

Divine Madness: Archetypes of Romantic Love

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Twelve

Love's Quest: Following The Relationship

Falling in love is a matter of luck or grace. Life simply grants us a favor. Although we may be able to look back on an incident of falling in love and appreciate the extent to which our woundedness had prepared us for it, it never appears that we in any way earned or deserved it. In its early stages romantic love almost always seems to be a wonder and a blessing -- like the arrival of the swan-knight or the hawk-knight, in answer to a maiden's prayer. As time passes, however, we may become less and less sanguine in our descriptions of our relationship. Difficulties rooted deep in our respective wounds begin to surface, and it may seem that the trials of love demand far more effort than love's pleasures can recompense. What seemed to pull us out of the doldrums, now takes us more deeply into them. We want to escape. We may even laugh scornfully at love and its chimerical promises. Very likely, though, we are stuck, feeling it too painful to go on and impossible to pull out.

We like to think of love as a kind of huckleberry raft or ethereal cruise ship afloat between reality's shores. But this respite from everyday concerns usually seems to betray us, for it seduces us into confrontation with some of the deepest conflicts of our lives. Until we are so seduced, we tend to believe we have successfully resolved or avoided such conflicts. No wonder love's reputation is clouded. Those who can successfully end their entanglement with a quarrel or walk away without regrets seem to be fortunate, indeed. If they can lead their lives happily without having to wrestle with the stickiness and pain that Eros unearths, the rest of us may envy them. But we who cannot change course so easily, find ourselves condemned to work through our difficulties. There is nothing left for us but to accept the challenge and *live* our romantic life.

In the previous chapter, we have tried to formulate an attitude about this. We have concluded that the course of romantic love is unique for every couple, so that practical precepts and guidelines are bound to be misleading. The one common denominator is that every couple must "follow the relationship." This implies that there is a guiding third principle, like Khidr, the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Grail, to which the partners open themselves in a kind of active receptivity. Because of their alert attention and their active participation, we may say that they "tend" the relationship as much as "follow" it. They resist sliding into unconsciousness and by no means abdicate moral responsibility. Following the relationship is a moral undertaking of the highest and subtlest order.

To flesh out this abstract picture, we shall consider the careers of three knights as they go in quest of the Holy Grail: Galahad, who enjoyed supreme success; Gawain, who was unable even to get started; and Lancelot, the only successful knight to have returned to the

real world. Unless otherwise noted, this material comes from *The Quest of the Holy Grail*.

Galahad's Quest

On the eve of a certain Pentecost, Lancelot is called out of Camelot by a young woman and taken to a nunnery. There he meets for the first time his own son, Galahad, whom the nuns want dubbed a knight. Lancelot does so Pentecost morning.

Arriving at Camelot about noon, Galahad pulls a magic sword from a stone and then becomes the designated occupant of the famous Seat Perilous, which had gone empty since the founding of the Round Table. Then he jousts -- shieldless -- with the finest of King Arthur's knights, demonstrating extraordinary prowess. That evening the Grail appears in the center of the Round Table, and all hundred fifty knights vow to go on the Quest.

As Galahad begins the Quest, he wins a shield designed for "the finest knight in Christendom," casts the devil out of a blessed graveyard, and frees a large number of imprisoned ladies from the Castle of the Maidens. Later he battles with Lancelot, Perceval, and Gawain -- all unrecognized. He unhorses his father, and almost kills the other two.

Next a maiden, who turns out to be the sister of Perceval, conducts Galahad to a magic ship in which the two of them set sail together with Perceval and Bors. They find another marvelous sword on board, and the ship takes them to the Castle of Carcelois in Scotland, where they are attacked by ten knights, whom they kill. They learn that these ten are guilty of incest with and the murder of their sister. At another castle, they fight seventy knights to save Perceval's sister from being bled to cure a leprosy from which the lady of the castle suffers. On learning the cause of the battle, the saintly maiden volunteers to be bled, and asks to have her body placed in a boat at the first port they come to. The boat will take her to the city of Sarras -- the end of the Quest -- ahead of the three knights.

The knights travel on in separate directions. Galahad finds the abbey where King Mordrain is suffering with 400 years of weakness and blindness after having approached too near the Grail. Galahad's presence restores his sight, and he dies in Galahad's arms. Galahad then meets Perceval and the two of them travel about Britain for five years putting an end to preternatural (pagan) phenomena, such as boiling springs and flaming tombs. At the end of this time, they meet up with Bors; and the three of them come to the Castle of Corbenic, the Grail Castle, where Galahad restores the broken sword of Joseph of Arimathea. At the table of the Grail, Josephus, "the first Christian bishop," is borne down from heaven by four angels; and Christ, naked with bleeding hands and feet, distributes communion. Galahad is bidden to heal the Maimed King[1] with blood from the lance which pierced the side of Christ. Then the three companions are ordered to take the Grail out of Britain to the City of Sarras, again using the magic ship.

In Sarras, an evil king imprisons the companions, and they are fed miraculously by the Grail for a year until the king dies. A voice tells the people to select Galahad for their king. But before this can happen, another Grail service is celebrated by Josephus, who invites Galahad to look into the Grail. The vision, not described to the reader, is so impressive that Galahad resolves to die on the spot. A hand reaches down from heaven and takes the Grail up with it. Perceval also dies, and Bors buries him beside his sister and Galahad. Bors returns alone to Camelot to tell the story.

Galahad, "the Good Knight," appears full-grown on the Arthurian stage, virtually without preparation and coming out of nowhere. His mother Elaine, along with Viviane, Morgaine, and Morgan, is one of the magical Ladies of the Lake who, in an earlier age, were Celtic goddesses. Everything about him sets him apart from ordinary mortals: the sword, the shield, the Seat Perilous, his virginity.

Some details mark him out as a new Arthur, particularly the favor of the Ladies of the Lake, the sword pulled out of a stone, and the second sword discovered in a magic ship.

There are many more, however, which mark him as a second Christ. He has a secret childhood, a short public life, and an early, voluntary death. He heals King Mordrain and others. He ends the pagan era, ushering in the era of Christianity. Above all, he is a virgin and preserved from sin. Even in portraying the violent life of a knight, the narrator rarely allows Galahad's blows to be fatal. If they are, he immediately reassures us that the knights Galahad killed were among the most heinous individuals on the face of the earth.

A magic ship seems to carry him through his entire life -- not only when he is travelling by sea. He lives entirely in the eternal, archetypal world, like Lohengrin. Such experience is by no means foreign to romantic love. We considered the stone-in-the-pocket kind of phenomenon at some length in Chapter III. When we are in an unconscious harmony, a mystical oneness, events glide by frictionlessly. It is inspirational; it bonds us with our beloved; it reveals us something about the profundity of the human soul; it may open the lens of our anima or animus and bring into focus the being of our beloved. All these things are very important. They guide our relationship, give it ballast, reinforce the certainty of our trust in one another. They shed light, too, on issues which arise in the personal, temporal realm of our joint life.

Sometimes we enjoy minutes or hours, even weeks, in this archetypal realm where everything seems to be divinely ordered. Sometimes a couple can seem to spend years this way -- particularly when they live quite different lives and spend fairly little time together. A moment's glimpse of our Self-level connection can nourish us for weeks, reassure us of the depth and eternity of our love. We catch one another up on the news from our respective lives, and we even pay some attention to the details; but all of this is really a vehicle for our reconnecting at a deeper level. Our meetings are radiant, glowing from within with the light of the divine spark. They are instances of love-play. We take delight in the new facets of one another's soul which have been brought out during the time we have been separated. We delight in our union, a kind of conspiracy of affection and inspiration. Each of us provides the matrix for the other's growth and transformation, because we do not cling to specific images of one another and insist that certain expectations be filled. We look forward to each meeting receptively, as to a spiritual adventure where we will be delighted to find more intriguing inspiration. It seems as the years go by that we are eternally the same and yet forever different. The breadth of our connectedness grows, seems to burst our chests in a most subtle ecstasy of joining ever more satisfyingly.

Probably we all experience something like this -- if only in nearly-missed glimpses. For this is simply the Self-level bond, always the same and yet always unique with every couple. It is rare, indeed, for such experience to dominate in a relationship which lasts on and on for decades. "Real life" with all of its mundane details is eventually bound to intrude, bringing with it conflicting demands and personal difficulties which we may very well regret. But, regret them or not, we have little control over their appearance. They are part of our very being as mortals. And, as we have explored in Chapter X, these differences can even be a blessing in disguise if we become worthy opponents and treat them as opportunities for growth rather than as indications that our union will never work.

In any event, when temporality and personal differences intrude into the paradisaical eternity of our union, we will probably find that the example of Galahad provides little help. His divinely privileged origins and goal preserved him from the practical frustrations

we have no hope ever of escaping. His value for us ordinary mortals is to remind us that there is a level of Self-Self union outside of space and time. As we have seen in the discussion on worthy opponents, the dimension of eternal union can operate as a kind of anchor amid the passionate storms brought on by our individual needs. We *could* follow our relationship in the Galahad manner, if only we could free ourselves of our non-ultimate attachments. Perhaps it is impossible for us not to have spasms of inordinate need for security, nurture, or independence. But the example of Galahad indicates the higher and clearer-eyed alternative. To have gained this kind of perspective already attenuates our non-ultimate spasms. A vision of following the relationship as smoothly as Galahad in his magic ship helps us to see our union as a whole, and keeps us from getting stuck on the same old snags. Or when we do get stuck in spite of ourselves, a Galahad vision makes it easier for us to detach ourselves from those snags.

The translator of the *Quest*, Pauline Matarasso, tells us in one of her very well-informed footnotes (p. 296, n. 56) that Galahad's boat represents Christian mysticism. In view of our discussion in the previous chapter, we can be more specific than that. The magic boat represents what Meister Eckhart calls *Gelassenheit*, the mystic's attitude of actively holding oneself open for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Grail, or any other personification of the Third. Galahad himself represents more than saintliness, because -- apart from the mother of Jesus -- no human has been preserved from sin as he. His quest of the Grail represents following a relationship with supernatural clarity. If, as lovers, we had Galahad's enhanced vision, we would never lose sight of our beloved as she appears through the lens of our anima (or animus). Despite our difficulties, we would keep our relationship anchored in the essential core of our beloved, the divine spark which justifies our relationship ultimately.

It is very possible to see that core and to fail to see the mundane issues which can lead to quarrels and worthy opposition. It does indicate a bit of perhaps willful blindness, but most couples who see through their anima and animus lenses can enjoy periods of time in a Venusberg of eternal joy. They might find that such interludes give them the strength and courage to struggle with their mundane issues. But I have seen couples, too, which have clung to their Venusberg interludes as though they were the whole of the relationship -- and denied the validity of their quarrels. There is a certain seductiveness to the eternal dimension of romantic love. It has a quality of being "realer" than real life, a quality of givenness, as though God has ordered things this way just for us. I have heard people describe their relationships this way, concluding that really nothing can go wrong, that the eternal, spiritual dimension of their union is so strong that it is bound to overcome all difficulties on the apparently less significant personal plane.

We know how people can come to have a view like this, for the archetypal dimension of relationship is often the most powerful experience of the psyche that individuals ever have. But with a modicum of exposure to the difficulties, we also know how easy it is to overlook and devalue the importance of the personal. Furthermore, as the story of Thomas Wolfe makes clear, there are other archetypal realities to reconcile with our relationship -- a need for personal autonomy and accomplishment, for example. When an archetypal requirement like one of these begins to make itself felt, it invariably picks up on some of the overlooked and devalued personal whims and individual differences we fooled ourselves into thinking we had overcome.

In general, I have more hope for the renewal and salvation of a relationship in which the couple too much favors their archetypal connection over the personal, than for a relationship in which the couple has never taken the archetypal dimension seriously. Nevertheless, this in itself is not adequate. It is very possible for the archetypally conscious relationship to fall apart even as the partners are denying evidence of failure.

In the real world it is not possible to live by archetypal vision, alone. It is possible, though, for the lovers to cultivate a Galahad-like vision which ignores interpersonal difficulties until they become large enough to be stumbling blocks. If then, in a kind of saintly earnestness, they accept the mundane challenge their personal differences offer them and value one another's complaints, the relationship can still move forward.

It will never move as smoothly and effortlessly as Galahad's magic ship, but the partners will experience an intermittent "divine" guidance. Their rootedness in their Self-Self bond continues to give them ballast and balance, and it relativizes the snags they meet and gives them the sense that these limitations are not insuperable. Therefore if they go to work on these difficulties with a good will, they may make the adjustments required and fall back relieved and triumphantly into their archetypal current. Such a relationship does not proceed so much like Galahad's magic boat's track over a glassy ocean as like the tumultuous course of an inflated raft on a white-water river. They shoot ahead like a rocket, get hung up on boulders and fallen trees, spin rear-foremost for several heart-in-mouth moments, and perhaps even overturn once or twice. But they are wearing their archetypal life-vests; and if they do not lose their hold on the line which attaches them to the raft, they will likely be able to right their craft and clamber back aboard. Then, after some laborious pushing, prying, and poling with the paddles, they may be able to shoot forward again in a spirit of eternal joy, while their muscles tremble with exhaustion and horror at their recent close call.

Such starry-eyed lovers and sometime worthy opponents do not so much resemble the Galahad of the *Quest* as the pure fool, Parzival, in the Grail stories of Wolfram von Eschenbach and Richard Wagner. Parzival's purity results from his Self-level vision and his foolishness from his ignorance of mundane affairs. What saves him and enables him to cure the Maimed King and restore the Wasteland is the archetypal purity of his intentions, the way he brings himself back onto the track of the Third after the mistakes which lead him foolishly astray.

Foolish or not, it really helps to be able to sail like Galahad in a magic boat and keep our focus on our beloved's transcendent individuality. Our battles are worth the trouble precisely on account of the beauty of our beloved's soul and the fulfillment we experience in our union. Indeed unions sometimes fail for no other reason than that the partners have forgotten about that archetypal perspective on one another which they used to enjoy. Without nourishment from the Self, they can come to feel that their battles with one another are wearing them out. Such a couple's struggle with the issues of relationship resembles more the plight of Gawain than Galahad's privileged course.

The Frustrations of Gawain

On Pentecost weekend, before the Quest is officially opened, Gawain obeys the order of King Arthur -- against his own better judgment -- and attempts to remove the magic sword from the floating stone, the sword which only Galahad can attempt without punishment. When the Quest is

declared, he is the first to vow wholehearted participation. Nevertheless, when Arthur expresses his sorrow that the Quest will take away his best knights, Gawain "would gladly have gone back on his word had he dared, but the occasion had been too public to permit it" (45).

On the Quest, Gawain continually misses adventures and comes upon Galahad's achievements a day or two too late to observe them or to participate in them. Eventually he meets Hector of the Marsh, and they compare notes. They cannot understand why they are not encountering any important adventures. Gawain has killed ten challengers without any hint leading to the Grail, and Hector has met twenty of Arthur's knights -- all complaining of lack of adventure.

On being challenged by an unknown knight, Gawain wounds him severely, and he and Hector carry the man to the Hermit Nascien to be healed. He dies as Gawain extracts the spearhead. Nascien then explains dreams and visions the two knights have had, telling them that they will never meet adventures of the Holy Grail as long as they are in a state of sin. He advises them to return to Camelot. Unwilling to accept this, Hector rides away. Gawain tells the hermit that he would like to talk more, but that he needs to catch up with his companion.

There are only two other references to Gawain. In one, he enters a fray outside a castle while, unbeknownst to him, Galahad enters on the other side. The Good Knight, wielding the magic sword Gawain had touched against his better judgment, slays Gawain's horse which falls dead on top of its rider. Much later in the Quest, as Lancelot is leaving the Castle of the Grail, he comes upon the tomb of King Baudemagus, whose inscription declares he was "slain by Gawain, the Nephew of King Arthur." Lancelot weeps and would have avenged the death, had the killer been a less beloved and honorable man.

The author of the *Quest* says of Gawain, "Beyond doubt he enjoyed a more widespread popularity than any man alive" (209). He and Lancelot are the knights King Arthur loves the most. Both the *Quest* and *Le Morte D'Arthur* portray Gawain as a generous, open-hearted, enthusiastic, brave and loyal soul. His impetuosity springs from these sources and is therefore generally quite endearing. However, it also leads him to commit a very grave and humiliating sin against chivalry and, indeed, humanity, early in the *Morte*. He battles with a knight who has slain his hunting hounds. At the last moment the knight's lady throws herself between the combatants, and Gawain is unable to stop his sword from beheading her (i, 101f). Such is typical of how the good-hearted Gawain stumbles unconsciously into sin. He is forever capable of breaking our hearts, and we are constantly ready to forgive him.

At the beginning of the Quest, too, he shows his endearing but limited colors, as he is the first to declare for the Quest and then the first to regret his oath, out of allegiance to King Arthur. Finally, he cannot go back on his pledge because so many people have witnessed it. All of this reveals him to be a man primarily concerned with literal, political reality and collective values. Whereas Galahad is motivated by the Holy Spirit moving within him, Gawain is motivated by the political and social allegiances which surround him. Even his desire to participate in the Quest comes essentially from his persona. He sees it as just another test of honor and courage. It is a large and celebrated test, but still subordinate to the duties and ideals of chivalry. This why his sentimental impulse to abandon his oath for the sake of the continuance of the Round Table is really stronger than his desire to quest after the Grail. For him, the Grail is just another sporting event, while the Round Table is the source and goal of his knightly oath.

Gawain is mundane man at his best: high principled, loyal, skillful, dedicated, boisterously good natured. But he has no talent or sensitivity for the spiritual life. He finds no "adventure" because he is not following the Third. Like most of the knights (Hector has met twenty of them), Gawain has no ear for the voice of the Holy Spirit. In Nascien's terms.

Gawain is a sinner. This does not mean he is a bad man. He is good as gold. The problem is, he does not know how to distinguish the center from the periphery. His sin is to mistake the less-than-ultimate ideals of chivalry for the absolute objective of his life's dedication. In religious language, he is idolatrous. He cannot see beyond the idol of chivalry to the One, which is the origin and aim of his heart's deepest longing.

We fall into the attitude of a Gawain in our relationships when we look primarily to collective expectations and rules to guide our outlook and behavior. There is no doubt that these rules ought to be taken seriously, for they have been developed over centuries, if not millennia, of human experience. There is a genuine wisdom in them. But it is a statistical wisdom -- what is best for the average individual. Unfortunately, none of us is entirely average, and life has a way of leading us into situations which fall between the cracks of our society's mainstream ethics. Gawain finds himself in such a difficulty when he cannot make a resolute judgment regarding the Quest. The theological and mystical element in his society's ethos impels him to be first in line to sign up for the Quest, while the chivalric ideal of fealty to his earthly lord pulls him in the opposite direction. Both ideals are good and admirable, both supported by Gawain's society. The issue is that he seems to have no inner criterion for prioritizing these conflicting claims on his allegiance.

We do this, too, in our relationships when we get caught between conflicting demands and cannot bear the tension which gives the Third its opportunity. We want an immediate solution, so we appeal to the rules everybody knows and to the experience of our friends. We go to a counselor to be advised what to do. Gawain-style issues and questions constitute nearly a hundred percent of readers' letters to newspaper advice columnists. We assume there must be a "right" way to do things which will cement our security in the matrix of society's approval. Since our "god," the highest principle in our outlook on life, is identical with the status quo in society, we have no "ear" for the voice of a Third like the intractable Holy Spirit or Khidr. Our relationship trudges along in the most ordinary and uninspiring way, and we begin to wonder, perhaps, whether there is some way to recover the interest in one another which we have lost. Still, when risky opportunities arise, we look first to collective notions of propriety or else feel ourselves wicked for leaving the straight and narrow.

Gawain tends to relieve life's ordinariness by throwing himself wholeheartedly into one lofty project after another. No challenge is too great for his enthusiasm and energy, provided he can be sure of society's approval. He obtains his greatest satisfaction, in fact, from his enthusiastic excesses. His killing is an example of this. Both the *Morte* and the *Quest* agree that, although he may kill the wrong man or woman, he does it with the best of intentions and cheerful good-heartedness. But he is very much a killer. The sword of his clumsy, flat-footed good deeds swings with a momentum which carries it too far. His short-sightedness results in a net decrease in life.

Our relationships should add to our lives. When we are guided by the Third, they shimmer with the light of the divine spark, they connect us with the One. This is what the hermit was trying to tell Gawain. When our relationships are this much in the dark that we are absolutely ignorant of the Third, it is time to stop riding in search of adventure. It is time to examine ourselves.

Gawain provides very little help to our search for an understanding of what it means to "follow the relationship." He never comes near to following the Grail. Lancelot begins his Quest in somewhat the same condition, but he listens to the hermit and stays on to effect an inner transformation. Lancelot is the whole man, comprised both of instinct and of spirit. Galahad and Gawain each represent a half of Lancelot.

Lancelot's Quest

After dubbing Galahad and returning to Camelot, Lancelot wisely refuses Arthur's order to try to remove Galahad's magic sword from its floating stone. He is the second, after Gawain, to declare his dedication to the Quest. In his first adventure he is unhorsed by Galahad. Then he enters the thick of the forest without benefit of a path and is the first to encounter the Holy Grail.

He has lain down for the night, with his head on his shield, and passes into a kind of waking catalepsy in which he cannot move or speak. He sees the Maimed King carried up on a litter before a small chapel. As the king groans for release from his suffering, the Holy Grail on a silver table issues from the chapel. The king drags himself up to it by the strength of his arms and obtains relief by kissing the silver table. During all of this Lancelot gives no sign of recognizing what he sees. The restored king's squire speculates that the immobile Lancelot "committed a grave sin, of which he was never shriven" (84). He then arms the king in Lancelot's armor and seats him on Lancelot's horse.

Lancelot then spends a good deal of time with hermits who preach to him about the sinlessness required for the Quest. Lancelot confesses his decades-long affair with Queen Guinevere and dons a penitential hair shirt. When he returns to the active Quest, he comes upon a tournament in which a group of black knights is losing to a group of white knights. Lancelot joins on the side of the losers and is taken prisoner for the first time in his life. After he escapes, he finds himself hemmed in on all sides: a deep river in front, cliffs on either side, and a treacherous forest behind. A black knight on a black charger emerges from the river and kills Lancelot's horse. Lancelot decides to pray and await God's mercy.

In the middle of the night, a voice commands Lancelot to gather his arms and enter a boat. It turns out to be the boat carrying the corpse of Perceval's sister. Lancelot rides it for nine months, six together with Galahad, having many strange adventures and enjoying the "grace of the Holy Ghost who was their constant aid and succour" (259). About a month after Galahad leaves the boat, it brings Lancelot to the Castle of the Grail, and he finds his way to the room where the Grail is kept. From the doorway he sees Josephus celebrating mass, surrounded by ministering angels. Lancelot has a vision of the Holy Trinity at the elevation of the host. As the priest struggles with the weight of the body of Christ, Lancelot starts forward to help. A blast of flaming wind scorches him, and hands throw him out. He lies inert for twenty-four days, and when he awakes he wishes his visions could continue. A maiden brings him a white garment and tells him he no longer needs his hair shirt, now that his Quest is ended. On his way back to Britain, he comes on the tomb of King Baudemagus, as mentioned above.

Lancelot is a little less impatient than Gawain and a good deal wiser. When he perceives a supernatural influence at work in the phenomenon of the sword in the stone, he knows that -- king or not -- Arthur has no authority to command his involvement. Very likely, this ability to distinguish center from periphery qualifies him to glimpse the Grail. But failure to respond to his first view of the Grail is Lancelot's greatest sin in the *Quest*. For when we have the vision of a Galahad, it is sinful to act with the thickheadedness of a Gawain.

In this Lancelot resembles us, when we recognize the divine spark in our beloved and remain strangely unmoved. It is an indication of sin, i.e., of some lesser attachment. For example, we may be gratified by this glimpse of the spark, but we do not want to be

distracted from our goal of persuading our beloved to marry us. Or perhaps the glimpse frightens us, because we are terrified that submission means a passing away from which there is no turning back. We have all kinds of good reasons for fearing this plunge into the abyss of *fana*. Like Thomas Wolfe, we may fear losing our identity, our autonomy, our ability to pursue our daily activities, our professional competence. We take comfort in the known -- even when it torments us or bores us to death -- , so that the prospect of *fana's* transformation impresses us first with what we may have to give up. We cling so tightly to what we have known ourselves to be, that there is no possibility for transformation.

If, on the other hand, we are overly impressed with the kind of temporal and accidental considerations with which everyday anxieties and daydreams bombard us, we may never even guess that such a thing as a Third could exist. For example, we may be so taken up with our concern for financial stability that we resist all efforts to rock the boat when things are going well for us monetarily. When we feel insecure, we escalate our demands, even threaten to break off the relationship if our partner cannot be more responsive to our needs. We become so taken up with these anxieties that they isolate us from one another. Similar diversions can result from our sexual and emotional needs. We almost seem to retreat from one another into a frantic flutter, searching for a smooth path out of our difficulties. We long for Galahad's boat, but we are looking entirely in the wrong direction. For the extent to which our interest in our beloved is overshadowed by carnal, financial, or ornamental considerations, the Grail of transcendent intimacy never appears. This would be the sin of a Gawain. Lancelot's sin is that he knows he is seeing the Grail and still does not let himself pass away.

But unlike Gawain, Lancelot submits to the regimen of penitence which the hermits recommend. This indicates that he has appreciated his sinfulness, that he has seen that his attachments have been keeping him closed to the Grail. Something has dawned on him which passed Gawain by. Still the work of repentance is not done when he dons the hair shirt, because he is still aware of his blindness in a merely theoretical manner. Apparently he still believes he can follow the Grail on the strength of his knightly prowess, now augmented by his repentance. But extraordinary knightly prowess is an ambiguous virtue in an individual like Lancelot. On the one hand, his success in tournaments and war is accepted as an indication that God favors his cause -- like the *Gottesgericht*, the divine judgment in *Lohengrin*. But even in *Lohengrin*, the question of whether the dream-knight has been sent by God or relies on magic, is central. Lancelot's prowess is comprised both of physical skill and spiritual talent and dedication. When he defeats those who accuse the queen of adultery, should we take this as God's condoning or even favoring of the adulterous affair; or should we take the more cynical perspective of Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*, that Lancelot was a star athlete and a colossal brute who justified his behavior with naive theology?

The *Quest* addresses these issues directly. By his cataleptic immobility on first sighting the Holy Grail, it tells us that he is more than a brute, more even than a good-hearted and enthusiastic citizen like Gawain. Lancelot has an eye for Galahad visions, but something stands in the way. He has not yet sufficiently differentiated his spiritual from his knightly prowess. He accepts this in a theoretical way when he sits at the feet of the hermits, but he does not really come to grips with the implications of this insight in an emotional and practical manner until his knightly powers fail him. He needs to ride into a formidable cul-de-sac in order to realize finally that the following of the Grail is not something which

falls into the bailiwick of his ego. This realization becomes undeniable when his horse is killed.

Lancelot spends a good deal of his time unhorsed in the *Quest*. The "greatest knight in Christendom" is unconquerable on the field of chivalry but cannot stay mounted on the Quest. The horse represents an animal, instinctual, carnal power -- precisely what needs to be transcended in order to exercise *Gelassenheit*. Thus Lancelot, having been converted in his thinking, saddles up and rides directly into an impasse where he loses his horse, becomes completely immobile, and reduced to prayer as a last resort. He needs to experience his own helplessness and his dependence on God before he can begin to travel on a magic boat with Galahad.

We, too, are like this in our relationships when we think that progress depends on negotiation and compromise -- as though we could work out in an intellectual manner issues which are rooted deeply in our woundedness and set about with emotional confusion. Although common wisdom tells us that each of us has to yield "fifty percent," in actual practice this rarely works. Jung refers to the individual's inner "Third" as the "transcendent function," precisely because it transcends impasses which the conscious mind cannot solve. In Jung's language, we must bear the tension of the opposites and simply stand still until the transcendent function provides us an illogical but forward-moving alternative. This is exactly what happens to Lancelot when he kneels to pray in his cul-de-sac beside his dead horse. And out of the darkness of midnight comes the magic boat of the Third. In just this way, a couple must have the patience to reject no alternatives and force no solutions, but wait in a spirit of *Gelassenheit* for the Third to guide them onward. The best exercise in preparation for this would be the process of recollection Lancelot has undergone in hermitage: a process of renewing his dedication to the Ultimate.

With all of this as background, it seems that Lancelot's actual encounter with the Holy Grail in the Castle of Corbenic is the author's way of ratifying the knight's earlier process of humiliation and transformation. He gets the reward, and this verifies his methods of following the Grail. The vision itself is almost an anti-climax. From our perspective, the most important element in this episode is his regret at awakening from the twenty-four days of trance and his return to Britain. This is the issue which Galahad never solved for us: how to integrate a vision of transcendental beauty with the everyday world. Aside from Bors, Lancelot is the only knight to see the Grail and return to Camelot. But Bors is a minor character; Lancelot, alone, commanded the story-teller's interest. Therefore we need to follow the story further to determine what effect the vision of the Grail has had on Lancelot's own relationship of romantic love -- or, indeed, on his everyday life in general. Such will be the topic of our next chapter.

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1. In this version of the Grail story, there are three different Grail kings. Pelles, the Fisher King, reigns at Corbenic. King Mordrain has been languishing in an abbey. And now, a Maimed King appears. It looks as though three traditions have been insufficiently harmonized.