

# Divine Madness: Archetypes of Romantic Love

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## Thirteen

### Love's Labor: Ordinary Time

In the previous chapter we have studied *The Quest of the Holy Grail* in order to find guide lines for what it means to follow a Third. Relationship always involves not only two individuals who have a connection with one another, but also the relationship itself or the spirit of the relationship which acts with relative autonomy, as though it were a third person. In fact, it acts in the relationship analogously as the Self within a single individual. It is a transpersonal factor which imposes itself on the two partners equally and mutually, and it has a wholeness to it by which it distinguishes itself from the one-sidedness or privatized quality of each individual partner. We have been arguing that a relationship has, as it were, a mind of its own and that this mind is more comprehensive than the conscious mentality of either of the partners. Therefore when we get involved in a relationship, we allow ourselves to participate in something which is not only larger than either of us, but which has an intentionality which is more comprehensive. If we are to avoid the pushing and shoving, narrowness, and shallowness of my will against yours, we have to consult this "wiser" participant in the relationship -- very much as the individual can consult his greater psyche, his Self, in order to get a more holistic perspective on the conduct of his life.

This "Third" has a number of analogs in the various traditions of human culture: the Holy Spirit, Khidr, the Tao, and the Holy Grail. The last of these has played an extremely important role in western thought over the past millennium. We have therefore chosen to examine it to see what kind of clues it can give us about following the relationship. In particular, we have tagged along with the three most important knights, as the Grail story is told in the anonymous *Quest: Gawain, Galahad, and Lancelot*. The *Quest* has taught us something about the attitude of *Gelassenheit*, whereby we actively keep ourselves in a state of receptivity for what may occur to us.

Gawain had none of that attitude and therefore met with no "adventures" in his Quest for the Grail. Eventually he saw the handwriting on the wall and gave up. He might have gone on, but only if he had the patience to sit still for perhaps a lengthy period of time and examine his conscience in order to determine what his goals really were. He had to learn to distinguish central matters from peripheral concerns and to perceive that the Quest was an undertaking of a wholly different order from the usual challenges of knight-errantry. He remained from first to last a very mundane individual. His less-than-ultimate concerns so dominated his consciousness that he was not able to recognize the more subtle issues which pointed to the Ultimate. His instructive value for us is that he embodies values which we all have, particularly values consonant with the social order. These are very important values,

without which society could not survive. Besides this, as social beings we find ourselves off-balance and frighteningly alone when we go against the collective mentality of our society. We begin to doubt ourselves and assume -- not without justification -- that we may be mistaken; for how do we dare set ourselves up as more reliable authorities than the society which has supported us and made us what we are?

Galahad, called "the Good Knight" by the author of the *Quest*, takes an opposite perspective. He was raised and trained outside of society by nuns, the Ladies of the Lake, or Celtic Goddesses, depending on which layer of the tradition we follow. He enters the Arthurian Cycle on the day before the Quest begins and the Quest ends with his death. He is privileged from first to last and a saintly virgin. Either the Christian God or the Celtic Goddesses prepare his course very carefully. They make sure that, with little foresight on his part, he commits no sin, kills no virtuous knight, and falls in love with no lady or maid. He performs miracles like Jesus and finds his guidance from ladies on white palfreys and magic boats which take him through difficulties he never has to face. Because of the privileges he enjoys, he is not a very useful model for following the Third. But he does give us a good notion of what it would be like for us, if only we did not have to deal with the limitations of the human condition -- especially our tendency to get confused about our priorities. If only we could "lock on" to the Third in our relationship, much as an airplane's automatic pilot locks onto electronic beams in the sky, we would be able to proceed as easily as Galahad. Galahad gives us a hint for what it must feel like to be on intimate terms with the Holy Spirit.

If Gawain and Galahad primarily show us what to avoid on the one hand and what we can hardly aspire to on the other, Lancelot provides a much more realistic model for us to consider. He begins somewhat in the style of Gawain, but with the addition of having a sense for the spiritual and especially for the Third. Due to his long-term erotic relationship with Guinevere, we might guess that he has learned something about following a Third. But clearly he has not learned enough, for his first encounter with the Holy Grail leaves him thoroughly anesthetized and in a state of catalepsy. This experience, however, is enough to build his resolve to get to the bottom of his sinfulness, i. e., to his habitual tendency to accept non-ultimate values as though they were ultimate. He spends a good deal of time seeking for no adventure at all, but sitting at the feet of hermits who instruct him in the spiritual life and bring about in him a change of heart, a conversion, a *metanoia* in the language of the New Testament. He returns to the active Quest wearing a hair shirt but gets almost no distance at all before he finds himself in a formidable cul-de-sac standing beside his dead horse. At this point he finally relinquishes his reliance on his own knightly prowess and places himself in the hands of God. His *fana* is rewarded by the appearance of a magic boat (and the companionship of his son Galahad) which carries him to the Grail Castle where he enjoys twenty-four days of sublime visions.

While it is wonderful that Lancelot has succeeded quite well in the Quest, it is too bad for us that his double conversion (once at the feet of the hermits and again when his knightly resources failed him) has led only to another Galahad-like magic boat. We conclude from this that to follow the Third is something like riding in a mystic barque. But we still do not know what to do with this insight. How do we cultivate a knack for following the Third and still have a *real* life? To pursue this question, we shall follow the career of Lancelot after he returns to Camelot and resumes his relationship with Guinevere.

It is the task of this chapter to enter "ordinary time." This felicitous phrase has been used by many of the Christian denominations to refer to those parts of the liturgical year when no cycle of supernatural events is being celebrated. From around the first of December until the middle of January, the Church celebrates the coming of Christ and the first major events of Jesus' life. Then from the middle of February until around the first of June, the Church remembers the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and then the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The rest of the year is "ordinary time." Particularly in the summer, after celebrating Pentecost, the Sundays are designated with numbers: Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Fifteenth, etc. Once the Holy Spirit has come at Pentecost to guide the Apostles, they go about the work of establishing the Church as an institution to carry on the project Jesus started. The special times are past, when we saw Christ face-to-face or felt his Spirit come over us in the form of tongues of fire. Now we are in Ordinary Space and Ordinary Time, trying to get along in our spiritual labors by following just the "ordinary" indications which the Holy Spirit gives. The Third is no longer a pillar of fire by night and a column of smoke by day. Now we need to follow the Holy Spirit by looking within ourselves, by relying on our intuitions and those of our partner.

Lancelot enters "ordinary time" when he returns from the Quest. If we follow his post-Grail career when he resumes his relationship with Guinevere, we will get an indication of how the integration of the eternal and the personal can be accomplished by following the Third. But we will have to change texts, because *The Quest of the Holy Grail* ends with the burial of Perceval. To follow Lancelot, we must rely on *Le Morte D'Arthur*, alone, of which the story of the Quest occupies only about fifteen percent of the narrative. The final quarter of the *Morte* is devoted almost exclusively to the activities of Lancelot on his return from the Quest. The second paragraph after the termination of Grail narrative again takes up the issue of Lancelot and Guinevere:

Then, as the book saith, Sir Launcelot began to resort unto Queen Guenever again, and forgat the promise and the perfection that he made in the quest. For, as the book saith, had not Sir Launcelot been in his privy thoughts and in his minds so set inwardly to the queen as he was in seeming outward to God, there had been no knight passed him in the quest of the Sangrail; but ever his thoughts were privily on the queen, and so they loved together more hotter than they did toforehand, and had such privy draughts together, that many in the court spake of it, and in especial Sir Agravain, Sir Gawain's brother, for he was ever open-mouthed (ii, 373).

Twice in one short paragraph, Malory distances himself from the theme by his phrase, "as the book saith." It is not *his* viewpoint, rather his sources insist. It is a difficult problem. Throughout the *Morte* Malory emphasizes the extraordinary virtue in Lancelot's faithfulness to Guinevere. In his very first mention of Lancelot, he says, "He loved the queen again above all other ladies damosels of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry" (i, 194). He places his final tribute in the mouth of Lancelot's brother Hector, "And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved a woman" (ii, 530). Regarding Guinevere, he says, "While she lived she was a true lover, and therefore she had a good end" (ii, 426).

Lancelot resists the seductions of four queens, one of them being the formidable Morgan le Fay, winning their praise: "Thou art the noblest knight living, and as we know well there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is Queen Guenever" (i, 198). He succumbs to Elaine, a humanized Lady of the Lake and Galahad's mother, only because she employs an enchantress to make her resemble the queen; and Lancelot is honestly fooled.

Indeed, Arthur's queen discovers them in flagrante only because Lancelot, still unaware of his error, is babbling in his sleep of the love he has for Guinevere (ii, 202). When he learns what he has done, he leaps out a window and goes mad, living like an animal in the forest. Eventually he is cured by the Holy Grail, as he wanders into Elaine's father's castle, Corbenic (ii, 220f). Finally, when Elaine announces the birth of Galahad and identifies Lancelot as the father, a white dove bearing a miniature golden censer in her bill comes down from heaven and the Holy Grail feeds all the assembled.

Clearly Galahad is a bastard in the style of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is very intimately involved in the unnatural unions which generate both heroes. The events and the images of the narrative, therefore, indicate that the problematic union between Lancelot and Guinevere is favored by God. The hermits do not know the Spirit which "bloweth where it listeth" (John 3: 8) or Khidr. They are the spokesmen of orthodoxy when they tell Lancelot that the devil entered Guinevere to seduce him (*Quest*, 142) and that she "loves you little and esteems you less" (*Quest*, 136). The Third does not always respect orthodoxy of religious belief.

The Christianizers of this ancient collection of legends have used the Quest episodes to inject a doctrinal apologia into the Arthurian cycle. But according to the stories the narrative relates, the Holy Spirit guides romantic love as much as it guides the Quest. The Quest, indeed, is in a position to further the erotic bond between Lancelot and Guinevere -- insofar as Lancelot can bring what he learned about following the Third into his relationship with the queen. This is, indeed, why we have resorted to the final books of the *Morte*, to see whether and how the Third of the Quest can be integrated into a relationship of romantic love.

I can accept that perhaps Lancelot and Guinevere "loved more hotter than they did toforehand"; but I cannot accept Malory's statement that Lancelot had been only "outwardly" devoted to God, while "privily" obsessed with his lady. Does God judge by outward appearances? Did Lancelot trick God into showing him the Grail? If he had wanted to see the Grail only as the ultimate sporting event, why did he not suffer the fate of a Gawain? Very possibly Guinevere was never out of his mind. But that he did not genuinely undergo a reorientation to the center, and that he did not in fact learn the attitude of *Gelassenheit*: these things are unthinkable if there is any integrity to the Quest at all. Furthermore, Guinevere may very well have made Lancelot's Quest possible. It has to have been with her that he had his first lessons in *Gelassenheit*, his first lessons in following a Third. Probably most people who learn anything at all about following a Third have learned through relationship. This is surely how Rumi learned this lesson and became a mystic -- through his friendship with Shamsuddin. In Lancelot, though, we have a unique opportunity. He not only transcended romantic love and entered the love of God; he was not allowed to stay with God and therefore had to return to the mundane world and his flesh-and-blood mistress with all her jealousy and crankiness. Will his magic boat help him weather these emotional storms? Will he have any better success than Tannhaeuser in integrating the two sides?

## Lancelot After the Quest

On his return from the Quest, Lancelot at first tries to behave coolly toward Guinevere, pleading the requirements of the Quest and the political danger of being caught. This enrages the queen, who banishes him from court. At the counsel of Bors, he stays nearby at a hermitage. Meanwhile at one of the queen's dinners, a knight eats a poisoned apple intended for Sir Gawain; and although innocent, Guinevere is accused of the crime. At the last moment, Lancelot appears and defends her honor in combat. This restores him to his former place in her favor.

But not for long, as Lancelot soon insults Guinevere by wearing in a tournament the red sleeve of the Fair Maiden of Astolat. Generally, this would be a sign he had given his heart to the girl, but in this case he believed he was only flattering a maid who twice nursed him to health. [ 1 ] He intends only to disguise himself in the tournament, for no one would expect Guinevere's knight to wear another woman's token. When the queen hears the whole story, she forgives Lancelot but makes him promise that he will in the future always wear her golden sleeve on his helmet at jousts and tournaments. The Fair Maiden of Astolat starves herself to death on being refused Lancelot's love.

In a third post-Grail episode, Lancelot is shot in the buttocks by a stray arrow from a huntress. He nevertheless does well at a joust.

After this the queen is abducted while out "Maying" with a group of knights and their ladies -- many of her knights suffering severe wounds in her defense. She sends for Lancelot, whose horse is speared and killed; and he arrives riding in a cart, as though for a hanging. To spend the night with her, he tears the bars off her window with his bare hands, injuring them so that he bleeds all over her sheets. In the morning the Queen is accused of sleeping with one of her wounded knights and condemned to be burned at the stake. Lancelot successfully defends her on a field outside of Camelot.

Next, a badly wounded Hungarian knight is brought to Camelot. He has been cursed so that his wounds fester and will not heal unless the "best knight in the world" search them. Lancelot heals him while calling on the Trinity. So far from being inflated by this show of power, Lancelot is humbled and weeps like a child.

In the sixth and final episode before the downfall of Camelot, Agravain and Mordred set a trap to catch Lancelot with the queen. Lancelot, naked and calling on Jesus to be his shield and armor, kills thirteen of his fourteen attackers. Mordred escapes to inform King Arthur, who again finds himself required to burn Guinevere at the stake. Again Lancelot saves her, this time inadvertently killing in the process Gawain's brothers, Gaheris and Gareth. He takes her to his castle, Joyous Guard, which he formerly gave to Tristan and Isolde when they fled King Mark. King Arthur would have taken the queen back and been reconciled with Lancelot, except for the strenuous objections of Gawain. Lancelot refuses single combat both with Gawain and with Arthur, and tries his best to avoid warfare. When it becomes inevitable, he does what he can to save the men of Arthur's party and even rehorses the king; "and then the tears brast out of [Arthur's] eyen, thinking on the great courtesy that was in Sir Launcelot more than in any other man" (ii, 482).

Arthur finally accepts Guinevere back on order of the Pope, but Gawain will accept no retribution for his brothers' deaths and requires Lancelot's departure from Britain. At Gawain's urging, Arthur then assembles a formidable army and pursues Lancelot's company to France, where again Lancelot avoids the clash of arms as well as he can. Meanwhile Mordred, Arthur's illegitimate son who has been left in charge in England, declares himself king of the land and husband of Guinevere. Arthur brings his forces back across the channel to fight Mordred. In the battle Gawain is mortally struck on a wound he originally received from Lancelot. Seeing his death before him, he forgives Lancelot and calls for a reconciliation between the king and the queen's lover in order to restore the Round Table. But before this can happen, the two English armies wipe one another out. In the battle, Mordred and Arthur kill one another.

Guinevere enters a nunnery and Lancelot a hermitage, where he takes the robes of a monk and is eventually ordained to the priesthood. He dies groveling in prayer on the tomb of Arthur and Guinevere, while the bishop of the hermitage has a vision of the knight-lover-priest borne up to heaven by angels.

Relations between Lancelot and Guinevere are described as both hotter and cooler; she is confused at his change in attitude; and he takes as his advisor Bors, the only one of the three virgin[2] knights and protectors of the Grail who returned to Camelot. It would be reasonable to think that it will take her a while to appreciate the changes the Grail has wrought in him. She must be confused by his coolness and not realize that it has nothing to do with the depth or endurance of his love for her. This is, in fact, a very difficult paradox to understand. Generally it requires a relationship of some years or even decades duration before we stumble upon this kind of curiosity in our soul.

A man in his late thirties reports that the great love of his life ended badly some fifteen years earlier. He had been married to a second woman for fourteen years; and although he loved his wife dearly, he regretted that she had had to live under the shadow of his great love the whole time. Now, after fifteen years and only intermittent communication with the first woman, he had an opportunity to spend a day with her. He describes it as an eye-opening experience. The two of them spent most of the day struggling with their defenses against each other. But about an hour before he had to leave to catch his plane, they finally began to deal with the primary issue. Suddenly the curtain fell and he saw her again through the lens of his anima, saw the spiritual light in her soul, saw how her shyness and self-hatred screened a lovely and radiant core. He saw in her eyes that they had not changed, that they loved one another as they always had. His fascination with her and the tenderness he felt for her were identical and undiminished by the fifteen years they had had continents between them. He was elated to learn that his belief about the eternity of their connection during the time of their separation was perfectly ratified by this one instant's eye-to-eye gaze. But he knew something else in this moment -- a much more surprising and revolutionary fact. It dawned on him that he loved his wife *no less* than he had loved his great beloved.

There are two lessons in this story. The first is that this man and his old flame had indeed persisted in their love for one another. It had exactly the same character as it had had a decade and a half earlier. But it was "cooler" in the sense that it was no longer surrounded with the panics, doubts, and youthful ardor it used to have. The man felt he was looking into the soul of his beloved with great calmness. He said it was as though he was standing on a precipice. He could jump if he wished and be back in the ardor and tumult of earlier days. But there was no impulse to jump. He knew their love did not require that and that it was no longer appropriate. In this sense, the coolness of his great love for her is contrasted with the impetuous heat they had experienced during the two years of their earlier association. But he reports that he had unknowingly experienced another kind of heat in his love for his wife. This heat always lacked impetuosity. It was a slow heat which did not force itself on their attention. It grew hot so slowly, in fact, that it needed the contrasting coolness of his meeting with his earlier friend to reveal it.

I suspect the situation between Lancelot and Guinevere is something like this. Through the more intense experience with the Third he had had in following the Grail, and especially through his detachment from non-ultimate concerns, he comes back to Guinevere a changed man. There is a coolness in his manner resulting from his lack of impetuous ardor. But

behind this coolness is a steadier and a hotter glow, a subtler but more intense love. Lancelot apparently knows that it will take her a while to appreciate that the change in him has enhanced rather than diminished his love. He respects her confusion and withdraws by counsel of Bors, who proved himself on the Quest to be at least equal to Lancelot in sensitivity to the Third.

The queen and the knight are behaving, here, as worthy opponents. They remain conscious of their Self-level connection as they dodge and feint on the mundane level. If I am the partner who has gained a new psychological awareness, I must be clear that I cannot simply teach it to my beloved. She or he<sup>[3]</sup> needs to unfold into this new space through a process which is probably as painful and individual as mine was. When I take a superior stance, I make her feel inadequate, and she begins to suspect me of arrogance. On the other hand, when I approach her with the same loving delight in her uniqueness which I have always shown, she can afford to marvel at this new facet I show her and allow herself to be influenced by it.

Lancelot must withdraw for another reason as well; he cannot hurry the course of their relationship by his demands. We can never get ahead of the Third. However much our intuitions about the direction of the relationship prove correct, we cannot move in that direction before the relationship is ready for it. One of the most highly differentiated examples of instructions for following the "transcendent function" is the Chinese *Book of Changes*, the *I Ching*. Its most frequent counsel is that when the time and circumstances are not right, the individual must withdraw and wait or seek guidance or look within. Therefore when we have shown the new radiance of our soul to our beloved and resisted her habitual moves as no longer appropriate, usually our best course is to withdraw and wait for some indication from the Third before we make another move. In her puzzlement and resistance, we meet our own failure to integrate the new psychological material.

After Lancelot's withdrawal, there are two deaths: a knight at the queen's table and a maiden who falls in love with Lancelot. This suggests that both parties had some painful adjustments to make and perhaps that Lancelot was not so much advanced as he may have thought. The poisoned apple at Guinevere's table suggests the apple of spiritual death in Eden. The fact that it was intended for Gawain underlines its reference to the "first Adam," as the Apostle Paul generally designates the mundane individual. If the queen's dinner party represents her psyche, with its several "complexes" or "part-personalities" assembled for communion and nourishment, the death of the unlucky knight points to her letting go of one of her mundane attitudes. Because it is linked with Gawain, she must have overcome a part of her soul which clung so tightly to non-ultimate desires, that she could not recognize the Third. This Gawain-like part of her probably viewed the affair with Lancelot as a kind of "sporting event" -- rather as Gawain understood the Quest. Meanwhile the Fair Maiden of Astolat falls in love with Lancelot and starves herself to death because his heart has already been claimed. This implies that within Lancelot, despite his success with the Grail, there still remain clinging, possessive motives.

These two deaths symbolize what needs to take place in order for a relationship to become both cooler and hotter. It is cooler insofar as they accept the naked sword and come to tolerate a certain distance between themselves. They give up their need to possess and control one another, symbolized by the young man and woman who died. The kind of

coolness achieved by the sacrifice of non-ultimate desires is nothing like the kind which comes in consequence of our losing our feelings for our beloved. Generally at the beginning of a relationship of romantic love, there is a great flurry of activity. A large number of dormant inclinations are aroused by a new sense of wholeness and the dawning of a new day. Many of these are disorganized and working at cross-purposes with one another. Many constitute non-ultimate attachments which give rise to anxieties and obsessions. A great deal of heat is created by what amounts to a kind of psychological "friction." It is a heat which distracts us from the Third. The coolness Lancelot and Guinevere experience comes from the purification of their love for one another.

The two deaths symbolize that these friction-causing and distracting motives have been let go. If the young people who died represent ego-centered needs for possession and control, Lancelot and Guinevere must now have discovered that less stands in the way of their *fana*. It is paradoxical that we can only attain our heart's deepest longing to the extent that we give up striving for it. Only an attitude of *Gelassenheit* allows the unattainable to yield itself freely. This, too, is why Lancelot has to retire to a hermitage when Guinevere becomes outraged and confused at the changes in him; for only in meditation and the attenuation of ego can the Third take the lead.

Unfortunately the story has no more to say about the psychological state of Guinevere. We have to confine our study to the male partner, although I think what we discover here is equally applicable to the woman in an affair of romantic love.

The narrative now provides us four incidents whose significance seems to be to demonstrate the nature of the spiritual transformation which Lancelot has undergone in consequence of his Quest and his new mode of loving the queen. First is the peculiar episode of Lancelot's being shot by the huntress. This appears to be an adaptation of the story of Artemis and Orion. In the Greek story, the huntress and goddess of the moon shoots the giant by mistake; and when she learns she has killed him, she transforms him into a heavenly constellation. His earthly life is ended, but he gains glory and immortality in the sky. It is a symbol of transcending the mundane and an indication that Lancelot's attitude has become a good deal more comprehensive. He is more able now to see things in a holistic manner. Also, as the constellation of Orion is associated with the summer months, it implies Lancelot's transformation gives him access to the fullness of life.

In the next episode, Lancelot heals the Hungarian knight, showing the powers of a Galahad or Jesus. But he does not identify with this power; he sees himself only as a humble conduit for the working of the divine will. This is the most convincing symbol of Lancelot's connection with the Holy Spirit. We never possess and control the Third, we can only follow it and cooperate with it or close our eyes and act possibly in opposition to it. When we are unaware of this subtle kind of cooperation we may be induced to identify our ego with the action of the Third and take credit for it ourselves. For when we see extraordinary results apparently following an unconscious act of ours, we may conclude we have powers we had not known. But *genuine* awareness of the nature of the Third can only produce humility.

Humility and self-sacrifice, too, are symbolized in his coming to the imprisoned queen, riding in a cart, as though to his execution. In this case we may say that the world has worked against him. Instead of the seemingly glorious event of a healing, he is presented

with the humiliating event of having his horse killed. It is a clumsy and embarrassing situation for a knight to be in, powerlessly and foolishly trying to walk in his armor. A proud man would find riding in a cart to be no solution at all. The fact that Lancelot accepts such humiliation proves not only his dedication to the queen, but his acceptance of the requirements of fate. Just as he does not take the glory of the cure as his own, so he does not take the humiliation as dispiriting.

He is willing to ride to his execution. In this again, he is like Jesus. He begins to identify outwardly with those young people who died in the early incidents, for his self-sacrifice now includes his ego and persona. We are often called upon to make this kind of sacrifice when following our relationship. Disputes arise, for example, and we are tempted to defend ourselves over what our partner claims we did or said a few minutes, weeks, or even years ago. It is a significant complaint, because our partner is pointing to a habit of ours. We feel ourselves humiliated by our partner's version of the incident, and so we justly want to defend ourselves and our reputation. But, in the context of worthy opposition, it is counterproductive. It leads us away from the here and now and away from the Self-Self connection which has to be the foundation of a valuable exchange. In trying to defend our ego and persona (our image in our own and others' eyes), we are led further from the Third. Lancelot accepts the humiliation in order to stay with the Third.

Malory makes another kind of claim about Lancelot, however, when he describes him as twice saving the queen from death by fire. This is a regular refrain, almost like an Homeric epithet, throughout the *Morte*. Malory honors Lancelot again and again for saving his queen from the fire. Symbolically, this means that he saved his anima from being destroyed in the fires of carnal passion. The social function served by burning the queen to death is to declare that she has violated her public trust by indulging her carnal appetites. Society sees their affair as aflame with lust, loss of dignity, and violation of public values. Society cannot afford to recognize the significance of the Third: just as orthodox Muslims are uncomfortable with Avicenna's angels and Christians with the Holy Spirit.

Lancelot cannot let the queen be burnt, either as chivalrous knight or as lover. Because his gallantry is required by the rules of knightly sport as well as by the dictates of a heart which gazes at Guinevere through the lens of an anima, his heroic act reconciles both sides of his personality. In the sexual episodes, however, eros threatens to overbalance fealty. Although Arthur does not seem personally to resent his wife's affair, it could become a liability to his royal prestige. Therefore he cannot afford to acknowledge it publicly and pretends not to know about it. If it is brought publicly to his attention, his position requires him to crush it mercilessly. Every time Lancelot sleeps with the queen, therefore, he threatens the kingdom of the king.

If the Holy Spirit is conducting this drama, we must conclude that God is countenancing adultery and endangering the kingdom. Is this preposterous, or are these the kinds of exceptions Khidr exemplified by drilling a hole in a poor man's boat and killing a boy? Is the sexual union of these two souls of more value than the Round Table? A Holy Spirit which can countenance the queen's extramarital affair may well be able to countenance ours. Sometimes, indeed, such an affair may be good for the marriage of the married party and for the psychological well-being and professional advancement of the single partner -- although rarely without involving a good deal of work between worthy

opponents. Sometimes it leads to the development of new self-knowledge, a reassessment of one's values, and especially to a new acquaintance with one's feelings.

I say this not to encourage people to initiate affairs, but rather to provide a perspective for individuals who are already so involved. It would be reasonable to guess that the number of extramarital affairs actually inspired by the Third is fairly small, because it is much easier for us, like Gawain, to slip unconsciously into entanglements than conscientiously to follow the relationship like Lancelot. To follow the relationship in an unorthodox direction, therefore, requires a good deal of self-confidence and the courage to face our guilt feelings squarely. It is no solution to sweep them under the rug or to tell ourselves that we should not have them. The guilt that we are hurting another individual or bucking public opinion needs to be used as a lever to pry open the full gamut of our needs and intentions.

It is natural for us to want to be relieved of our feelings of guilt and to have our burden relieved. It is normal, also, to want reassurance and direction which will help us to "do right" in the eyes of our society or of authorities we trust. But to be relieved of them -- if indeed we can be -- means that we no longer have them as pointers to the tension wherein the Third resides. People sometimes come into analysis hoping to be scolded into giving up their affair. I never oblige them, for I do not know whether their affair is right or wrong. Generally, it is too complicated for easy answers. I can only help them to find out why they are having the affair and to help them to learn from it. To do this, we have to tolerate our guilt enough to let it speak to us. We have to open ourselves in humility and pain to the thoughts and images and feelings associated with our guilt and sort out which feelings we have unconsciously taken over from our family and society and which are appropriate to our individual situation. In a case like this, the Third is speaking to us through our guilt; and we accomplish nothing by hiding from it.

Often our guilt prompts us to shut down, almost to pretend we are not enjoying the affair. When we react this way, we can be sure we are not following the Third. If we are going to be having an affair anyway, we owe it to ourselves, our lover, and our injured spouse, to learn something from the experience. We need to question our honesty if we cannot entertain *both* the possibility that the Holy Spirit is guiding this affair *and* the possibility that we are fooling ourselves. The transcendent function always emerges out of a tension between opposites.

The imagery of the sexual episodes in the *Morte* is appropriately ambiguous. In one of them Lancelot injures his hands ripping out the bars on the queen's window and then bloodies her sheets, leaving her open to the accusation that she had made love with one of the knights who had been wounded in the fight with her abductors. The reader sees the absurdity of the accusation against the queen -- even though she did in fact sleep with a bleeding knight. It was not one of those bleeding Gawains in the next room; it was Lancelot. The qualitative difference between these two sex partners is unmistakable. In the one case, the queen would be guilty of the lust and depravity of which she is accused. In the other case, we are not sure that the Holy Spirit is not guiding them. Lancelot's injuring his hands is also an ambiguous image. It is reminiscent of his bout with madness (*Morte* ii, 201-230), when he injures his hands breaking the chains which bind him. Shall we take this madness as a regression to base and animalistic instinctuality, sexual compulsiveness? Or may it not be the divine madness of a man who is following a Third not recognized by his compatriots? In

the earlier madness, Lancelot was not in the grip of his lust but broken hearted to have been duped by the Ladies of the Lake into betraying Guinevere. Finally, too, he is cured by the Holy Grail. We know the Grail heals only its special servants and that the Grail required Lancelot's intercourse with Elaine in order to produce Galahad.

All of this supports the possibility that Lancelot may have been in the grips of a divine madness and that the Holy Spirit was behind his tryst with the queen. Similarly, in the second sexual incident, Lancelot -- naked from his love-making with the queen -- wades into hand-to-hand combat with fourteen knights, calling upon Jesus to be his shield. Does Jesus want him to kill thirteen knights? Is he fighting for his own honor or the king's? The fact that the treasonous pair, Agravain and Mordred, are behind the attack lends a certain honor to Lancelot. But it remains a puzzling and disturbing incident -- especially since the queen's reputation is not saved.

Following the relationship is always fraught with ambiguity. An ethical code or moral consensus is too much oriented to typical situations to be of much help in the most subtle of interpersonal debates. We are left then to rely upon our feeling and intuition to find our way. But these, too, are of little use until we have developed them as we would cultivate any skill. As with drawing and bicycle riding, we only learn by trying and failing. Refining our technique is a very slow process, but we do have several guidelines to follow. One is the depth dimension of our relationship. We need to keep coming back to this again and again as a kind of touchstone against which we test the truth of our intuitions. Another guideline is the perspective of our partner. If we are in disagreement with our partner, at least one of us must be wrong about the direction the Third is leading us. When we find ourselves at odds with one another, we have several ways to proceed. One way is playfully to juggle alternative images of one another and of the relationship, as was described in Chapter Eight. Another is to square off as worthy opponents. A third is to seduce and be seduced, investigating alternatives as calls which are leading us on and leading us aside from our habitual paths and ego-centered goals. In all of these we are actively fostering our receptivity to the not-yet-known, enabling ourselves to be surprised by the truly new. It is the attitude of *Gelassenheit*. It is never found in advance and stored up for the right moment to be sprung on our partner. It is always a joint discovery, made by those who can stay in the moment with one another.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of following the relationship is bearing the several tensions. It would be easy if we could be confident beyond a shadow of doubt that we are following the will of God, i.e., a path expressive of ultimate and transcendent truth. But Holy Grails rarely appear to us in the modern world. If they do, they are most likely to appear in the form of some kind of inner sense of fittingness -- and rarely to individuals who are unable to carry the responsibility for their own decisions. In this regard, I think of two gray-haired former monks who consulted me. They had a great deal in common: both from the same order, although from different monasteries and completely unknown to one another, and both married twice.

One was still -- twenty-five years later -- not reconciled with his departure from the monastery and very much afraid that he had let God down and committed a grave sin. He had left in his twelfth year only because his spiritual director had detected his unhappiness in the monastic life as well as his inability to consider the option of leaving. Consequently the

superior had ordered him "under holy obedience" to request release from his vows. My client had felt himself relieved of a great responsibility and was sometimes able to believe that God's will was expressed through the orders of his superior. But he felt guilty that he was happy to be out of the monastery and had moments and days when he was sure he had "let God down." His first marriage and divorce were no less traumatic for him; and, although his second marriage seems to have been particularly felicitous, he felt triply guilty: for not being a monk, for not being married to his first wife, and for being married to a non-Catholic.

In his first session of analysis, I thought that he should not be working with me, because he wanted me to take charge as the spiritual director had done twenty-five years earlier. I felt I could not save him from his decisions, but also could not tell him this lest I reenact the relationship with the spiritual director. Therefore I was delighted when, after about three months of dream work, he announced his resolution to leave analysis because he knew he had to make his own decisions without looking to me for approval.

The other ex-monk had developed an entirely different attitude toward what amounts to almost identical decisions. While praying one day in his sixth year in the monastery, it dawned on him that God's will for him was what he truly wanted to do himself, that God gave him the freedom to choose his own course. A week or two later he drew the further conclusion that this principle of free-will applied also to his monastic vocation. In very short order he realized that he had joined the order out of a much narrower and more rigid conception of the divine will, and that deep in his heart he had never really wanted to be a monk. He therefore applied for release from his vows and left with a light heart. His first marriage ended in similar fashion. He and his wife encountered difficulties based on rather different approaches to life. They spent many months working through their issues with a marriage counselor and arrived at a mutual conclusion that they were better off living separately. In this case, too, the second marriage was much more successful than the first.

This man, although outwardly in the same situation at the first, is at peace with himself. He sees his first two life choices as honest mistakes which he learned to improve upon. He is confident that he has followed the will of God for himself as well as he has been able to discern it. From my perspective, both men have done the best they could with the outward course of their lives. But there is all the difference in the world between an individual who has a "feel" for the Third and one who is looking for authoritative confirmation of his decisions.

These ex-monks correspond very well to Gawain and Lancelot. Gawain follows the letter of the law enthusiastically, has no feel at all for the Third, and brings about the fall of Camelot by his vengeful insistence on propriety. Lancelot stumbles and makes many mistakes, but does manage to follow the Third. He contributes to the destruction of the Round Table by allowing his erotic connection with the queen to embarrass the king.

The fall of Camelot is a centrally significant event in the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere. It deserves a chapter of its own.

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1. Many of these episodes have parallels in the Tristan cycle. An interesting parallel, here, is the name of the maiden, Elaine le Blank, Elaine the white. Tristan enters an unconsummated marriage with Isolde of the White Hands, while Isolde the Fair was called in twice to nurse him to health. Some of the more prominent parallels mentioned in this synopsis of the end of the *Morte* are: bloodying the queen's bed with his wounds, an extended period of madness on being separated from the queen, saving the queen from execution by a daring knightly act, and living with the queen at Joyous Guard.
2. Bors "abused his virginity" only once and "atoned so fully by the purity of his life that the offense is wholly pardoned" (*Quest*, 170). In Gawain's dream, there are one hundred fifty bulls (the number of knights of the Round Table), and all but three are dappled with blots on their virginity. Two are pure white (Galahad and Perceval) and one bears the traces of spots.
3. It is unfortunate for our gender-specific grammar that the more advanced figure in this relationship is male. In real life the genders might well be reversed. Bear in mind, too, that the Third, when it has a gender, is usually feminine: the Holy Spirit, the Grail, the ubiquitous unknown lady on a white palfrey, and the Ladies of the Lake.