late (ca. 1220). There are some exotic variations, however, such as Joseph's turning black from grief as he collects the blood and the mention of a Temple of the Sun at Sarras.¹⁷ This is the first of the continuations to actually bring Perceval to an adequate conclusion.

The fourth continuation (ca. 1226), attributed to Gerbert de Montreuil, also brings the Perceval to a suitable close, and its Joseph account indicates familiarity with the Queste and probably even the later Estoire. It accords closely with the standard history and contains no important variations as far as Joseph of

¹⁷Although a definitive edition of the third continuation is still wanting, Ivy provides this passage in his Manuscript Relations of Manessier's Continuation of the Old French Perceval 57-60.

Arimathea is concerned, even though it does place more emphasis on Perceval's ability to join the broken sword than upon his asking the usually all-important Grail question, which here is the barest formality and has no miraculous consequences.

Perlesvaus (ca. 1200)

One of the most bizarre of all the Grail romances is the Perlesvaus. The most overtly allegorical of the romances, this work has been called by Carman, "a sort of symbolical New Testament, canonical and apocryphal, employing a system of knightly substitutions for Biblical characters" (42). Although its principal theme is salvation (Kelly 181), the Perlesvaus is a disturbing work, a Grail romance in which the quest has failed (Waite 227). At the very beginning we learn that Perceval has failed to ask the question, and that it is his failure to do so which has resulted in the wasting of the land. The Fisher King, now doomed, dies midway through the romance. On the whole, the Perlesvaus is a mixture of occasionally tasteless symbolism, with some tedious exegesis, and excessive, often shocking and disgusting violence. But unattractive as the Perlesvaus may be at times, it probably established the precedents for a number of features of the later romances: Joseph as a warrior-saint, the Grail wars (here implied), and the tendency to link objects to Joseph and members of his line.

Joseph of Arimathea attains a peculiar prominence--the romance virtually bristles with references to him and his line--yet

even this pious figure is not unmarred by the bloodlust which runs through the Perlesvaus, as can be detected in the first reference to him:

Joseph was [Perceval's] mother's uncle and for seven years had been a soldier of Pilate; and he asked no reward for his service but permission to take the body of Our Saviour from the cross. This gift when granted seemed great to him, though to Pilate it seemed small indeed, for Joseph had served him well, and if he had asked for gold or land or other wealth he would willingly have given them.¹⁸ So Pilate granted Joseph the body of Our Saviour, supposing that when he had taken it from the cross he would drag it shamefully through the city of Jerusalem and leave it in some foul place outside; but the good soldier had no such intention: rather did he honour the body as highly as he could, laying it to rest in the sacred tomb; and he kept the lance with which Christ's side had been pierced and the holy vessel in which those who believed in Him and feared Him gathered the blood which flowed from His wounds when he was nailed to the cross (High Book, trans. Bryant 19, italics mine).

Despite the author's tendency to add detail, he tells the standard Joseph story as far as it goes, but he leaves out the middle. There is no story of Evelac and Sarras, yet the number of references to Joseph's shield strongly implies his role as warrior saint. The principal references to the shield are two and follow:

Josephus tells us that Joseph of Arimathea had sealed some of Our Saviour's blood and clothing in the boss (162).

¹⁸Pilate's assumption that Joseph would defile Christ's body is in keeping with the ferocious character given him by the Jewish historian Josephus. Thus, if Joseph served him well as a soldier, then Joseph must have been ruthless as well.

Beneath the fountain two men were sitting, with hair and beards whiter than new-fallen snow, yet their faces seemed young indeed; and as soon as they saw Perceval they rose to meet him, and bowed to him and worshipped the shield that hung at his neck, kissing the cross and the boss which held the relics. ✓

"Sire," they said, "be not amazed if we behave thus, for we were well-acquainted with the knight who bore this shield before you; we saw him many times before God's crucifixion. . . . His name was Joseph of Arimathea. There was no cross on it before the death of Jesus Christ, but Joseph added it after the crucifixion out of love for the Saviour, whom he loved most dearly."

. . . Perceval looked beyond the fountain, and in a most fair place he saw a cask which seemed to be made all of glass, and it was so big that inside was a knight in full armour . . . [who] was very much alive. . . . [Perceval] came back to the worthy men and asked them who the knight was, but they said he could not know just yet (250).

I have quoted the second reference at considerable length because of its central importance to my theme. First, the red cross being placed on the shield by Joseph may have suggested the formation of the famous shield of Elevac which figures heavily in the *Vulgate Queste*. Second, Joseph's great concern for making his own shield so efficacious strongly implies that he must be a warrior to be so concerned with the power of an implement of war. It is my contention that the notion of Joseph as a warrior saint began in the *Perlesvaus*, an idea completely appropriate for a romancer could so easily turn symbolic Biblical figures into a pack of fierce knights who are fond of taking heads. And if the knight in the glass cask is Joseph of Arimathea himself, as Heinzel (174) has suggested, then Joseph is not only the first Grail-Bearer, but the first Grail

Knight, and the latter role seems the more important because Joseph is preserved as a knight in full armor.¹⁹ Since the identification of the knight remains uncertain, the character of Evelac/Mordrains (who also is made to tarry in the flesh) was created by the Vulgate writers possibly to account for him.

Joseph's importance for the author of the Perlesvaus is further demonstrated by his tendency to link almost everything with him. Most of the important characters, positive and negative, are of Joseph's bloodline, and many physical objects mentioned or used by these characters have passed through Joseph's hands at one time or another. These include the shield, a sacred cloth that protects one from devils (145-46), and even an undying mule (93)! And one must not forget the lance and the Grail itself. Of the former, I suspect that the Perlesvaus writer is also the first to clearly identify the lance of the Grail Castle with that which pierced Christ's side.²⁰ The author of Perlesvaus is remarkable for his specificity and usually clearly identifies everything. For

¹⁹Note that besides the Grail, the most common items associated with him are implements of war--a shield, a lance, and a sword.

²⁰Although the extant versions of the Perceval of Robert mention the lance, neither the Joseph or the Merlin do. Robert is very careful to elaborate upon the full significance of the Grail and the Round Table; thus, I find it odd that he makes no reference to the lance in the two romances of his which have come down to us in something close to their original forms. Since both versions of his Perceval which survive are clearly influenced by the continuations, I feel that the mention of the lance owes to corruption of Robert's text.

example, the well-known Grail sword is here identified as that which beheaded John the Baptist.

The last significant Joseph development in the Perlesvaus is the connection with Glastonbury. Nitze has established that the descriptions of Avalon in the romance identify it with Glastonbury (Introduction to Perlesvaus 16. See also his piece in Loomis, ed. Arthurian Literature 261-73 and his "Glastonbury and the Holy Grail" 9-11). In stressing the identification of Avalon as Glastonbury in a romance which gives so much prominence to Joseph of Arimathea, the author probably established the link between the two which has been the subject of such endless religious and literary controversy.

I have spent much space on one of the least attractive of the Grail romances, not because I wish to argue for its appeal, but because of its influence. It established the precedents for a number of the standard features of the later romances: Joseph's status as warrior as well as saint; the Grail wars, implied by Joseph's military implements; and the tendency to link swords, shields, and other objects with Joseph, and characters to his line.²¹

The Vulgate Cycle (ca. 1215-1230)

The romances of the Vulgate Cycle present the most fully developed version of the figure of Joseph, and one of the most significant, since it was the Vulgate Cycle which standardized his

²¹The Vulgate Cycle uses such references to unify the work as a whole.

image and his role. To deal extensively with it would be to repeat much of the history which I have supplied in the previous chapter. However, a few minor points deserve attention in reference to the romances which do not feature the Grail: Merlin, Lancelot, and Mort Artu.

In the first two, especially in the Lancelot, the authors keep Joseph and the Grail before the reader's eyes by means of a number of references, most of which are of the "kin of Joseph of Arimathea" variety. The Merlin, a brief work compared to the huge Lancelot, is well-known to be the work of Robert de Boron up to the crowning of Arthur, and that of a continuator for the remainder. Since the Joseph of Robert and that of the Vulgate in general are not quite the same, one would expect in the continuation some attempts to reconcile the earlier Joseph with that of the cycle. Apart from several minor references to Joseph in the continuations, there is one which is aimed specifically at this sort of reconciliation. As mentioned earlier, Robert knew nothing of the Sarras adventure or the Grail wars of the Estoire, so they do not figure in the previously mentioned passage in his part of the Merlin, where Merlin tells Blaise to set down the history of Joseph. To make up for this obvious deficiency, the continuator introduces Nasciens II and adds a brief summary of important matters which figure in the Estoire:

[T]his knyght was nygh kyn to Ioseph Abaramathie, for he was the sone of Enhynghes, the soster of Ioseph, that was the wif wedded to Ebron, that hadde xij sones, where-of the londe of Bretaigne was after enlumyned, and next co-sin to Selydoyne, the sone of Duke Nascien de Breting, that the grete merveile of the graal saugh firste, and also a-pertened to kynge Pelles of lytenoys and his brethren (Prose Merlin 326).

And thus the Vulgate Merlin which pretends to be a single continuous work is "fixed" as far as its Joseph lore is concerned.

Joseph and his story are much more ingeniously worked into the immense Lancelot. The authors do not permit Joseph or the Grail to go unmentioned for long. Throughout the long romance, the reader is reminded that the Grail is the greatest quest of all and that being of the line of Joseph gives a character special distinction. The system of lineage of Joseph of Arimathea is so elaborate that Jean Frappier has claimed that it "hold[s] together the past, present, and future" (in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 296) and is part of a greater "system of forecasts and concordances" (295-96) which unifies the entire work. As effective as this system is, Joseph is kept before the reader's eyes by more than brief notices. There are several summaries of his history in the Lancelot placed at regular intervals. More remarkable, however, is the entire episode, of his healing of the Saracen, which is lifted whole out of the Estoire and inserted with only minor abridgment into the first part of the Lancelot (Sommer 4: 325-27); and this is balanced by a previously unrecorded adventure of Josephes in a similar position in the last part (Sommer 5: 465-468). And finally, the

Lancelot concludes with a passage which predicts that Galahad will be the one to achieve the Holy Grail, setting the stage for the Queste which is almost entirely concerned with Joseph and his line.²²

Another curious but strangely logical change the Vulgate writers made was to split Joseph of Arimathea into two characters, himself and his son. The character had grown too large to remain single. Thus they provided a Joseph, also of Arimathea, who could meet the requirements of celibacy that one would expect of the first bishop of Britain, requirements that the very married old Joseph could not. At the same time this separation made it possible for the Vulgate writers to crowd even more episodes into the cycle.

Prosa-Lancelot (ca. 1225)

The Prosa-Lancelot is a faithful German translation of the Vulgate Lancelot, Queste, and Mort Artu, the primary significance of which is that it demonstrates how quickly the French Vulgate Cycle dominated the field of Arthurian romance everywhere. The absence of a translation of the Estoire is easily explained, that segment of the Vulgate Cycle had yet to be composed. The absence of the Merlin (at least Robert de Boron's portion) is another matter unless the translator really was interested only in recording the romances

²²One might argue that there are no references to Joseph of Arimathea in the Mort Artu, but this should not be surprising because once the Grail quest is achieved, there is no need for further allusions. Even as central a figure as Galahad, much more prominent in both textual proximity and chronology, only receives a sparse handful of references in the Mort Artu.

concerned with Lancelot. The problem is that such titles as Prose-Lancelot tend to be convenient designations by editors to describe the contents of a portion of a manuscript which is rarely so clearly titled. It seems unlikely that the translator is deliberately ignoring the early Grail history because of his own country's Grail tradition in which Joseph has no place. If this were so, he would probably have modified his translation of the Queste to reflect the Parzival, but there is no hint of such modification in the Prosa-Lancelot. The translation is accurate. All the Joseph passages and allusions are intact, and Galahad, not the German favorite Perceval, is the one who achieves the Grail in its fulness. The German translator simply translates. He makes no attempt to reconcile the French Grail tradition with his own.

I mention this work because I think that the Joseph material in this early translated version of the Queste could well have influenced the interpolation of such material into the later redactions of Wolfram's Parzival and the romance compilations which include Grail adventures. These will be discussed later.²³

²³Another reason is probably just an interesting coincidence. In my discussion of Chrétien's Perceval I mentioned the disparity between the forty-year period of subsistence upon the Grail usually associated with Joseph and that of twelve years that Chrétien claims for his "man in the inner room." In the Gral-Queste of the Prose-Lancelot, the White Knight's tale of Evelac's shield begins thus: 'Herre Galaat, 'sprach er, 'es geschach nach unsers herren martel zwölff jare das Joseph von Arimathea der edel ritter, der unsern herren von dem cruz hub, schied von Jherusalem und ein grob teil von dem geschlecht dannen er was' (*italics mine*). A glance at Kluge's notes to his edition reveals the following variants: "xlij" (40)

Post-Vulgate Cycle (ca. 1230)

Owing to Fanni Bogdanow's Romance of the Grail, we finally have a reasonably clear reconstruction of the contents of the Post-Vulgate Cycle.²⁴ These are an Estoire, Merlin, Queste, and Mort Artu which generally follow the Vulgate,²⁵ but the Merlin continues the Robert de Boron Merlin with the so-called Suite du Merlin instead of the usual Vulgate continuation. Bogdanow's claim is that the Post-Vulgate authors wished to make Arthur the central figure of the Cycle, and did so primarily by removing the Lancelot which devoted more than half of the Vulgate to that character and substituting a bridge passage between the Suite du Merlin and the Queste (197-221). However, removal of the Lancelot had another effect which Bogdanow does not emphasize--it also brings the character of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail quest more strongly into focus than they were in the Vulgate Cycle. A mere look at the contents of the new

and comparison of Sommer's text of the Queste shows similar variations (25). Number variants are common in such manuscripts, but I suggest that the persistence of the twelve may owe to an association of Chrétien's mystery man with Joseph by some readers and scribes.

²⁴Clearly I owe much of the following discussion to her Romance of the Grail, but also useful are Bruce 1: 458-79; David E. Campbell's Introduction to his translation of the Tale of Balain; and Roger Lathuillere's "Le Roman du Graal posterieur a la Vulgate."

²⁵French manuscript evidence is fragmentary, and much of the cycle has been reconstructed from existing Spanish and Portuguese translations. For this, see Bogdanow in Loomis, ed. Arthurian Literature 325-35 and her Romance of the Grail generally.

cycle reveals that more than half is devoted to Joseph and the Grail, and the supremacy of the Grail quest is clear simply because it has to compete with fewer quests and conflicts for the reader's attention. Finally, the thrust of the work is indicated by the authors' choice of a title. Again and again they refer to their work as L'Estoire dou Saint Graal or La Haute Escriture del Saint Graal. Arthur may be the central figure, but the romance is of the Grail.

Heinrich von dem Türlin's Diu Crone (ca. 1225)

Although Heinrich von dem Türlin's Diu Crone contains a now famous Grail episode,²⁶ it can by no means be considered a Grail romance. The Grail episode itself accounts for only 1/44th of the entire romance. It comes near the end, topping off a long series of knightly adventures for Gawain, and the Grail quest itself is given little distinction from Gawain's other adventures, although he is prepared for it to some extent in the last quarter of the romance.

Joseph of Arimathea does not appear, nor is there any reference to him or the usual members of his line anywhere in Heinrich's

²⁶This is mainly due to excessive interest in the Grail itself and scholars' wide and exhaustive search for any text containing a reference toward it, in hopes of finding yet another piece to help in the final solution of the Grail puzzle. Jessie Weston brought particular attention to this Grail episode by publishing a translation of it in her Sir Gawain at the Grail Castle. As Weston points out, the Diu Crone contains the only example of Gawain's success as Grail quester (ix-x). Important studies include Heller, Walshe, Jillings, and Waite (277-82).

30,000+ lines of verse. The author appears to be in complete ignorance of the Estoire (which may not yet have been written) or the work of Robert de Boron; but he seems acquainted with portions of the Lancelot and the Queste; and this last indicates that he may well have deliberately suppressed any mention of Joseph. His suppression of Parzival's triumph is odd, because he does know of Wolfram's work and mentions him by name in line 6380. Instead, he stresses Parzival's initial failure and refuses him a second chance. His clearest sources, however, are Chrétien and the First Continuation, and Heinrich's Grail King, sustained by yearly eating of the sacred bread in the Grail and drinking the blood from the lance, is undoubtedly based upon Chrétien's man in the inner room.

Although Gawain asks the vital question and matters are brought to what seems a satisfactory conclusion, this particular Grail quest is far from satisfactory and contains a number of disturbing elements. First, much of the Grail's mystery is wanting; it is merely a container for the host. Second, the lance yields the blood upon request, and both the Grail and the lance seem to serve no other purpose than to keep the guilty inhabitants of the Grail Castle in an unwanted state of un-death. Third, Gawain's question "What does all this mean?" is not answered satisfactorily. Finally, the Waste Land remains waste. In essence, all Gawain succeeds in doing is exorcizing a group of earth-bound spirits. But the most disturbing aspect of this Grail quest is this, as Waite so lucidly puts it:

The Romance, for the rest, is the work of one who has resolved to give the palm to Gawain at the express expense of Perceval, to the Knight of This World in place of the Knight Celestial. It is the experiment of an inventor who possibly may have adapted some old materials to another purpose, at once indeterminate and undesirable (282).²⁷

I have considered this non-Joseph romance at length because it shows how rapidly the Grail quest could be degraded. Here the Grail and the lance are instruments of torture, keeping a group of damned souls in a mockery of life. It is to Heinrich's credit that he had the good taste to keep the pious Joseph of Arimathea out of such a production.

Livre d'Artus (ca. 1250)

By no stretch of the imagination can the Livre d'Artus be considered a Grail romance. I mention it because it demonstrates that Joseph's reputation was such that he could intrude into a romance that does not concern him.²⁸ Toward the end of this romance which tells the history of Arthur and has no interest in the Grail, there is inserted a brief summary of the Estoire and a complete Gospel of Nicodemus!²⁹ If there was ever a clear interpolation,

²⁷Waite must always be read with great caution since he as often as not writes as much to conceal as to reveal. I have followed Waite through many volumes and have learned enough of his system of occult philosophy to know when he can be trusted on his literal level, and I vouch for him here.

²⁸Whitehead and Loomis have entirely missed the Grail material in the romance in their brief discussion of the Livre d'Artus in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 336-38.

²⁹This is Sommer 7: 243-60. Sommer claims severe variations but this Gospel is merely Latin A, as identified in my Chapter I.

this is it. The implication is that Joseph's reputation was such in France that no Arthurian romance could be considered complete without some reference to him and the Grail.

Jacob von Maerlant's Historie van den Grale and Merlijns Boek
(ca. 1260)

Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail story are best represented in the Netherlands by Jacob van Maerlant's Historie van den Grale and Merlijns Boek.³⁰ These are free and often ill-tempered translations of Robert de Boron's first two romances. Jacob's method and attitude toward his work are such that one gets the impression that he took on the task of translating de Boron's work for the express purpose of pointing out and correcting its faults. Jacob opens his work promising to finally tell correctly the tale which has been falsely told before--as do many of the medieval writers--but he makes good his promise by translating what Robert de Boron has written and then adding his own critical commentary, saying that Robert is wrong, illogical, or lying. One of the most common words in Jacob's translation is walsche (false), usually occurring in in comments like: "Dus scriuet robrecht wt zinen monde/Mijn her robrecht van barioen/ De in dat walsch screyff al dit doen"; thus claims Robert with his mouth, Master Robert de Boron who has put

³⁰Much of the following depends upon Sparnaay in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 445-46, and especially Sodmann's Introduction to his edition of Jacob van Maerlant.

together that false account) (Sodmann 9). Jacob corrects names and Biblical references and claims that he doesn't believe that Joseph could have collected the blood in the way Robert describes and that he finds it unlikely that Vespasian could have been a Christian. His most striking correction, however, concerns Joseph's forty-year imprisonment. Jacob translates Robert, claims the account cannot possibly be true, and adds a shortened version of the passage of the Gospel of Nicodemus which states that Joseph spent only four nights in prison (405-54).

The Merlin he generally leaves as Robert had it, probably because he had no material against which to check it. However, Jacob is unable to resist tampering with his material. His largest change is the addition of a Maskeroen which concerns the Trial of Satan (ll. 1694-2981), but he also makes some minor additions, one of which is a reference to Joseph of Arimathia which is not found in Robert's romance (ll. 4100-1409), and another which is an expansion of Merlin's reference to Joseph when he tells Blaise to write down the history of the Grail (ll. 4770-4795).

What Jacob does is generally to correct and deepen the religious matter in Robert's romances, but he shows special concern for Joseph of Arimathia. Jacob especially wants his story told correctly, and to accomplish this, he, like the author of the Livre d'Artus inserts a portion of Joseph's standard, non-romance history, the Gospel of Nicodemus. Also, by expanding the references to Joseph in

the Merlin, where his source is brief, he insures that his reader does not forget Joseph in his undoubted role, the mourner and burier of Christ, as well as the collector of the blood, none of which are actually mentioned in his original.

Sone de Nausay (ca. 1275)

A much less reverent treatment of Joseph of Arimathea is found in the Sone de Nausay, a lengthy and rambling French romance concerned mainly with the adventures of the semi-historical title figure.³¹ The Grail Castle episode which occurs approximately a quarter of the way through the romance offers an odd account of Joseph's history. The first part (ll. 4569-4738) generally agrees with the usual account, but afterward, there is a sudden shift, and the author heads off in a direction of his own. Joseph goes not to Britain but to Norway where he defeats the Saracens and becomes king.³² Old as he is, Joseph is a mighty warrior invincible upon

³¹Waite identifies this figure as the eldest son of Count Anseis of Brabant and the daughter of the Count of Flanders (245). Loomis makes a cautious but non-specific reference in The Grail (135). The introduction of historical figures into a romance is usually done at the expense of the legendary ones. Of all the usual romance heroes, only Joseph is mentioned in the Sone de Nausay.

³²At this point the Sone de Nausay is too much for its editor who exclaims in a note: "Die Sarrazenen in Norwegen!" (591). I suspect that the explanation for this absurdity lies in the author's perhaps only hearsay familiarity with the Estoire. With Waite, I suspect that the Norwegian location owes to the opening of the Estorie where the recorder of the history is ordered by an angel to seek the Grail Book in Norway, and I further suspect that the Saracens, being there owes to the author's dim recollection of the Sarra material in the base romance; but these are matters which require separate treatment.

✓
 the batterfield but vulnerable in the lists of love, and his heart is stolen by the daughter of the Saracen king he kills. He baptises and marries her, but neither have the desired effect because she secretly rejects the faith and openly hates Joseph for killing her family and friends. As punishment for his folly, the Lord wounds Joseph in the thighs and thereabout, and he and his kingdom fall into decline.³³ His only pleasure in life is fishing, and he becomes known as the Fisher King; and thus he remains until an unnamed knight skilled in the medical arts heals him, returning king and kingdom to normal. Joseph then takes up his old military career, conquers and converts his enemies, sets up a Grail Castle (more an abbey), and later dies. His body is kept there on display in a glass box.

This is a curious Joseph. Not only does he become the Fisher King and the frosty side of a January-May relationship, but a display at a Grail Castle which is now open to the general public. But it is not only Joseph who suffers devaluation at the hands of the Sone writer--the Holy Grail itself has lost all of its mystery.

³³Loomis translates this passage (ll. 4846-53) as: "Neither peas nor wheat were sown, no child was born to man, nor did maiden have husband, nor did tree bear leaf, nor meadow turn green, and neither bird nor beast had young" (The Grail 138). From the specificity of this passage, he deduces that the author of the Sone was following a source more ancient than any of those extant. However it could easily be a formula dimly based on the archetypal Osiris/Persephone myth.

Bruce observes of the Grail Mass section of the Sone (ll. 16914-17130):

The Grail service is conducted in the sight of the whole people (ll. 17055ff.) and after the ceremony is over, the abbot puts the sacred vessel into an ivory box (ll. 17103ff.), exactly as a priest of the period, after the sacramental service, would restore the chalice to its appointed receptacle. . . . [W]e see here the old veil of mystery that had surrounded the holy vessel in the earlier treatments of the theme finally thrown aside and the identity of the Grail with a vessel of the eucharist acknowledged without disguise (Bruce 1: 352).

How is one to account for such variations? Critics from Moritz Goldschmidt, the romance's first editor, to R. S. Loomis have believed that the answer lies in a lost source, perhaps Kyot, pre-dating any of the extant Grail romances. Like Bruce (352-53), I favor a different approach to the matter. Why postulate a lost source when a simpler answer is at hand? The first part of the Joseph account agrees generally with the usual one, and perhaps particularly with that in the Perlesvaus, since both have in common the warrior view of Joseph, the knight in the glass case, and the number of years (seven) that Joseph served Pilate; but nowhere is there any real evidence of a source at hand. There are no similarities of wording, and even the sequence of events is marred by blunders which are inexplicable if the author was working from any source dealing with the story of the Grail, Joseph, or both: Pilate throws Joseph into prison; Nicodemus, Josephes, and the followers of Joseph are missing; Joseph is not baptised by Philip; and Joseph finds the spear after he is freed from his prison by

Vespasian. Even if there was a lost romance by Kyot, one can presume that it would have agreed at least as much with Chrétien and Wolfram as they to one another, since it has been thought the source for both. It therefore seems unlikely that a third romance following the same source could bear so little resemblance to the extant ones.

Rather, the impression I receive of the Grail passages in the Sone de Nausay is one of an author attempting to retell a story he only dimly recalls and does not fully understand. He does the best he can, slurring over details he cannot remember and resorting to imagination to account for things he does remember but can not reconcile to the rest of his material and to fill in gaps. How else can one account for the fact that neither Perceval's name or the Grail question are mentioned here when both are absolutely essential to both Chrétien and Wolfram, his claim that Logres was later called Norway (!), and his addition of Joseph's victory over the Saracens along with the affair with the pagan princess? He clearly has no inkling of the significance of the Grail--or its quest--and simply equates it to the closest thing he can think of, the chalice of the Mass.

As far as sources are concerned, one can conclude only that the author of the Sone de Nausay probably had general (perhaps only hearsay) knowledge of the Estoire or the work of Robert de Boron and perhaps somewhat more detailed knowledge of the Perlesvaus and, of course, the Biblical accounts of Joseph and the Avenging of the Savior. He clearly was not so awed by the traditional figure of

Joseph of Arimathea that he felt it inappropriate to paint him as a fool in love, and he attached no overwhelming significance to the Grail and its secrets. In the Sone Joseph is primarily a warrior and the Grail simply the most appropriate chalice for the celebration of the Sacrament. And above all, the Grail Castle passages are only episodes having little influence on the surrounding romance. They don't even appear at a strategic point in the narrative as they do at least near the end of the Diu Crone. In the Sone the Joseph material is anomalous, lacking even the thematic link that allowed his insertion in the German romances.

Der Jüngere Titurel (ca. 1300)

Long believed to be the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach, Der Jüngere Titurel by "Albrecht" is an odd combination of two virtually independent narratives.³⁴ The bulk of the work is a lengthy romance of Sigune and Schionatulander which is simply jammed in between the halves of a much smaller history of Titurel, the first of the Grail Kings. The latter, which is my concern, tells of Titurel's lineage, upbringing, his reception of the Grail, his reign as Grail King,

³⁴Most studies tend to be comparisons of Wolfram's work and verse form to that of his less-talented imitator. Until Wolf's edition is completed by other hands, one must rely on Hahn's flawed edition for the end of the romance. Discussions of Jüngere Titurel include A. G. Thornton's Weltgeschichte unde Heilsgeschichte in Albrechts von Scharfenberg "Jüngerem Titurel," Helen Adolf's Visio Pacis 127-46, and Waite 283-87.

his removal of the Grail to the realm of Prester John, and finally his death.

Since the author claims to be Wolfram, he obviously employs him (and the shadowy Kyot) as his principal source, following the suggested story line of Wolfram as far as it goes, incorporating all of the genuine work of Wolfram, the so-called Titirel Fragments, and adding huge clumps of material of his own devising. But dependence upon other sources reveals itself, especially in the Grail portion of the romance. Early in the first part of the history of Titirel, we learn that he is descended from one of the knights who helped Vespasian to destroy Jerusalem, a feature which betrays the influence of the French romances since Wolfram says nothing of it. This however, is a minor matter compared to Albrecht's introduction of Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail into his romance. This passage occurs almost at the very end of the romance and seems almost an afterthought added at the last moment to correct his main source material.

When Titirel finally arrives at the palace of Prester John, the legendary king asks him of the nature of the Grail, and Titirel answers according to Wolfram's account that the Grail is a miracle-working stone brought to earth by the neutral angels. Then he goes on, ingeniously bridging the gap between stone and the Grail of the Last Supper. The stone was made into a dish by unspecified personages ("man"), and this was naturally the dish used by Jesus to

celebrate the first communion. However, a second dish was made and, because of its lavish ornamentation, was mistaken for the true Grail by all but Joseph of Arimathea who figures in the following passage:

[He] knew the right one,
 Who early and late loved Jesus Christ with perfect truth.
 He justly kept the dish in secret
 Until the angel brought it to me, known as the Grail in
 angelic tones (Hahn's ed. stanza 6176).

This, of course is in direct contradiction with the accounts that Wolfram gives in Parzival and the Titirel Fragments. In the latter Titirel plainly states:

When I received the Graal with that high embassy
 Which the glorious angel brought me in power and majesty,
 There I found my kingdom's laws recorded.
To no other hand before me had the keeping of the Graal
 been awarded (Richey trans. in Studies 222--my italics).

Wolfram left no room for Joseph of Arimathea, and yet by the end of the thirteenth century, another writer, posing as Wolfram, was able to bring this alien figure into a work which for a while was considered Wolfram's greatest literary achievement. The location of the Joseph passage is also suggestive. The romance has creaked along for over 6,000 stanzas without the least need for Joseph of Arimathea, and suddenly at the very close of an unnecessary account of the Grail, this solitary reference appears. It is as if the author felt he was forced to mention Joseph for the sake for completion, perhaps fearing that his Grail romance would not receive approval without him. Thus, a shaky compromise is effected between the French and German Grail traditions. The Grail is the dish of the

Last Supper, but it was fashioned from Wolfram's stone. Joseph did bring the Grail westward, but Wolfram's Titurel is the first person formally entrusted with its keeping. Clearly, the French tradition, the Joseph tradition was beginning to supplant that of Wolfram in his own country, in a work claiming to be his own. And, as will be seen later, this process was to continue.

Spanish/Portuguese and Italian Grail Romances (ca. 1300-25)

The relative failure of the Grail romance in the Iberian Peninsula and Italy is difficult to explain unless the reason lies in the fact that they had developed no early Grail tradition of their own on which the foreign, especially the French Grail literature could be engrafted. However, the Arthurian romance did flourish in these countries. Heroes such as Lancelot, Tristan, and Arthur were quickly embraced by these cultures and inserted into original, native romances like Amadis de Gaula and the much later Orlando Furioso which employed the Court of Arthur either as a backdrop or a point of reference. But the Grail material received only summary treatment and perhaps was included only because it was an acknowledged part of the story.

The Portuguese and Spanish romances may be treated together since they are virtually the same.³⁵ Foremost among them are

³⁵For much of the discussion below, I rely upon Malkiel in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 406-18, appropriate sections in Bogdanow's Romance of the Grail, and especially Entwistle's Arthurian Legend in Literatures of the Spanish Peninsula.

translations of the so-called Post-Vulgate Cycle which I have already discussed above. These translations are considered accurate enough, even slavishly so, to be used for reconstruction of material now missing in the original language (Bogdanow Roman chapters 4-7), but they deviate from their originals, real or presumed, in spirit and religious emphasis. Bruce, one of the first to notice these deviations, notes that in episodes of the Queste where the Grail is not actually the subject, "the Grail theme disappears almost entirely from view, and Galahad . . . differs from the other knights merely in being the hardest hitter [in fist-fights] of them all" (1: 471. See also Enwhistle 165). As might be expected, the figure of Joseph of Arimathea is considerably reduced by the strong emphasis of physical action at the expense of the supernatural and mystical (Malkiel, in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 412). He retains his status of burier of and sufferer for Christ and evangelist, but since the Grail is de-emphasized, his role as its bearer is considerably lessened. If the Post-Vulgate Cycle was an attempt to make Arthur (and Joseph) the focus of the cycle, the Spanish and Portuguese translators defeated that purpose. The emphasis upon and addition of physical violence and action at the expense of supernatural and mystical matter and characterization produces a sense of blurring, and the final impression is one of a rough court where the brutish knights are indistinguishable from one another, and the ladies are no better than they should be.

Joseph and the Grail suffered a similar devaluation in Italy though, once again, much of the remaining Arthurian matter enjoyed great popularity.³⁶ E. G. Gardiner sums up the matter well near the beginning of his still-standard Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature:

Among the frequent allusions to Arthurian names and matters in the lyrics of the thirteenth century, and the fuller treatment of such themes and motives in fourteenth-century poetry, the Grail and its questers seldom appear. In Italian prose we shall indeed find one Grail text of singular importance, but the story of the Holy Grail took no root in Italian soil; its mysticism was a kind of alien to the Italian genius (19-20).

The Grail text which Gardiner mentions is La Tavola Ritonda, a liberal translation of the French Prose Tristan. Although the Italian romance does include a Grail quest, it is not a major concern of the romance and is reduced almost to the point of unintelligibility. The Grail itself is one of the most curious in the literature: it is a vessel made of the earth beneath the cross onto which had fallen the precious blood, and into which had been poured the wine used to wash the wounds of Christ. Nor is the holy blood present in the Grail; it returned to Christ upon the resurrection.

Even odder than the nature of the Grail is the author's attitude toward Joseph of Arimathea. The numerous references to Joseph

³⁶For much of the discussion below, I rely upon Gardiner's Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature. A supplement to Gardiner is Viscardi in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 419-29. Of special interest is a recent translation of Tavola Ritonda by Anne Shaver as Tristan and the Round Table.

in the Prose Tristan--which opens with an extended reference proving Tristan to be kin of Joseph--have been reduced to a mere handful; moreover, no distinction is made between Joseph and his son, so it is apparently Joseph himself who appears at the end of the quest (302-5). Another curious point is the author's interpolation of a lyric which flatly states that Nicodemus placed Jesus in his tomb (86)! Save for the sort of acute stupidity which is nowhere else evident in the romance, the only explanation to this apparent blunder is that it is intentional, for all known versions of the established source contain at least two passages that clearly identify Joseph as the custodian of the holy body.

But the strangest variation of all is a preposterous account of Joseph's career in Britain:

It happened that after the death of Cristo there arrived here a great baron of saintly life, called Giuseppe Bramanzia; he went about preaching and showing the Christian faith, and soon he had converted a fourth part of the people on this island. . . . Then [the ruling giant Dialantes] sent out a great proclamation, and made it known that anyone else who believed Giuseppe would suffer [beheading]. . . . [The giant and his army] captured Giuseppe and all who followed him, and cut off their heads. Afterwards, he had this castle built, and had its foundations made. . . . [of] the bones and flesh of Christians, and he gave orders that their blood be mixed into the sand and lime with which it is walled and finished. Those who were beheaded numbered 76,432, and this was how Dialantes recaptured his people (82).

If the Sone de Nausay shows lack of respect for the figure of Joseph, then here is complete deflation. Joseph's execution of the Great Commission results in the deaths of all the faithful, the desecration of their bodies, and the initiation of a tradition of

chopping off the heads of foreigners who visit the castle. Nor is this story unique to La Tavola Ritonda--it also appears in the Tristano Riccardiano (ca. 1290) which Gardiner believes to be the first Italian Arthurian romance (64), and is clearly the source for the tale in La Tavola. Thus, on the basis of the evidence above and the absence of any more positive counter-versions, one may conclude that from the very beginning, the Italian romancers little venerated Joseph of Arimathea and had small tolerance for tales of the Holy Grail.

Wisse and Colin's Der Neue Parzival (ca. 1331-36)

Joseph of Arimathea received much better treatment, if only incidentally, at the hands of Claus Wisse and Philipp Colin who in the early part of the fourteenth century produced an updated version of the Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach. This greatly expanded version called Der Neue Parzival consisted of Wolfram's romance with, apart from minor additions elsewhere, a full and close translation of the Elucidation and the first three continuations to Chrétien's Perceval inserted between Books XIV-XV (Wittmann-Klemm 16-28. On the minor additions, see Heller). The significance of these additions, for my study, is that they plant Joseph firmly into the German Grail tradition. Since Wisse and Colin's version of the first continuation includes the extensive Joseph interpolation, that added to the account in the third continuation, permits Joseph to usurp Titurel's position as first Grail-Keeper by virtue of a much

greater amount of space allowed him in Der Neue Parzifal. This, with the earlier brief mention of Joseph in Der Jungere Titurel, indicates a growing tendency among the German writers to consider Joseph of Arimathea so essential a part of the Grail story that no Grail tradition, even their own, could be complete without him. And, again, the process was to continue, as will be discussed later.

The Early English Romances (ca. 1275-1350)

Of the three romances which I will treat here, only the first, Joseph of Arimathie (ca. 1350), can properly be considered a Grail romance; but the other two, the Morte Arthure (ca. 1350) and Arthour and Merlin (ca. 1275), have Grail connections, however subtle, and help to illustrate the peculiar development of the Grail tradition in England.

If for no other reason, Joseph of Arimathie is significant because it is the first extant English Grail romance; moreover, it provides the most concentrated focus on the figure of Joseph himself since Robert de Boron's initial treatment.³⁷ As Lagorio has rightly pointed out, this is Joseph's romance ("Transition" 96). Joseph is the central figure, not only through his innate significance, but through his actual participation in the events related in this romance. Although the extensive and digressive Estoire is his

³⁷ Especially in the Vulgate Estoire, Joseph seems almost lost in the sheer mass of characters, miracles, and battles.

undoubted source, the author of Joseph of Arimathie by eliminating the exploits of other heroes and abbreviating (and improving) the battle sequences keeps his focus almost exclusively upon Joseph himself and his first major evangelical triumph, the conversion of the pagan nation of Sarras. Although Lagorio's treatment of the poem is generally fine, she goes too far in claiming that the poet was carefully de-emphasizing the Grail and the Arthurian connections. First, the Grail passages are intact and only slightly reduced, if at all. Although the importance is here given to the blood rather than the Grail, this is merely in keeping with the current Glastonbury version which claimed that Joseph brought two cruets containing the blood and sweat of Christ.³⁸ Although Joseph himself is emphasized, there is no escaping the fact that the Grail is the source of his power and strength. Second, after the irrelevant Estoire material is excised, only one Arthurian reference, that to Galaad/Galahad (ll. 231, Lawton ed.) remains, and it is intact in the alliterative poem. Failure to make other such references probably owes more to their contextual absurdity than any attempt to downplay Arthurian matters. If such had been the poet's wish, why did he who cut his source so freely leave in that passage? Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the poet did all that he could within his context to magnify Joseph, and this is especially apparent in his

³⁸The containers themselves are given no special significance.

treatment of Josaphe. In the Estoire Josaphe is perhaps more prominent than Joseph himself, but here he is clearly of secondary importance. The author of the English romance reduces his role throughout and ends before his real career begins in the Estoire. As Lagorio puts it: "[T]he Estoire's glorification of Joseph films is as unmistakable as the English poet's determination to extol Joseph pere as an exemplar Christian rather than his purely fictional offspring" ("Transition" 97).

All of this is interesting, but what does it mean? I feel that the poet was attempting to turn the material he took from the Estoire into British property, a task involving more than merely adapting it in a distinctly British verse form. Although the poem's latest editor David Lawton claims that there is "absolutely no sign in the Middle English Joseph of Arimathea of any interest in, or knowledge of, the Glastonbury account" and "proves" this by pointing to a few disagreements between the two versions (x1), I think he is mistaken. What is more likely is that the author of the alliterative poem chose Joseph of Arimathea as his subject because of his already existing association with Britain in general and Glastonbury in particular. William Nitze has proven that the Joseph-Glastonbury connection had reached as far as France by ca. 1200 since it is reflected in the Perlesvaus (in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 267-69). Thus, it seems reasonable that the author of Joseph of Arimathie would have been aware of it by ca. 1340, and this

supposition is made even stronger by the fact that the dialect of the poem has been identified as West Midlands, with some Southern features, placing the probable area of its composition relatively close to Glastonbury (Skeat xi).

Just as it is clear that the poet was carefully and methodically magnifying the Joseph that he found in his source, I feel that he was doing so because of Joseph's special importance to Britain as its premier evangelist, a tradition which had recently been acknowledged by Glastonbury, which claimed now to have his body, as well as those of Arthur and Guinevere.³⁹ True, there is no allusion to Glastonbury, but Joseph's coming to Glastonbury simply is not part of the story the poet wished to tell. Failure to allude to Glastonbury may even have been deliberate. After all Joseph of Arimathie was not a Glastonbury production. Since there was often competition between various abbeys and orders for pilgrims (and resulting revenue), one can certainly understand the poet's possible reluctance to give publicity to a rival abbey which had been receiving more than its share of attention for a century and a half, since the alleged discovery of the bones of Arthur and Guinevere in 1191.

Still, the influence of the Glastonbury version of the Joseph legend can not be absolutely verified. One can only point to the

³⁹This tale was believed in so strongly that by June 10, 1345 (the approximate date of Joseph of Arimathie), a John Blome had been given permission by the Chancellor of Edward III to search at Glastonbury for the remains of Joseph. Apparently little of interest was discovered (J. A. Robinson 53-64).

probability of such influence. However, even without that, Joseph of Arimathie remains a significant development in the saint's tradition. The primary accomplishment of the British poet was the deliberate amplification of Joseph himself and the sharp focus on the first great triumph of his evangelistic career. He began the process, which Malory was to complete, of taking a French Joseph source and giving it a peculiarly British treatment, adapting it to British interests and temperament. Many of the characteristics that Vinaver notes in Malory's treatment of his sources are already present here: the simplification of the French "enterlaced" narrative line, the resulting focus on particular characters and events, and the reduction of theological discourse (Malory 109-114).

The peculiarly British tendency to simplify and focus is also apparent in the Morte Arthure, an alliterative poem roughly contemporary with Joseph of Arimathie.⁴⁰ Nowhere is there any hint of Joseph or the Grail.⁴¹ The Morte Arthure is unlike the romances typical of the period. The ladies are of little importance, feats

⁴⁰The date of the poem is still a matter of controversy. For a discussion of this matter, see Hamel's edition 53-58. Much discussion of the Morte Arthure has been on trying to determine what the poem is--epic, romance, tragedy, etc. A summary discussion of such matters is found in Göller ed. Alliterative Morte Arthure 7-14.

⁴¹Haas in Göller AMA claims that Arthur's Collecting Gawain's blood in a helmet is an allusion to the Holy Grail, but there is little in his argument or in the poem itself to make this view convincing (123-4).

of arms are almost exclusively confined to the batterfield, and the supernatural is usually represented only in dreams. Only when Arthur fights the giant of Mont St. Michel does the reader feel himself in the usual realm of romance.

Indeed, if it were not for the appearance of Lancelot and passages that owe more to Wace than to Geoffrey or Layamon, it might seem that the Morte author is completely ignorant of the French Arthurian tradition which would explain why he mentions neither Joseph of Arimathea or the Grail. After all, Wace was very early, and the poet (of the Morte) could easily have heard of Lancelot and thrown him into his poem for good measure. The solution, however, is not nearly so simple. Careful examination of the poem reveals that the poet was aware of the Arthurian romances after Wace, and source studies have established that the poet certainly knew the Vulgate Mort Artu and was probably aware of the other branches of that cycle (M. Hamel in her edition of the Morte Arthure 34-36 and M. Fries in Göller ed. Alliterative Morte Arthure 30-43). Probably he was familiar with the story of Joseph and the Grail. He certainly knew of the Glastonbury "discovery," for at the close of his poem he clearly connects Glastonbury with Avalon; and it seems quite probable that he would have at least heard of the Joseph "tradition" there, considering the relatively late date of the poem. It would be more remarkable if he had not.

Did the Morte poet neglect to mention Joseph and the Grail, or did he deliberately avoid such references? The latter seems to me the more likely. Like the author of Joseph of Arimathie before and Malory after him, the poet of the alliterative poem selected the story he wanted to tell, a British story from what was thought to be an essentially British history, and took missing materials, characters, and details from the French and other sources available. He always takes care to disentangle from his straight-forward story line matters which he considers extraneous or distracting, matters like Joseph and the Grail and, surprisingly, Merlin who is so prominent in Geoffrey and all the derivative histories. The result is a particularly British romance of Arthur, a quality Eugène Vinaver emphasizes at the close of a discussion of the poem in his Malory:

There is in this poem, despite its French descent, a peculiarly English chord. The older alliterative form is revived, the patriotic note is struck with great poignancy, and the "crowned King Arthur" is duly restored to the heart of the Romance (90).

This Britishness is not only seen in the verse form and the poet's tendency to identify himself and his audience with Arthur's forces by using the pronoun "oure," but also in his identification of Gawain, not Lancelot, as the best knight of all. Lancelot makes a few cameo appearances only, and is nowhere on the same footing as Gawain, often called "the gracyous," "the gude." Nowhere is there any hint of the Gawain of the Mort Artu, the poet's source, who makes improper advances to the Maid of Astolat. Here is a Gawain

who reserves all his love and loyalty for his lord, like the faithful retainers that one encounters in Old English poetry. But the strongest proof of the poet's esteem for Gawain is that he reserves for the hero the fullest measure of his poetic talent. Arthur's lament for Gawain near the end of the poem is one of the finest passages in the poem and is perhaps its emotional and moral climax. One may argue that the poet represents Arthur as deserving his fate due to his personal failings of wrath, greed or pride, but not so with Gawain. His only concern is his duty, and even faced with impossible odds, his only thought is to avenge the honor of his lord. Arthur, finding the body, realizes that all is vanity and that his own honor is now pointless and finished. He acknowledges that Gawain is not only his own superior, but almost an equal of Christ:

Dere kosyn o kynde, in kare am I leuede,
 For nowe my wirchipe es wente and my were endide. . . .
 Of all knyghtes þe kyng at vndir Criste lifede,
 þou was worthy to be kyng, þofe I þe crown bare.
 My wele and my wirchipe of all þis werlde riche
 Was wonnen thourghe sir Wawayne and thourghe his witt one! . . .
 O rightwis riche Gode, this rewthe thou beholde,
 þis ryall rede blode ryn appon erthe!
 It ware worthy to be schrede and schrynede in golde,
 For it es sakles of syn, sa helpe me oure Lorde! (ll. 3956-92)

Then Arthur goes forth to avenge Gawain and meet his own fate, and the poem comes to a close. In the end the poem seems to best fit the "fall of princes" category, showing how the greatest knight and king in the world must surely be brought low and all their deeds

come to naught when the Wheel of Fortune inevitably turns against them.

The alliterative poet does not need Joseph or the Grail to tell his story of Arthur. Indeed, they would spoil it, for the Grail quest implies that earthly man, if he can be good and pure enough, can achieve the ultimate through the code of chivalry and be transported directly into heaven. The Morte poet's intention is very nearly the opposite--to show that even the greatest of heroes, while they and their deeds of valor are appropriate subjects and admirable, will reach the end that all must face (Benson Alliterative Morte Arthure 84-85). If he accepted the legend of Joseph then current at Glastonbury, he undoubtedly felt that it had nothing to do with his story. It is almost as if the poet thought that by removing the usual trappings of chivalry and the unnecessary enterlaced material and by making Arthur the true center of his poem and representing Gawain as the best knight in the world, he could perhaps restore the Arthurian story to the British in its original purity.⁴²

The earliest of the English romances treated here, Arthour and Merlin (ca. 1275) is a condensed translation of the Vulgate

⁴²The strongest argument for French influence is that of John Finlayson who, in the Introduction to his partial edition of the poem, claims that the chanson de geste is reflected in the structure and content of Morte Arthure (5-10). If this is true, then one could expect no reference to one such as Joseph since the poem would be concerned only with martial matters.

Merlin, yet it already displays the tendency which R. W. Ackerman has noted of the English Romances in general: "Yet, in their adaptations and often in their translations as well, the English writers, who were addressing a later audience, tended to create a type of romance quite distinct from the French" (In Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 481). The first truly "British" characteristic of Arthour and Merlin is what Elizabeth Sklar has called the author's conscious "Englishing" of his source, that is, not mere translation and adaptation, but frequent allusion to the fact that he is presenting the work in English for Englishmen ("Arthour and Merlin: The Englishing of Arthur"). As one might expect, the first such allusion appears at the very opening of the work and is not unlike the sort of passage that one is accustomed to finding at the beginnings of other translated books:

Of Freynsch no Latin nil y tel more
 Ac on I[n]glisch ichil tel perfore:
 Rigt is þat I[n]glische vnderstond
 þat was born in Ingland.
 Freynsche vse þis gentil man
 Ac euerich Ingliche Ingliche can,
 Mani noble ich haue yseige
 þat no Freynsche coupe seye,
 Biginne ichil for her loue
 Bi Ihesus leue þat sitt aboue
 On Ingliche tel mi tale (Auchinleck MS. ll. 19-29,
 ed. Macrae-Gibson).

What makes this passage important is its emphasis on the translation into English, rather than the extraordinary worth of the tale itself and the benefit that the English can derive from it once it is put in their own language. A single such passage means little, but

similar passages abound in the work, and Sklar lists a number of them, the most striking of which is undoubtedly the poet's insistence that the inscription on Excalibur is in English:

On þe pomel was ywrite
 "Icham yhot Estalibore
 Vnto a king fair tresore"
 (On Inglis is þis writeing
 "Kerue stiel and iren and al þing") (ll. 2816-20).

The "Englishing" of the source also includes the great reduction or complete omission of episodes which are set in places other than Britain, and so much of the material concerned with Merlin alone is similarly reduced or removed that the romance becomes much more directly than the Merlin the story of Arthur's rise to power and the unification of his kingdom (Sklar 53-4). As well, the general English geography in the Merlin is made specific by the Arthour and Merlin poet, and outright mistakes are methodically corrected. Thus, the French source is transformed into a British romance with a British hero in a British setting.

The author's focus on his political theme, the unification of Arthur's kingdom, also results in his reduction of the Grail theme and the associated Joseph of Arimathea material, but these reductions are not as extreme as Sklar claims (55). First, the Merlin itself does not abound with references to Joseph and the Grail. Of the three principal Joseph references in the Merlin, the English poet does omit allusions to Joseph in the first two, when Merlin tells Blaise to record the Grail history and when the Round

Table is established (although he does mention the Grail in the latter); but in the third, the background of the younger Nasciens, a prominent ally of Arthur's in his war against King Rion, the Joseph reference is given full treatment. When one considers that Arthour and Merlin is only about a third the length of the parent work, the proportions seem about right. And since, as Ackerman notes, the author's primary concern is with Arthur's wars (in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature 485-6), the withholding of the Joseph allusion is probably a matter of intelligent artistic judgment. If the author does not consider Joseph important and is careful to omit references to him, why does he permit this extended one to stand? It is also interesting that the author seems to take for granted his audience's familiarity with the story of Joseph of Arimathea and leaves out the sort of material which he could expect to be already known by an audience cognizant of the then current Glastonbury tradition. His emphasis is upon identifying Nasciens II and showing how he is linked with the line of Joseph. Joseph himself he simply names--not even adding the "of Arimathea"--as though he is certain that his audience will easily identify him properly. Details found in the Glastonbury tradition, such as Joseph's coming to Britain, are apparently assumed as common knowledge. What he adds is information, such as Celidoine's vision and the hero's relationship to Lancelot, which would be needed by audience familiar with the Glastonbury story, but not the Vulgate Cycle.

The Later English Translations (ca. 1410-50)

Less typical of the English versions of the French romances is the work of Henry Lovelich who in the first part of the fifteenth century translated the Estoire (as the History of the Holy Grail) and much of the Merlin. Unlike the other English romancers treated in this chapter, Lovelich did not adapt or show any degree of selectivity--he merely started at the beginning of the Vulgate Cycle and translated word for word, line for line, chapter for chapter until he was stopped by death.⁴³ His talent was slight but not really less than that of the general run of Middle English romancers, and if his works are dismissed by critics like George Kane as "monuments of dullness" (Middle English Poetry 16-7), some of the responsibility should go to his diffuse originals which he was too unimaginative to reduce. The equally slavish Prose Merlin (ca. 1450), is as tedious as Lovelich's version, the principal difference being Lovelich's unfortunate choice of verse as a medium.

Since Lovelich so closely reproduced his originals, there is little need to comment on his version of the Joseph story, except where it does differ. Such variations are rare and usually the result of padding out a line, imposing a rime, or sheer blundering. But there is one highly significant alteration in his History of

⁴³Studies of Lovelich include R. W. Ackerman's "Herry Lovelich's Merlin," his sections in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature (486-8, 506-7), and Lagorio's "Evolving Legend" (226-7).

the Holy Grail which Lagorio points out in her "Evolving Legend of St. Joseph of Glastonbury" (226-7): Lovelich changed his version so that it would accord with the Glastonbury tradition. In the Estoire, when Josephes dies, he is transported to Scotland and the presence of his body there brings an end to an ongoing famine. Lovelich, however, slavish he may be, capitulated to British tradition and imposed the Glastonbury legend upon his source:

and thus Iosephes there parted hym fro.
 Vppon the morwe Atte Owr of pryme
 he paste to God In A blesid tyme,
 and was Entered In that same Abbey
 There As kyng Mordreins bedered lay.
 but thanne Comen Othir Men, and his Fadyr bore
 Into A Nothir Contre besides thore;
 For A gret Affamyne Amonges hem was.
 his body they boren Into that plas,-
 For this storye ful trewe it Is,
 and also I-proved with-Owten Mys,-
 that At the Entre Of that holy Man
 Al that Famyne Secede Anon than;
 and the lond becam ful Of blessidnesse
 Of Catel, Of good, and Of Al Richesse;
 so that they seiden with-Owten Obstacle,
 "that God for that body wrowthe Miracle
 and wheche they browhte Into that Contre:"
 and In Abbey was buryed ful Solempne,
 that the abbey of Glas that tyme was Cald,
 whеч Abbey of Glastyngbery now men hald (Furnivall ed.
 LIV, ll. 136-56).

Lagorio notes that the Glastonbury legends also heavily influenced other works contemporary with Lovelich's, including the chronicles of John Hardyng and the revision of history by Robert of Gloucester, indicating "the fairly widespread currency of the Glastonbury claim by the mid-fifteenth century" (227). Surely, its force must have been great if a writer like Lovelich who elsewhere

almost never tampered with his source did so in this instance, almost as if he felt his work would be unacceptable to his English audience without it.

In these early adaptations, one can not help noticing similar traits to those admired in Malory's work. Here, too, are often found the selectivity, the compression, and simplification that one finds in Le Morte Darthur. Present, too, is the general tendency of the authors of transform rather than merely translate their originals into English romances. Religious matters are reduced in size, but not necessarily in importance, and the effect is often that of a text of religious character from which most of the unnecessary and foreign commentary has been removed, allowing the British readers to form their own British interpretations, if they so desire. Also, in the Morte Arthure and oddly enough in Lovelich's work, one also detects the famous Malorian desire to tell the "hooole" story. The alliterative poet accomplished this in miniature, and Lovelich certainly set out to render the entire Vulgate Cycle into English before he was prevented by death. All the elements are present in these romances and perhaps from the very beginning, perhaps innate in the British character itself, but it took one like Malory who had the talent and the leisure--perhaps enforced--to bring them all together into an enduring British masterpiece.

The Welsh and Irish Versions of the Queste

Since the Welsh and Irish Grail versions of the Vulgate Queste are mere translations, they require little treatment here,

and I restrict myself to a few comments. What I find significant is the very fact that the French Grail tradition was able to take root in the Celtic countries whose pagan legends had allegedly given it birth, and to do so without so much as an interpolation, marginal comment, or gloss to that effect by the Celtic translators and scribes.⁴⁴ The Joseph story in both the Welsh and Irish versions is almost identical to that of the standard history, and although there is some general abridgement in the Irish version, the Joseph passages are not shortened, which indicates that the Irish translator considered them central to the work. The Welsh version similarly includes all of the Joseph material except that found in the vision of Celidoine which is omitted. Strangest of all is the methodical excision of references to the Maimed King, who obviously is not healed at the end of the Welsh Queste (Waite 218-19. See also Nutt 38-52). Thus, for reasons which would require a separate study, the Welsh version considers Joseph far more essential to the Grail story than the Maimed King himself, a feature that predates Joseph's formal association with the Grail. If the Welsh Queste can be taken as evidence, and the Celtic origin claim is true, then the Joseph legend had attained such vitality that it was able to supplant a native tradition.

⁴⁴If there were such a gloss or comment, the advocates of the Celtic origin of the Grail would certainly have brought it to light by now since it would greatly strengthen their case. This is especially true since there are few manuscripts involved.

Ulrich Fuetrer's Das Buch der Abenteuer (ca. 1473-78)

As mentioned earlier, similar supplantation of native tradition was also taking place on German soil, with Joseph of Arimathea being tacked on to the Jüngere Titurel and eventually being interpolated into Wolfram's story in Der Neue Parzival. The latter especially creates a contradiction since two distinct accounts of the origin of the Grail occur in the same work with the author making no attempt to reconcile them. The same competition is found in the later compilation by Ulrich Fuetrer, Das Buch der Abenteuer, a vast collection of romances yoked together in a roughly chronological sequence. Although not side by side, the two mutually exclusive accounts of the Grail origin are close enough together to be encountered in a single reading, and both are equally designated "Awentewr." It is almost as if the reader is to decide for himself between the two. However, if one considers the other tales in the compilation, the author's tendency seems to be to favor Wolfram's account since Perceval is favored as a hero.

If Das Buch der Abenteuer had been left as it first appeared, the Joseph version of the Grail story could be said only to be in competition with the German one. But such was not the case. In 1484 a second part was added, possibly by Fuetrer himself, which was an expansion of his earlier (ca. 1467) Lantzilet vom Lack, an abridgment of the already mentioned Prosa-Lancelot, which, of course, accords in detail with the standard Joseph Grail history and

features Galahad as the hero. The result is that the native tradition is completely buried by the French one--the Joseph tradition--and Joseph wins his competition for the title of First Grail Keeper over Titurel by an overwhelmingly greater number of allusions to and recitations of his story.

Malory's Le Morte Darthur (ca. 1470)

I conclude my survey of the romances with Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur because he is one of the last of the Arthurian romancers and it is his work more than any other upon which the common notion of Arthurian tradition is based. Apart from his talent and his accomplishment, he had an important advantage over nearly all of the other Arthurian romance writers: he wrote late enough to be both available and intelligible to William Caxton who subsequently adapted and printed his work, giving it a currency which no manuscript, no matter how frequently copied, could ever hope to approach. Malory's was the first printed Arthurian romance, the only one frequently printed, and the only one which has been almost continuously popular in the modern sense.

Before discussing what Malory did with the tradition of Joseph of Arimathea, it is useful to review what he did for the

Arthurian romance in general.⁴⁵ His most significant achievement was to give a definitive treatment to a tradition which was on the verge of extinction, and he did so "just in time," as Lewis claims to at once preserve it and insure its survival (English Literature 156). Malory may have happened to write at just the right time, but more than mere luck is involved in his achievement. He did for the body of Arthurian romances that which had never been done before--he made it manageable, preserving most of the best and a good deal of the worst as well. And he did so by following the tendencies of his British predecessors in handling romances--he reduced and simplified, placing sustained emphasis on a smaller cast of characters and upon the action that actually moved the story along. But perhaps above all, he told the whole story of Arthur and his court and did so by himself in an often faulty but nevertheless individual manner. The Vulgate Cycle tells the whole story, too; but it tells far too much far too fully, and the individual segments never quite form a whole--they are joined together, but they do not cohere. Even if one follows Vinaver in feeling that Malory's tales

⁴⁵ Studies of Malory are numerous. Still the best authority on the subject is Eugène Vinaver. In his study Malory and especially in the apparatus to his three-volume edition of the Works, Vinaver demonstrates exactly how Malory treated his sources and how Caxton treated Malory. For a concise statement of Vinaver's work on Malory, see his section in Loomis ed. Arthurian Literature (541-52). Other studies include Malory's Originality, ed. Lumiansky; Essays on Malory, ed. Bennett; Ihle's Malory's Grail Queste; and Benson's Malory's Morte Darthur. Needless to say, my discussion owes much such scholarship.

do not form a very satisfactory whole, at least they are all his, and that alone is unity beyond the reach of the Vulgate Cycle. The result of Malory's labors is perhaps the closest thing to a British epic England has ever produced. It is no accident that when Milton and Dryden originally considered English epics, they first thought of King Arthur as a subject. Writing when he did and as well as he did, Malory in effect "froze" the story of Arthur, giving it its permanent form, for better or worse.

Malory applied the same techniques of reduction and simplification to the story of Joseph of Arimathea as he did to that of Arthur. The most obvious alteration he made, is that he simply removed the first segment of the Vulgate, the Estoire, which gives the Joseph story its fullest treatment. After all, Malory was concerned with the story of Arthur. But this single-minded concern with Arthur did not blind him to the role of Joseph in his story, and he rarely removed a reference to Joseph in an episode that he selected for inclusion in Le Morte Darthur. In fact, as Lagorio has noted, Malory actually added references to Joseph of Arimathea to his book ("Glastonbury Legends" 361-66). These tend to be of the "kin of Joseph of Arimathea" variety, but there is one addition which is of some significance. This occurs in the Knight of Two Swords. Balin enters the Grail Castle and sees Joseph's body laid out upon a golden bed just before he grabs the Lance and lays Pellam low with the fateful stroke. The deed done, Malory inserts the following:

And kynge Pellam lay so many yerys sore wounded, and might never be hole tylle that Galaad the Hawte Prynce heled hym in the queste of the Sankgreal. For in that place was parte of the bloode of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste which Joseph of Aramathy brought into thys londe. And there hymself [lay] in that ryche bed. And that was the spere whych Longeus smote oure Lorde with in the herte. And kynge Pellam was nyghe of Joseph his kynne, and that was the most worshipfullest man on lyves in tho days (54).

Considering that the author is Malory, this is an extensive and significant addition. It not only does it refer ahead to the Grail quest, but it explains the full nature of the dolorous stroke, instead of leaving the reader to guess, as had the source, the Suite du Merlin. The preservation of Joseph's body is curious. It could mean that Malory was influenced by the Perlesvaus, but it probably alludes to Glastonbury's claim to possess the body of the saint.

Perhaps as significant as his additions was Malory's failure to reduce an extended Joseph passage in his usually severely abridged version of the Queste. This is the already mentioned White Knight's summary of the history of Joseph which Malory chose to translate almost word for word (526-8). Malory may have removed the Estoire since it delayed the real beginning of the story he wanted to tell, but here he left in a full history of Joseph, and the effect is not the sort of repetition that one finds in the Vulgate, but a story told in exactly the right place.

Although Malory did reduce the Joseph material of the Vulgate overall, he did so in keeping with his usual practice of simplification. What matters is that the whole story of Joseph is included.

It is related at an appropriate point and is alluded to frequently in the work. Malory reduced the matter without reducing the story itself, and as a result the version of the Joseph story which because of Malory is the best-known and most influential is essentially the standard history of my previous chapter. Moreover, Malory's habit of reducing the number of characters added even greater prominence to Joseph himself.

In conclusion, this survey of the variations on the theme of Joseph of Arimathea in the romances reveals that Joseph was subject to the same sort of development that one notices in other romance characters such as Gawain and Arthur, that of rise and eventual decline. Gawain is a case in point. He begins as the best knight in the world and ends a lecher and, in some instances, a figure of burlesque. Joseph's rise is similar as the romancers add more and more material about him, filling in gaps or developing details until a very solid picture, that of the "standard" history, is produced. To create such a history, members are added to Joseph's immediate family and line, and this sometimes places him in competition with them as they are developed--just as Gawain has to compete with each new knight added to the Round Table. As Gawain is overtaken by Lancelot and Perceval by Galahad, Joseph is often in danger of being overshadowed by his son or Nasciens, but in the end--partially through Malory's reductive methods and the British interest stimulated by the Glastonbury "forgeries"--he maintains his centrality.

Although the authors of the romances generally give Joseph reverent treatment, at least one, the author of the Sone du Nausay, shows what could easily have happened to Joseph if the romancers had treated him as they did Gawain. Fortunately, Joseph remains in the background in many of the romances and is less subject to burlesque than figures like Gawain. The fact that most of the Joseph romances are translations and adaptations also helps to preserve his dignity.

Another point which emerges from a survey of the romances is the sheer vitality of the Joseph legend. Just as it was able to take firm root in the Arthurian tradition, it was also able to invade and even supplant the related native traditions of other countries. As Joseph began to decline in France, at least two countries, Germany and England, made him a part of their own traditions. By the time of the decline of the Arthurian romance in Germany, Joseph's story had supplanted its own strong tradition of Titurel as first Grail Keeper. And in England, Joseph became the tradition in both the secular and religious accounts. By the time Malory wrote, Joseph was widely considered one of England's greatest saint, possibly the very founder of Christianity there; and when Malory reflected this belief in his version of the Arthurian story, he established what would become for all time the definitive romance figure of Joseph of Arimathea. Malory's methods removed a number of the distracting side-issues and characters from the Joseph story and returned him to his initial brilliance. As in music, the Joseph

theme and its romance variations ended with a powerful restatement of the theme.

CHAPTER IV

JOSEPH'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ROMANCES

After dealing with the romance authors' treatment and development of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea, it is appropriate to consider the effect that the presence of this figure had upon the romances. Of the Arthurian romances as a whole, Helaine Newstead has written:

In the thirteenth century the development of Arthurian romances is distinguished by a vast expansion of material, the use of prose rather than verse, and a tendency to combine separate narratives. One powerful impulse towards this kind of synthesis was the progressive Christianization of the Grail legends during the early thirteenth century and the resulting adaptation of stories about Lancelot, Perceval, Arthur, and other figures to the quest of the Grail (40).

Newstead's view is somewhat restrictive, for the synthesis of the Arthurian romances is largely the result, not only of the "progressive Christianization of the Grail legends" themselves, but the general Christianization of the entire Arthurian legend primarily by means of Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail. What Joseph and the Holy Grail bring to the Arthurian saga is a sense of unity that the history of Arthur and his court alone could not achieve. First, there was the history of Arthur, but its unity was broken by the insertion of the histories and adventures of additional major figures like Lancelot, with the eventual result that Arthur faded into the background of his own story. Such unity as the Arthurian romances now possess is chiefly the result of the romances imposing

the story of Joseph and the quest for the Holy Grail upon the heterogeneous Arthurian material and making it the framework upon which the cycles depend.¹

The most basic unity that Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail history bring to the Arthurian romances is that of storyline. To demonstrate the importance of this storyline, it is useful to contrast the romances of Chrétien de Troyes with the cycles. Chrétien's romances are Arthurian only in the sense of setting. Arthur himself is a minor and not especially attractive figure, and hardly essential to Chrétien's narrative. As L. T. Topsfield has pointed out, the only thing that Chrétien's romances have in common is a thematic/structural pattern:

A knight, successful in the eyes of the world, suffers a moral or spiritual humiliation which is prefigured by earlier failures in apparently minor episodes. Seeking rehabilitation, he progresses beyond the values and reputation of his former self, and attains a degree of virtue and wholeness beyond that of the ideal Arthurian knight, such as Gawain (25).

Chrétien's Perceval is simply another such romance. Perceval's eventual success on the Grail quest is primarily a personal one.²

¹I have limited my discussion primarily to the cycles because they alone provide complete accounts of the Arthurian and Grail histories. It should be noted that many of the individual romances are adaptations or translations of portions of the cycles and need not be considered here.

²The successful accomplishment of the Grail quest would also bring about the restoration of the Wasteland and the healing of the Fisher King, but most importantly, Perceval would be reunited with his uncle (the Fisher King). Through negligence Perceval has allowed his mother to die, so the restoration to life of a "lost" member of his family would cancel some of Perceval's guilt.

His story has no intimate connection to the fate of Arthur or his court. Taken together, Chrétien's romances do not provide any sense of a larger story or of any overall destiny shared by the individual characters. The heroes achieve their quests, and the court of Arthur remains static, unchanged. Even the adulterous relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere fails to have any significant effect upon the story of Arthur, as Chrétien tells it. Chrétien provides no overall beginning, middle, or end, but only a collection of essentially separate adventures which superficially share a common setting and narrative structure.

The cycles, however, do achieve a synthesis. Although the authors may digress, draw in apparently unrelated material, and tend to pile combat upon combat, they do in the end succeed in relating a larger story with a definite beginning, middle, and end. In fact, they usually tell two which are intimately related: the stories of Arthur and of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail.

The earliest cycle, that of Robert de Boron, provides the simplest version of the story which would be taken up and elaborated upon by the writers of the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate cycles. Despite the problems in establishing his text, especially in his Perceval (see Roach's edition 2-11), Robert's overall storyline is clear: Joseph of Arimathea because of his faith and special service to the Savior receives the Holy Grail and goes forth to execute the Great Commission, taking with him into the desert a host of converts from his family and friends. After he ascertains the truly faithful

through forced fasting and other deprivations, Joseph establishes the second Round Table, the first being that of the Last Supper, and passes the Grail on to his brother-in-law Brons who is to carry the faith to foreign lands. Joseph remains behind and presumably dies. After Brons takes the true faith and the Grail to Britain, the Devil attempts to thwart the work of Christ and Joseph by producing an antichrist, Merlin, through the union of a demon and a mortal woman. However, the mother baptizes the child, and Merlin becomes an agent of good, able to use ordinarily demonic powers of deception and magic to bring about positive results and the will of God. Thus, he uses Uter's lust for Igerne to produce Arthur, the greatest of kings. But Merlin's primary mission is to set up the third Round Table and to initiate the quest for the Holy Grail. After accomplishing these things, Merlin manipulates events so that the bastard Arthur can claim the throne by the miracle of his drawing the sword from the anvil.³ After Arthur's rise to power, Merlin returns to the court and announces that Brons, the Fisher King, is old and ill and cannot be restored until the best of all knights, the one who can occupy the empty seat at the Round Table, finds his Castle and inquires about the nature of the Grail. No one dares to sit in the place at the table or attempt the Grail quest until Perceval, the grand-nephew of Joseph, comes to court and vows to accomplish the quest. Perceval fails initially because he lacks

³This is peculiar to Robert de Boron. Although the Vulgate writers follow Robert's Merlin closely, they change his anvil to a stone.

maturity and proper spiritual development, but after a period of wandering and penance, he does achieve the Grail, heal the ailing king, and become ruler of the Grail Kingdom.⁴

Lancelot is hardly mentioned, Gawain is only a minor figure, and Arthur, though prominent in the Merlin, is of secondary importance. The plan is simple. There is only one hero per romance, Joseph, Merlin, Perceval; and the three segments together tell the larger story of the Grail and the history of the line of Joseph. The later cycles greatly expanded this material, brought in a huge cast of heroes, adapted a number of alien narratives; but this was the storyline that held everything together, and gave them the largest portion of unity that they possess.

The authors of the later cycles were acutely aware of the unifying force of the story of Joseph and the Grail, as can be demonstrated by the manner in which they assembled and adapted their materials. This method of employing the Joseph story to bind together and unify large masses of often independent material is best illustrated by the so-called Vulgate Cycle. Although scholars have differed on details of the composition of the cycle, most agree with the general order of composition suggested by Bruce in his Evolution of the Arthurian Romance (1: 455-57). The first of the Vulgate romances was the original Lancelot, and it was followed by the Queste, which features Lancelot as a major character and

⁴The emphasis is upon Perceval's education. He progresses from innocence to experience, from sin to salvation. Galahad, however, is perfect from beginning to end.

replaces Robert's Perceval with Galahad as principal Grail quester. The next segment was the Mort Artu which shows some dependence upon the Queste, and it was followed by the additions to the Lancelot and the Estoire, which relates the full early history of the Grail which was briefly summarized in the Queste. Finally the cycle was completed by the addition of Robert de Boron's Merlin and a long continuation of that work.

This order of composition is suggestive. The secular and morally improper story of Lancelot is made more acceptable by yoking it to the spiritual romance of the Queste with its emphasis upon the story of Joseph and the Holy Grail. Then the Lancelot history is completed with the Mort Artu which demonstrates the destruction of Lancelot and Arthur's world after the supreme spiritual goal (the Grail) has been removed. The Lancelot itself is then expanded. Then, to balance the secular conclusion of the Lancelot story, the Estoire is added which emphasizes the story of Joseph and the Grail, and gives a sense of destiny to the rest of the cycle. And finally Robert's Merlin and its continuation are added to relate the rise of Arthur and fill in the gap between the Estoire and the Lancelot. The stories of Lancelot and King Arthur may be the main concern of the Vulgate writers, but these stories are given a spiritual direction by being placed within the context of the larger story of Joseph and the Grail.

The composition of additional romances is not the only means by which the Vulgate writers tied the Lancelot material into

the history of the Grail. They also imposed the story of Joseph and the Grail upon the Lancelot itself by adding a series of allusions and interpolations which bind the base romance to the Grail materials that envelop it. In his "Composition of the Old French Prose Lancelot" (2: 393-95) Bruce provides a list of references in the Lancelot to the other segments of the cycle, and examination of Bruce's list reveals that the majority of the references are to the story of Joseph and the Grail. It is clear that when the romancers attempted to add a sense of unity to their cycle, they used the history of the Grail, not the story of King Arthur, as their primary unifying principle.

Thus, the Lancelot material is justified within the context of the Grail history and is given an allegorical significance. Lancelot is the best knight in the world in terms of worldly values, but he is not the knight to achieve the Grail quest because he is unable to put aside his worldly concerns and seek perfection of spirit. His path is the wrong one. His history provides a contrast to that of his son Galahad who though perfect in the worldly sense is able to take the right path by putting aside the desire for martial glory and human love.

Although the writers of the Vulgate Cycle were able to justify the Lancelot materials and work his story into the larger one of the Grail, the final effect of their cycle is one of disproportion. Over half of the cycle is devoted to the adventures of Lancelot which overshadow the story of King Arthur and that of Joseph and the

Grail. To reduce this sense of disproportion, the authors of the Post-Vulgate Cycle adopted the radical procedure of removing the Lancelot. Although, as Bogdanow claims, this procedure produces a "New Arthuriad," a cycle with Arthur as its hero (Romance of the Grail passim), it also tightens and focuses upon the overall storyline of Joseph and the Grail. Now the proportions of the cycle favor the Grail history. The new "Arthuriad" begins with the Estoire and has the Queste as its center. The contrast now is between the kingdoms of Arthur and the Grail, and it is Arthur who chooses the wrong path. More clearly than in the Vulgate Cycle, Arthur's court represents the values that one must put aside if he wishes to attain salvation. Once Galahad achieves the Grail quest and the Grail is withdrawn, Arthur is unable to keep his court from collapsing. Arthur may be the principal hero in the Post-Vulgate Cycle, but the story as a whole is that of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail.

Of the cycle writers only Robert de Boron set out with the clear intent of composing the history of Joseph and the Grail. The others may have wished to emphasize Lancelot, Arthur, or both, but had to turn to the Grail saga as the most convenient means of unifying their materials and placing the adventures of their heroes in a meaningful context. Even the non-cyclic romancers were unable to resist the attraction of the Grail history, e.g., the Prose Tristan. As the writers had done with the Lancelot, the author of the Prose Tristan imposed the structure and content of the Grail

history upon his originally independent material. Thus, the work begins with a summary of the story of Joseph of Arimathea which connects the hero Tristan with the all-important line of Joseph, continues with the story of Tristan and Isolde which is interrupted near the end by the inclusion of a version of the Grail quest which Tristan naturally fails, and concludes with the final tragedy of the adulterous lovers. The force of the Grail story is so powerful that it was even able to survive Malory's removal of the Estoire and severe reduction of the Queste. He emphasizes the story of King Arthur and his court, but the story of Joseph and the Grail is still present in the background; the Grail quest is still the ultimate challenge; and after the Grail is withdrawn, the court of Arthur falls apart.

Perhaps even more important than a powerful overall storyline is the internal unity that the history of Joseph and the Grail brings to the Arthurian romances. The introduction of the Joseph material makes possible a complex system of types and parallels which helps to increase greatly the allegorical and religious significance of the basically secular Arthurian story. Without the Joseph material, the rise and fall of Arthur could still be given a moral interpretation--that all in this world is vanity and even the greatest of earthly kings will be brought low; but the inclusion of Joseph and the Grail increases the potential religious thrust of the Arthurian material and provides an almost boundless store of typological opportunities.

The use of types and allegory is not something which has been imposed upon medieval art by modern interpreters, but a standard procedure employed in both the visual and literary arts. The theory of typology is based on the assumption that in a world created and divinely directed by God, nothing can happen by accident. Every event, every minor detail of daily activity is the direct result of the will of God; if one studies His creation long enough and in the proper frame of mind the Providential Plan will become clear. The types themselves are individual correspondences, but when they are employed to form a larger pattern or tell a connected story, the result is allegory.

Although typology was employed by Lucretius, Ovid, Cicero and other classical authors, medieval writers and artists viewed it almost exclusively in a Christian context. As Erich Auerbach has observed: "The aim of this sort of interpretation was to show that the persons and events of the Old Testament were prefigurations of the New Testament and its history of salvation" ("Figura" 30).⁵ Common examples of such prefigurations include: Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish pointing to Jesus' three days in the tomb; the serpent on the rod which healed the children of Israel of snake-bite prefiguring Jesus on the cross; Moses and Joshua leading the children of Israel to the land of promise anticipating Jesus leading

⁵In addition to Auerbach's essay, important studies on typology include Goppelt's Typos, Miner's Literary Uses of Typology, and Charity's Events and Their Afterlife.

the believers to the Kingdom of Heaven; the feast of the Passover prefiguring the Last Supper; and Isaac's carrying the wood for his own pyre pointing to Christ carrying the cross.

Christian typology goes as far back as St. Paul who claims in I Cor. 10:6-11 that the events that befell the Children of Israel in the desert occurred as examples for later Christians, but it was the Church Fathers who developed it into a truly comprehensive system. For convenience I shall pass over the other Church Fathers and briefly discuss only St. Augustine's theory of typology since his was the most systematic and probably the most influential on later interpreters of Scripture. In Book 3 of On Christian Doctrine and elsewhere, Augustine outlined his system of interpreting the Bible. Basically he taught that everything in the New Testament is prefigured in the Old Testament, but the Old Testament should on no account be read merely as allegory. The history therein is real history, an infallible record of what actually happened; the people and the events were real, but they are also types. Such is the power of God. Everything in the Old Testament points toward the New. Any seeming contradiction or detail which seems to fail to find a referent in the New Testament is not the fault of the Scripture but due to man's imperfect understanding, a result of the Fall. According to Augustine, when one reads the Scriptures, he should seek out these correspondences and attempt to understand through them the perfect wholeness of God's Word and the all-encompassing nature of His divine plan for mankind.

Consistent with his views on the typological interpretation of Scripture is Augustine's philosophy of history which may be broadly summarized as follows: All human history is a unified whole with a definite beginning, middle, and end. The beginning is the Creation, and the end is the final redemption of mankind. At the middle stands the Cross. Everything that came before points to the Cross, and everything after will point back to it. This view of history greatly extends the range of typology, for the clear implication is that post-Biblical history will accord fully with that of the Scriptures and one can seek types wherever he will. And since all human history is included, one may seek types in the pagan as well as the Christian world. Thus, medieval writers were able to find Christian allegory in the works of Ovid, view Virgil as a natural Christian at heart who foresaw the coming of Christ, and regard the divinely conceived Hercules as a type of Christ. Given this understanding of human history, the interpretation of Scripture and the classics was greatly extended. Auerbach gives an impression of the extraordinary range of the medieval writers:

In the high Middle Ages, the Sybils, Virgil, the characters of the Aeneid, and even those of the Breton legend cycle (e.g., Galahad in the quest for the Holy Grail) were drawn into figural interpretation, and moreover there were all sorts of mixtures between figural, allegoric, and symbolic forms ("Figura" 64).

It is primarily with these "mixtures" that the Grail romancers busied themselves, and there was perhaps no greater source of such mixtures than Joseph of Arimathea and the members of his family.

The typological significance of Joseph of Arimathea is found as early as Tertullian who saw the reference to the just man at the opening of the first Psalm as a prefigurement of Joseph (Spectacles 53-54). Jerome in the first of his Homilies expanded upon this interpretation:

I grant that there are many who, with some reason, I think, apply the words of the Psalm to Joseph; I mean Joseph of Arimathea, who did not follow the counsel of the Jews, who did not stand in the way of sinners, and who did not sit in the company of the Pharisees (Homilies 1. 4).

Other Church Fathers gave the Psalm a similar interpretation, and it is likely medieval writers were familiar with this typological interpretation of Joseph of Arimathea. This is typology in the "unmixed" sense (a one-to-one correspondence between the Old and New Testaments), but the beginning of mixing can be seen as early as Augustine and in an important context:

(14) As for the blood and water which His side pierced with the lance, poured forth upon the earth, without a doubt they represent the sacraments by which the Church was formed, as Eve was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam who was the form of the future.

(15) Joseph and Nicodemus buried Him. As some have interpreted these names, Joseph signifies "the exalted [.]"
(Sermon 218, 169)

Here, in a passage loaded with typological interpretation, Joseph is by textual proximity associated with the blood and the lance of Longinus and represented as one exalted by means of the same sort of imaginative etymology which the romancers would employ to interpret the "Graal" as meaning "agreeable to all."⁶ When the Grail

⁶"Joseph" is a Jewish name, and the New Testament Greek only attempts to approximate the sound.

romancers took up the figure of Joseph and began making him a bountiful source of types, they were only expanding upon a well-established practice.

The most obvious typological use the authors of the Grail romances make of Joseph is, as Lagorio has observed "Transition" 94), to represent him as a figure of Moses in Exodus leading the faithful through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Like Moses, he keeps his people together while their faith is tested by God, miraculously supplies them with food, and builds an ark to contain the Grail which none but he and Brons/Josephes may touch. Similarly, in Robert's Joseph d'Arimathie, Joseph, like Moses, does not reach the land of Promise himself. In addition, Joseph can easily be interpreted as a type of Abraham, the father of a great nation and founder of the faith. This is especially apparent in the Estoire where the aged Joseph begets the first Galahad upon his equally aged wife, just as Abraham did with Sarah, and from that issue will come the later Galahad, generally acknowledged as a type of Christ, just as Christ eventually sprang from the line of Isaac and the House of David. Although Joseph cannot be seen as a type of the Virgin, he is strongly associated with her. His tomb corresponds metaphorically to Mary's virgin womb, for Joseph buries Christ in his own tomb in which no man had ever been laid, and the ever-living Christ emerges from it just as He did from the body of Mary. As already mentioned in Chapter I, Joseph is seen as the protector

of Mary and as a replacement for her husband, since by burying Christ, he fills the role appropriate for a father.⁷

The same sort of typological interpretation can be applied to most of the major figures in the Joseph story, and in the court of Arthur, after his story was attached to Joseph's. Merlin's miraculous birth certainly reminds the reader of that of Christ, but since his origins are partly demonic, even the most imaginative interpreter should be wary of carrying the Christ association very far. However, the figure of Merlin shows some correspondence to that of Samuel of the Old Testament. First, he is a prophet. Second, he actively manipulates events and grooms the kings of Britain until the country is unified under King Arthur who sets up his glorious court. Clearly Merlin's activities reflect those of the Biblical Samuel who groomed first Saul and then David to be the kings of Israel before the nation reached its greatest glory under Solomon, after whose reign the kingdom was destroyed. Similarly, Galahad, through Lancelot, can be said to be of the court of Arthur, just as Christ came from the House of David. Of the mixed typological possibilities, one is of particular interest. The Merlin in the Vulgate Cycle and in Malory's Morte Darthur who foolishly falls in love with Viviane, teaches her his secrets, and then is subdued by her corresponds to the Virgil of medieval tradition, which

⁷Valerie Lagorio furthers this association with the husband of Mary by claiming carpentry skills for Joseph of Arimathea. He builds an ark of wood to contain the Grail ("Vita" 65).

represents him as a magician who forms a similar fatal fascination for a young woman, who ultimately makes a fool of him (Comparetti 325-39).⁸

Arthur is less subject to such a broad range of typological interpretation, and the Biblical character he represents is often confused. Usually he appears to be a type of King David. He kills a giant (at Mont St. Michel), he is proclaimed king by the efforts of a wise counselor (Merlin), he brings unity to his nation, and he is eventually betrayed by his son (although David survives the betrayal by Absalom, and Arthur does not). But in at least one important respect, he shares his Davidian association with his father Uter Pendragon, for it is Uter who lusts after the wife of a subject and brings about his death so that he might have her. And as in the case of David and Bathsheba, the result of this wicked union is the greatest king of the era, here Arthur and there Solomon. The roles overlap. King Arthur usually corresponds to King David, but sometimes Uter is David and Arthur Solomon. The role of Solomon does not suit Arthur very well. Although like Solomon, he does bring the British court to its peak of glory, he is rarely represented as possessing any special share of wisdom that one associates

⁸ Aristotle suffered a similar fate in medieval popular tradition. This notion probably goes back to story of Solomon. Although the wisest man who ever lived, he was seduced by one of his wives into the following of false gods (which were commonly regarded as devils in the Middle Ages). It was further widely believed that Solomon turned his knowledge to evil and became a practitioner of the black arts.

with the great Hebrew king. In all likelihood, this confusion of types is far more perplexing to the modern mind than to the medieval one. The medieval writers were probably content just to make the associations and felt no obligation, unless it was convenient, to follow through even in major details. Usually Arthur is like King David, and sometimes he is like Solomon; but the only person he needs to be all the time is Arthur, and even that role varies from romance to romance.

A figure like Lancelot is much more difficult to classify. Since he has no clear typological referent and he is hardly suitable to be styled as the spiritual warrior who dons the armor of faith, he is probably best regarded as an idealized Everyman. He has reached the summit of worldly accomplishment; he can even see where his proper duty lies; he can repent of his worldly concerns and of his improper love for Guinevere; but he cannot give up the latter even though he knows it is the only thing that stands between him and the Grail. Although he knows what he should do and earnestly desires to do it, he simply cannot rise above his earthly nature. Perhaps this was what made Lancelot so popular. Joseph and Arthur were types of Moses, David, and others; but Lancelot was a type of the romancers' audience. While possibly the fictive embodiment of their fantasies, he was human, as they were, with human failings. It is only after he has seen that his worldly concerns have helped to destroy everything that he holds dear that Lancelot is able to truly give them up. Only then can he become a hermit and eventually die fully shriven.

Of specific figures in the Old Testament, Lancelot most closely resembles Adam, always the type of the fallen man into whose mold all men may fit. Although Lancelot fails in the Grail quest and betrays Arthur whom he loves, through the grace of God, he is finally able to repent and is saved in the last years of his life. Like Adam, Lancelot is the fallen man, yet as Pauline Matarasso points out in the Redemption of Chivalry, the theme of felix culpa is an underlying motif in the adventures of Lancelot, and even his greatest failing, his love for Guinevere, is turned to good purpose by the power of God:

From Lancelot's sin there issued Galahad as Christ was crucified on Adam's tree. Indeed from the heart of his sin, from the very seat of his will, for Galahad would never have been, had Lancelot not believed King Pellés' daughter to be Guinevere. But it is only spasmodically in the Queste that Lancelot appears in full allegorical garb. More generally he is the mystical Adam, the old Adam which St. Paul bids us put off, for the Queste recounts in the adventures of Lancelot the redemption of Adam in the guise of the conversion of a sinner, and in so far as all men are sinners and all stand in need of conversion he is a type of Everyman (116).

Another type of Adam in the Grail romances is the Maimed King, whether he be Robert's merely aging and sick Brons, Chrétien's Fisher King, Wolfram's Anfortas, or the Vulgate Cycle's Pelleans. All have lapsed in some way and are in need of the healing power of the blood of Christ.⁹ Even though the Maimed King lives in the very presence of the Grail, he is unable to heal himself and must wait

⁹This is not precisely true. Anfortas is healed by the Grail question alone, and, of course, by the Grace of God.

in torment for the promised intercessor to cleanse him with the holy blood, just as all the sons of Adam under the Old Law had to wait for Christ and the New Law.

One character over whom there is little typological confusion is Galahad. That he is clearly a type of Christ cannot be doubted by anyone who gives even a casual reading to any of the versions of the Queste. He is far more appropriate than Perceval the original Grail quester of Chrétien, Wolfram, and Robert, for unlike Perceval who does through innocence yield to temptation and sin, Galahad remains pure and untainted throughout his early life and the Grail quest. He excels in all meaningful worldly matters and easily overcomes all of the worldly knights, even Lancelot. To the modern reader Galahad may seem too good to arouse sympathy--everything is too easy for him, but this is to mistake his role in the Queste. Galahad is more a type than an actual character in the romances. He is an ideal, and ideals ways are two-dimensional. His final giving up of life at the end of the Queste may seem like a sort of suicide, but it is wholly appropriate in the typological sense. Like Christ on the cross, Galahad for whom physical life is a form of torment, a sort of death after witnessing the Grail, knows when his mission is completed and may utter his own "It is finished."

Galahad's primary function in the cycles is to fulfill the many prophecies about his coming, and there is little time for anything else. There is no suspense about his attainment of the Grail--

his success was ordained even before his birth, just as Christ's was. Thus, unlike the original Perceval, there can be no first bungled Grail attempt. That failure is given appropriately to Lancelot. As an ideal and a type of Christ, Galahad's purpose is to instruct, rather than entertain, and direct the audience's attention to spiritual matters. But we must not assume that a medieval audience would not have taken great pleasure from seeing how effortlessly Galahad triumphs where most of the other knights so laboriously fail. This was probably what they expected. As with Christ, when Galahad fulfills all the prophecies, he departs; but before doing so, like Christ, he sends his disciple Bors back to the worldly Court of Arthur to tell his story.

Besides identifying the various roles of the characters in the romances, typing can also be employed to help clear away some of the problems with the Grail romances. The greatest of these problems has always been the origin of the Grail legend itself. Although in the Grail romances of Chrétien and Wolfram, the Grail is a mystery, there is no such difficulty in the cycles. There the Grail is the vessel of the Last Supper, and the spear is that which pierced the side of Christ. Once placed within a typological context, it does not really matter if the original notions for the vessel and spear came from Christian or pagan sources. For the medieval writers who could see Hercules as a type of Christ and turn the works of Ovid and Virgil into Christian allegories, everything was part of the Christian whole, wherever it was encountered.

In all likelihood, the Celtic cauldrons of plenty and magical spears were interpreted as types of the Holy Grail and the spear of Longinus, and the medieval mind must have found it gratifying that such types were turning up even in unlikely places. Such was the power of God that even the Celts, with their darkened pagan minds were able to envision, in a limited sense, the sacred relics of the Last Supper and Crucifixion.

But the Celtic sources were hardly the only ancient examples of such types. There was also the Old Testament chastity test, the cup of bitter water containing a curse which refreshed chaste women and rotted the bowels and loins of adulteresses (Num. 5. 5-31). Wasn't this a type of the cup containing the holy blood, the curse having been removed by Christ? Similarly, a type for the spear of Longinus could be found in Ovid's Remedia Amoris, a work which L. P. Wilkinson claims was allegorized during the Middle Ages into an "aid to chastity" (383). This is the spear of Achilles "that wounded Telephus, [and] also healed the wound it made" (ll. 47-48).¹⁰ To the Grail writers, accustomed to looking for such things, all of these types must have seemed of similar value. They were types, not sources in any real sense. Which one may have actually reminded the Grail writers of the holy cup or spear is not important. To them, the sacred implements were the realities; the other objects were only shadows.

¹⁰This especially reminds one of the wound of Anfortas which can be eased only by re-insertion of the lance.

In addition to an abundance of pure and mixed types, the story of Joseph and the Grail provided the romancers the opportunity to make use of extensive parallelism within their romances.¹¹ Again it is useful to begin with the cycle of Robert de Boron. There the levels of action are the clearest, and the parallels found hold true for the later cycles. In the first segment, Joseph d'Arimathie, Joseph sets up the Grail Kingdom and establishes the line of Grail Guardians, and initiates the spiritual level of action for the rest of the cycle. He provides for the Christianization of Britain, the land where the Grail is destined to be achieved. This done, Joseph ceases to be an active part of the story. Robert then immediately begins his story of Merlin who initiates action on the secular level. Merlin first instructs Blaise to record the history of Joseph and the Grail and record the events, also part of the Grail history which he (Merlin), is about to set in motion. He then goes forth on his mission and masterminds the setting up of the Round Table, the very conception of Arthur, and Arthur's eventual unification of Britain. The establishment of Arthur's court provides the starting point for the Grail quest which is perhaps its very reason for being. This done, Merlin ceases to take an active role in the story, acting only occasionally as a sort of overseer. Then

¹¹ Actually typology includes events, as well as people. It is usually difficult to make a distinction between typology and parallelism. I have done so here primarily as a matter of convenience.

the cycle turns almost wholly to Perceval who brings about a synthesis of the spiritual and secular levels of action by achieving the Grail quest. He is crowned Grail King, and the Grail Kingdom is renewed, apparently for all time. Arthur's kingdom then falls quickly into ruin.¹²

The parallelism is satisfying and neatly accomplished. Each segment is concerned with a mission to be accomplished, and each ends with some sort of coronation--Brons as Grail Guardian, Arthur as King of Britain, and Perceval as Grail King.

The same pattern is present in the later cycles although the sheer bulk of the Vulgate Cycle tends to obscure it. There, however, further parallels are established that sometimes become confusing in their sheer numbers. The most successful of these is the pattern of mysterious conceptions that is found in the cycle. Robert de Boron had already contrasted the demonic conception of Merlin with the divine one of Christ and extended this parallel with the conception of Arthur, made possible by Merlin's magic. There is no mystery about Perceval's birth, which is a fault in the pattern. The writers of the Vulgate Cycle, however, correct this fault and complete the pattern by composing the tale of Galahad's conception through Lancelot's deception by King Pellés and Elaine. This pattern also helps to reinforce the general Christian theme of good coming from

¹²There is some controversy over whether the brief Mort Artus which concludes both manuscripts of Robert's Perceval is actually his work.

evil by the power of God. Merlin is to be an antichrist, but he is turned into a force for good by baptism and the innocence of his mother; Arthur is the result of lust, but he becomes the best of all kings; Galahad is the result of deception (even if it is to fulfill a prophecy), and he achieves the Grail.¹³

The Vulgate Cycle also contains a bewildering number of parallel adventures. Various knights arrive at the same locations as their counterparts before them and have similar adventures. The disguised knight in combat is another popular motif, and occasionally friend unknowingly faces friend with nearly disastrous results. Similarly Joseph is imprisoned more than once, and the Grail battles tend to be won by miraculous intervention; and many of the Grail Guardians and Knights are wounded in the thighs in obvious parallel to the injury of the Maimed King.

Another parallel in the later cycles is the splitting of a principal figure into two characters. The original Joseph of Arimathea is given a son Josephes who is able to be the chaste first bishop of Britain, "married" only to the Church, a requirement which Joseph obviously could not meet. Similarly the original Grail quester Perceval is in a sense divided into two knights, Lancelot the perfection of worldly knighthood, and Galahad, the spiritually perfect

¹³A negative example is the incestuous conception of Modred. In the above parallels, at least one of the parties involved is innocent or absolved of responsibility. Even though Arthur and King Lot's wife do not know they are brother and sister, they are still both guilty of adultery. Thus, the result is an evil one.

knight. The two Grail Castle episodes of the early romances are then divided between them, Lancelot being allotted the unsuccessful quest and Galahad the successful one. This splitting accomplishes another purpose, too. Galahad is given a double measure of the blood of Joseph of Arimathea. Through Lancelot, who is related to Joseph, he receives the worldly line of Joseph's blood, and through Elaine, the Grail King's daughter, he is connected to the more spiritual strain. Thus, he is the perfect blend of world and spirit, the knight who can go out into the world and fully achieve the spiritual goal of the Holy Grail.

The parallelism in the cycles also works on a greater scale. One cannot help noticing the contrast between the two courts, that of Arthur and that of the Grail King. Clearly these correspond to the Kingdom of Earth and the greater Kingdom of Heaven. Appropriately, the impression one has of Arthur's court is one of splendor, feasting, and intrigue, while the Grail Kingdom impresses one with its divine light, sense of communion, and peace. The knights who glory in and remain with the earthly court are ultimately destroyed, but those like Galahad who seek diligently for the heavenly kingdom triumph. Ultimately the message of the cycles is an apocalyptic one. The history is one with a purpose. Lagorio writes of the Vulgate Cycle:

As the purpose of history is to instruct men, the Vulgate history presents its sententia in the combined form of an Arthurian de casibus and providential history. The fall of the greatest of Christian kings and his elite society markedly points to the evanescence of

this world, just as the sinfulness which precipitated the fall gives added import to the spiritual ideals essential for salvation. The apocalyptic mode adds a new dimension to this sententia, for the Vulgate authors are urgently warning their contemporaries that the Arthurian world is but a speculum of their own, which faces imminent doom ("Apocalyptic Mode" 17).

The combining of the history of Joseph and the Grail with that of Arthur and his court gives a force to this spiritual message which never could have been attained by the Arthurian story alone. The types and parallels made possible by the addition of Joseph and the Grail tie the romances of the cycles together into a unified whole and give a spiritual emphasis to the adventures of the various knights. Within the context provided by Joseph and the Grail history, the individual and large-scale battles can be seen as representing man's struggle with nature and the devil and demonstrating that it is possible for at least some sinners to overcome the concerns of the world and finally reach the Kingdom of Heaven.

But a continuous and enveloping storyline and a pervasive system of types and parallels are not all that Joseph brings to the Arthurian materials. He is the Christianizing force behind the Arthurian story. He does far more than provide a prize (the Grail) and a noble line of kings and heroes; he legitimizes the whole chivalric ideal represented in the romances of the cycles. He brought not only the Grail but the true faith to Britain. He plotted the course of salvation for all that came after him and set up the Grail as a tangible goal to direct men on that course. But the path to salvation is a difficult one and full of obstacles, and

few are those that follow it to its end. The knights of the Round Table who view the quest of the Grail as simply a bigger and better quest are doomed to wander in the wilderness, never even approaching the Grail Castle. Others like Gawain and Lancelot fail in the quest at the very threshold of the Grail Castle because they are unable to give up the earthly treasures of glory and love. Only those like Bors, Perceval, and Galahad who make the proper moral choices along the way and are willing to sacrifice earthly glory for the sake of greater glory reach the end of the path. Finally, Galahad gives up life itself to achieve the ultimate glory of heaven itself.

Besides "baptising" the chivalric idea and the Arthurian story itself, Joseph similarly Christianizes most of the important elements of that story. In Chapter III I discussed how the romancers were careful to link most of the important characters and objects to Joseph of Arimathea. Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, Tristan, and Galahad are all members of his noble line; and objects like lances and other weapons are represented as having been used by or closely associated with him. I have already discussed the shield of Evelac and its link with Joseph. Another example of how objects are associated with Joseph is found in the Vulgate Merlin. King Rion and Arthur are in the midst of mortal combat, but the author halts his narrative to describe their swords. Rion's sword once belonged to Hercules, but Arthur's has the even greater distinction of being linked, although indirectly, to Joseph:

And, forto speken of the swerd of Arthowr,
hit was on Perowns, a man of honowr,
a worthy knyght and dewk also,

and cosyn to josepe of Armathye
 which that was captayn & Gouvernowr
 of al pylatis werre bothe day & owr.
 (Lovelich's trans. 627)

With this sword Arthur is able to give Rion the wounds that force him to leave the field of battle and eventually return to his own country. The Grail apparatus may be of pagan (Celtic) origin, but once these items are linked to Joseph of Arimathea, they are transformed into Christian relics, and the originals--if they matter at all--become emblems, types pointing forward to these relics. Similarly, the romancers linked almost every other important object or character at least indirectly to Joseph. His importance was such that without him, there could have been no Holy Grail, no King Arthur, no Lancelot, no Galahad, no Christian Britain as we know them.

Brut may have brought the blood of Troy to Britain, but Joseph brought the blood of Christ. He indicated the path of salvation and established the Grail as a goal to direct men toward that path. As a result the Arthurian history reflects that of the Bible. In a sense, the Grail is the veiled promise of the Old Testament, and that promise is fulfilled when Galahad achieves it. Since Britain is the nation chosen as the setting for this great drama, the country itself is given special distinction over other nations. This distinction was recognized by the Church itself, and in the early fifteenth century England was, in Lagorio's words, given "precedence among the leading nations of western Christendom" ("Pan-Brittonic Hagiography" 60), on the basis of the Joseph legend. Joseph with his unimpeachable Scriptural credentials acts as the

solid historical anchor for the cycles. He is the point of contact that ties the whole Arthurian story together and makes the allegory work. Joseph not only spiritually legitimizes the Arthurian history; he authenticates it as well.

CHAPTER V

THE JOSEPH TRADITION AFTER MALORY

With the coming of the so-called Renaissance and the large-scale rediscovery of classical (especially Greek) learning, the Arthurian romance fell into decline. But it was not the interest in the new learning alone that drew men's attention from the Arthurian story. It was a mine which had become exhausted. With the completion of the cycles, the tale had been told, and later treatments of the Arthurian material tended to be mere translations of the already dated material. Even Malory's Morte Darthur is yet another recasting of old-fashioned material, and this point is borne out by Caxton's justification for printing Malory's work, that there was still much of value in these old stories. Necessarily interest in the romance of Joseph of Arimathea similarly declined, but like King Arthur, he managed to maintain a place in the British popular imagination until the rediscovery of Malory in the early nineteenth century.

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the popular image of Joseph of Arimathea after Malory. Such an approach contains a number of difficulties, the greatest of these being that the true "popular" image of Joseph--that held by the general populace--may not necessarily be accurately reflected in the literary sources upon which my study must rely, treatments aimed at a relatively small literate audience. But a survey of the literary treatments of the

Joseph legend can still be useful, for popular tradition often possesses immense vitality and eventually exerts its influence upon literary output. This becomes true after the advent of printing and truer with the steadily increasing availability of such literature and the growth of a literate public. By the middle of the sixteenth century printers were already beginning to suit their output to what we would deem a genuinely wide popular audience, as is witnessed by the flood of cheap pamphlets, broadsides and jestbooks on subjects clearly intended to appeal to a relatively unsophisticated reader. Thus, as literature becomes more generally available and the reading public grows, the line between oral and literary tradition becomes less and less distinct, and it becomes increasingly possible to arrive at a reasonably accurate assessment of the "popular" impression of a figure like Joseph of Arimathea.

Although my survey is mainly concerned with the development of the Joseph figure after Malory, some of the roots of that development are found in earlier literature like the mystery cycles and the chronicles, so I have given them relatively full treatment. I have also limited my scope to English literature. The reason for this is a practical one. After the decline of the Arthurian romance, interest in such matters, probably because of Arthur's association with Britain, survived almost solely in the British Isles until Wagner adapted some of the material for operatic treatment in the nineteenth century.

Probably the most efficient means of determining the early common perception of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea is to examine

his representation in the art form that reached the widest range of public, the medieval religious drama.¹ Although the religious drama had originated in the Church, by the end of the thirteenth century it had become fully secularized throughout Europe (Craig 88). Drama was then being performed in the vernacular outside the Church and by lay performers, the productions themselves commonly being the responsibility of the various guilds. These plays were produced in cycles and presented in conjunction with appropriate Feast Days, the most notable being the festival of Corpus Christi, and of all the forms of medieval literature, the religious drama is probably the only one which could be considered popular in the modern sense of the term. In an essay on the "popularity" of the medieval drama, Stanley J. Kahrl writes:

Medieval drama was "popular" in the larger sense as well; that is, it appealed to all levels of the population, regardless of class. On a given festival, be it Corpus Christi, Whitsun, or the saint's day of a particularly important local guild, every member of a given locality would take part in the celebration. At major cities, such as York, Lincoln, Coventry, or Chester, town councils regularly enacted statutes governing the form of attendance at the religious processions which were a part of those feasts (88).

In further support of this thesis Kahrl uncovered records that prove that the plays were being performed even at tiny villages like Frieston, Donnington, Leake, and Kirton; and that some city councils actually instituted a tax to support the productions (89-92).

¹Useful studies of the mystery plays include those of Craig, Kolve, and Woolf.

Thus, the plays were genuinely popular. Everyone who could saw them, and studies like Kahr1's show that a much larger portion of the entire British population was able to see them than has previously been imagined.

These cycles of plays attempted to present the entire Biblical history of mankind from the Creation to the Last Judgment, but the bulk of the religious drama was concerned with the central events in Christian history: the Life, Passion and Resurrection of Christ. The transformation of Scripture into extended dramatic form required considerable elaboration, but the writers were careful to avoid any genuine conflict with their sources or the understood Church position on doctrinal matters. While the introduction of low comedy into the Biblical material indicates that the plays were intended to entertain, their primary purpose was always to present spiritually edifying material and "objectify abstract didactic doctrines for a popular audience" (Kahr1 103; see also Cawley, "Medieval Drama" 3-12). Since the large majority of the medieval audience could not read, these plays were the greatest source of Biblical teaching outside the Church itself, and the common notion of figures like Joseph of Arimathea necessarily owed much to the way they were presented in such plays.

Since Joseph is a key figure in the Biblical accounts of the Passion and the Resurrection, it is to be expected that the cycle-dramatists would give him full and appropriate dramatic treatment in their plays. In every instance he is depicted as the good and

just man of the Scripture who boldly requests of Pilate the body of Christ and buries it, with the aid of Nicodemus, in his own tomb. But there are some significant variations from the Gospels which show a heavy reliance upon the apocryphal writings, especially the Gospel of Nicodemus.² One of these variations is the assumption of friendship between Joseph of Arimathea and Pilate, a notion shared and even more fully developed by the romances. In the extant plays Pilate's greeting of Joseph is always cordial, and he seems eager to grant Joseph's request for the body of Christ. This is illustrated in the following extract from the English Towneley or Wakefield cycle, which includes a direct allusion to Joseph's service to Pilate:

Ioseph. Syr pylate, god the saue!
Graunte me that I craue,
If that it be thi will.

pilatus. Welcom, Ioseph, myght thou be!
what so thou askys I graunte it the,
So that it be skylle.

Ioseph. For my long seruyce I the pray
Graunte me the body--say me not nay--
Of ihesu, dede on rud.

pilatus. I graunte well if he ded be,
Good leyfe shall thou haue of me,
Do with hym what thou thynk gud (Crucifixion ll. 631-42).

Another commonly held assumption in the plays is Joseph's special status among the disciples of Christ. As discussed in

²Although few actual texts have survived of the German and French cycles, the ones that remain show the same treatment of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea. See Altdeutsche Passionsspiele aus Tirol and Le Mystère de la Passion.

Chapter I, Joseph's coming forth to beg the body of Christ when the other disciples were apparently in hiding was interpreted by medieval writers as implying that he had a greater degree of faith than they that Christ would fulfill His promise of overcoming death. Near the end of the Chester Passion while he and Nicodemus are preparing to bury Christ, Joseph affirms his faith:

Yett hope I within these dayes three
in flesh and blood alyve to see
thou that art nayled on a tree
unworthely todaye (ll. 452-55).

Such passages are proof that medieval writers and audiences must have held Joseph in high esteem, but the plays depict him in an additional role that must have afforded Joseph a far greater measure of importance, that of comforter of the Virgin. This role is most movingly demonstrated in the Digby Burial of Christ in a scene between Joseph and the three Marys which Craig has described as "more elaborate than anything else of the sort to be found in the English mystery plays" (318). Joseph comforts all the Marys, informing them that he has already obtained the permission of Pilate to bury the body; then he and Nicodemus bring the body to the tomb where Joseph allows the Virgin another look at her beloved son; and finally he assures all that on the third day He will rise again as promised. Here Joseph is depicted as a tower of strength, one who though himself deeply in sorrow is a man of action in the time of greatest need, the one who reminds the others of the promise of the Resurrection when the Virgin herself is completely overcome with grief.

On the basis of the above, it seems certain that the common medieval impression of Joseph of Arimathea was one to inspire a high degree of veneration, and that members of a medieval audience would be alert to any tradition which closely associated Joseph with their national heritage. In England such a tradition was provided by the Glastonbury version of the Joseph story, the source of the later chronicle accounts. As mentioned in Chapter II, the French romances' association of Joseph of Arimathea with Britain probably led to his being interpolated (ca. 1240) into William of Malmsbury's history of Glastonbury; but by the time of John of Glastonbury's Cronica (ca. 1400), Joseph's role as premier evangelist to Britain was assumed as fact. John's history, which admits a debt to the Estoire (49), greatly expands the account interpolated into William's history by including material from the Estoire and the Gospel of Nicodemus, but it omits Joseph's association with the Holy Grail. Instead, John substitutes two small vials containing the blood and sweat of Christ which have been buried with the body of Joseph at an unspecified location in the abbey precincts.

At first glance denying Joseph his association with the Holy Grail seems an attempt to reduce his status, but a deeper examination of John's chronicle reveals that the Glastonbury writers admitted as much as possible.³ Every major detail of the Estoire short of

³For more detailed accounts of how the Glastonbury version of the Joseph story was probably derived, see Lagorio "Evolving Legend," Loomis The Grail (249-70), and Gransden "Growth of the Glastonbury Traditions."

the Grail itself is confirmed, including the conversion of Sarras and the genealogical link with King Arthur. On two counts the Holy Grail had to be omitted. First, it implied a communion greater and antecedent to that offered by the Church; and second, it failed to accord with the account of the twelve unnamed apostles who, according to William's earlier history, established the church at Glastonbury. Although John removes the Holy Grail, he is careful to include many of the apocryphal traditions held in common with the mystery plays and provide a transition to the early Glastonbury version:

After [being freed from his prison by Christ], the noble Joseph of Arimathea, animated by an ardent faith, became the disciple of blessed Philip the apostle, and, filled to overflowing with his saving doctrine, was baptised by him along with his son Josephes. Later he was appointed guardian of the blessed ever-virgin Mary by blessed John the apostle, while John himself laboured at preaching to the Ephesians: Joseph was present at the Assumption of the same glorious Virgin, along with the blessed Philip and his other disciples. . . . Philip came to the Kingdom of the Franks to preach, and he converted and baptised many into the faith of Christ. Since, then, the holy apostle wished to spread the Word of God, he sent twelve of his disciples to Britain to proclaim the good news of the Word of Life; over these he sent his dear friend, the aforesaid Joseph. . . , along with his son Josephes. . . . But the barbarian king [Arviragus] and his nation, when they heard doctrines so new and unusual, did not wish to exchange their ancestral traditions for better ways and refused to consent to their preaching. Since, however, they had come from afar, and because of their evident modesty of life, Arviragus gave them for a dwelling [Avalon] (51).

It should be noted that although John names Joseph as the founder of Glastonbury and first evangelist to Britain, Joseph's attempt to convert the Britons apparently failed even though Joseph is depicted as a favored disciple of Christ. John goes on to record

the subsequent attempts to convert Britain, culminating in Augustine's historically verifiable success. Still it was Joseph's first attempt to bring the faith to Britain that most forcefully captured the British imagination. This combination of romance, apocryphal tradition, and history I shall henceforth call the "Glastonbury version."

A contemporary and less successful blend of romance, apocryphal tradition, and earlier Glastonbury version is that of John Hardyng. His Chronicle (ca.1430) is so garbled that the confusion seems almost deliberate. According to Hardyng, Joseph and Vespasian came together to Britain, Joseph to bring the Holy Grail and convert the British, and Vespasian apparently to conquer them. He also recounts Galahad's successful quest of the Grail and his death in Sarras, and then adds a hitherto sourceless account of Galahad's heart being buried at Glastonbury. Hardyng's Chronicle though continued and printed by Grafton in the reign of Henry VIII was apparently too extravagant even for the loose historical expectations of Renaissance audiences and consequently had little influence.

Hardyng's skill as a poet was modest, and his verse reflects the same tendency to muddle that is found in his handling of his sources. The following extract is typical of Hardyng. Galahad sits upon the Perilous Seat and

So sodenly doores and wyndowes al clapped
With hydeous noyce, farre passyng meruelous,
Opened and sperred al by them selfs fast rapped,
For whiche thei trust of some cause meruleous;
As with that noyse the saynt Graal precious
Flowe thryse about within the hall full ofte,
Flytteryng full fast aboue them high on lofte.

And as it came sodenly vnknown
 Right so it went awaye withouten lees,
 The knightes all that tyme that had it sawen,
 Amerueled were of it doutelesse[.] (132)

Later chronicles after Hardyng's were generally more coherent and tended to accept the Glastonbury version as their standard. The most influential of these was Holinshed's Chronicle (1577) where we find the following account of Joseph of Arimathea:

In the daies of the said Aruiragus, about the yeare of Christ 53, Ioseph of Arimathia, who buried the bodie of our sauour, being sent by Philip the Apostle (as Iohn Bale following the authoritie of Gildas and other British writers reciteth) after that the Christians were dispersed out of Gallia, came into Britaine with diuers other godlie christian men, & preaching the gospell there amongst the Britains, & instructing them in the faith and lawes of Christ, conuerted manie to the true beliefe, and baptised them in the wholesome water of regeneration, & there continued all the residue of his life, obtaining of the king a plot of ground where to inhabit, not past a foure miles from Wells, and there with his fellowes began to laie the first foundation of the true and perfect religion, in which place (or neere therevnto) was afterward erected the abbeie of Glastenburie (486-87).

This was the version of the Joseph story which was mainly known to the writers of the English Renaissance, who, after the split with Church of England from the Roman Church, tended to place a moral interpretation upon the story of Joseph: Joseph brought the true and unpolluted faith to Britain where it languished, possibly due to the unworthiness of the Britons. When the faith was returned to England by Augustine, it was already distorted by the false teachings of the Roman Church, and only the later separation of the Church of England restored the faith to its original

purity. Thus, the Joseph story was increasingly looked upon with a sense of nostalgia and a feeling of loss for what might have been if the faith had been allowed to flourish originally.

For those like Edmund Spenser who saw the Church of England as less than perfect, this feeling of loss was intensified. Spenser mentions Joseph and the Grail only once in the Faerie Queene (1596) and in this context:

[Arviragus] dyde; and him succeeded Marius,
 Who ioyed his dayes in great tranquillity,
 Then Coyll, and after him good Lucius,
 That first receiued Christianitie,
 The sacred pledge of Christes Euangely;
 Yet true it is, that long before that day
 Hither came Ioseph of Arimathy,
 Who brought with him the holy grayle, (they say)
 And preacht the truth, but since it greatly did decay.
 (2. 10.53)⁴

This was to become the standard view of the Joseph story until the revival of interest in Malory in the nineteenth century.

Another Renaissance poet who treats the Joseph legend is Michael Drayton in whose Poly-Olbion (1613) the following passage is found. The subject is the destruction of the monasteries under Henry VIII:

When not great Arthur's Tomb, nor holy Joseph's Grave,
 From sacrilege had power their sacred bones to save;
 He who that God-in-man to his sepulchre brought,
 Or he which for the faith twelve famous battles fought.
 What? Did so many Kings do honour to that place,
 For rev'rence to that seat which hath ascribed been,
 Trees yet in winter bloom, and bear their summer's green.
 (Third Song ll. 307-14)

⁴Although King Arthur and Merlin are prominent in the Faerie Queene, none of the other principal figures of Arthur's court are mentioned.

The tree to which Drayton refers at the end of the above passage is the famous Hawthorn of Glastonbury, a late addition (ca. 1500) to the Glastonbury version. It was said that when Joseph and his followers rested at Wearyall (Wirral) Hill, Joseph thrust his staff into the ground where it took root and miraculously blossomed then and every year afterward at Christmas in commemoration of the birth of Christ.

Better educated and more skeptical of the Joseph legend than Spenser or Drayton was John Milton. In his unfinished History of Britain (ca. 1570) Milton expresses his doubt of the accounts of the early conversions of Britain, but he does not go so far as to reject them altogether. Instead he leaves such problems to be pondered by men of greater authority in such matters than he:

Nor yet then [under Lucius] first was the Christian Faith
 heer known, but eev'n from the later daies of Tiberius,
 as Gildas confidently affirms, taught and propagated,
 and that as some say by Simon Zelotes, as others by
Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, Paul, Peter, and thir prime
Disciples. But of these matters, variously written and
 believ'd, Ecclesiastic Historians can best determin: as
 the best of them do, with little credit giv'n to the par-
 ticulars of such uncertain relations (98).

Such skepticism increased through the Restoration and into the eighteenth century when even the long-held religious truths themselves were being called into question by the Enlightenment and the attendant advance of scientific learning. Along the way Joseph of Arimathea was virtually forgotten. When writers turned their attention to matters Arthurian, it was to produce entertaining "spectacles" or political allegories. Dryden's King Arthur (1691)

is an example of the first. Although Dryden had toyed with the idea of an epic about King Arthur, when he did turn his pen to the subject, it was to write an opera. King Arthur does betray some general knowledge of the Arthurian story as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, but in the main King Arthur is like most of the operas of the period, and the purpose of the thin storyline is to display the usual love-versus-honor conflict and lead into musical numbers, songs, and choruses replete with the stock sighting swains and their Clorindas, and such. Political allegory is the motive behind Richard Blackmore's forgettable Prince Arthur (1695) and King Arthur (1697). Blackmore's epics owe more to the Aeneid and Paradise Lost than to any genuine Arthurian work, and his principal subject is the conflict between William of Orange and James II, a subject which is given superficial allegorical treatment for more than twenty books of heroic couplets. Neither Dryden nor Blackmore mentions Joseph of Arimathea.

But Joseph does figure in the literature of the period, and oddly enough in a play. The play is Christ's Passion (1689), a translation by George Sandys of a drama of the same name by the Dutch writer, Hugo Grotius. Joseph appears in Act Five in his standard Passion role. After witnessing the torment and crucifixion of Christ, Joseph delivers an extended curse upon Jerusalem and the Jews; then he vows to leave accursed land, and here Sandys provides a note:

The Ecclesiastical Histories report, how Joseph of Arimathea, after he had suffered Imprisonment by the Envy of the Jews, and was delivered by an Angel, left his Country, and sailed to Marcellis in France. From thence, passing over into this Island, he preached the Gospel to the Britons and the Scots: Who there exchanged this Life for a better (96).

Again, although Glastonbury is not mentioned, this is the Glastonbury version of the Joseph story. Thus, Joseph of Arimathea was at least represented in the literature of the Restoration and the so-called Age of Reason, and in his now standard role, bringer of the faith to Britain.

During the later eighteenth century, authors began to take a more serious interest in the Arthurian legend, but this interest was at first more antiquarian than general. Chief among the works which deal with Arthurian matters are Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765); Warton's Observations on the Faerie Queene, History of English Poetry (1782), and Poems (1777); and Ritson's Select Collection of English Songs (1783). Although these writers and collectors were not specifically attempting to promote the Arthurian story, they made Arthurian materials available and helped to awaken the interest of the public in that story. Additionally, these collections and works demonstrated that the Arthurian matter was a suitable subject for poetic treatment. Indeed, Warton actually composed a handful of short Arthurian poems which though of little value were admired in poetic circles and ultimately led to better creations.

It was just before the flowering of renewed interest in Arthurian matters that William Blake, ever a solitary and

transitional figure in English Literature, wrote what has become the best-known Joseph poem. Curiously, no mention is made of Joseph of Arimathea:

And did those feet in ancient time.
Walk on Englands mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On Englands pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land.
(Poetry and Prose 95)

The most popular of Blake's lyrics, this poem has achieved the status of a second national anthem in England. The tradition to which it refers is that Jesus Christ in his youth once visited England in the company of his supposed uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, who had interests in Cornish tin mining (the source of his wealth). The appeal of such a notion to British Christians is obvious. Any myth which gives one's country a special degree of distinction is certain to be cherished, as this one still is. In fact, this myth combined (or confused) with the Glastonbury version of the Joseph story has become the popular standard. Implied here is the same sense of loss of the true faith of the Glastonbury account, but there is also a rallying cry to restore that which has been lost, to rebuild the New Jerusalem on English shores.

It is ironic that the most popular version of Joseph story is reflected and promoted by Blake who, when asked why he did not write more clearly, answered that to be understood by idiots was not worth his bother. As is usual with Blake, he means more than the ordinary reader--and frequently the student--is likely to understand from his lines, but how much more is a matter of debate among scholars. Indeed, more typical of Blake is his other Joseph poem:

I will tell you what Joseph of Arimathea
Said to my Fairy was it not very queer
Pliny & Trajan what are you here
Come listen to Joseph of Arimathea
Listen patient & when Joseph has done
Twill make a fool laugh & a Fairy Fun.
(Poetry and Prose 470)

Although the exact meaning of this enigmatic ditty is by no means clear, when the poem is placed against the contexts of Blake's contempt for rulers and most men of learning, and the notion of the "lost true faith" associated with the Glastonbury version of the Joseph story, the gist can be determined: Joseph knew the true faith (not necessarily Christianity in any recognizable sense), and if all would listen to it, they would become happy and free. This notion of Joseph can be traced back to Blake's boyhood when at sixteen he made the first sketches of his engraving (based on a drawing by Michelangelo) "Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion" which later was supplied with a revealing caption: "This [Michelangelo's drawing] is One of the Gothic Artists who Built the Cathedrals in what we call the Dark Ages Wandering about in sheep

skins & goat skins of whom the World was not worthy; such were the Christians in all Ages" (Poetry and Prose 660).⁵ Although Blake had considerable interest in Joseph and some in King Arthur, it is important to note that he apparently never associated the two.

However, it was the publication of new editions of Malory's Morte Darthur in the early nineteenth century that brought the Arthurian story into vogue.⁶ Oddly, the first major work produced on the subject was one which dismissed Malory's version of the story. This was Thomas Love Peacock's The Misfortunes of Elphin (1829) which was a scathing attack on the romantic interpretation of the Arthurian story.⁷ A man with strong antiquarian interests, Peacock gives a "realistic" account of what the ancient Arthurian society must have been like. There are no heroes, only stupid brutes who are incapable of even imagining anything better than drunken revelry or pillaging their neighbors' property. Arthur is little more than a tribal lord whose greatness lies in the fact that he is more cunning, ruthless, and stronger than the other

⁵Although the caption is badly garbled, Joseph of Arimathea is clearly the person to whom reference is made. However, it is not impossible that Blake may have given the saint and the artist some sort of subtle connection.

⁶The first of these new editions of Malory was Haselwood's which appeared in 1816. This was nearly two hundred years after the last printing of Morte Darthur in 1634.

⁷The Misfortunes of Elphin is one of the least known of Peacock's "novels" and one of the most entertaining. Besides assuming the Celtic origin of the Arthurian story, it also includes some specimens of early Welsh poetry.

cutthroats and reivers in his miserable little country. Of special interest is Peacock's full anticipation of the Celtic origins of the Arthurian and Grail histories. Naturally he rejects the story of Joseph of Arimathea and an early Christian Britain; and his version of the Grail is Gwythno's "marvelous" hamper which is every morning full of hams and flagons of beer and wine, probably stolen.

Much more sympathetic treatment is given to the Arthurian story by William Wordsworth in his Egyptian Maid (1830) which is clearly indebted to Malory's Morte Darthur. The maid herself is a symbol of purity and is at the end of the poem given by King Arthur to Galahad, the only member of the court who can equal her in virtue. The substitution of the maid for the Holy Grail is strange and inappropriate, but Wordsworth's purpose in doing so is far from clear, and he is certainly not at his best in the Egyptian Maid. More central to this study is Wordsworth's treatment of the legend of Joseph of Arimathea in one of his Ecclesiastical Sonnets (1822) entitled "Dissolution of the Monasteries":

Threats come that no submission may assuage,
 No sacrifice avert, no power dispute;
 The tapers shall be quenched, the belfries mute,
 And, 'mid their choirs unroofed by selfish rage,
 The warbling wren shall find a leafy cage;
 The gadding bramble hang her purple fruit;
 And the green lizard and the gilded newt
 Lead unmolested lives, and die of age.
 The owl of evening and the woodland fox
 For their abode the shrines of Waltham choose:
 Proud Glastonbury can no more refuse
 To stoop her head before these desperate shocks--
 She whose high pomp displaced, as story tells,
 Arimathean Joseph's wattled cells (Poetical Works 341).

Here again is the theme of loss of the pure faith which is so frequently found in the writers who recount the Glastonbury version of the Joseph story. Clearly the true faith that Joseph brought to Britain has been lost, destroyed by Glastonbury's pride in itself rather than its purpose for being, and by its consuming interest in piling up material wealth which like all worldly things was eventually taken from it. All that remain are a sense of quiet and a peace, perhaps akin to that which could be found when Joseph built the ancient wattled church.

With the Victorian period, the Arthurian story truly reached its greatest level of fame. The story as a whole is lifted bodily from Malory by most of the writers who treat it, but there is an interesting development in the treatment of Malory's version of the Joseph story, and that is its blending with the Glastonbury version. The obvious sign of this blending is the Victorian writers' intrusion of the legend of the Glastonbury Hawthorn into their treatments of Malory's Tale of the Sankgraal.

One of the earliest clear examples of this blending is found in Robert Stephen Hawker's Quest of the Sangraal (1863). Although Hawker claims a preference for Celtic sources, he bases his story almost entirely upon Malory. Hawker's is a rousing account, and he is overfond of exclamation, but on the whole his work is one which deserves more attention than it has received. The primary interest for my study is his considerable elaboration upon the story of Joseph of Arimathea. He turns the account of Joseph before the

cross into an intensely dramatic scene and is unusually specific as to the nature and significance of the Holy Grail:

Then came Sir Joseph, hight of Arimathèe,
 Bearing that awful Vase, the Sangraal!
 The Vessel of the Pasch, Shere Thursday night,
 The selfsame Cup, wherein the faithful Wine
 Heard God, and was obedient unto Blood.
 Therewith he knelt and gathered blessèd drops
 From his dear Master's Side that sadly fell,
 The ruddy dewes from the great tree of life:
 Sweet Lord! what treasures! like the priceless gems
 Hid in the tawny casket of a king,--
 A ransom for an army, one by one! (63)

Hawker's technique is to swiftly advance narrative and focus on character. He brings to Joseph a genuinely heroic grandeur, giving him as well a sense of mystery and vital force that one usually associates with Merlin:

He lived long centuries and prophesied.
 A girdled pilgrim ever and anon,
 Cross-staff in hand, and, folded at his side,
 The mystic marvel of the feast of blood.
 Once, in old time, he stood in this dear land,
 Enthrall'd--for lo! a sign! his grounded staff
 Took root, and branch'd, and bloom'd, like Aaron's rod:
 Thence came the shrine, the cell; therefore he dwelt,
 The vassal of the Vase, at Avalon! (64)

Besides adding the legend of the Glastonbury thorn, Hawker further alters Malory's story to bring in that sense of loss associated by most of the British writers with the Glastonbury version. There is no line of Grail Kings to guard the vessel; it is simply withdrawn and can be recovered only when the worthy Galahad seeks it in the future. And the reason for its removal is here spelled out: "This could not last, for evil days came on, / And evil men: the garbage of their sin / Tainted this land, and all things holy

fled" (64). Hawker did not finish his planned poem. This is unfortunate, for it would be interesting to see how he would have treated Galahad's success on the Grail quest. A mystic and a visionary, Hawker had the potential to produce the most mystically-charged and symbolically rich version of the Grail quest since that of the Vulgate Queste. As matters stand, however, his primary importance lies in his vivid treatment of Joseph, by far the most striking and detailed of all the Victorian treatments. If Tennyson was the poet of Arthur, Hawker was (or could have been) the poet of Joseph.

Many Victorian writers of prose and poetry turned their talents to the Arthurian subject, but it was at the hands of Tennyson that it received its most definitive treatment. In his Idylls of the King, Tennyson reinterpreted Malory's Morte Darthur for his own age and the age to come. Giving the Arthurian theme its finest poetic treatment, he infused his Idylls with a spiritual allegory to please those who were not content with the story alone, and thus his work has been appreciated by readers on all levels of sophistication. Twice he treats the Joseph legend, first in Balin and Balan and more fully in The Holy Grail. Since he often follows Malory closely, his Joseph is essentially that of his source, but he makes one alteration characteristic of the other Victorian writers who handle the material. He blends with Malory's account the Glastonbury version, with its popular tradition of the flowering hawthorn. In the Holy Grail Percivale tells the monk Ambrosius of the "phantom of a cup that comes and goes" (ll. 44):

The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
 Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
 This, from the blessed land of Aromat--
 After the day of darkness, when the dead
 Went wandering o'er Moriah--the good saint
 Arimathean Joseph, journeying brought
 To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
 Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
 And there awhile it bode; and if a man
 Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,
 By faith, of all his ills. But then the times
 Grew to such evil that the holy cup
 Was caught away to Heaven, and disappeared.

To whom the monk: "From the old books I know
 That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,
 And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,
 Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build;
 And there he built with wattles from the marsh
 A little lonely church in days of yore,
 For so they say, these books of ours, but seem
 Mute of this miracle, far as I have read. . . .
 (ll. 46-66)

This is the most successful marriage of the two versions of the story of Joseph of Arimathea. Here the two versions confront each other and ultimately are blended when Ambrosius regrets that he was till now unfamiliar with the sublime part of the story missing from his old books.

Also present here is the motif of Duty, so cherished by the Victorians and central to the Idylls as a whole. The merely contemplative life cannot lead one to the greatest truth. One must go out into the world and actively pursue it. Ironically, Arthur (often said to represent Spirit) is unable to seek the Holy Grail, because his duty as king must keep him at Camelot. Thus, by first contrasting and then blending the two versions of the Joseph story, Tennyson amplified one of the larger themes of his great poem and

reinterpreted the Holy Grail itself in a manner to seize upon the imagination of his society.

With the growth of popular occultism near the end of the nineteenth century, there occurred a strange development. Joseph was largely disassociated from the Grail and discarded. One occult organization, the Esoteric Order of the Golden Dawn, is of interest here because it was composed of literary men: William Butler Yeats, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Lord Dunsany, A. E. Waite, and S. L. MacGregor Mathers. The goal of the Order was mystical enlightenment and the power that such enlightenment could produce. Although the members primarily relied upon the Cabala and Ceremonial Magic in the attempt to achieve the Greater Awareness, they also employed the techniques of Eastern religion and Spiritualism.⁸ However various their approaches, their goal was the same. Basically they believed that reality is an illusion imposed upon mankind for some unspecified failing, and that through supreme effort and spiritual

⁸Yeats was deeply impressed by Eastern thought and religion, and his plays show the influence of the Japanese Noh drama. He also in later life was fond of demonstrating his wife's skill at spirit-guided "automatic" writing. For an account of his friendship with Mathers, the founder of the Order, see Yeats Autobiographies (182-88). According to Yeats, it "was through [Mathers] mainly that I began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory" (183). It was his association with the Order that ultimately inspired A Vision.

training, some men may rend the veil of illusion, achieve enlightenment, and then apply their new knowledge to achieve whatever goal they desired, be it physical or spiritual. The use of the sword and chalice in their rituals reminded some members like Waite and Machen of the Grail legend and they began to look upon the Grail as the ultimate symbol of the sought-after enlightenment and a portal through which one might reach the Reality beyond. Waite moves toward this understanding of the Grail in his study The Holy Grail. For him the Grail romancers, though often hampered by partial understanding of the meaning of the Grail, employed the fictions of Joseph of Arimathea and the Quest to hint at the inexpressible for those readers and auditors who possess the potential for spiritual awakening. However the stories might grasp the imagination, it is the Grail and the Grail alone that matters. It cannot be properly understood in this world, but some may be able to experience it, obtaining a sort of mystical communion which would open their eyes to the Greater Reality. Such people are the elect, and Waite postulated that a secret community of such awakened ones existed within the Church in the Middle Ages and was responsible for the Grail stories which were designed to direct worthy individuals toward the true path. Joseph was only a narrative convenience; he really had nothing to do with the Grail and the Hidden Church.

Arthur Machen, the only member of the Order to treat the Grail in imaginative fiction, discards Joseph altogether and adds to Waite's notion of the Grail a measure of what for convenience may

be called "Grace." Waite stressed individual worthiness in the achievement of the Grail, but Machen depicted the Grail as actively seeking out men of all walks of life, probably because he felt that mankind had atoned for its original failing through the suffering imposed by the Great War (WWI). In "The Great Return" the Grail returns to the world of men, manifesting itself near a small Welsh fishing village. The inhabitants are given glimpses of the Grail and a sort of mystical infection sets in, resulting in a total social harmony and a final Communion at the Mass of the Grail for those who are the most spiritually awake. Neither Joseph nor Christ are mentioned, and the legend of the Rich Fisherman is represented as a Celtic ancestral memory of the ancient harmony, once lost, which is now being restored.

Eventually the Order of the Golden Dawn was disbanded due to the intrusion of Aleister Crowley, a Black Magician and self-styled "Great Beast" of Revelation, who perverted the purpose of the Order and established his own system of "enlightenment" through the use of drugs in combination with sexual rituals. He adapted the symbolism of the Grail and the lance (or sword), but awarded them an obvious sexual significance. Needless to say, Joseph of Arimathea had no place in Crowley's system.

For different reasons which are difficult to ascertain, the later twentieth century Arthurian tradition has had little use for the legend of Joseph of Arimathea, and the tendency has been to separate him from it. Perhaps this is due to emphasis on material

science and technology, and the attendant distaste for spiritual matters. Joseph and the Grail appear at times, but the tendency has been to give them wry or ambiguous treatment. This is perhaps best seen in the most popular recent Arthurian work, T. H. White's Once and Future King. Here the Joseph association with the Arthurian tradition is made the object of humor:

There had been a good deal of talk in Camelot about a certain King Pelles, who was lame and lived in the haunted castle of Corbin. He was supposed to be slightly mad, because he believed himself to be a relation of Joseph of Arimathea (384).

After this passage, Pelles' madness and its link to Joseph is treated as a standing joke which, owing to the skill of White, is often genuinely funny. The subject of the Grail is treated, but with a skillful indirection which absolves White of the responsibility of a clear explanation. It is Lancelot who recounts for Arthur and Guenevere the conclusion of the Grail quest, and since he was kept apart because of his sinfulness, he is unable to give a full account. Because Lancelot has the misfortune to be something of a mystic and a visionary, he feels his failure on the quest acutely, and the reader's sympathy is with him rather than with the prig Galahad who actually succeeds--and dies.

Since and partially because of White, the Arthurian story is more widely popular than ever before. It has been the subject of streams of paperbacks, movies and even comic books, and the trend is still increasing. One line of this development is that previously taken by Peacock to return the Arthurian story to a realistic

primitive Celtic setting. This necessarily removes Joseph of Arimathea from the story, because the context is pagan and the Grail must needs be a cauldron of plenty. Children's books, when they mention him at all, tend to make him a good man who happens to own a Magic Cup.

What my survey has shown, I hope, is the same sort of development of the figure of Joseph of Arimathea that one finds in the romances, with one essential difference, the steadily increasing vitality of the Glastonbury version and especially the legend of the flowering hawthorn. Although the standard Grail history remains relatively static, the Glastonbury version shows definite development through addition of the attractive legend of the flowering hawthorn and the equally appealing notion that Joseph brought the youthful Jesus with him on an earlier trip to British shores. If the later twentieth century has generally removed Joseph from the story of Arthur, the legend of Joseph himself is still very much alive by virtue of the Glastonbury version. I do not predict that this legend will ever attain the sort of literary success that Arthur's has achieved. After all, warriors and kings are nowadays deemed more suitable subjects for fiction than saints, but it is at least possible that the Joseph legend may receive a share of literary treatment in the future. It has already been attempted in the otherwise negligible novel The Thorn of Arimathea by Frank G. Slaughter. Perhaps better writers will turn their attention to the legend of Joseph. Only time will tell.

CONCLUSION

Denied imaginative literary treatment, what is the current status of Joseph of Arimathea? The recent purging of the calendar of saints by the Catholic Church did not affect Joseph. As long as the Gospels are believed, his sainthood will be secure for his service at the burial of Christ. This is indeed something, but is that all that remains of the once rich Joseph tradition? Certainly not. One must not forget the annual Glastonbury Festival, a celebration which has increased steadily in popularity over the years. Oddly enough, the festival is sponsored by the Church of England, and in the early sixties the Chapel in the lower storey of the ruined Abbey was formally re-dedicated to Joseph of Arimathea and all on the basis of the popular appeal of the Glastonbury version of his legend. Yearly thousands of people, often at great expense and trouble, take part in the pilgrimage to Glastonbury to pay reverent tribute to the memory of the saint who brought the faith to Britain for the first time, and thousands more observe the proceedings and take part in the festival. The prevailing attitude seems to be that which was once expressed by G. K. Chesterton:

The tale is certainly not impossible; as it is certainly not certain. . . . Modern people must make scientifically certain that St. Joseph did or did not go to Glastonbury, despite the fact that it is now quite impossible to find out; and that it does not, in a religious sense, very much matter. But it is essential to feel that he may have gone to Glastonbury: all songs, art, and dedications branching and blossoming like the thorn, are rooted in some such sacred doubt. . . . Something is really present in the

place; . . . there is verily some communion between the thorn tree and the crown of thorns (96).

For many Joseph is a matter of fact and not of legend, and even would-be debunkers of that legend hesitate to so do altogether. A typical example is R. F. Treharne, who after spending the bulk of his study on the sheer absurdity of the traditions of King Arthur and Joseph of Arimathea, writes the following:

Yet it is well to reflect that, thanks to the Pax Romana and, after 43 A. D., to the Roman conquest of Britain, a wealthy Jew, especially if he happened to be a merchant, could have travelled more easily from Palestine to Glastonbury in the thirty years following the Crucifixion than at any later time until well into the nineteenth century. Strictly speaking, it is not impossible that Joseph of Arimathea came to Glastonbury: historically speaking, there is not a scrap of evidence whatsoever to support the tradition that he did so come (119).

Joseph has had his share of champions as well. In The Flowering Hawthorn Hugh Ross Williamson attempts to prove that Joseph did come to Glastonbury and that the attendant legends of Joseph's bringing Christ to England and the hawthorn are true as well. As evidence he cites an apparently ancient tinkers' tradition that Joseph was in the tin trade and might very well have brought Jesus with him on a business trip to look after his mining interests in Cornwall, and that the Glastonbury thorn is a species peculiar to East and that it does blossom when no native hawthorn does. But his greatest emphasis is upon the question: "Why Joseph of Arimathea?"

If the story is nothing but a late invention to glorify the British church, why not postulate one of the Apostles? . . . It is arguable that St. Paul himself, following the tin

trade route from Spain, visited these shores. He, had it been a merely legendary matter, would have been a more impressive founder than the Arimathean.

May not the reason for the powerful and persistent tradition about Joseph be, quite simply, because it happened to be true? . . . Had he this first-hand knowledge of the country [through his presumed interests in Cornish tin mining], he was the most likely person to be appointed to evangelise it in later years (48-49).

There is some merit to such reasoning, but without any real proof, it is only reasoning. However, it does demonstrate the very real force of the Glastonbury legend of Joseph, ultimately the version of the Joseph legend which has shown the greatest degree of vitality. Why this is so, is difficult to say. Perhaps it is because Joseph was a real person and Glastonbury, unlike Arthur's Camelot, is a real location that can be pointed out on a map and visited. And the miraculous hawthorn can still be seen, blossoming on schedule at Christmas time. True, the original thorn was destroyed by Puritan zealots in the seventeenth century, but the surviving transplanted cuttings from the original prove that there was such a tree. One may separate Joseph of Arimathea from the Arthurian story, even take from him the Holy Grail, yet he still has things like these to authenticate his legend. Circumstantial evidence will often not hold up in a court of law, but it is usually enough to convince most people, especially those who wish to believe. And doubtless there are many who faithfully attend the Glastonbury festival who scoff at the notion of an historical Arthur, but do not doubt the truth of the story of Joseph. When

facts and beliefs--especially religious beliefs--conflict, facts are usually discarded. In this sense Joseph is far more real than Arthur. If Arthur must be given up, all one loses is an attractive story or perhaps a dream; but for many, being asked to give up Joseph is asking them to give up a measure of their religious faith. Perhaps no one has summed up the phenomenon better than E. A. Freeman: "We need not believe that the Glastonbury legends are records of facts; but the existence of those legends is a very great fact" (80).

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VITA

Jerry Lee Ball was born in Ravenden, Arkansas, on December 6, 1949. After shuttling back and forth between Arkansas and Missouri and attending various schools, he finally finished high school in Walnut Ridge, Arkansas in May 1967. The following fall he entered Arkansas State University, and in August 1971 he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. After being drafted initially, he spent seven years in the Army as a military journalist and newspaper editor with service in Taiwan and Utah. During the five years he was in Taiwan, he was an instructor of English as a Second Language in addition to his military duties.

Upon completion of military service, he resumed his academic career at Arkansas State University where in 1980 he received his Master of Arts degree in English. Wishing to continue his studies, he accepted an assistantship at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the fall of 1980 and began working toward a Ph. D. in English. This degree was awarded in December 1986.

The author is a member of Phi Kappa Phi. After graduation he plans to teach English at the college level.