

5-2016

Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature

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Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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Abstract

In “*Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature*,” I analyze the appearance of the Eucharist as a sacred motif in secular *lais*, romances, and chronicles. The Eucharist became one of the most controversial intellectual topics of the High Middle Ages. While medieval historians and religious scholars have long recognized that the twelfth century was a critical period in which many eucharistic doctrines were debated and affirmed, literary scholars have given very little attention to the concurrent emergence of eucharistic themes in twelfth-century literature. This is unfortunate, since the Eucharist emerges as an intriguing motif, appearing in fantastic encounters with werewolves, demons, fairies, and other supernatural figures. “*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*” argues that many of these narratives reflect and reinforce the eucharistic teachings circulating in northern France at the time, with which the courtly and clerical audiences would be quite familiar. I show how the authors under consideration, many of whom were clerics, crafted engaging and simultaneously instructive tales that blended sacred and secular material to explore theological truths in fictional contexts. Many of the tales encourage annual reception of the Eucharist, discourage the practice of trial by ordeal, and demonstrate the validity of transubstantiation. Other stories use the Eucharist to affirm the humanity or orthodoxy of certain individuals, or to reveal the demonic or heterodox identity of those who should not be included within Christendom. Whether including or excluding, the Eucharist serves as a discerning tool.

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Acknowledgements

I offer thanks first of all to my beloved husband, whose perpetual encouragement gave me the hope and resolve I needed to complete "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*." I also thank my parents, who have always been a source of wisdom, strength, and support, from elementary school through graduate school. To my siblings and friends both in Fayetteville and afar, you have been an incredible support team; thank you for putting up with conversations on matters of medieval literature about all things medieval, from sacramental rites to supernatural beings. And finally, I want to thank all of my magnificent English professors, and Dr. William Quinn and Dr. Joshua Byron Smith in particular. Their excellent teaching and scholarship has provided me with a model to emulate, and has enabled me to thrive as a writer, teacher, and student of medieval literature and languages.

Dedication

“*Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature*” is dedicated to
Christi Iesu, in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi.

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Introduction

In “*Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature*,” I analyze the use of the Eucharist as a sacred motif in secular romances and chronicles. The Eucharist became one of the most controversial intellectual topics of the High Middle Ages. While historians and religious scholars have studied the sacrament in depth, surprisingly, few literary scholars have devoted time to the subject.¹ This is unfortunate, since the Eucharist emerges as an intriguing motif, appearing in fantastic encounters with werewolves, demons, fairies, and other supernatural figures. For example, the clergyman and chronicler Gerald of Wales writes of an encounter between a priest and a pair of cursed Irish werewolves, who convince the priest to administer the *viaticum* to the sickly she-wolf before her death.² In another tale, the secular cleric Walter Map describes how one noblewoman—a succubus in disguise—avoids receiving the Eucharist for years on end. When finally trapped in a church and confronted with the sacrament, she reveals her demonic identity and flies out a window, shrieking in fear.³ In *Yonec*, a *lai* of Marie de France, a fairy knight receives the Eucharist and then commences an affair with a noblewoman, while in the anonymous *lai Desiré*, a female fairy offers to enter a church and partake of the Host, in order to reassure the knight who is her lover.⁴ Chrétien de Troyes’s romance *Perceval*, *Le Conte del Graal* tells of the Welsh knight Perceval, who fails to inquire about a procession he

¹ On the subject of the role of the Eucharist as a literary motif, a few scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum in *Metamorphosis and Identity* have considered the subject of the Eucharist, but it has always been a discussion tangential to the central argument of some other subject—in Bynum’s case, the views of metamorphosis and hybridity pre-and post-twelfth-century. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 15-31. A brief survey of the work of religious and historical scholars regarding the sacrament of the Eucharist will be included below.

² Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica, et Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. James F. Dimock. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1964), V. 101–07 [hereafter, “*Top.*”].

³ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium. The Courtiers’ Trifles*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 344-49 [hereafter, “*De nugis*”].

⁴ Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Éditions Champion, 1983), 102-119. [hereafter, “*Lais de Marie*”]; “Le lay du Desiré,” *French Arthurian Literature, Volume IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 41-79. [hereafter, “*Desiré*”].

observes in the castle of the Fisher King, in which a *graal* containing a single eucharistic wafer passes by him.⁵ In “*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*,” I will dedicate a chapter to each of these narratives, exploring how the mingling of sacred and secular motifs not only entertains, but offers instruction.

My dissertation is the first to demonstrate how these chronicles, *lais*, and romances, usually read as entertaining fiction, also accomplished serious theological work. The authors speak to controversial ecclesiastical and social issues of the twelfth century, using the tales to demonstrate the validity of transubstantiation, to discourage the practice of trial by ordeal, and occasionally to encompass unexpected individuals, such as Irish werewolves or otherworldly fairies, within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. These writers portray the Eucharist as a sacrament which surpasses borders and ethnicities. Conversely, the stable identity of the divine Body works to reveal the changeable identities of other medieval bodies, such as succubi masquerading as human women. The Eucharist can include or exclude, but it always serves as a discerning tool.

Although the Eucharist is a subject of interest from the first century onwards, I will focus primarily on twelfth-century texts, and I will be working mainly with literature composed in northern France or Britain, and written in Old French or Latin. Preceding the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the twelfth century sees lively discussion and dispute about the nature of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation. The term “transubstantiation” was used as early as the eleventh century, and while the Church officially recognized the equivalence of the Host and the literal body and blood of Christ in 1215, it was not a new belief but rather the affirmation of a doctrine which had been believed, debated, and enacted throughout the twelfth century and

⁵ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval, ou Le Conte du Graal: Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits par Keith Busby*, ed. Keith Busby (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993) [hereafter, “*Le Roman de Perceval*”].

earlier periods.⁶ During the High Middle Ages, one of the centers of these sacramental discussions was northern France. This region became renowned for its theological training, attracting people from across Europe, and disseminating well-trained clerics to serve in the courts and churches across England and the continent.⁷ It should come as no surprise, then, that clerical writers such as Gerald of Wales and Walter Map, trained in Paris, began to incorporate eucharistic motifs in their chronicles, or that the French romances and *lais* crafted for the Norman courts included sacramental scenes which reflected the theological debates circulating among educated circles of the era.

“*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*” bridges the divide between literary criticism and religious studies. My dissertation is the first detailed study of the Eucharist’s appearance as a medieval literary motif in the High Middle Ages. However, medieval historians and religious scholars have written prolifically on the subject of the Eucharist. I will give a brief survey of several book-length studies of the sacrament, which provide valuable insights regarding the historical, cultural, and religious contexts that surround and influence the eucharistic narratives I examine in my dissertation.

Medieval historian Miri Rubin addresses far more than the feast of Corpus Christi in her book, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*.⁸ She offers a comprehensive overview of the development of clerical and lay understandings of the Eucharist throughout Middle Ages. Rubin begins by outlining some of the earliest recorded discussions about the

⁶ See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14-25; Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100-1250* (Bury St. Edmunds: St. Edmundsbury Press, 2002), 1-22; and Merrall Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 38, for discussions of the history of eucharistic debate and the recognition of transubstantiation by the Fourth Lateran Council.

⁷ Dorothea Kullmann, “Introduction,” *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, ed. Dorothea Kullmann (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), 1-11.

⁸ Rubin, *Corpus Christi* (n. 6 above).

nature of the Eucharist from the ninth century, in which Paschasius Radbert (d. ca. 860) asserted that Christ's body was truly present in the elements through the priest's consecration, while Ratramnus (d. 868) interpreted Christ as a figure in the Eucharist, a spiritual truth but not a literal presence.⁹ The debate was revived in the eleventh century, attracting papal attention, as Berengar of Tours (d. 1088) emphasized the symbolic significance of the bread and wine rather than the Real Presence of Christ in the elements.¹⁰ Lanfranc of Bec (d. 1089) opposed Berengar, insisting that the bread and wine were in substance the body and blood of Christ; he argued that the subject and predicate must be entirely equal in Jesus's declaration, "Hoc est corpus meum."¹¹ Lanfranc's view was upheld by the pope, and Berengar was made to confess that he had erred.¹²

Rubin then turns her focus to the twelfth century, emphasizing that this is the key century during which theologians addressed some of the most difficult questions regarding the nature and meaning of the Eucharist. The majority held views similar to those of Lanfranc, but found many nuances left to be explored in regards to the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated elements.¹³ By 1215, the doctrine of transubstantiation was formally affirmed by the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council. Throughout the twelfth century, the laity's reverence for the Host had grown, as practices such as the elevation of the elements after consecration were introduced.¹⁴ With the widespread devotion to the Eucharist came the feast of Corpus Christi, first celebrated in the mid-thirteenth century as the result of a vision of a Belgian nun, Juliana of Liège.¹⁵ Christ revealed to her that the Church was missing a feast day devoted to the

⁹ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 14-16.

¹⁰ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 17-18.

¹¹ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 18; Matthew 26:26, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010).

¹² Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 18-20.

¹³ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 20-35.

¹⁴ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 55-63.

¹⁵ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 169-71.

Eucharist.¹⁶ The feast of Corpus Christi received papal patronage and rapidly became one of the most popular feast days, reflecting the place of central importance the Eucharist had achieved, due in large part to the theological discussions and resolutions of earlier centuries, and particularly the twelfth century. Rubin's book gives careful consideration to the ways both the clergy and laity viewed and celebrated this sacrament, offering a detailed depiction of the way in which the Eucharist came to hold such a position of prominence in the Church's sacramental system. While she briefly mentions the Eucharist's appearance in the Grail Quest, her book focuses on using historical and anthropological approaches to understand and explain the growth of eucharistic devotion from the twelfth century onwards.¹⁷

In *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period*, Gary Macy offers a detailed investigation of the diverse theological understandings of the Eucharist which proliferated in the twelfth century.¹⁸ He first briefly describes the debates of Paschasius and Ratramnus in the ninth century, summarizes the Berengarian controversy of the eleventh century, and shows how the majority of masters in the twelfth century affirmed and taught the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹⁹ However, they disagreed over the salvific function of the Eucharist, and Macy outlines three different interpretations held by various theologians. The first view, upheld by clergymen such as Lanfranc of Bec, Alger of Liège, and Rupert of Deutz, asserted that the reception of the Eucharist was necessary for salvation.²⁰ The second stance, held by Hugh of St. Victor, Anselm of Laon, and William of St. Thierry, among others, focused on the way the

¹⁶ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 170.

¹⁷ For Rubin's discussion of Grail imagery, see *Corpus Christi*, 139-42.

¹⁸ Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament According to the Theologians, c. 1080- c.1220* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Macy is a professor of theology who actively publishes on the Eucharist. Another of his books is also noteworthy: Gary Macy, *Treasures from the Storeroom: Medieval Religion and the Eucharist* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 18-43.

²⁰ Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 44-72.

Eucharist joined the believer in spiritual union with God. But these theologians argued that reception of the Eucharist was not a necessary qualification for salvation.²¹ The third view, upheld and taught by masters such as Peter Lombard, Peter Abelard, and Gilbert de La Porrée, emphasized that eucharistic reception effected not merely a personal bond between Christ and an individual, but a bond of Christ with the Church.²² Thus the believer who received the Eucharist also received salvation, but this came about because they had been incorporated into the Church, and the Church had been unified with Christ. Macy then demonstrates how these views of the Eucharist in the early scholastic period became foundational to thirteenth-century eucharistic theology, influencing the work of Thomas Aquinas.²³

A recent and valuable contribution to the field, *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* is a collection of thirteen essays addressing the sacrament from various perspectives, considering eucharistic theology, art, liturgy, and lay reception.²⁴ The collection is divided into four chronological sections, spanning Late Antiquity and the Early, High, and Late Middle Ages. Joseph Wawrykow offers a depiction of the patristic views of the Eucharist, which served as a foundation for medieval eucharistic theology. Many of the Church Fathers, and particularly Ambrose and Augustine, affirmed the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, though they did not concern themselves with resolving the challenging intricacies of this teaching, as did theologians beginning in the ninth and continuing through the twelfth century.²⁵ Elizabeth Saxon examines art in the Carolingian period, showing how Paschasius's writing about Christ's Real Presence in the sacrament is reflected in artistic portrayals of the suffering of Christ

²¹ Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 73-105.

²² Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 106-32.

²³ Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 133-41.

²⁴ *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²⁵ Joseph Wawrykow, "The Heritage of the Late Empire: Influential Theology," *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 59-92.

by depicting the Crucifixion just above the Last Supper. The meal of bread and wine is visually linked to the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood.²⁶

The collection then turns to the High Middle Ages, when universities grew out of cathedral schools and offered instruction in theology and canon law. Ian Levy documents how canonists played a key role in affirming the doctrine of transubstantiation, while Miri Rubin demonstrates how the clerical teachings were disseminated to laypeople via sermons, *exempla*, and the ritual of the Mass.²⁷ Gerhard Lutz speaks of the public display of the Eucharist in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as when the Host was carried in a monstrance through the streets as part of the feast of Corpus Christi, and when miraculous hosts that bled when attacked, or had displayed some other visible sign of the Real Presence, were placed in shrines and became pilgrimage sites.²⁸ As the collection draws to a close, Stephen E. Lahey offers a detailed analysis of the complexities of eucharistic theology in the Late Middle Ages. While transubstantiation had been affirmed by Lateran IV, nuances of how it occurred, precisely when Christ was present, and how the accidents and substance could coexist continued to offer theological challenges. Lahey shows how these debates led some, such as John Wyclif, to reject transubstantiation and offer alternative interpretations of the eucharistic celebration.²⁹ For further investigation of later eucharistic controversies, the collection of essays in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* is a useful resource.³⁰

²⁶ Elizabeth Saxon, "Art and the Eucharist: Early Christian to ca. 800," *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 93-161.

²⁷ Ian Christopher Levy, "The Eucharist and Canon Law in the High Middle Ages," *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 399-446; Miri Rubin, "Popular Attitudes to the Eucharist," *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 447-70.

²⁸ Gerhard Lutz, "Late Medieval Sacred Spaces and the Eucharist," *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 471-98.

²⁹ Stephen E. Lahey, "Late Medieval Eucharistic Theology," *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 499-540.

³⁰ *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* by Caroline Walker Bynum, she traces the development of holy feasting and fasting throughout the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, with a particular focus on women's devotion to eucharistic adoration and consumption.³¹ She begins by outlining the development of religious understandings of the Eucharist, emphasizing that by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the bread and wine are no longer viewed simply as elements of a communal meal that draws believers together and offers spiritual comfort, as it had been in early church history.³² Instead, with the focus on the literal and physical presence of Christ in the elements, the Eucharist became an object of devotion, and a means of intimate interaction with Christ, as his body was made manifest through the consecration of priests, and then placed on the tongues of recipients.³³ Bynum shows how both men and women adored the Eucharist and sought divine union with Christ through reception of the sacrament, but she takes female fasting and eucharistic feasting as the focus of her study. Drawing on miracle tales, *exempla*, and hagiographies, Bynum shows that while women were viewed as "fleshier" than men, this also gave them a closer connection to Christ, who took on human flesh in the Incarnation.³⁴ He offered his body for consumption in the Eucharist, creating another link to women's bodies, which were also perceived as sources of food and nourishment.³⁵ Bynum's work fosters a deeper understanding of medieval views of fasting,

³¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Bynum also addresses eucharistic subject matter in *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). *Wonderful Blood* studies the devotion to Christ's saving blood in north German pilgrimage sites, and suggests that Christ's blood is a symbol of utmost importance and an object of veneration in late medieval theology, art, and literature. Bynum discusses three miraculous hosts each bearing a drop of Christ's blood at their center, which became the object of pilgrimage in Wilsnack, Germany, but her book's argument as a whole treats the broader subject of Christ's blood as a motif in art, visions, prayers, and literature.

³² Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 53.

³³ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 56.

³⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 48-67.

³⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 114.

eucharistic reception, and female spirituality. The Real Presence of Christ in the elements did not create a distance for women, but rather enabled them to identify parallels between their female bodies and the Body of Christ, both given as sources of life and sustenance for others.

These book-length studies of the Eucharist offer valuable insights about the complex development of sacramental theology, but as historical and religious studies, they do not give much attention to the emergence of eucharistic narratives in twelfth-century literature. A relevant subject to be considered in studying the Eucharist as a literary motif is the relationship between the secular and the sacred, which is being adeptly explored by scholars such as Barbara Newman, Sylvia Huot, Dorothea Kullmann, and Sarah Kay.³⁶ In Barbara Newman's most recent book, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred*, she acknowledges that the relationship between the secular and sacred has been a continuous—and sometimes heated—subject of scholarly debate.³⁷ While Newman does assert that “the sacred was the inclusive whole in which the secular had to establish a niche,” she does not privilege a spiritual or allegorical reading, or subversively push for a profane reading, but instead offers a new approach to this controversial field by introducing the concept of crossover.³⁸ She specifies that crossover should not be viewed as a genre in itself, but rather as a mode of interaction in which sacred and secular material can meet and merge, evoking tensions and demanding multivalent

³⁶ Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013); Sylvia Huot, *Allegorical Play in the Old French Motet: The Sacred and the Profane in Thirteenth-Century Polyphony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Dorothea Kullmann, ed., *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009); Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

³⁷ The most well-known controversy was sparked by D. W. Robertson Jr., who argued in a series of articles and in *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* that all medieval secular texts support the Scripture by promoting charity and condemning greed. Robertson claimed that medieval authors used exhortation, allegory, and irony to bring human affections from earthly desires to devotion to God. He was opposed by Yale critic was E. Talbot Donaldson, and the debate raged among Robertsonians and their opponents through the 1970s, until scholars finally dropped the debate in sheer exhaustion, rather than as a result of finding resolution. Newman, *Crossover*, 2-4; see also Steven Justice, “Who Stole Robertson?” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 609-615.

³⁸ Newman, *Crossover*, xiii.

interpretations.³⁹ Newman finds the phenomenon of crossover first emerging in Paris and northern France in the late twelfth century.⁴⁰ Interestingly, virtually every author whose work I am analyzing in my dissertation studied or wrote in northern France in the late twelfth century. I find in their work ideal examples of the crossover of sacred and secular thought which Newman describes. In each instance when authors include the sacrament of the Eucharist in unusual contexts, such as in meetings with werewolves, succubi, and fairies, I find that deliberate blending of sacred and secular material which is the essential feature of crossover. Newman notes that crossover by its very nature introduces tensions, raises questions, and creates a “sense of novelty and excitement” for audience members.⁴¹ I see crossover as a strategy employed by each of my authors as they worked to craft tales which would both engage and challenge their clerical and courtly audiences.

Each chapter of “*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*” closely examines one to three twelfth-century narratives in which the Eucharist figures as a central feature of the plot. Some of my selected works are canonical while others are virtually unknown, yet each narrative contains eucharistic elements that merit closer exploration. Every chapter demonstrates how the literature emerges from and engages with the surrounding clerical and courtly contexts of the twelfth century. Chapter One investigates the Eucharist’s role in defining and affirming an individual’s humanity and transcending boundaries of ethnicity by examining Gerald of Wales’s tale of the priest and werewolves. In the second chapter I consider what happens when demons in human guise encounter the Eucharist. Often the Host causes their true identities to be revealed, as they are repelled by the Host, but there are also instances when demons are able to tolerate the Eucharist,

³⁹ Newman, *Crossover*, ix.

⁴⁰ Newman, *Crossover*, 3.

⁴¹ Newman, *Crossover*, ix.

and even receive it themselves. Chapter Three examines instances when fairies from the Otherworld volunteer to receive the Eucharist, and do so without any difficulty. Far beyond indicating that they are not demons, their reception of the sacrament incorporates them within the borders of Christendom, rather than allowing them to remain as ambiguous outsiders. The fourth and final chapter examines *Perceval, Le Conte del Graal* by Chrétien de Troyes, considering reasons for the narrative insistence on the importance of asking questions about the *graal*, which contains a single Host.

Chapter One examines a narrative from the *Topographia Hibernica* (*The Topography of Ireland*, ca. 1187) by Gerald of Wales. He tells of a priest traveling through the woods in Ireland, who had made camp for the night and was astonished when a wolf approached his fire and began to speak to him. The wolf explains that he and his female companion are really Irish humans from Ossory, and that they are under a curse which mandates that two of their inhabitants at a time must take on the form of wolves and live in exile. The she-wolf is near death, and so her companion begs the priest to give her the *viaticum*. The priest initially refuses to offer the *viaticum* to this desperate she-wolf, until he is compelled by a visual demonstration of her humanity: the he-wolf pulls back his companion's wolf-skin to reveal the form of an old woman underneath. The priest gives her the consecrated Host as she appears in her human form, and then watches her wolf-skin re-shape around her human body. The priest later tells the bishop of Meath about the events of that night, and the bishop, much amazed, convokes a synod to determine what should be done about the matter. Gerald claims that the bishop asked him to attend the synod, but that he was unable to do so. Gerald says that instead he submitted his advice in a letter (the contents of which he does not specify), and he then proudly proclaims that

the synod followed his own counsel, and that the priest was sent before the Pope to convey the synod's conclusions.⁴²

The *Topographia* is infamous for its depictions of Irish barbarity, treachery, and bestiality.⁴³ The werewolf tale is often interpreted as yet another of Gerald's attempts to show the Irish as savages, their bestial natures made visibly evident in their lupine forms.⁴⁴ However, I show that Gerald's inclusion of the *viaticum* is central to interpreting the narrative. The Eucharist is used as a discerning tool which affirms the wolf-woman's orthodoxy and humanity, in spite of her outward appearance. Gerald develops his eucharistic themes further in subsequent versions of the tale, which have been mostly overlooked in scholarship. He significantly revised the *Topographia*, more than doubling its length over a span of twenty-two years, and creating five distinct recensions of his text. His two earliest recensions are dedicated to Henry II, but as time progressed, Gerald ceased to try to please the Angevin court and wrote from his identity as a clerical reformer.⁴⁵ Chapter One examines the significant additions Gerald inserted throughout the werewolf narrative, in order to demonstrate how Gerald develops eucharistic themes which include the Irish werewolves within the realm of orthodoxy, instead of situating them as outsiders. Gerald adds a discussion of Augustine's assertion of the fundamentally human nature of the monstrous races, implying that even if they appear bestial or barbaric, the Irish

⁴² *Top.*, 101-07.

⁴³ *Top.*, 149-53; 165-69.

⁴⁴ For postcolonial readings of Gerald's werewolf chapter, see Catherine E. Karkov, "Tales of the Ancients: Colonial Werewolves and the Mapping of Postcolonial Ireland" in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, ed. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 93-109; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 86-89; Rhonda Knight, "Werewolves, Monsters, and Miracles: Representing Colonial Fantasies in Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*," *Studies in Iconography* 22 (2001): 55-86; Linda Mitchell, "Gender(ed) Identities? Anglo-Norman Settlement, Irish-ness, and the Statutes of Kilkenny of 1367," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 37, no. 2 (2011): 8-23; Michael A. Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 139-47.

⁴⁵ Amelia Borrego Sargent, "Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*: Dates, Versions, Readers," *Viator* 43, no.1 (2012): 241-61.

werewolves are undeniably human.⁴⁶ Gerald also expands his discussion of the Eucharist, referencing transubstantiation and evoking parallels with the werewolves: just as the she-wolf possesses human identity abiding beneath her lupine exterior, the substance of Christ abides beneath the accidents of bread and wine.⁴⁷

In the second chapter, I examine several narratives when demons encounter the Eucharist. The appearance of demons in human guise is quite common in medieval literature, and they appear for various purposes, one of the most common being that of ensnaring humans in relationships. Such is the case in Walter Map's tale in *De nugis curialium*, in which a beautiful lady who appeared from somewhere over the sea is married by Henno, a nobleman of Normandy. She is warmly welcomed into Henno's family, where she eagerly displays her devotion by attending church and giving to orphans and widows. It is not Henno, but his astute mother, who begins to suspect the lady, for she behaves strangely in two respects, avoiding being sprinkled by holy water and always leaving church before the consecration of the Host. Henno's mother spies on the woman in her bedchamber one day, and watches the lady and her handmaid transform into dragons. She immediately summons Henno and a priest, who takes them by surprise and sprinkles them with holy water. The lady and her maid dash shrieking through the roof and are never seen again.⁴⁸ Walter's account is followed by similar tales by Gerald of Wales, Gervase of Tilbury, and the anonymous author of *Richard Coer de Leon*, in each of which a beautiful wife evades the Eucharist for years, and finally reveals her demonic identity when forced to remain present for the consecration of the Host.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Top.*, 105-06.

⁴⁷ *Top.*, 107.

⁴⁸ *De nugis*, 344-49.

⁴⁹ Gerald of Wales, *De Principis Instructione Liber*, ed. George F. Warner. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891), VIII. 301-2; Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, ed. and trans. S.E.Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) at *Distinctio* 3.57, 664-69; *Der Mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, ed. Karl Brunner (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1913), lines 227-40.

In each of these tales, the sacrament effectively reveals the hidden demonic identities of those who draw near it. At the same time, the demons' reactions to the Eucharist are also used to reveal truths about the nature and proper treatment of the sacrament. I argue that the clerical authors used each of these tales affirm the truth of transubstantiation, endorse annual reception of the Eucharist, and discourage the practice of the trial by ordeal. These tales all specifically mention that the succubi avoid the moment of the consecration of the Eucharist, subtly implying that at that moment, the Real Presence of Christ is manifested. The demons do their utmost to evade His presence. Simultaneously, the stories demonstrate that devout Christians should regularly and willingly receive the Eucharist rather than fearing or avoiding it. This reflects another issue being taught as a part of the clerical reform movement throughout the twelfth century, which was formalized in Canon 21 of Lateran IV: laypeople were required to receive the Eucharist at least once a year.⁵⁰ Finally, Canon 18 of 1215 prohibited clerical participation in trial by ordeal, including trial by ingestion of a eucharistic wafer.⁵¹ During the period in which these tales were written, trials by ingestion were commonplace, and people believed that if an individual sickened or choked after receiving consecrated Host, their guilt was proven.⁵² But the theological masters in Paris, who trained Walter, Gerald, and Gervase, taught against trials by ordeal which put God to the test.⁵³ It is likely that all of the authors discussed in Chapter Two stood against trial by ingestion and in favor of transubstantiation, as did their teachers. Thus each of the tales makes it clear that there is no need for the priest to forcibly administer the sacrament; instead, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is sufficient to reveal and dispel evil.

⁵⁰ Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 12-15.

⁵¹ Canon 18, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. 1*, ed. Norman Tanner (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

⁵² Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 160.

⁵³ Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 86; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 14-17.

Chapter Two then turns to another tale focused on a succubus and the Eucharist, also told by Walter in *De nugis curialium*. He writes of a youth Gerbert, who makes a pact with a beautiful woman, Meridiana, who appears to him in the woods and promises him wealth and success if he will be her lover and pledge allegiance to her alone. He complies and keeps his relationship with her a secret, all the while rising in ranks of priesthood and eventually becoming pope. But Walter relates how during this entire time, either through fear or respect, Gerbert never receives the Holy Sacrament but instead carefully feigns the act and hides the Host. Finally, he realizes his death is imminent, and in fear of damnation he confesses all his sins and lives the rest of his short life in severe penance and sincere faith.⁵⁴ While the first type of tale I explore in Chapter Two portrays succubi who avoid the Eucharist, the second tale describes a pope who cannot receive the sacrament because of a demon's influence. The story implies that not only succubi, but also those who willingly place themselves under the influence of such demons are repelled by the Eucharist.

I conclude Chapter Two by examining a perplexing story, told by Gerald of Wales in his *Gemma ecclesiastica (The Jewel of the Church, ca. 1197)*, which portrays a succubus who has no problem receiving the Eucharist. A beautiful lady appears to a young cleric and expresses her desire to become his lover, but the hesitant cleric suggests that first she should appear in church and receive the Holy Sacrament. She gladly assents to his condition and receives the Eucharist without difficulty. But the cleric is still unsure of her identity, and his hesitation so offends her that she pronounces that he will die of unrequited love for another woman, since he will not show her affection. She vanishes, and shortly thereafter all of her words are fulfilled, and the

⁵⁴ *De nugis*, 351-64.

cleric dies in grief and unsatiated longing, unable to be saved even by many prayers.⁵⁵ This episode complicates the understanding of a demon's relationship to the Eucharist. In the accounts of Henno and Gerbert, the Eucharist operates as one would expect: it serves as a sound indicator of the orthodoxy, or heterodoxy, of those who encounter it.

Yet Gerald's third tale of the cleric also operates based on theological insights. In another brief narrative in the *Gemma*, Gerald describes a demon-possessed woman to whom the Eucharist is administered in hopes of driving the demon out. Instead, the demon remains and mocks them, declaring: "[W]hat you are giving her is not the food of the body but of the soul, and, in truth, power has been given to me not over her soul, but over her body."⁵⁶ This story sheds light on Gerald's tale of the cleric and succubus, for the succubus's ability to receive the Eucharist could be explained by the divisions between body and soul, and the reception of the Host sacramentally versus physically. Though the succubus appears to be a human, she is actually a spirit in a fabricated body. Because she does not possess a human soul, the Eucharist, food for the soul, can enter the body of the apparition, but will find no destination. This final story related by Gerald emphasizes a different aspect of the Eucharist's nature. While the other tales of succubi displace the practice of trial by ordeal, uphold the doctrine of transubstantiation, and urge annual reception of the Eucharist, this tale emphasizes that the sacrament directly affects the souls of its recipients, rather than their physical bodies.

Chapter Three of "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*" explores the interaction of fairies with the Eucharist. The boundary between demons and fairies is a thin one in medieval literature. Fairies,

⁵⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, ed. J.S. Brewer. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), II. 228-31 [hereafter, "*Gemma*"]. For the English translation, I use Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of the Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, trans. John J. Hagen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979) [hereafter, "*H.Gem*"].

⁵⁶ *Gemma*, 54; *H.Gem.*, 43.

like succubi, are remarkably beautiful supernatural beings, but they are not characterized by opposition to faith or the Eucharist. In several romances and *lais*, fairies either swear by the name of God or offer to receive the Eucharist. Scholars have traditionally explained these moments as an authorial method of proving that the fairies are non-demonic.⁵⁷ Though partaking in the sacrament may have offered a reassuring indication that the recipient was not a demon, I believe the authors were undertaking a larger endeavor of *incorporation*. As fairy narratives began to appear in the Anglo-Norman court, both in tales for entertainment and in the writings of clerics, it is natural that there would be unease and tension over what these beings represented and where they fit in the orthodox order of the universe. *Lais* such as *Desiré* and *Yonec* acknowledge that the relationship of fairies to faith must be faced, even though the interplay of the two causes tensions, fears, and dilemmas to arise in the *lais*—and likely in the listening audiences, as well. But these tensions are resolved, and the outcome in each *lai* is an accord between the realms of orthodoxy and the Otherworld, achieved by the fairies willingly incorporating themselves into the Body of Christ through reception of the Eucharist, and by the humans, in return, accepting the fairies as devout beings and entering into the Otherworld without fear or hesitation.

Desiré (ca. 1190-1208) tells of the Scottish knight Desiré's encounter with a fairy lady near the hermitage he has visited since childhood. She becomes his lover and bears him two children, but as time progresses Desiré feels guilt for his relationship outside of marriage and fears the fairy lady may be of evil origin. He confesses to the hermit about his supernatural lover, but the sincerity of his confession is instantly called into question, as he rushes to meet with the

⁵⁷ James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 31; Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 179.

fairy again. He is distraught when she refuses to appear. Instantly remorseful, Desiré falls into deathly illness for a year, and when his lady finally reappears, she rebukes him for doubting her devotion and offers to receive the Eucharist with him in church. After doing so, they recommence their relationship until the lady finally appears in the king of Scotland's court with her two nearly adult children, asking that the king grant her the right to marry Desiré and take him back to the Otherworld with her. The king agrees, and then marries Desiré's daughter himself and knights Desiré's son. The *lai* ends with Desiré joyfully departing to the Otherworld with his fairy love, now his bride.⁵⁸

Marie de France's *Yonec* (ca. 1170-89) narrates the appearance of a fairy knight, Muldumarec, to a noblewoman who is confined in a tower in Caerwent by her jealous old husband. Muldumarec wishes to be her lover, and she acquiesces on the condition that he can demonstrate his belief in God. He does so by reciting a statement of faith and receiving the Eucharist. Their affair carries on until the husband discovers them and mortally wounds Muldumarec, who returns to his kingdom in the Otherworld to die. Before death, he tells the lady that she will shortly bear him a son who will avenge them. She raises their son, Yonec, to be a knight. As they stand at Muldumarec's graveside, she finally reveals the truth of his birth and his father's murder, then dies of grief. Yonec immediately slays his stepfather, avenging his parents' deaths, and becomes king of his father's fairy realm.⁵⁹

In both *lais*, the humans feel unease over the orthodoxy of their fairy loves. Desiré initially enjoys the relationship without questioning the lady's beliefs, but later he feels guilt over their love, assuming incorrectly that the fairy could not also be a Christian. The noblewoman in *Yonec* is far more cautious, asking for evidence of Muldumarec's devotion to Christianity from

⁵⁸ *Desiré*, 41-79.

⁵⁹ *Lais de Marie*, 102-119.

the outset. In both cases, the fairies choose to offer assurance to their human lovers by partaking in the Eucharist. The significance of the fairies' reception of this central sacrament of the Church would be strikingly evident to a twelfth-century audience; those who receive the Eucharist are incorporated into the Body of Christ and belong within the borders of orthodoxy.

Simultaneously, the humans in the *lais* recognize and accept that the fairies' land is a space they can enter, live in, and even rule, without leading to any contradiction between orthodoxy and the Otherworld. The end result in each *lai* is a resolution of tensions or seeming contradictions between the supernatural realm of the fairies and the spiritual realm of Christendom. The fears of the human protagonists in the *lais*, and likely those of the listening twelfth-century audiences, are allayed as a relationship between the fairy and mortal worlds is shown to be mutually beneficial, and in accord with the Christian faith.

The fourth and final chapter of *Hoc Est Corpus Meum* turns to one of the most famous and intriguing appearances of the Eucharist in twelfth century literature. Chrétien de Troyes writes an unfinished romance, *Perceval, ou Le Conte del Graal* (ca. 1180-90) in which the eponymous protagonist observes a magnificent procession pass by him when he sits as a guest in the Fisher King's castle. A bleeding lance and a shining *graal* containing a single eucharistic wafer pass by Perceval multiple times throughout the evening, but he does not once ask the Fisher King to explain the significance of the procession. As the romance progresses, Perceval is repeatedly chastised for his failure to inquire about the lance and the *graal*, until he resolves to seek out the castle to ask the questions he did not voice on his first visit. Instead of succeeding, he falls into forgetfulness and despair for five years, forsaking prayers and churches until he finally encounters a hermit who leads him through confession, penance, and reception of the Eucharist on Easter Sunday. At this moment Perceval celebrates his spiritual rehabilitation. The

question of whether or not he would then succeed in his quest to inquire about the *graal* procession is never resolved, for this is the last scene in the romance in which Perceval appears before it cuts off, incomplete.⁶⁰

Perceval is unique among romances in its emphasis on the importance of asking questions, and scholars have been unable to find analogous literary narratives which place the same insistence on the necessity of asking questions.⁶¹ Why, then, did Chrétien choose to make inquiry the crux of his romance? I propose that by looking to the twelfth century's system of clerical education, it is possible to read *Perceval* as a romance reflecting the educational methods of the theological schools of twelfth-century France, and also as a work which wishes to educate its lay audience by cultivating an attitude of inquiry. Through the *quaestiones* and *disputationes* of clerical education, and through the *exempla* and miracle stories used in sermons for lay audiences, clergymen were invested in teaching individuals to ask difficult theological questions and to find reasonable answers.⁶² As this introduction has already shown, one of the matters of greatest concern and interest in ecclesiastical circles of the day was the Eucharist. By placing a single eucharistic wafer in the *graal*, Chrétien could effectively awaken in lay audiences a similar ongoing curiosity and interest in the spiritual significance of the Host.

I also demonstrate through a close reading of the romance that Chrétien uses not only the enigmatic *graal* procession, but the entirety of *Perceval* to awaken an attitude of inquiry in his audience. While churchmen were trained to wrestle with difficult theological questions, a danger for laypeople was that they would respond with bewilderment or complacency to spiritual

⁶⁰ *Le Roman de Perceval*, lines 1-6513.

⁶¹ Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 109.

⁶² Brian Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic Quaestio Disputata: With Special Emphasis on Its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 6-12; Steven Justice, "Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, no. 2 (2012): 307-332.

mysteries.⁶³ *Perceval* does not allow the audience to passively listen. From the first scene onwards, the simple Perceval fails to ask relevant questions which would supply himself, and the audience, with insights about mysteries in the narrative. Inviting plot threads remain unresolved due to the protagonist's passivity and lack of curiosity. But it could be that Chrétien seeks to awaken a keen sense of inquiry in the audience, whose understanding of the value of asking questions would grow as they repeatedly saw Perceval failing to do so. And as the romance progresses, Perceval himself undergoes a transformation from being a passive spectator to an active inquirer. After his most significant failure to inquire in the Fisher King's Castle, Perceval learns from his errors, and he begins to ask relevant questions, seeking answers to unexplained events around him. He becomes a model, rather than a negative exemplar, for the audience. Though Chrétien never finished *Le Conte del Graal*, he and his protagonist Perceval have successfully led many audience members throughout the subsequent eight hundred years to diligently inquire about all manner of supernatural and spiritual mysteries, and particularly those of the single Host and the shining *graal*.

In summary, "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth Century Literature*" explores reasons why the Eucharist appears as a literary motif in chronicles, romances, and *lais* throughout the twelfth century. I demonstrate the ways the authors were exploring theological truths in fictional contexts, synthesizing sacred and secular material to produce tales which were entertaining and also instructive. Many of the narratives, written by clerics and individuals familiar with the theological precepts circulating in northern France, reflect the eucharistic teachings that were ultimately affirmed in the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Other stories use the Eucharist to affirm the humanity or orthodoxy of certain individuals, or to

⁶³ Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1-29, at 19.

show the demonic or heterodox identity of other individuals. Whether coming into contact with werewolf, demon, fairy, or knight, the Eucharist serves as a discerning tool, revealing truths which would otherwise remain hidden. "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*" demonstrates how authors awaken curiosity about spiritual matters and address many of the social and theological concerns of the twelfth century by incorporating the Eucharist into their literature.

Chapter One: Werewolves, Irish Ethnicity, and the Eucharist*

From the moment of its completion, Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*, or *The Topography of Ireland*, played a central role in shaping English views of the Irish. Gerald's text became "what Foucault would call a foundational text for the discourse that constructs the Irish as barbarians."⁶⁴ At least, this is the view of the Irish that has been most often emphasized and extracted from Gerald's writing.⁶⁵ Even his biographer Robert Bartlett declares that Gerald's criticisms of the Irish are characterized by "his unsympathetic and external viewpoint. He wrote as a hostile outsider."⁶⁶ The *Topographia* does indeed include salacious accounts of Irish barbarity, treachery, and bestiality.⁶⁷ Gerald paints vivid portraits of the inhabitants of Ireland as inhospitable, wild, and violent, given to incest and innumerable vices.⁶⁸ Yet Gerald also includes many positive portrayals of the land of Ireland. He claims, for example, that it is a poison-free realm and a place of healing.⁶⁹ He also praises the Irish for their musical skill, lauds the devotion of some of the Irish clerics, and even evokes pity for the ox-man who is the result of bestiality.⁷⁰

One narrative in particular exemplifies the complexity of Gerald's views towards the Irish. In the *Secunda Distinctio* of the *Topographia*, which treats the subject of wonders and miracles, Gerald writes of an encounter between a priest and a pair of cursed Irish werewolves,

* A shorter version of this chapter was published as an article in *Viator*. Lindsey Zachary Panxhi, "Rewriting the Werewolf and Rehabilitating the Irish in the *Topographia Hibernica* of Gerald of Wales," *Viator* 46, no. 3 (2015): 21-40.

⁶⁴ Clare Carrol, *Circe's Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Ireland* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 14.

⁶⁵ From the twelfth century onwards, readers repeatedly chose to extract and emphasize the anti-Irish passages. See John Brannigan, "'A Particular Vice of that People': Giraldus Cambrensis and the Discourse of English Colonialism," *Irish Studies Review* 6 (1998): 121-30, at 129; R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 116.

⁶⁶ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2006), 39.

⁶⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica, et Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. James F. Dimock. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1964), V. 165-69 [hereafter, "*Top.*"].

⁶⁸ *Top.*, 149-53.

⁶⁹ *Top.*, 62-73.

⁷⁰ *Top.*, 153-61; 163 and 172; 108, resp.

who convince the priest to administer the *viaticum* to the sickly she-wolf before her death.⁷¹ This tale is often interpreted as yet another of Gerald's attempts to show the Irish as savages, their bestial natures made visibly evident in their lupine forms. However, I will show how Gerald significantly develops his portrayal of the werewolves in his four subsequent recensions of the *Topographia*, showing them to be not only devout, but also concerned that both the Irish people and the Norman conquerors remain open to spiritual reform. I will also demonstrate that Gerald's focus on the werewolf's reception of the Eucharist is of central importance in interpreting the tale. Though Irish, and though bearing in her body the results of a curse centuries old, the wolf-woman's reception of the *viaticum* incorporates her into the Body of Christ, the Church, a universal community which transcends ethnicities. Only by examining all five recensions of the werewolf tale is it possible to gain a full picture of the way Gerald complicates his portrayal of the Irish people, and develops eucharistic themes which include the Irish werewolves within the borders of orthodoxy, instead of situating them as heterodox outsiders.

A detailed investigation of the textual history of the *Topographia Hibernica* has only recently been accomplished.⁷² Gerald's first version of the *Topographia* was completed ca. 1187. He more than doubled the length of his first version over a span of twenty-two years, creating five distinct recensions of his text, each directed towards a specific audience.⁷³ As Gerald

⁷¹ *Top.*, 101-04.

⁷² Amelia Borrego Sargent, "Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*: Dates, Versions, Readers," *Viator* 43, no. 1 (2012): 241–61. See also Catherine Margaret Rooney, "The Manuscripts of the Works of Gerald of Wales," (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge 2005); Sumithra J. David, "Looking East and West: The Reception and Dissemination of the *Topographia Hibernica* and the *Itinerarium ad partes orientales* in England [1185–c.1500]," (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews 2009); Amelia Lynn Borrego Sargent, "Visions and Revisions: Gerald of Wales, Authorship, and the Construction of Political, Religious, and Legal Geographies in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Britain," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley 2011).

⁷³ Amelia Sargent's careful research has confirmed that Gerald produced five separate recensions directed to specific audiences, rather than adding passages whenever the mood took him, as earlier scholars had concluded. The exact date of each recension may not be known, but Sargent offers a specific range of time during which each was produced: first recension: 1187–88; second recension: 1188–89; third recension: 1190–94; fourth recension: 1196–98; and fifth recension: 1207–09 (Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 244–58).

continued to expand the *Topographia* in his later recensions, he steadily added more passages that cast the Irish in a positive light. By the fifth recension, virtually all of Gerald's additions portrayed the land and its people favorably: he included new pieces of legend, allegory, and even an account of a boy whose agony caused by a snake in his belly was completely cured by going to Ireland.⁷⁴ Readers of the *Topographia*, both medieval and modern, have often chosen to emphasize and repeat Gerald's negative representations of the Irish, while overlooking the moments when he complicated his portrayal of these people.

Over the years, Gerald returned repeatedly to the tale of the priest and the werewolves, which is the single longest narrative in the *Topographia* and the only one that he expanded in every single recension. His repeated revision of the same episode suggests its importance in his view.⁷⁵ For the most part, the first recension of the werewolf chapter has been privileged, and has attracted postcolonial readings that portray Gerald as a pro-Norman court writer seeking to depict the Irish as barbarians.⁷⁶ Such an interpretation of the text is viable in the first recension.

⁷⁴ In the fifth recension, Gerald recounts the legend that St. Patrick cleared the island of poisonous reptiles, but shares his personal opinion that Ireland has always been naturally free of venomous creatures (*Top.*, 62). In a chapter describing the weasel's ability to slay basilisks, Gerald points out the fact that the strong are sometimes defeated by the weak—possibly intended as a warning to the Norman conquerors (*Top.*, 60–61). When he tells of the boy with the snake in his belly, he specifies that the event occurred recently, in his own time, thus ensuring that the positive portrayal of Ireland is relevant not only to the past but also to the present. Gerald also states that the boy had prayed for help from the saints at shrines in England without avail, but as soon as he crossed over to Ireland to drink the water and eat the food of that healing land, he was delivered (*Top.*, 65).

⁷⁵ Gerald's additions to the *Topographia* have not received sustained scholarly attention. Within the body of recent scholarship on Gerald's werewolf account, a few authors make mention of the material from Gerald's later recensions, but no one has yet systematically examined Gerald's development of the episode in each recension. Caroline Walker Bynum, Rhonda Knight, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, for example, all show some awareness of the material from Gerald's later recensions, but the purposes in their projects are not concerned with understanding the contexts and audiences for which each recension was produced, or with how these additions complicate Gerald's view of the Irish and develop further eucharistic parallels. See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf" *Speculum* 73.4 (1998): 987–1013, at 1011; Rhonda Knight, "Werewolves, Monsters, and Miracles: Representing Colonial Fantasies in Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*," *Studies in Iconography* 22 (2001): 55–86, at 72; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 86–87.

⁷⁶ The first recension of the *Topographia Hibernica* has long been favored. Early Giraldian scholars deplore the archdeacon's additions to the *Topographia* as dull and distracting theological discourses. In James F. Dimock's preface to the *Topographia*, he declares that Gerald's additions in every version beyond the first have "as much to do with Ireland or its people as with the moon and the man in it." *Top.* preface, xiv. John J. O'Meara prefers the first

However, I argue that Gerald's additions in subsequent recensions should be read through an ecclesiastical lens, for the tale is most significantly shaped and informed by Gerald's identity as a clerical reformer, rather than as a court writer seeking to debase the Irish. The later passages he adds suggest the possibility of rehabilitating the Irish, and they also draw further attention to the Eucharist's significance in the narrative. Gerald not only depicts the Irish werewolf's incorporation into the Church via her reception of the *viaticum*, but he also uses the tale to draw parallels between the between the werewolf narrative and the doctrine of transubstantiation, a controversial subject in clerical circles of the late twelfth century. Gerald's entire werewolf narrative affirms and reflects aspects of transubstantiation: just as the werewolves reveal their human identity abiding beneath their lupine exteriors, the substance of Christ abides beneath the accidents of bread and wine.

An Overview of the Irish Wolf-Tale

Gerald sets the werewolf encounter in 1182 on the borders of Meath. The narrative begins as an Irish priest makes camp one night in the forest, accompanied by his only traveling companion, a young boy. As they sit by the fire, a wolf approaches, and the creature astonishes them by speaking words expressing his faith in God and his need for the priest to aid his dying female companion. The wolf explains that he and the woman are from Ossory, and that the

version so strongly that his English translation excludes all of Gerald's additions in recensions two through five, and to this day his translation is the most popular English edition of the *Topographia*. See Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John J. O'Meara (London: Penguin Books, 1982) [hereafter, "*O.Top.*"]. For postcolonial readings of Gerald's werewolf chapter, see Catherine E. Karkov, "Tales of the Ancients: Colonial Werewolves and the Mapping of Postcolonial Ireland" in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, ed. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York 2003), 93–109; Cohen, *Hybridity*, 86–89; Knight, "Colonial Fantasies," 55–86; Linda Mitchell, "Gender(ed) Identities? Anglo-Norman Settlement, Irish-ness, and the Statutes of Kilkenny of 1367," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 37, no. 2 (2011): 8-23; Michael A. Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 139–47.

inhabitants of their region were cursed by St. Natalis in centuries past.⁷⁷ The Irish saint declared that two people, one male and one female, must leave their homeland and take on the form of wolves, living for seven years in exile. If they survive, they can return to their homes in human form, while two more people will take their place. However, the wolf's female companion is near death, and when the priest is led to her side, she begs him to administer the *viaticum* before she dies.⁷⁸ The priest is reluctant to do so, but is compelled by a visual demonstration of the she-wolf's humanity: the he-wolf pulls back his companion's wolf-skin to reveal the form of an old woman underneath. The priest gives her the consecrated Host as she appears in her human form, and then watches as her wolf-skin re-shapes around her human body.⁷⁹ Though Gerald does not write of the she-wolf's death, it seems that after receiving the *viaticum*, she passes away, since the he-wolf spends the rest of the night by the fire with the priest. The next morning he guides the priest and young boy through the woods, sets them on the right path, thanks the priest once again for his services, and goes his own way to complete his years of exile.⁸⁰

Gerald then writes himself into the account, stating that about two years after the priest gave the *viaticum* to the dying werewolf, he himself was traveling through Meath when the

⁷⁷ Natalis is an obscure individual, an Irish abbot of the sixth century associated with the church of Cell na Manach which is in the western region of Ossory. John Carey speculates that Gerald's choice to include Natalis of Ossory, rather than a more well-known saint, must reflect that he is drawing on preceding sources and local tradition as he fashions his narrative. See John Carey, "Werewolves in Medieval Ireland," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 44 (2002): 48–64, at 50.

⁷⁸ The introduction of a female alongside a male werewolf is a rare innovation, as most werewolves tend to be male. See Carey, "Werewolves in Ireland," 68. Perhaps Gerald means to evoke the edenic imagery of man and woman cast out, cursed for their sins, and in exile from their first homeland. Yet the man and woman this priest encounters are never declared to be husband and wife, and the wolf's care for his old female companion seems simply solicitous, rather than romantic. The age of the male werewolf is never given, but his health is not at risk so it is possible that he is a younger and stronger companion, and that the pair sent out are selected at random from among the people of Ossory.

⁷⁹ Though the wolf-woman only receives the consecrated Host, and not the wine, she would still have received both body and blood according to the notion of concomitance. Due to fear that the wine might be spilled, throughout the twelfth century the chalice was withdrawn from lay communion, but the concept of concomitance assured communicants that in each species the fullness of Christ—flesh as well as blood—abides. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 70–71.

⁸⁰ *Top.*, 101–03.

bishop convoked a synod so that all his fellow clergymen could advise him on what should be done about this matter, which had come to his knowledge through the priest's confession.⁸¹ The bishop asked Gerald to attend the synod, but Gerald was unable to do so and instead submitted advice in a letter. He writes (perhaps with some pride) that the synod followed his own counsel, and that the priest was sent before the pope with his confession and the synod's conclusions.⁸² In the first recension of the *Topographia Hibernica*, the story ends here, without any specific explanation of the opinions that Gerald, the members of the synod, or the pope might have held concerning the actions of the priest and the werewolves that night in the woods of Ireland.

The Werewolf Renaissance and Gerald's Twelfth-Century Ecclesiastical Context

The subject of werewolves, sensational as it may seem, intrigued not only Gerald, but many of his contemporaries.⁸³ Caroline Walker Bynum terms the outbreak of writing on the subject the "werewolf renaissance of the twelfth century."⁸⁴ Likewise, the twenty-first century has seen a lycanthropic revival, a renaissance of werewolf scholarship. One of its prize narratives is Gerald's tale of the priest's encounter with the wolves. A text rich in interpretive possibilities, scholars have investigated the subjects of identity, metamorphosis, hybridity, and ethnicity within the tale.⁸⁵ Many readings of Gerald's werewolf story, particularly postcolonial readings,

⁸¹ *Top.*, 104.

⁸² *Top.*, 104.

⁸³ Other werewolf tales of the twelfth century and beyond include *Guillaume de Palerne*, *Méliion*, *Biclarel*, and Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, to name but a few. *Guillaume de Palerne: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandra Micha (Geneva: Droz, 1990); *Méliion* in *Les lais anonymes des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, ed. Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin (Geneva: Droz, 1976), 296–316; *Biclarel* in *Le roman de Renart le Contrefait*, ed. Gaston Raynaud and Henri Lemaître (Paris: Champion, 1914); *Bisclavret* in *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Champion, 1966), 61–71.

⁸⁴ Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf," 1000.

⁸⁵ Recent scholarship in which Gerald's werewolf episode appears includes Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York 2001), at 15–31 and 92–111; Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf," 987–1013; Carey, "Werewolves in Ireland," 48–64; Jan R. Veenstra, "The Ever-Changing Nature of the Beast: Cultural Change, Lycanthropy, and the Question of Substantial Transformation (from Petronius to Del Rio)," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 133–66, at 148–50; Asa Simon Mittman, "The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the 'Marvels of the West,'" in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills

interpret his tone as distinctly hostile, offering yet another portrayal of the Irish as inferior and uncivilized. For instance, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen understands Gerald's depiction of the werewolves in such terms: "The humane possibilities of the Irish ('fully endowed with natural gifts') vanish beneath a wolfskin of barbarous 'beard and dress' and a bestial lack of mental cultivation."⁸⁶ The Irish werewolves can be seen as freakish anomalies, cursed and exiled wanderers, an absolute Other.

Yet Gerald's role as a clerical reformer complicates any such negative reading. Before coming to court, Gerald was trained in the theological schools of Paris, where he caught the infectious zeal of churchmen such as Peter Cantor who sought to spread reform among both clergy and laypeople.⁸⁷ As a secular cleric, Gerald navigated both court and Church throughout his life, and when the two came into competition, he most frequently sided with the Church.⁸⁸ Though Gerald did serve the Angevins for ten to twelve years, he was never an uncritical

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 97-112, at 103-04; Myra J. Seaman, "Becoming More (than) Human: Affective Posthumanisms, Past and Future," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37 (2007): 246-75, at 251-52; Gerard Loughlin, "Found in Translation: Ovid, David Malouf and the Werewolf," *Literature and Theology* 21, no. 2 (2007): 113-130, at 123-25; Matthieu Boyd, "Melion and the Wolves of Ireland," *Neophilologus* 93 (2009): 555-70, at 563-65; Philip A. Bernhardt-House, *Werewolves, Magical Hounds, and Dog-Headed Men in Celtic Literature* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 228-32. (See additional postcolonial scholarship in n. 13 above).

⁸⁶ Cohen, *Hybridity*, 87. Cohen, Knight, and Karkov interpret Gerald's portrayal of the Irish werewolves as part of his overriding agenda to delineate the Otherness and inferiority of the conquered, colonized Irish. In a slightly more favorable reading of the werewolves, Bynum places Gerald's portrayal among her list of "fake" or "sympathetic" werewolves to differentiate them from the savage werewolves of earlier tradition. Bynum notes that Gerald's werewolves display rationality even in wolf-form. She does not discuss their Irish ethnicity in relation to this observation, however (Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf," 1001 and 1011). Another favorable interpretation of the werewolves appears in Andrew Murphy, *The Irish Sea Betwixt Us: Ireland, Colonialism, and Renaissance Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 51-53.

⁸⁷ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 32.

⁸⁸ Gerald repeatedly highlighted his relentless pursuit Church expansion and reform. In the opening chapter of his autobiographical work, *De rebus a se gestis*, Gerald declared of himself: "In fact, he desired nothing on earth as much as the great glory of Christ's church and its success and esteem in all things, whatever his age and his status." "Nihil enim adeo in terris sicut ecclesiae Christi gloriam amplam, profectum in omnibus et honorem, quolibet aevo statuque suo cupiebat" (my translation; Gerald of Wales, *De rebus a se gestis, Libri III, Invectionum libellus, Symbolum electorum*, ed. J.S. Brewer. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), I. 22 [hereafter, "*De rebus*"]). Unless otherwise noted, future translations are my own. For more information about the challenges secular clerics faced as they took part in the activities of both Church and court, see John D. Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma: Peter of Blois and Literate Culture in the Twelfth Century* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

admirer of their rule, and he eventually became one of their harshest critics.⁸⁹ The *Topographia Hibernica*'s five recensions, produced over a twenty-two year span, reflect his changing sympathies. Gerald's tone towards the Irish became increasingly nuanced in later recensions, as he found much to criticize in the conduct of the Normans both as conquerors and Christians. By the fourth and fifth recensions, he used the words of the Irish werewolf to speak a warning to the Norman invaders, voicing the ideals of clerical reform, which he viewed as relevant to both Normans and Irish alike. Gerald also continued to develop eucharistic themes in later recensions, and more directly addressing the much-debated topic of transubstantiation,

Preceding the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the twelfth century sees lively discussion and dispute about the nature of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation.⁹⁰ Gerald of Wales, ambassador of the ecclesiastical reform movement, was immersed in the eucharistic discussions abounding among fellow clergymen.⁹¹ Gerald's personal interest and investment in guiding the proper treatment and understanding of the Eucharist is evidenced by his extensive passages on the subject in the *Gemma ecclesiastica* (*The Jewel of the Church*) (ca. 1197).⁹² Gerald stipulates proper treatment of the elements, upholds the doctrine of transubstantiation, describes what should be done if the Eucharist is mishandled, explains how the *viaticum* should

⁸⁹ Davies, *First English Empire*, 15; Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 54.

⁹⁰ While the Church officially recognized the equivalence of the Host and the literal body and blood of Christ at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, it was not a new belief but rather the affirmation of a doctrine which had been much debated and discussed. The term "transubstantiation" was used as early as the eleventh century, and the eighth through twelfth centuries contained vocal debate about the nature of the Eucharist, as seen both in theological treatises and literary tales and *exempla*. Rather than instituting a new doctrine, Lateran IV formalized a doctrine which had been believed, debated, and enacted throughout the twelfth century and earlier periods. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 14-25, for a discussion of the history of eucharistic debate and the recognition of transubstantiation by the Fourth Lateran Council.

⁹¹ Gerald studied in Paris from ca. 1165 until 1172, and returned again in 1176-79 to study canon law and theology. His writings all reflect the influence of the education and theological training he received in Paris (Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 32).

⁹² Gerald of Wales, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, ed. J.S. Brewer. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862) [hereafter, "*Gemma*"]. For dating of the *Gemma ecclesiastica*, see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 178.

be administered to those near death, and then includes many colorful *exempla* in which the Eucharist holds center stage.⁹³ The *Gemma* relies heavily on the influence of Peter Cantor's *Verbum Abbreviatum*, and references the eucharistic writings of many other influential French churchmen such as Berengar of Tours, Peter Lombard, Peter Comestor, and Maurice de Sully.⁹⁴ But a full decade before his production of the *Gemma ecclesiastica*, Gerald revealed his interest in the Eucharist as he composed the *Topographia*, which contains four eucharistic tales, the longest of which is the account of the priest and the werewolves.⁹⁵ Merrall Llewelyn Price writes of the centrality of the sacraments, and particularly the Eucharist, in the development of the twelfth-century bureaucracy of the Church, and observes that general concern with symbolism of the Host "also erupted into popular secular texts."⁹⁶ Gerald's interest in the symbolism of this sacrament does indeed cause him to introduce the Eucharist into the previously secular werewolf lore.

The existence of other tales of Irish werewolves originating in the eleventh century and continuing through the sixteenth century has been well-documented.⁹⁷ One of the earliest

⁹³ *Gemma*, 12-43.

⁹⁴ Eva M. Sanford, "Giraldus Cambrensis' Debt to Petrus Cantor." *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 (1945): 16-32; see also *Gemma*, 12-43.

⁹⁵ The other three tales are as follows: In the *Secunda Distinctio* Gerald writes of a well in Munster which causes rain to pour incessantly unless a virgin priest celebrates Mass in a nearby chapel and then sprinkles holy water and milk from a cow of only one color into the well. After performing this bizarre rite, the rain will cease. See *Top.*, 89. Gerald records another instance also set in Munster, where a church has a stone outside its door, on the right hand-side. The stone has a hollow in which wine miraculously appears every morning, always exactly as much wine is as necessary for the celebration of the Masses for that day. See *Top.*, 118-19. Finally, in a parody of the eucharistic celebration, Gerald recounts how some Irish men will make treacherous treaties. They will meet at a holy site with their enemy, and make a treaty, and then enter a church, swearing friendship on the relics and saints and then celebrating Mass together. Then to make their union even stronger, those making the treaty will drink each other's blood. But Gerald reports that often after this series of holy pacts, the enemy who has made the treaty will be ambushed and slain. See *Top.*, 167.

⁹⁶ Price, *Consuming Passions*, 38.

⁹⁷ John Carey states that the werewolf stories are "limited to a single region in Ireland, and [are] not traceable earlier than the eleventh century" (Carey, "Werewolves in Ireland," 64). See also Boyd, "Melion and the Wolves of Ireland," 563-65; Elizabeth Boyle, "On the Wonders of Ireland: Translation and Adaptation," *Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland*, ed. Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2014): 233-61, at 248-51.

recorded werewolf accounts is found in the Latin poem *De mirabilibus Hibernie*, generally attributed to Bishop Patrick of Dublin (d. 1084); in a brief portion of the poem, just fourteen lines long, “men who turn themselves into wolves” appear.⁹⁸ This Latin poem shares much in common with Middle Irish accounts about werewolves from Ossory, indicating that a body of werewolf lore was in circulation from the eleventh century onwards.⁹⁹ It is highly probable that Gerald had heard or read similar werewolf accounts, if not *De mirabilibus Hibernie* itself.

A closer examination of the werewolf passage within *De mirabilibus Hibernie* brings to light many striking similarities and contrasts with Gerald’s narrative in the *Topographia*. In Bishop Patrick’s poem, the men “of the Irish race” can turn themselves into the shape of wolves whenever they desire, and they often go out to hunt sheep.¹⁰⁰ However, while in wolf-form, they leave their human bodies behind, giving orders that the bodies are not to be moved. If their human forms are moved, the werewolves can no longer return to their own bodies.¹⁰¹ Another strange feature of the arrangement is that if men, trying to defend their flocks, attack and wound

⁹⁸ Aubrey Gwynn, *The Writings of Bishop Patrick, 1074-1084* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), 62-63. The Latin title is “De hominibus qui se uertunt in lupos.” The date of composition for this poem is thought to fall during Patrick’s time as a monk in Worcester, prior to his becoming bishop in 1074 (Gwynn, *Writings of Bishop Patrick*, 12-13).

⁹⁹ Two similar Middle Irish werewolf accounts appear in the Book of Ballymote (14th c.) and in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1336 (16th c.) (Carey, “Werewolves in Ireland,” 54). Bishop Patrick’s poem very closely resembles these two vernacular accounts, which leads Gwynn to speculate that though they are dated much later than Patrick’s version, Patrick likely based his Latin account on a “lost Irish prose original,” the remnants of which has been preserved in the two later Middle Irish manuscripts (Gwynn, *Writings of Bishop Patrick*, 128). For example, the accounts in *De mirabilibus Hibernie*, the Book of Ballymote, and Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1336 all state that there are Irish men—the vernacular texts specify that they are from Ossory—who are able to leave their human bodies behind and take the shapes of wolves to go hunt livestock. But all three texts also emphasize the vulnerability of the human bodies left behind; if the wolves are wounded or devour raw meat, the wounds appear on the human bodies, and the flesh in the human mouths. Gerald, likewise, specifies that the werewolves are from Ossory, but his account places the focus not on hunting and eating animal flesh, but on imminent death and the desire for the *viaticum*.

¹⁰⁰ “Sunt homines quidam Scottorum gentis habentes / Miram naturam maiorum ab origine ductam, / Qua cito quando uolunt ipsos se uertere possunt / Nequiter in formas lacerantum dente luporum” (Gwynn, *Writings of Bishop Patrick*, lines 96-99).

¹⁰¹ “Cum tamen hec faciunt, sua corpora uera relinquunt / Atque suis mandant ne quisquam mouerit illa . / Si sic eueniat, nec ad illa redire ualebunt” (Gwynn, *Writings of Bishop Patrick*, lines 103-05).

the wolves, the injuries will appear on the werewolves' inert human bodies.¹⁰² Likewise, when the wolves devour flesh, "their companions can see the raw flesh in their jaws / Of their true body: and we all wonder at the sight."¹⁰³ It is intriguing to note that the werewolves' consumption of raw flesh merits specific mention in this brief account. Gerald of Wales also considers the consumption of flesh to be paramount as he writes his narrative, but he introduces flesh of a very different sort, as the she-wolf receives the *viaticum*. Raw, bloody meat appearing in the human mouths of the Irishmen's bodies would be a deeply disturbing sight, and yet the human consumption of raw sheep-flesh would be nothing to that of a werewolf's reception of the Eucharist, body and blood of the Lord.

There is no other known werewolf narrative that approximates Gerald's. While other versions relate purely secular accounts of Irish werewolves from Ossory, Gerald's tale weaves in the threads of the sacred: now a priest appears in the Irish woods, a priest met by a wolf who asks for the right to receive the *viaticum*. Familiar echoes appear: the werewolves are natives of Ossory, and they, too, have the chance to return to human form if they survive dangers while in the shape of wolves. Yet the differences Gerald introduces are dramatic: now both a male and female werewolf appear, and they do not willingly become werewolves for purposes of hunting; their people have been cursed by Saint Natalis. Furthermore, they give all appearance of being devout, rational, and desirous of receiving the sacred flesh of the Host, not the flesh of sheep or men. Also, they are able to reveal their humanity which endures beneath the wolfskins, rather than leaving their vulnerable human bodies behind. The human abides just beneath the surface of the wolf-skin, a proof for the priest that they are not mere wolves. Yet the fear with which the

¹⁰² "Si quid eos ledat, penetrent si uulnera queque, / Uere in corporibus semper cernuntur eorum" (Gwynn, *Writings of Bishop Patrick*, lines 106-07).

¹⁰³ "Sic caro cruda herens in ueri corporis ore / Cernitur a sociis: quod nos miramur et omnes" (Gwynn, *Writings of Bishop Patrick*, lines 108-09).

priest administers the *viaticum* makes sense when one considers the implications of giving the sacred Host to those who are known to eat the flesh of men. The werewolves still desire to engage in anthropophagy of a sort, yet it is the flesh of the Son of Man that they desire. Gerald brilliantly crafts a tale of Irish werewolves which also allows him to explore the sacred significance of the Eucharist.

Gerald's First and Second Recensions of the *Topographia Hibernica*

The crux of the narrative, the female werewolf's reception of the *viaticum*, merits a close reading. However, before examining the passage itself, I will describe the audience to which Gerald directed his first and second recensions of the *Topographia*, explaining why his werewolf account in these first and second recensions is so easily interpreted as an anti-Irish tale. I will also demonstrate how a synod which Gerald personally attended likely shaped the writing of his werewolf tale. The Synod of Dublin of 1186 provides valuable insight about the ecclesiastical circumstances that inspired Gerald's writing and led him to make the Eucharist such a central part of his narrative.

The Audience for the First and Second Recensions

Recall that in the first and second recensions of the *Topographia*, Gerald's werewolf tale ends by stating that the bishop of Meath convoked a synod to discuss the priest's administration of the *viaticum* to the she-wolf. The gathered clergy came to a conclusion, and sent the priest to the pope with their verdict. However, Gerald offers no explanation of what the synod resolved or what message they sent to the pope.¹⁰⁴ I propose that Gerald's inconclusive ending to the werewolf episode reflects a deliberate authorial decision, determined by the contexts and audiences towards which the first two versions of the *Topographia Hibernica* were directed.

¹⁰⁴ *Top.*, 104.

The first and second recensions of Gerald's *Topographia* were written for a joint audience, both courtly and clerical.¹⁰⁵ Gerald completed his first version by 1187 or early 1188 and dedicated the work to Henry II. His second version was completed prior to Henry II's death in July 1189.¹⁰⁶ Gerald was personally present among the anticipated readerships of both recensions. For instance, the *Topographia* was likely presented to the Angevin court and read aloud shortly after Gerald returned from Ireland in 1187.¹⁰⁷ It was also read by Archbishop Baldwin as Gerald accompanied him through Wales in 1188, and finally, read aloud at Oxford over several days in late 1188 or early 1189.¹⁰⁸ Gerald was particularly proud of the reading at Oxford and mentioned it several times throughout his works. For instance, in his autobiographical work, *De rebus a se gestis*, he depicts his performance as a brilliant success: "It was a costly and noble event, because on this occasion, the authentic and ancient age of the poets was revived to a certain degree; nor has a similar deed been accomplished in England, either in the present age or in any past age I can recall."¹⁰⁹

Gerald's evident sense of pride in his text, and his attendance at each presentation of the *Topographia*, indicates his active involvement in the introduction and reception of the work. His

¹⁰⁵ Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 244–50. The division of Gerald's *Topographia* into five recensions provides an accurate model for the development of the text. The additions Gerald made in each recension can be discerned in part through Dimock's apparatus in the Rolls Series edition. The more recent work of Rooney, David, and Sargent (n.72 above), is an invaluable aid in determining which recensions are represented in each of the forty-five extant manuscripts (some of which are fragmentary), and in specifying the audiences towards which each recension was directed. Sargent's article, "Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*: Dates, Versions, Readers," provides the most concise overview of the textual development of the five recensions. A few manuscripts of the *Topographia* are available for viewing online. For example, the priest's encounter with the werewolves can be seen with vivid marginal illustrations in London, British Library, Royal 13.B.viii, fols. 17v–19r, and in Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 700 fols. 23r–24v. Both manuscripts offer a glimpse of the recensions under development. BL Royal 13.B.viii (12th–early 13th cent.) shows the transition from the third to fourth recension, as the main text is third recension material, while marginal additions contain the text which is later incorporated into the body of the fourth recension manuscripts. N.L.I. 700 (early 13th cent.) contains marginal additions of both fourth and fifth recension material.

¹⁰⁶ Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 247.

¹⁰⁷ Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 244.

¹⁰⁸ Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 244–50.

¹⁰⁹ "Sumptuosa quidem res et nobilis, quia renovata sunt quodammodo authentica et antiqua in hoc facto poetarum tempora; nec rem similem in Anglia factam vel praesens aetas vel ulla recolat antiquitas" (*De rebus*, 73).

proximity during the readings of the first and second recensions would have allowed him to guide interpretations of the werewolf encounter and subsequent synod.¹¹⁰ Gerald's abrupt ending to the werewolf episode in the first two versions concludes in a manner that raises questions, rather than resolving them. Gerald had authorial control of the narrative and its reception, and perhaps even enjoyed discussion with his varied audiences over the unresolved ending of the narrative, where the subjects of Irish ethnicity, the administration of the *viaticum*, and the judgment of the synod linger so enticingly.¹¹¹ Moreover, Gerald's account could be approached from various angles to please his different audiences: it could easily be interpreted as an anti-Irish, pro-colonization piece if presented to the Angevin court, while it could also encourage a more theological train of thought when presented to the clergymen of Oxford.

A negative reading of the werewolf couple is easily accessible in this first recension, which perhaps explains why scholars have reached a general consensus that the tale is hostile towards the Irish. In the judgment of both medieval and modern readers, the natives of Ossory, cursed by a saint of God, can appear to be sinful people worthy of punishment, and their wolfish exterior can be seen as a fitting a visual image of the state of their barbaric souls. The fact that they ask for the *viaticum*, and that the Irish priest administers it, can be viewed as an affront to the sacrosanct Host and proof of the poor judgment of native churchmen. Yet from the first

¹¹⁰ This could explain why Gerald only makes a minor change to the werewolf narrative in the second recension. The sole addition is one brief phrase, *presbytero praebens iter*, "showing the path to the priest" emphasizing how the werewolf is serving as the priest's guide through Meath, helping him to continue his journey (*Top.*, 103). The addition shows that while the narrative is still receiving Gerald's thought and attention in the second recension, he is, for the most part, satisfied with the content as it stands.

¹¹¹ While definitive evidence of practices of reading aloud and discussing texts in court is sparse, M.T. Clanchy and Peter Dronke indicate that Henry II is considered *litteratus* by his courtly and clerical contemporaries, and Clanchy feels that Peter of Blois was likely not exaggerating when he stated that one of Henry's forms of relaxation was private reading with learned scholars to unravel some complicated question. Gerald's werewolf narrative could be just the type of puzzle Henry would enjoy discussing. Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and His World* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984); M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066–1307* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1979), 186. See also Sargent, "Visions and Revisions," 49–54.

recension onwards, Gerald's refusal to openly condemn the actions of either priest or werewolves complicates the text. Furthermore, he portrays the werewolves as well-spoken, intelligent beings, whose devout conversation and desire for the Eucharist could also be taken as proof of their orthodoxy and humanity. The ambiguity inherent in the narrative should not be overlooked.

The Synod of Dublin

A likely source of inspiration for Gerald's werewolf narrative, the Synod of Dublin of 1186, has been largely overlooked in scholarship.¹¹² Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many synods were convoked to bring about church reform, which included standardizing the treatment and administration of the sacraments. In Ireland, the activity of reform sparked at least twenty synods spanning the twelfth century.¹¹³ Gerald personally describes his attendance at the Synod of Dublin of 1186 in *De rebus a se gestis*. He states that the synod commenced under the leadership of Archbishop John Cumin, who began by preaching a sermon about the sacraments of the Church.¹¹⁴ When writing about the second day, Gerald relates how the Irish Abbot Albinus stirred up ire by claiming that the clergy of Wales and England had carried the contagion and corruption of sin to the pure and blameless Irish.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Carey makes brief mention of this synod in a footnote. He speculates that Gerald's synod in the werewolf chapter may have been suggested by his memories of the synod convened in Dublin. However, his study is not concerned with the events of the synod or its influence on the actual content of Gerald's own werewolf episode, as I am. See Carey, "Werewolves in Ireland," 50.

¹¹³ William G. Todd, *A History of the Ancient Church in Ireland*, Englishman's Library, vol. 30 (London: James Burns, 1845), 194–95. William Todd includes an appendix of the principal synods of the Irish Church, and acknowledges that any such list will be incomplete, as there were many convened of which no account has been preserved. See also J.A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 243.

¹¹⁴ *De rebus*, 66.

¹¹⁵ *De rebus*, 91. "Albinus, the Abbot of Balkinglas...preached at greater length on the continence of the clergy, heaping all the blame in this matter on the clergy who had come from Wales and England to Ireland, and setting forth how pure and blameless had been the life of the clergy of Ireland, until catching the contagion from the newcomers they themselves had been corrupted, since manners are formed by intercourse and 'he who touches pitch shall be defiled thereby'" (Gerald of Wales, *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*, ed. and trans. H.E. Butler (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 91).

Already two central subjects that Gerald will include in the narrative of the wolf and priest appear in the subjects of discussion at the synod: the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the relative innocence or sinfulness of the Irish people. Albinus's words aggravate the Welsh and English clergy, and the second day of the synod is filled with accusations and judgments. Archbishop John, greatly dismayed, asks Gerald to preach on the third day of the synod.

Gerald includes a portion of his sermon, the subject of which is pastoral duty, in *De rebus* and also in the *Tertia Distinctio* of the *Topographia*.¹¹⁶ His words to the synod reinforce the fact that his attitude towards Ireland and its clergy is not unequivocally negative. He praises the clergy's chastity, vigilance in prayer and reading, devotion to perform the divine offices, and practice of fasting.¹¹⁷ His main criticism is the sin of drunkenness and the negligence of the bishops and prelates in enforcing discipline and virtue.¹¹⁸ Gerald has the ability to speak with a flaming tongue when he wishes to criticize, but the moderate tone of both praise and censure he maintains in this speech suggests that there are practices of merit in the Irish church, which he does not hesitate to acknowledge.

While Gerald does not make the Eucharist a subject of his sermon, his mention of John Cumin's preaching on the Sacraments, joined with a consideration of the twenty canons produced by the synod, indicates that the Eucharist was a central matter of discussion at the synod.¹¹⁹ The Synod of Dublin produced twenty canons, not recorded by Gerald, but salvaged through a single ancient roll, containing Pope Urban III's affirmation of the synod's decrees

¹¹⁶ See *De rebus*, 67–72, and *Top.*, 172–79.

¹¹⁷ *De rebus*, 67.

¹¹⁸ *De rebus*, 68–71.

¹¹⁹ The subject matter of Gerald's sermon makes sense in the context of *De rebus*, for a central aim of that text is to show Gerald's role in upholding clerical reform within the Church everywhere he goes. Thus his sermon calling out drunkenness and urging care on the part of the prelates fits his narrative focus in *De rebus*. Yet Gerald was also intrigued by the Eucharist, as seen in his thorough exploration of the Host, its proper treatment, and various *exempla* and miracle tales in the *Gemma ecclesiastica*, and in his four eucharistic narratives in the *Topographia*. See *Gemma*, 12–43, and *Top.*, 89, *Top.*, 101–07, *Top.*, 118–19, and *Top.*, 167.

alongside a list of the canons.¹²⁰ The first seven canons focus on the proper presentation and treatment of the Eucharist, specifying the appropriate vestments, chalices, altar-stones, and procedures for administration of the sacrament.¹²¹ The fourth canon speaks of the ingredients from which the wafers should be made, explaining directives based on the symbolic implications, directing that “the Host, which represents the Lamb without Spot, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, be made so White and Pure, that the Partakers thereof may thereby understand the purifying and feeding of their Souls, rather than their Bodies.”¹²² Both the literal directives and the spiritual symbolism of the Eucharist were discussed in the synod and formalized by these canons.

As Gerald left Ireland shortly after the synod, the discussion of the Eucharist and the political and spiritual situation in Ireland would have been at the forefront of his mind. In *De rebus*, Gerald closely connected the Synod of Dublin to his further writing and revising of the *Topographia*. He ended his description of the synod (which was held in the middle of Lent) and the sermon he had delivered by proudly narrating, “So having won great name and fame in the island, between Easter and Pentecost Giraldus crossed the seas from Ireland to Wales, where he turned his whole mind to the completion of the *Topography of Ireland*, which he had already

¹²⁰ The roll containing Urban’s confirmation and the list of the canons was held with the rest of Christ Church Deeds until the entire collection was lost to fire in 1921. Preceding the fire, Walter Harris printed his English version of the canons in 1739, noting that they were already in very poor condition when the roll was discovered. Not long after Harris produced an English version, a canon of St. Patrick’s, John Lyon, made a full Latin copy in the *Novum Registrum*, which is still held by Christ Church Cathedral. So, in spite of the original roll being lost, a record of the twenty canons yet endures. See Aubrey Gwynn, “Provincial and Diocesan Decrees of the Diocese of Dublin during the Anglo-Norman Period” *Archivium Hibernicum* 11 (1944): 31–55, at 31–32. See also Sir James Ware, *The Whole Works of Sir James Ware Concerning Ireland, Vol. 1*, ed. Walter Harris (Clarendon: E. Jones, 1739), 315–17.

¹²¹ Harris, ed., *Works of Sir James Ware*, 316–17. The next three canons address the sacrament of baptism, and the final ten forbid simony and concubinage and address general church discipline and procedure.

¹²² Harris, ed., *Works of Sir James Ware*, 316; I have modernized the eighteenth-century spelling. The Latin, included in Gwynn’s “Provincial and Diocesan Decrees,” 41: “Hostiae, quae agnum sine macula, Alpha et W repraesentant, adeo delicatae, purae et immacolatae sint, ut ex earum condigno...sacrificio finitis, spiritum potius, quam corpus saginari.”

begun.”¹²³ It seems highly likely that as he wrote of the convocation of a synod in Meath to discuss the reception of the *viaticum* by a werewolf, he held in mind the topics of discussion from the Synod of Dublin, which he had so recently attended.

While the Synod of Dublin of 1186 is a well-documented historical event, no record apart from the *Topographia* mentions a synod held in 1183 in Meath.¹²⁴ It is possible that a synod could have occurred at that date, for which the records have been lost. In his description of the gathering at Meath, Gerald includes specific, seemingly historical details. Yet, his account is simultaneously vague, and (unsurprisingly) self-glorifying. For example, Gerald claims that his attendance at the synod is so desired that the Bishop of Meath sends two clerics to request his attendance. Though he is unable to attend “because of pressing business,” he asserts that he sends his advice in writing.¹²⁵ Gerald never explains what “pressing business” could have caused him to miss such an opportunity to attend and advise, nor does he state what counsel he gave, though he proudly notes that his advice is heeded by the bishop and synod. They decide to send the priest to the Pope with a sealed account of the entire event.¹²⁶ Although it is possible that these events and this synod took place, it does not seem likely that they ever did. And

¹²³ “Cum itaque magni nominis in insula tunc Giraldus extiterit et famae praeclarae, inter Pascha et Pentecosten de Hibernia in Walliam transfretavit; ubi et *Topographiae* suae, cujus tractatum jam inchoaverat, consummationi studiosam ex toto mentem applicuit” (Butler, trans., *Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*, 97; *De rebus*, 72).

¹²⁴ As of yet, no other known record of a synod convoked in Meath anytime between the years 1183–85 has been found. Marie Therese Flanagan states that the synod Gerald describes is “otherwise unrecorded” (Marie Therese Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 6, fnt. 21). For a list of known synods, see Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland*, 243. The approximate date for Gerald’s supposed synod hangs upon the date he gave for the actual event when the priest and wolves met, which was “about three years before the arrival of Lord John in Ireland,” “Circa triennium ante adventum domini Johannis in Hiberniam...” (*Top.*, 101). This places the date of the werewolf encounter around early 1182, since John arrived in Ireland in April 1185. Therefore, the synod, which Gerald stated occurred almost two years later, would have taken place in late 1183 or early 1184. Such a date coincides exactly with Gerald’s first trip to Ireland, as he arrived in 1183 and possibly stayed until early 1184.

¹²⁵ “...quia causis quibusdam urgentibus...” (*Top.*, 104).

¹²⁶ *Top.*, 104.

whether there was a synod in 1183 or not, it is highly improbable that the synod's actual subject of discussion would have been a priest's administration of the *viaticum* to a dying werewolf.

A far more likely scenario, I suggest, is that Gerald's recent attendance at the Synod of Dublin—an event of such rousing success in his view—encouraged him to write another synod into his narrative of the priest and wolves.¹²⁷ The crux of the episode, the werewolf's reception of the *viaticum*, could in part have been inspired by Archbishop John's sermon on the Sacraments, and further by the canons delineating the proper administration and spiritual symbolism of the Eucharist. Moreover, the second day's rivalry and debate between the Irish, Welsh, Norman, and English clergy would have been a memorable experience. Such a dispute could have inspired Gerald as he continued expanding the narrative in the fourth recension, in which he gave voice to the Irish werewolf's opinion of the spiritual causes for conquest. Another detail of note is that the Bishop of Ossory, Felix O'Dubhlaine, a respected Cistercian, was almost certainly present at the Synod of Dublin, since he was bishop from 1182 until his death in 1202.¹²⁸ It is even conceivable that Gerald might have heard of the Irish werewolves of Ossory directly from the bishop of that diocese. All of these threads of evidence come together to suggest that the Synod of Dublin in 1186 played a significant role in shaping Gerald's narrative of the priest and wolves.

¹²⁷ This would not be the first instance of Gerald inventing fictional happenings within the Church. For example, as he fought for the independence of St. David's from the authority of Canterbury, he claimed that St. David's used to be the seat of an archbishop bearing a pallium. He cites Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*—a work which he elsewhere harshly criticizes—to assert that St. David's ought to be considered a metropolitan see. Neither see nor pallium ever existed in historical fact, but Gerald insists on their reality. He explains the pallium's present-day absence from St. David's by saying that it was carried off by the Archbishop Samson who fled to Brittany out of fear of the yellow plague. The pallium was never restored to St. David's, but it is Gerald's assertion that to bestow a pallium on an archbishop of St. David's would simply be a restoration of its rightful status as a metropolitan see. Gerald relates all of this contrived history both in the *Itinerarium Cambriae*, Book 2, Chapter 1, and in *De jure et statu Menevensis ecclesiae*, Part 2, Chapter 1.

¹²⁸ Aubrey Gwynn, "Archbishop John Cumin," in *Reportorium Novum: Dublin Diocesan Historical Record, Vol. I, No. 2*. (Dublin: C.J. Fallon Limited, 1956), 285–310, at 302.

Two further references to the werewolf episode appear in Gerald's *Expugnatio Hibernica*, or *The Conquest of Ireland* (1189), giving insight into both readers' responses to the text and Gerald's own view of his writings' veracity. In Gerald's first preface to the *Expugnatio*, he speaks bitterly about a malevolent critic who "is tearing apart and depreciating our *Topography*, a work by no means to be scorned," and he sets out various points in defense of his work.¹²⁹ Gerald explains that it is primarily the *Secunda Distinctio*, with its subject matter of marvels and miracles, which has come under attack. The detractor accuses Gerald of falsehood, citing the werewolf episode first among the list of deceptions and improbable outrages: the author "brings into this book a wolf talking with a priest; he describes a human body which has the extremities of an ox, a bearded woman, and a goat and a lion copulating with women."¹³⁰ In the critic's view, all of these accounts are too bizarre or implausible to be taken as anything but lies. In defense, Gerald draws on Scripture and the lives of the saints who converse with satyrs and are fed by ravens. He also cites Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, especially "books sixteen and twenty-one, which are full of miracles."¹³¹ Gerald seems most concerned not with defending the veracity of each of his wonders, but in citing precedents, such as saints' lives and the writings of church fathers in which similar wonders have appeared.

Gerald quotes Augustine and says he wants to prove the same point which Augustine makes, which is to qualify the degree of his own belief in the wonders he has recorded: "For I

¹²⁹ "quoniam opus non ignobile nostrum *Topographiam* livor laniat et detrectat..." *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978) 4-5 [hereafter, "*Conq.*"]. Gerald expands the *Expugnatio*, as he does the *Topographia*, but he creates only two versions, rather than five, and his additions are fewer. The first recension is dated to 1189, and the second recension additions were made from 1190 onwards, but completed by 1209 when Gerald sent a copy of the *Expugnatio* to King John. See *Conq.* Introduction lxxiii. The name of the critic who seeks to disparage Gerald's *Topographia* is unknown.

¹³⁰ "Lupum introducit cum sacerdote loquentem, bovina humano corpori depingit extrema, mulierem barbatam, hircum amatorem et leonem" (*Conq.*; 5; *Conq.* 4).

¹³¹ "Legatt Augustinum *De civitate Dei*, et precipue libri sexti decimi et vigesimi primi plena prodigiis volumina non pretereat" (*Conq.*; 5; *Conq.* 4).

myself do not believe in them as if I had no mental reservations regarding them, except in the case of those phenomena which I have myself experienced, or which it is easy for anyone to experience. I believe in all other such only [sic] to the extent of judging that their existence is neither to be completely denied nor stoutly maintained.”¹³² The werewolf narrative falls within the realm of phenomena which Gerald has not experienced personally, but only heard related to him. Thus he acknowledges the werewolf account in his writing as one of those events which cannot be denied and likewise cannot be stoutly maintained. He is content to let the tale stand on its own, without offering proof of its literal historical veracity. As for the synod, Gerald does not mention it in this preface at all. As he concludes his defense of the *Topographia*, though, he does once again assert that God can work any marvel he pleases, insisting that wonders are possible, brought about by God, shaper of Nature himself.¹³³ His narrative may be set on the margins of Meath and involve shape-shifting hybrids, but Gerald solidly positions himself on sound theological grounds by quoting saints’ lives, and the writings of church fathers such as Augustine. He stands secure within the borders of Scripture and tradition.

In summary, Gerald’s clerical interests are inscribed in the werewolf chapter from the first recension onwards. While recent scholarship has highlighted the subjects of ethnicity and conquest which certainly appear in the narrative, the ecclesiastical elements Gerald wrote into the account also merit consideration. The concerns of the twelfth-century Church, such as the proper treatment of the sacraments and the spread of reform by way of synods, deeply interested Gerald. As evidenced by his participation in the Synod of Dublin, Gerald took an active role in the matters of clerical reform and administration, and this clearly influenced his writing. In the

¹³² “...quia nec a me ipso ita creduntur, tanquam nulla de illis sit in mea cogitatione dubitatio, exceptis his que vel ipse sum expertus, vel cuius facile est experiri. Certera vero sic, ut neque affirmanda neque neganda decreverim.” (*Conq.* 7; *Conq.* 6).

¹³³ *Conq.*, 6.

first and second recensions of the chapter, Gerald not only addressed members of the Church, but also of Henry II's court. His tone was carefully ambiguous and his ending inconclusive, allowing for a wide variety of responses from his audience, and also allowing for a wide variety of interpretations among modern scholars. But by the third recension, his clerical voice grew ever stronger as he affirmed the humanity of the Irish werewolves, based upon the authority of Augustine and of Scripture.

A Close Reading of the Werewolf's Reception of the Viaticum

Before examining the third recension, I wish to devote some space to a close reading of the narrative climax, when the priest administers the *viaticum* to the dying she-wolf. This scene is placed at the center of the tale from the first recension onwards. The he-wolf approaches the priest in the woods, explains that his female companion is sick and near death, and pleads for the priest to accompany him and provide her with "the solace of the priesthood" in her last hour.¹³⁴ The priest follows the he-wolf, finding the female werewolf in the hollow of a nearby tree "groaning and grieving like a human being, even though her appearance was that of a beast. As soon as she saw him she welcomed him in a human way, and then gave thanks also to God that in her last hour he had granted her such consolation."¹³⁵ Already, her human identity is evident in spite of her lupine physical appearance. And, like her companion, the she-wolf is able to speak as a human being, and her words give every indication that she is a devout Christian. Yet at this moment the priest faces crisis, for she implores him to administer the *viaticum*: "She then received from the hands of the priest all the last rites duly performed up to the last communion.

¹³⁴ "Cui, si placet, jam in extremis agenti, sacerdotale solatium intuitu divinae pietatis indulgeas" (*O.Top.* 70; *Top.* 102).

¹³⁵ In cujus concavitate lupam conspicit, sub specie ferina gemitus et planctus humanos emittentem. Quae statim ut ipsum vidit, praemittens salutationem satis humanam, gratias etiam Deo retulit, quod in tali articulo tanto eam solatio dignatus esset" (*O.Top.* 70-71; *Top.* 102).

This too she eagerly requested, and implored him to complete his good act by giving her the *viaticum*. The priest insisted that he did not have it with him...¹³⁶ The priest is faced with the decision of whether or not to allow this individual, who in spite of her human-sounding words has the body of an animal, to receive the Eucharist. The priest responds to her request with outright denial of possession of the *viaticum*, which is shown to be a falsehood.

In spite of the priest's insistence that he does not have the *viaticum* with him, the he-wolf cannot be deceived, and he pointed to the priest's *perula*, or leather wallet, in which there was a small missal-book, "containing several consecrated Hosts, which the priest carried on his journey, hanging about his neck, under his garment, according to the custom of his native country."¹³⁷ The reversals in the scene are vexing, for the priest is shown to be guilty of lying to the werewolves. Even as he denies possession of the *viaticum*, he must feel the weight of the missal resting upon his chest, must be exceedingly aware of the presence of the consecrated wafers hovering so near his heart. Perhaps he wonders if his lie permissible if told for the protection of the sanctity of the sacrament? If told out of fear, is he culpable? Regardless, the lie is ineffectual. The he-wolf's sharp eyes perceive the *perula* concealed beneath the layer of the priest's garment, just as the he will shortly enable the priest to perceive the humanity of the she-wolf concealed beneath the layer of her outer 'garment.' Also important is the fact that the werewolf seems to know without doubt that the lump under the priest's robe signifies the

¹³⁶ "Et sic usque ad extremam communionem a sacerdote cuncta rite peracta susceptit: quam et ipsa constanter efflagitans, attentius supplicavit ut viatici largitione beneficium consummaret. Quo sacerdos cum se carere firmiter asseruisset..." (*O.Top.* 71; *Top.* 102).

¹³⁷ "...ostendens ei perulam, librum manulem et aliquot hostias consecrates continentem; quae more patriae presbyter itinerans [sub indumento] a collo suspense deferebat" (my translation; *Top.*, 102). This passage is the first in which Gerald's addition in a later recension intervenes to clarify and alter previous interpretations of the lines. The two words, "sub indumento," "under the garment," are not added until Gerald's fifth and final recension. Before this time the wallet could be interpreted as hanging about the wolf's neck, or the priest's, at this moment. As Rhonda Knight briefly notes, the illustrators of the fourth recension chose to interpret the scene with the wallet about the wolf's neck, rather than the priest's. It is not until Gerald adds the phrase 'sub indumento' in his fifth recension that it becomes clear the wallet must be about the priest's neck (Knight, "Colonial Fantasies," 72).

presence of the consecrated Host, a practice which Gerald claims is a custom of that country. The Irish werewolf knows what this Irish priest bears about his neck, for though one be wolf and one be man, they share familiarity with the religious practices of their land. Yet again, the orthodoxy of the werewolf is revealed through his intimate knowledge of priestly custom.

Though the werewolf may be familiar with the priest's practice of carrying the consecrated wafer with him, this practice is rarely mentioned in historical and ecclesiastical outside of Ireland. What, then, should we make of this unusual custom of bearing consecrated wafers about one's neck? Neil Xavier O'Donoghue suggests that the *perula* which the priest carries contains a chrismal.¹³⁸ He explains that "the chrismal in an Irish context was a small vessel that was used to carry a portion of eucharistic bread on one's person, as opposed to the more general use of the term for a container holding the oil of chrism used in the anointings associated with Christian initiation, ordination, and the consecration of churches."¹³⁹

O'Donoghue offers textual evidence from several saints' lives which refer to the practice of bearing the Host in a chrismal, the most interesting of which is the life of St. Laurence O'Toole, archbishop of Dublin, (d. 1180), who was attacked by bandits.¹⁴⁰ The robbers "desecrated the host he carried on his person 'as *viaticum* and as a safe guide on the journey, as was then the custom.'"¹⁴¹ Just as in Gerald's account, reference is again made to carrying the Host as custom

¹³⁸ Neil Xavier O'Donoghue, *The Eucharist in Pre-Norman Ireland* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 139.

¹³⁹ O'Donoghue, *The Eucharist in Ireland*, 121.

¹⁴⁰ O'Donoghue, *The Eucharist in Ireland*, 121-24. The fact that this practice is attributed to St. Laurence ties us once again to Gerald, who writes in the *Expugnatio* of Laurence, archbishop of Dublin. In this text, as in the *Topographia*, Gerald includes praise of Irishmen alongside his more-frequently quoted passages of censure. Gerald praises the archbishop as *vir bonus et iustus*, "a good and just man" and even attributes several miracles to St. Laurence (*Conq.*, 197; *Conq.*, 196). He explains that Laurence had suffered the displeasure of Henry II due to his zeal for his own Irish people, and that at his death in 1180, he was replaced by John Cumin, a Norman appointed archbishop of Dublin under the king's influence (*Conq.*, 197-99). (The same John Cumin who led the Synod of Dublin in 1186, interestingly.)

¹⁴¹ O'Donoghue, *The Eucharist in Ireland*, 123.

of that time in Ireland. Furthermore, the reason for carrying the Host seems to be twofold in the saints' lives; it is revered almost as a talisman which has power to keep harm from the bearer, and it also is available if the priest encounters a Christian near death.¹⁴²

It must be noted that Gerald gives no explanation of the priest's purpose for his journey. If he were on the way to visit a dying parishioner in a remote area, that would be reason to bear the *viaticum*, but no such errand is mentioned, and though by chance he encounters the wolf-woman in need of the *viaticum*, he is reluctant to use it for this purpose. It seems probable that as he journeys through the woods in this remote area, he bears the Host for its apotropaic properties.¹⁴³ This could also explain his reluctance to admit to the werewolves (who, in spite of their devout words, still have fangs and claws) that the Host is in his possession, for revealing one's sacred protection would seem unwise and could perhaps put the sanctity of the Host at risk, as it indeed does. The priest's denial of possession of the *viaticum* escalates the encounter further, prompting the werewolves to irrevocably prove their humanity.

The he-wolf sees that the priest is clearly reluctant to admit that he bears the *viaticum* with him, much less willing to administer it to a she-wolf. Seeing the priest's need for more convincing proof, the he-wolf takes action: "To remove all doubt he pulled all the skin off the she-wolf from the head down to the navel, folding it back with his paw as if it were a hand. And immediately the shape of an old woman, clear to be seen, appeared."¹⁴⁴ In this cataclysmic instant, the priest witnesses an unveiling of the outward appearance to reveal an inner reality. It is at this moment that the parallel to the Eucharist becomes clearly evident. In his *Gemma*

¹⁴² O'Donoghue, *The Eucharist in Ireland*, 123-24.

¹⁴³ O'Donoghue writes of the Irish people's perception of the Sacrament: "The Eucharist was seen as something powerful. It was a great protector in the moment of death...the reason the *chrismal* can grant protection is precisely because it contains the awesome majesty of God" (*The Eucharist in Ireland*, 124).

¹⁴⁴ "Et ut omnem abstergeret dubietatem, pede quasi pro manu fugens, pellem totam a capite lupae retrahens, usque ad umbilicum replicavit; et statim expressa forma vetulae cujusdam apparuit." (*O.Top.*, 71; *Top.*, 102).

Ecclesiastica, Gerald records a eucharistic miracle in which, one Easter Sunday, an absent-minded woman places a consecrated Host in a locket and forgets she has done so. After much time passes, on three consecutive nights the locket radiates light, and the terrified woman and her husband finally realize it must be due to the forgotten Host within. Repentant, they go to their priest, and many witnesses observe as the priest reveals the Host, which “appeared like bleeding flesh on one half and bread on the other.”¹⁴⁵ This Host, simultaneously displaying both the substance and the accidents, is much like the wolf-woman once her companion has pulled back her pelt. Her skin is only split from her head to her navel, so if one were to gaze on her, one would presumably see the legs of a wolf, its pelt lying in folds around her aged female form.¹⁴⁶ The striking visual liminality of her body emphasizes her hybridity, her two paradoxical identities coexisting. Just as the Host is simultaneously bread and body, this prostrate figure is simultaneously wolf and woman. Regardless of whether or not the true substance is made visible, as in the eucharistic miracle of the *Gemma*, or the woman within the wolf-skin, the substance abides within the accidents. These two narratives are not tales of transformation but of revelation.

Once her human form has been thus revealed, the priest, “more through terror than reason, communicated her as she had earnestly demanded, and she then devoutly received the

¹⁴⁵ Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of the Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, trans. John J. Hagen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 33. “...inventa est hostia quasi per medium carne existente cruenta, altera medietate sub specie panis permanente...” (*Gemma*, 40). Bynum cites this tale in a one-sentence footnote of her discussion of transformation miracles. See “Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf,” 1009, n.103.

¹⁴⁶ Lamentably and yet intriguingly, no illustration depicts the scene as Gerald so specifically describes it. There are four illustrated editions of the *Topographia*, two of which provide illustrations of the precise moment when the priest is placing the Host in the wolf-woman’s mouth. (Cambridge University Library FF. 1.27 (13th c.) and BL Royal 13 B. viii (13th c.)). But both illustrations depict a wolf receiving the consecrated wafer, not an old woman enveloped in a split wolf-skin. The illustrations do not offer the slightest hint of humanity within the wolf-form at all; it appears that a beast is receiving the Host. The disconnect between text and illustration is a subject worthy of further investigation. If the illustration’s differentiation from the text was deliberate, it would likely make the narrative all the more shocking, for a visualizing beast’s reception of the Host would be far more troubling than an image depicting an old woman’s reception of the same consecrated wafer.

sacrament.”¹⁴⁷ Just as recipients of the Eucharist must be able to perceive that the substance beneath the accidents is, in fact, the flesh and blood of their Lord, so the priest sees that the substance beneath the “accident” of the wolf-pelt is indeed a human in the flesh, a human who devoutly receives the Eucharist. But what are we to make of the priest’s fear? If this encounter is read against other twelfth-century eucharistic *exempla* and miracles, one finds that the visible revelation of the actual Body abiding within the accidents is often a troubling and jarring event.¹⁴⁸ As Steven Justice argues in his article “Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt,” such dramatic eucharistic miracles are meant not only to affirm belief but to inspire questions in the minds of those who would passively receive the Eucharist without pausing to be astonished at its complexity.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, the revelation of the old woman’s body beneath the wolf-skin inspires fear and awe in the priest, baffling his reason rather than bringing clarity. Yet along with his fear is the undeniable evidence lying before him. What has been unseen is now unveiled. Whereas virtually all eucharistic *exempla* record instances when the substance of the Host is revealed to potential recipients, Gerald reverses the normal narrative here and uses the *viaticum* to lead to the unveiling of the substance of the recipient. Just as the true nature of the Eucharist appears visibly in many *exempla*, the true identity of the she-wolf as an elderly woman appears visibly in order that she may receive the Eucharist. Gerald masterfully mirrors the doctrinal truths of the Eucharist in the body of the werewolf.

¹⁴⁷ “Quo viso, tandem sacerdos obnixe postulante et devote suscipiente, terrore tamen magis quam ratione compulsus, communicavit” (*O. Top.*, 71-72; *Top.*, 103).

¹⁴⁸ Many such miracles are cataloged in the *exempla* collections. See Gerald’s own *Gemma*, 12-43. See also Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100-1250* (Bury St. Edmunds: St. Edmundsbury Press, 2002), I. 258-82; Stephano Mula, “Geography and the Early Cistercian *Exempla* Collections,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 46.1 (2011): 27-43.

¹⁴⁹ Steven Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 307-332, at 330-32.

Immediately after the woman receives the *viaticum*, her wolf-skin reforms itself, once again obscuring her human body from sight.¹⁵⁰ Though only visible for the short space of time needed to persuade the priest and receive the *viaticum*, the wolf-woman's human form seems to provide undeniable evidence of her true nature. In human form she receives the sacrament reserved for humans. Though Gerald does not write of her death, it seems that after receiving the *viaticum*, the wolf-woman passes away, for the he-wolf spends the rest of the night by the fire with the priest. In the morning he leads the priest and young boy through the woods, and when they are going to part ways, he indicates the best path they should take onwards.¹⁵¹ It is at this juncture, in the first and second recensions, that the priest's encounter with the werewolf ends. But in the third recension, Gerald returns to the story and makes significant additions.

The Third Recension

By the time Gerald produced the third recension, sometime between 1190–94, Henry II had passed away, and Gerald turned to a specifically clerical audience, sending the *Topographia* to Bishop William de Vere with an introductory letter seeking patronage.¹⁵² For the most part, Gerald made only minor textual additions to his third recension. But a significant amount of new material appears in the werewolf episode, material that has seldom been discussed in scholarship due to the tendency to privilege the first recension. Gerald's new passage commences immediately after his description of the synod, and his addition can be read as a potential reply to the enigmatic conclusion of the synod in Meath. Evidence indicates that by the time the second recension was complete, Gerald's *Topographia* began circulating in manuscript, denying him

¹⁵⁰ "Et statim pellis, a lupo retracta, priori se formae coaptavit" (*Top.*, 103)

¹⁵¹ *Top.*, 103.

¹⁵² Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 251–52. For more information on William de Vere, see Julia Barrow, "A Twelfth-Century Bishop and Literary Patron: William de Vere," *Viator* 18 (1987): 175–90.

personal control of its reception and interpretation.¹⁵³ While previously Gerald himself could have discoursed on his advice to the synod and their judgment of the matter, he could no longer do so once the text began to circulate without his presence. He may have felt it necessary to add an interpretive apparatus, thus guiding the discussion and interpretation of the werewolf encounter in the direction he wanted it to take. In the third recension, Gerald also places greater emphasis on the moral, theological, and sacramental implications of the tale, reinforcing the notion that he was directing his text towards a clerical audience and not a royal court.

Displaying his learning and likely hoping to impress William de Vere, Gerald begins his addition in the third recension with this scholastic *quaestio* about the werewolf:¹⁵⁴

But is an animal of this sort to be called a beast or a man? For a rational animal seems to be far removed from a beast. But also, who will associate a four-footed animal, prone to the earth and incapable of laughing, with human nature? Likewise, is it possible that anyone who might kill this animal could be called a murderer? But divine miracles must be held in awe, and must not be drawn into the logic of human debate. Yet Augustine, in the sixteenth book of *Civitate Dei*, raises the question about the monstrous races of humans the East gives birth to, some of which are dog-headed, while others who lack their heads are said to have eyes in their chests, and others have various disfigurements in their forms. He questions whether they actually should be called human beings, descended from the first couple. In the end he adds, “We should think the same of them as we do of the monstrous offspring of humans, which we so often see coming into being. And true reason testifies that each being which fits the definition of a human as a rational, mortal creature, under whatever appearance it takes, is a human being.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Sargent, “Visions and Revisions,” 92.

¹⁵⁴ On the subject of the *quaestio*, see Brian Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic ‘Quaestio Disputata’: With Special Emphasis on Its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).

¹⁵⁵ “Sed animal hujusmodi brutum an homo dicetur? Animal namque rationale a bruto longe alienum esse videtur. Praeterea animal quadrupes, primum in terram, nec risibile, humanae naturae quis adjunget? Item, qui hoc animal occiderit, nunquid homicida dicetur? Sed miracula divina sunt admiranda, non in rationem humanae disputationis trahenda. Augustinus tamen, xvi. libro *De Civitate Dei*, ubi de monstruosis hominum generibus quos oriens parit quaestionem movet; quorum quidam caninis capitibus, alii vero capite carentes oculos in armis habere dicuntur, et variis deformati formis; utrum a primo parente propagati revera homines dicendi sint, tandem subjungit; Idem de istis sentiendum, quod et de monstruosis hominum partibus, quos fieri persaepe videmus. Et quicquid hominis definitionem, animal scilicet rationale mortale, sub quacunque forma recipit, illud hominem esse vera ratione testatur” (my translation; *Top.* 105).

Gerald's discussion of Augustine does the work of humanizing the werewolves, thus limiting possibilities as to how the text should be interpreted. Doubtless, the werewolves' Irish ethnicity is still a factor in Gerald's evaluation of their humanity. The sixteenth book of *The City of God*, from which Gerald draws his excerpts, opens with a discussion of the three sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and maintains that Ham's descendants were cursed because of his sinfulness and lack of piety.¹⁵⁶ Gerald likely saw parallels between Augustine's portrayal of the race of Ham and his own view of the Irish, as humans who have strayed from the path of God and therefore suffer the consequences.¹⁵⁷

However, Gerald went beyond such an unfavorable comparison by carefully demonstrating that these werewolves were no longer in rebellion but were unquestionably devout. They conversed accurately about Christian doctrine and showed their devotion to Christian practices by their pursuit of the *viaticum*. The Irish may have been in spiritual rebellion, but they may also have learned humility and devotion due to their divine punishment. Gerald viewed the Irish as a people who held potential for restoration.

Immediately following his affirmation of the humanity of the werewolves, Gerald incorporates Augustine's description of the Arcadian werewolves, revealing what is likely his other primary source of inspiration for his own werewolf narrative:¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 694–701.

¹⁵⁷ Gerald believes that a common consequence for a people's sin is their conquest by another nation. His views on conquest are most clearly portrayed in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*. He states, "You will never find that any race has ever been conquered except when their sins demanded this as a punishment. This being the case, the Irish people have deserved to suffer the confusion attendant on invasion and conquest by foreigners, since their misdemeanours and vile practices demanded this punishment. However, they have not as yet implacably offended the Supreme Judge, and have not deserved to be completely crushed or wiped out. Or alternatively, the English have not as yet won the right to obtain the full submission and placid obedience of a race that is already partly conquered and ready to serve them" (*Conq.*, 233). In the *Expugnatio*, as in the *Topographia*, I see Gerald's view of the Irish as nuanced. As evidenced by this quote, he does not view them as an entirely evil people, worthy of obliteration, nor does he see their conquerors as entirely noble.

¹⁵⁸ Gerald's account is likely inspired in part by Irish lore about the werewolves of Ossory, but this addition in the third recension makes it clear that he is also strongly influenced by Augustine's Arcadian werewolf story. Carey

The same author, in the eighteenth book of the *Civitate Dei*, speaks about the Arcadians, who were selected by lot to swim across a lake, and there they were transformed into wolves, and they lived in the wilderness of that region with similar savage beasts. However, if they did not feed on human flesh, after nine years, having swum back across the lake, they were re-formed once again into human beings.¹⁵⁹

Gerald's summary of Augustine's tale resonates with the werewolf narrative he has just related: there are cursed humans, taking on the shape of wolves, living in exile, and permitted to resume human form if they survive a lengthy number of years in wolf-form.¹⁶⁰ But a specific condition stands in Augustine's account which Gerald does not include; instead, in a sense, Gerald's werewolves defy the Arcadians' stipulation. In order to regain their humanity, the Arcadians must abstain from consuming human flesh while in wolf-form. And yet in Gerald's narrative, in a sacramental act, this is precisely what the wolf-woman does, partaking of the flesh of Christ, embodied in the consecrated Host. Her reception does not curse her or preclude her return to humanity. Instead, it gives her security; having received the *viaticum*, she is assured that her soul is under divine protection. In Augustine's account, the act of consuming the flesh of a human could indeed be seen as a mark of bestiality. If the Arcadians cannibalized other people, they would deny their own humanity. Conversely, the reception of the *viaticum* by the wolf-woman in

speculates that "Gerald may have drawn upon Augustine's paraphrase in recasting whatever story he was told concerning the Ossory werewolves" (Carey, "Werewolves in Ireland," 62). However, the only aspect of the Arcadian account that Carey chooses to address is the fact that Gerald's version innovates by including both a male and female werewolf (Carey, "Werewolves in Ireland," 62).

¹⁵⁹ "Idem, in xviii libro *De Civitate Dei*, refert de Archadibus, 'qui sorte ducti transnatabant quoddam stagnum atque ibi convertebantur in lupos, et cum similibus feris per illius regionis deserta vivebant. Si autem carne non vescerentur humana, rursum post novem annos, renatato stagno, reformabantur in homines'" (*Top.*, 105).

¹⁶⁰ Gerald, like Augustine, shows a strong interest in composite creatures such as the cynocephali and werewolves. While scholars today might explain such interest in terms of liminality and hybridity, Gerald's consideration is more likely rooted in the theological significance of these creatures. In *Myths of the Dog-Man*, David Gordon White writes that from the fifth century onwards, "[t]hanks to Augustine, the Cynocephali were seen to be a part of the economy of salvation, albeit a fallen or exiled part; and so it was that they become [sic] widely allegorized and moralized as a quarrelsome, morally dumb, or even demonic race that was nevertheless redeemable." David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 30. Though White never references Gerald of Wales in his book, Augustine's inclusion of the dog-headed men in the realm of humanity and salvation parallels Gerald's depiction of the Irish werewolves as redeemable humans.

Gerald's tale is a sacramental and devout act, a proof of her humanity. As Gerald adds Augustine's account of the Arcadians into his third recension, it seems probable that he is deliberately divulging a source of inspiration that helped shape his own werewolf chapter, and also expecting his readers to see the mirroring of flesh-eating in the two tales.

Following his discussion of the Arcadians, Gerald continues to expand his third recension by describing humans who undergo transformations and take unusual forms. He briefly cites accounts from Augustine, Apuleius, and contemporary tales of his own time.¹⁶¹ Most of the examples Gerald sets forth speak of transformations brought about by magical arts, instead of by divine power, as in his werewolf narrative. But as he concludes his survey of types of transformation, he returns to the subject of the Eucharist:

But of that apparent change of the bread into the body of Christ—yet not just an apparent change, but truly a change in substance, because the whole species remains, and only the substance is changed—I have judged it safer to pass over, because it is too far above human understanding, and its comprehension is difficult.¹⁶²

Gerald very deliberately draws the attention back to the Holy Sacrament, the paramount instance of transformation in the Church. No other change is so significant theologically. Even as Gerald insists that he cannot comprehend or treat this most sacred instance of transformation, he slips in his explanation that Eucharist truly undergoes a change in substance. It is also important to note that Gerald places this as his very last sentence in the entire werewolf chapter. Though he returns and adds further segments to earlier portions of the tale in recensions four and five, this sentence remains in its position as the last word. I see the ending not as an ambiguous or confused

¹⁶¹ *Top.*, 105–06.

¹⁶² De illa vero speciali panis in corpus Christi mutatione, nec speciali tamen, immo verius substantiali, quia specie tota manente substantia sola mutatur, hic praetereundum tutius existimavi. Quoniam supra humanam longe intelligentiam alta nimis et ardua est ejus complexio" (*Top.*, 106–07). In this passage, Gerald does not use the term "transubstantiation." However, Gerald embraced the teachings of transubstantiation, and the concept is expressed in his explanation above. There are also several passages in the *Gemma ecclesiastica* when Gerald does indeed use the term, particularly in the *Prima Distinctio*, Chapters 1–22. See *Gemma*, 12–61.

conclusion, but as an invitation: with his ‘refusal’ to treat the change of the Eucharist, Gerald urges his audience to do just that, taking up the train of thought he has left throughout his tale, and piecing together the significance of the wolf-woman’s reception of the *viaticum*.¹⁶³ Gerald reveals that the analogy in which he is most interested is the spiritual parallel between the multivalent nature of this sacrament and of the werewolves. Just as it was possible to peel back the she-wolf’s outer skin and reveal the human woman abiding within, so it is possible, with spiritual insight, to look beneath the accidents of the Eucharist and perceive the true substance, the body of Christ, within.

The Fourth Recension

Gerald’s sacramental emphasis in the third recension persisted in his fourth recension, as he continued to write towards a clerical audience. This version of the *Topographia* is dated to his time in Lincoln, ca. 1196–98, during his first retirement from court life, and contains relatively few new passages but adds many illustrations.¹⁶⁴ It is most likely that these additions were directed at the participants of the pastoral care movement growing in Lincoln at that time.¹⁶⁵ The movement known as *cura pastoralis* was a reforming program, which sought to provide laypeople with sound doctrinal and moral teaching and with a correct understanding of the sacramental system.¹⁶⁶ In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Paris became the center of the pastoral care movement; masters of theology such as William de Montibus taught and produced

¹⁶³ Gerard Loughlin interprets the mention of the eucharistic change at the end of the episode as Gerald’s confused effort to address the topic of transubstantiation, while I read Gerald’s conclusion as a concise and significant indication of the eucharistic symbolism embedded within his entire werewolf narrative (Loughlin, “Found in Translation,” 124–25).

¹⁶⁴ Sargent, “Dates, Versions, Readers,” 253; 257.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Ward Goering, *William de Montibus (c. 1140–1213): The Schools and the Literature of Pastoral Care* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), 12–23; Sargent, “Dates, Versions, Readers,” 253–58.

¹⁶⁶ Ronald J. Stansbury, “Preaching and Pastoral Care in the Middle Ages,” *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200–1500)*, ed. Ronald J. Stansbury (Boston: Brill, 2010), 23–39, at 25.

instructional literature, encouraging the spread of *cura pastoralis*.¹⁶⁷ Gerald studied under advocates of the pastoral care movement during his time in Paris, and he writes that a large part of what drew him to Lincoln was the presence of William de Montibus, who had become chancellor there.¹⁶⁸ Gerald's own voice as a preacher and proponent of reform emerges even more strongly in the fourth recension of the *Topographia*. Though Gerald makes few textual additions to the fourth recension, he chooses to expand the werewolf chapter yet again by adding a sermon of sorts, spoken by none other than the he-wolf. The werewolf speaks with a voice of authority, as he offers an admonition regarding military conquest and its spiritual correlations.

Gerald extends the final conversation between the wolf and the priest before they part ways by having the priest ask the wolf “whether the hostile people which had formerly arrived on the island would continue in it for a long time, enduring there.”¹⁶⁹ The priest's question indicates his recognition of the humanity and insight that his lupine companion possesses. He speaks to the wolf as a peer, seeking his opinion on the political state of affairs.¹⁷⁰ The he-wolf replies:

Because of the sins...of our people, and the immensities of our faults, the anger of God fell onto a perverse generation and has given them into the hands of their enemies. Therefore, as long as that people [the Normans] will observe the commands of the Lord and walk in his ways, they will stay secure and unshaken. If, on the contrary, because the way to pleasure is easy and nature is the imitator of vices, that people might chance to stoop to our habits by living among us, doubtless they will provoke divine retribution on themselves likewise.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Stansbury, “Preaching and Pastoral Care,” 25–26; Goering, *William de Montibus*, 7, 11–12.

¹⁶⁸ William was chancellor ca. 1186–1213. Gerald explained his decision to go to Lincoln in *De rebus*: “Ubi sanius atque salubrius in Anglia theologicam scientiam vigere cognovit, sub doctore peroptimo magistro Willelmo de Monte dicto...” “The science of the theology flourishes there most soundly in all of England, under the best of teachers, Master William de Monte” (*De rebus* 93; trans. Goering, *William de Montibus*, 17–18).

¹⁶⁹ “Inter ultima vero confabulationis hujus verba, quaesivit presbyter a lupo utrum gens inimica, quae in insulam supervenerat olim, foret diu in ea permansura” (*Top.*, 103).

¹⁷⁰ The priest also underscores his Irish ethnicity by his use of the phrase *gens inimica* to refer to the Normans.

¹⁷¹ “Propter peccata,” inquit, “populi nostri, et vitiorum enormitates, ira Dei descendens in generationem pravam, dedit eam in manus inimicorum. Quamdiu ergo gens ea mandata Domini custodierit, et in viis ejus ambulaverit, tuta manebit et inconvulsa. Sin autem, quia proclivis est cursus ad voluptates, et imitatrix natura vitiorum, ad nostros ex convictu mores forte descenderint, divinam in se quoque proculdubio vindictam provocabunt” (*Top.*, 103).

This speech contains echoes of the writings of Gildas and Bede, who offer similar warnings and remonstrations towards the Britons who had strayed from singular devotion to God.¹⁷² Just as these earlier writers were concerned with offering stern admonitions and urging repentance, the proponents of the pastoral care movement encouraged preaching in order to inspire repentance and devotion among the laypeople. The wolf's speech has the tone of a sermon, and could easily have been adapted by preachers as a moral admonition for both Irish and Normans to beware the propensity to fall into sin.¹⁷³

The wolf's words cast the *gens inimica*, the Norman and English invaders, as devout followers who are currently keeping the Lord's commandments. This statement, spoken from the mouth of the cursed Irish werewolf, could be read as an instance of Gerald's exaltation of the Normans and critique of the Irish. Yet implicit in the wolf's speech is also a warning relevant to the Norman invaders. They are not so different from the Irish, perhaps, after all, and are just as much in danger of sin as are the Irish. Gerald uses the voice of the Irish werewolf to remind the Normans of their potential to become identical to those they conquer. The difference between the people is not fundamentally in ethnicity, then, but rather in behavior. The conquerors are just as vulnerable to vices and faults as are the Irish, and should take warning.

Just as Gerald is neither a wholesale critic of the Irish nor an outright supporter of the Normans in these later recensions of the *Topographia*, his tone towards these two peoples is

¹⁷² Gerald saw himself as a writer in the tradition of Gildas and Bede (Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 13). The speech also echoes many similar Scriptural warnings found in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Psalms which were aimed at the Israelites. Gerald's words also parallel those of a more contemporary writer, Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose admonition to the people of Britain at the end of his eleventh book of *Historia regum Britanniae* is similar in tone as well. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Michael A. Faletra (Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2008), 197–204.

¹⁷³ Further warning may be implicit in this speech. The cause of the curse, which has remained unexplained thus far, is perhaps revealed by the werewolf's statement that his people have followed the downward path to pleasure and vice.

nuanced in the *Expugnatio Hibernica* as well. Gerald catalogues reasons why the Normans have not yet completely subdued the Irish, stating that “neither side seems completely to have deserved God’s favour or completely to have lost it. The result is that up to the present the English have not [been] assured of complete and final victory, nor have the Irish been completely vanquished and entirely bowed their necks beneath the yoke of slavery.”¹⁷⁴ Gerald may hold that the sins of the Irish have brought about their conquest, but he does not see their vices as irredeemable. Neither does he view the Norman and English invaders as emblems of righteousness. In Gerald’s view, a stalemate has been reached, as the sins and virtues of each people keep both conquest and independence in check.

Gerald’s only other addition to the werewolf chapter in the fourth recension is one single, significant sentence which addresses the subject of the Incarnation and is well-suited to a clerical audience. The addition appears immediately after his account of the synod and before the question of whether or not werewolves should be called beasts or men. He inserts this statement: “Therefore, it cannot be doubted, but it can be believed with most certain faith, that the divine nature took on human nature for the salvation of the world, while in this case, by the will of God alone, to reveal his power and judgment, human nature took on that of a wolf by no less a miracle.”¹⁷⁵ Gerald drives home the fact that the werewolves’ transformation was brought about by God as a display of power and judgment, rather than through demonic or magical arts. Thereby he can safely parallel this wonder, wrought by God, to the Incarnation. Gerald’s

¹⁷⁴ “...adeo neuter ex toto vel meruisse gratiam vel demeruisse videtur, ut nec ille ad plenum victor in Palladis hactenus arcem victoriosus ascenderit, nec iste victus omnino plene servitutis iugo colla submiserit” (*Conq.*, 233; *Conq.*, 232). Gerald expands the *Expugnatio*, as he does the *Topographia*, but he creates only two versions, rather than five, and his additions are fewer. The first recension is dated to 1189, and the second recension additions were made from 1190 onwards, but completed by 1209 when Giraldus sent a copy of the *Expugnatio* to King John. See *Conq.* Introduction lxxiii. The passage quoted above appears from the first recension onwards.

¹⁷⁵ “Non itaque discredendum, sed potius fide certissima est amplectendum, divinam naturam pro mundi salute humanam naturam assumpsisse; cum hic, solo Dei nutu, ad declarandam sui potentiam et vindictam, non minori miraculo humana natura lupinam assumpserit” (*Top.* 104).

reference to the Incarnation is also directly pertinent to the episode's focus on the Eucharist, since, in Catholic theology, Christ's condescension as a human is paralleled, and indeed enacted, in each celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁷⁶

The Fifth Recension

In his fifth and final recension, produced ca. 1207–09, Gerald re-directed his manuscript once again, almost certainly intending for it to be read by King John.¹⁷⁷ Open hostility had endured for many years between the two men. Gerald had disapproved of John's incivility towards the Irish, which he observed when he accompanied the prince there in 1185.¹⁷⁸ In the conclusion of the *Topographia's* second recension (1188–89), Gerald inserted harsh criticism of John, depicting him as an impulsive and immature individual, given to vices and passions.¹⁷⁹ In 1202, John worked to ensure that Gerald lost his benefice in Brecon, a significant blow that weakened Gerald's status and income.¹⁸⁰ A few years later, as Gerald revised his fifth recension of the *Topographia*, he made only a half-hearted attempt to amend his earlier criticisms of the king. He removed his accusation of John's tendency towards immorality but maintained that John was prone to immaturity and levity.¹⁸¹ He concluded by dolefully hoping that John's ending would be better than his beginning.¹⁸² It seems most probable that Gerald's purpose in sending

¹⁷⁶Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). As Bynum says, "One could meet Christ at the moment of his descent into the elements—a descent that paralleled and recapitulated the Incarnation" (Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 53). See also Loughlin, "Ovid, Malouf and the Werewolf," 124.

¹⁷⁷ Sargent, "Dates, Versions, Readers," 258.

¹⁷⁸ In the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Gerald relates how he was sent by Henry II to accompany Prince John when he came to assert Norman rule in Ireland. Gerald watched as John and his young entourage alienated the Irish with their rude behavior. They insulted the Irish chiefs who came to pledge fealty by treating them with contempt, pulling on their large beards and mocking them. Gerald observed that the Normans' inability to subdue Ireland was due in part to John's actions (*Conq.*, 237).

¹⁷⁹ *Top.*, 199–201.

¹⁸⁰ Gerald of Wales, *De invectionibus, Lib. IV., De menevensi ecclesia dialogus, Vita S. David*, ed. J.S. Brewer, Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London 1863), III.197–202.

¹⁸¹ *Top.*, 200.

¹⁸² *Top.*, 201.

his writings to John arises from his reforming impulses rather than a hope of patronage. As he addressed King John, he did not back down from his clerical stance. Instead, he seemed to feel the need to emphasize the fragility of conquest to John, and did so by returning once again to the werewolf chapter.

The dating of this final recension is significant, as it precedes John's expedition to Ireland in 1210. Gerald apparently desired to underscore the truth of the werewolf's opinions regarding conquest before John set out. Gerald returned to the wolf's cautionary speech which he had included in the fourth recension, and added two passages from Scripture in this fifth version:

You will also find a similar opinion in Leviticus, as the Lord spoke to the Israelite people in this manner: "All these detestable things," which have already been mentioned, "were done by the inhabitants of the land who were here before you, and they have defiled it. Beware, then, lest the land vomit even you out likewise, if you do similar deeds, just as it vomited out the people that were here before you." All this happened to them afterwards, first by means of the Chaldeans, and afterwards through the Romans. Similarly, in Ecclesiasticus, "A kingdom is transferred from one people to another people because of injustices, wrongdoings, abuses, and various deceits."¹⁸³

By means of these verses, Gerald again emphasizes his conviction that the Irish are not a race set apart due to inferiority or bestiality. Instead, people of every ethnicity, Normans included, have the same propensity to sin, and must beware lest they fall.¹⁸⁴

The context in which Gerald's quotation from Leviticus is found is also significant, and his insertion of the phrase *praedictas scilicet* indicates that he expects his audience to be aware

¹⁸³"Similem quoque sententiam in Levitico reperies; Domino ad populum Israeliticum loquente in hunc modum: "Omnes execrationes istas," praedictas scilicet, "fecerunt accolae terrae qui fuerunt ante vos, et polluerunt eam. Cavete ergo, ne et vos similiter evomat, cum paria feceritis, sicut evomit gentem quae fuit ante vos." Totum hoc autem postmodum contigit eis, primo per Chaldaeos, et postea per Romanos. Item et in Ecclesiastico: "Regnum a gente in gentem transfertur, propter injustitias, et injurias, et contumelias, et diversos dolos" (*Top.* 103–04). Gerald's quotation of Leviticus 18:27–28 follows the Vulgate exactly, except for the absence of *enim*: "Omnes enim execrationes istas..." His quotation of Ecclesiasticus 10:8 matches the Vulgate verbatim.

¹⁸⁴ The other minor addition in the fifth recension is the phrase *sub indumento*, "under the robe," specifying that the wallet containing the consecrated hosts was beneath the garment of the priest (*Top.* 102). For more on this addition, see n. 74 above.

of the *execrationes*, the “detestable things,” which appeared in the passage. The entire chapter of Leviticus 18 is dedicated to delineating what constitutes unlawful sexual relations. This chapter forbids acts such as incest and bestiality.¹⁸⁵ Throughout the *Topographia*, one of Gerald’s repeated indictments against the Irish is their illicit sexual behavior.¹⁸⁶ Just four brief chapters after relating the werewolf encounter, Gerald states that the king of Connaught owns a goat which has intercourse with the woman who is its caretaker.¹⁸⁷ Gerald expresses horror at her unnatural lust, and yet again provides grist for the anti-Irish propaganda mill, which has successfully operated ever since.

Yet immediately following his record of the Irish bestiality, Gerald describes a similar situation in Paris, in which a lion is often pacified by intercourse with a certain girl named Joan. Significantly, this lion was given by a cardinal to the prince Philip, the son of King Louis VII.¹⁸⁸ It seems that the behavior is known and tolerated at the highest levels of church and court. Thus, even when recording shocking instances of sexual deviance, Gerald does not limit his descriptions to Ireland, but turns to France as well. Gerald views his moral warnings and injunctions as relevant to both peoples. Though he views the Irish as guilty of sexual perversions, he does not suggest that they alone commit such acts, but acknowledges that the French are guilty of such immorality as well. Gerald’s writing throughout the *Topographia*, particularly in later recensions, shows him to be no respecter of persons; he does not hesitate to call out vices wherever they appear, regardless of the ethnicity of the perpetrators. He is most concerned that the teachings of the Church to be upheld in all countries and contexts, from the coasts of Ireland to the courts of France.

¹⁸⁵ Leviticus 18:6–18, 23.

¹⁸⁶ *Top.*, 108–11; 164–65; 169.

¹⁸⁷ *Top.*, 110.

¹⁸⁸ *Top.*, 111. The records of the goat and the lion both appear in the *Topographia* from the first recension onward.

In summary, each recension of Gerald's werewolf chapter is shaped by the author's identity as a clerical reformer. In the first recension, Gerald's inclusion of the synod convoked by the Bishop of Meath likely found its inspiration from the archdeacon's attendance at the Synod of Dublin in 1186. In the second recension, Gerald made only minor changes to the text because he still maintained his authorial presence with the *Topographia* as it was read by members of the Church and the Angevin court. Gerald's lengthy additions to the third recension, directed towards a distinctly clerical audience, affirmed the humanity of the Irish werewolves on the basis of Augustine's authority, and served as an interpretive apparatus to accompany the text as it began to circulate without its author. Gerald's participation in the pastoral care movement was reflected in his fourth recension additions, as the werewolf cautioned the Normans against falling into sin. In the fifth recension, directed once again to a royal audience, Gerald did not hesitate to maintain his clerical stance. He augmented his warning against moral decay by including passages of Scripture which affirmed certain downfall for any people who turned away from devotion to God. The evidence from the five recensions indicates that rather than using the werewolves as an image of Irish inferiority and inhumanity, Gerald sought to offer a spiritual admonition applicable for both the colonizers and the colonized. His most enduring aims were derived from his identity as a clerical reformer, and he considered his message to be one that applied to all ethnicities.

Gerald incorporates the Eucharist into the werewolf tale as a central signifier of meaning. He shows through the werewolf's reception of the *viaticum* that the Irish are desirous of, and within reach of, spiritual rehabilitation. The significance of the wolf-woman's reception of the Eucharist is immense; thus she is incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church, which transcends ethnicities. Moreover, the werewolves' condition reflects and parallels the reality of

transubstantiation. Just as peeling back the she-wolf's outer skin reveals the human who abides within, Gerald leads his audience to engage in a similar mental exercise with the Eucharist itself: to look beneath the outward accidents of bread and wine, and to perceive the true substance of Christ's body and blood within. The narrative teaches the audience to perceive truths which are not initially apparent, as they learn to recognize devout, human, Irish individuals hidden within wolfskins, and the substance of Christ concealed within the accidents of the Host.

Chapter Two: Demons and the Eucharist

Introduction

The last chapter considered Gerald of Wales's narrative of a dying Irish werewolf who receives the *viaticum* and is thus incorporated into the Body of Christ. Gerald affirms her humanity and demonstrates all peoples, Irish and Norman alike, must maintain their devotion to faith and an openness to spiritual reform, or face the consequences. This chapter will examine several twelfth-century instances when demons, and particularly women who can be classified as succubi, encounter the Eucharist. The first tale I will investigate appears in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* (*Courtiers' Trifles*), an assorted compendium offering commentary on the court, amusing tales, and more serious *exempla*.¹⁸⁹ Walter writes of the nobleman Henno's marriage to an incredibly beautiful woman, who always avoids being present in church during the consecration of the Eucharist. Upon further investigation, the lady is discovered in the form of a dragon, and she flies away shrieking when sprinkled with holy water.¹⁹⁰ Walter's account is followed by the similar versions of Gerald of Wales, Gervase of Tilbury, and the anonymous author of *Richard Coer de Leon*, which all portray a beautiful wife who evades the Eucharist for years. When each woman is finally forced to remain present for the consecration of the Host, she flies in panic from the church, revealing her supernatural identity. I will demonstrate how all of these tales speak to the subjects of annual reception of the Eucharist, the practice of the trial by ordeal, and the truth of transubstantiation, which were under discussion in clerical circles of the twelfth century.

¹⁸⁹Walter Map, *De nugis curialium. The Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) [hereafter, "*De nugis*"]. Dating the *De nugis curialium* with any certainty is a vexed issue, but it is generally thought to date to the late twelfth century.

¹⁹⁰*De nugis*, 344-49.

The second tale I will examine is also told by Walter Map, and once again, a succubus is associated with the avoidance of the Eucharist. In this instance, a young churchman named Gerbert meets the beautiful lady Meridiana in the woods, who promises him wealth and influence if he will be her lover. He gladly assents, and rises in the Church until he is made Pope, but all through the years, he feigns his reception of the Eucharist. When he realizes that death is near, he publicly confesses all, performs penance, and dies in peace.¹⁹¹ The story implies that not only demons, but also those who willingly place themselves under the influence of demons are repelled by the Holy Sacrament.

However, the third tale, told by Gerald of Wales in his *Gemma ecclesiastica* (ca. 1197), portrays a succubus who seems to have no problem receiving the Eucharist. An exquisite lady appears to a young cleric and expresses her desire to become his lover, but the hesitant cleric suggests that first she should appear in church and celebrate the Holy Sacrament. She gladly assents to his condition and receives the Eucharist without difficulty. But the cleric is still unsure of her identity, and his vacillation so vexes her that she pronounces that he will die of unrequited love for another woman, since he will not show her affection. She vanishes, and shortly thereafter all of her words are fulfilled, and the cleric dies in grief and unsatiated longing, unable to be saved even by many prayers.¹⁹² This episode complicates the understanding of a demon's relationship to the Eucharist. In the accounts of Henno and Gerbert, the Eucharist operates as one would expect: it serves as a sound indicator of the orthodoxy, or heterodoxy, of those who encounter it. Yet Gerald's third tale of the cleric also operates based on theological insights. The woman's ability to receive the Eucharist could be explained by the divisions between body and

¹⁹¹ *De nugis*, 350-65.

¹⁹² Gerald of Wales, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, ed. J.S. Brewer. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), 228-31 [hereafter, "*Gemma*"].

soul, and the reception of the Host sacramentally versus physically. All three of the aforementioned accounts, and the theological implications underlying them, will be discussed within this chapter.

The Ambiguous Supernatural

The distinction between fairies and demons who appear in the guise of beautiful women can be surprisingly difficult to determine. This chapter will address the latter category, and I will turn in my third chapter to an examination of fairies who can receive the Eucharist. Both fairies and demons fall within the category of the supernatural, and make frequent appearances in medieval chronicles and romances. While there are many tales in which a creature is clearly a fairy, or definitely a demon, there are also occasions in which the subject does not fit neatly into either category. These beings abide in the hazy region that has been termed “the ambiguous supernatural,” and the women under discussion in this chapter all initially seem to hail from that realm.¹⁹³ For instance, the exquisite physical appearance of the women is a well-known trait of the fairy race.¹⁹⁴ Also, the circumstances in which the men encounter these women evoke commonplace fairy motifs. Fairies often appear to humans at noonday, when the sun is at its zenith.¹⁹⁵ Henno, Gerbert, and the cleric all meet the beautiful women at noon. Moreover, fairies frequently make their appearance in a natural setting. Trees, forests, or streamsides are all dangerous locations for mortals to linger too long, if they wish to avoid fairy contact.¹⁹⁶ Again,

¹⁹³ C.S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30-38.

¹⁹⁴ Helen Cooper cites common motifs associated with fairies, including their surpassing beauty. Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182-83.

¹⁹⁵ Cooper, *English Romance*, 180.

¹⁹⁶ Cooper, *English Romance*, 181.

in all three tales, the men meet their ladies among the trees: two appear in the forest, one in an orchard. Every detail of the women's introductions indicates fairy origins.

But as each story progresses, the origins of these women become more dubious, and the authors hint at demonic provenance through foreboding narrative comments and events which unfold. Though Walter and Gerald never explicitly use the terms of demon or succubus to describe these women, the antagonists all appear as beautiful females who seek to enter into sexual relationships with the human men they have met. In each instance, the women are later revealed to be supernatural beings with malicious intent; thus the term succubi seems an apt descriptor for them.¹⁹⁷ Although evil intent towards humans is fairly common among fairies as well as demons, the authors end each of their stories by specifically associating the supernatural women with the devil's deception, the Lord's supremacy over such spirits, or their destination of eternal damnation.¹⁹⁸

While there is a general consensus among scholars that there is a distinct difference between fairies and demons, the line between these two supernatural orders is often blurred or called into question. As Helen Cooper describes the nature of fairies, she explains that “[f]airies were an anomaly in the divine order of creation, and romances are rarely interested in defining

¹⁹⁷ Simply put, incubi and succubi are demons who take on human guise in order to have sexual intercourse. They are called incubi if they appear as men, and succubi if they take the form of women. Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 197. As James Wade traces the history of terms used to refer to fairies, he notes that incubi is a term under transition in the medieval period. From late antiquity, it had signified evil spirits and demons with specifically sexual connotations, but by the time Layamon was writing at the start of the thirteenth century, incubi were beginning to take on fairy characteristics. By Chaucer's time the terms fairy, elf, and incubus were used interchangeably, and incubus had become one word among many to denote a fairy or fairy-like being (Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 4; 14).

¹⁹⁸ However, a small degree of ambiguity still hovers about their figures, even when their supernatural identities are discovered and they vanish from the human world. Sudden disappearances are also commonly accomplished by fairy-women. Neither Henno's bride nor Meridiana actually performed any blatantly wicked deed, and the death of the cleric can only be partially attributed to his prospective lover. Though evidence legitimizes calling the women succubi and reading them as demons as I choose to do in this chapter, a sense of ambiguity perhaps ought to be maintained. Walter and Gerald's writing styles seem to encourage a nuanced view of these women as liminal figures, bordering both demon and fairy in that hazy zone of the ambiguous supernatural.

their precise metaphysical or theological status except in terms of what they are not: it is frequently insisted that they are not diabolic.”¹⁹⁹ The repeated insistence that fairies are not demons implies that a reoccurring question in the minds of authors and audiences was whether they were indeed evil spirits, or whether there could be another supernatural race apart from the demonic. Cooper continues, stating that even the fairies within the texts “are often at pains to make the distinction clear, sometimes by passing a test of true faith such as partaking of the Eucharist, or simply by naming God.”²⁰⁰ Cooper makes this brief and enticing reference to the reception of the Eucharist as a test of true faith, but she is concerned with addressing the larger topic of the English romance, and does not explore the subject of the eucharistic test further, as I intend to do in this chapter.

James Wade also addresses the position of fairies in relation to the normative Christian world, and he places them outside of both orthodox and heterodox bounds, holding that they are “*adoxic*.”²⁰¹ Because of this “adoxic positioning,” Wade argues that the fairies are free from humanity’s social, moral, and religious structures.²⁰² The clue, then, to distinguishing a fairy from a demon should be that the demons are not “adoxic,” as are the fairies. It makes sense that the authors would seek to shed light on a supernatural being’s identity by bringing them into contact with rites which bear sacred significance, such as the celebration of the Eucharist. Wade

¹⁹⁹ Cooper, *English Romance*, 179.

²⁰⁰ Cooper, *English Romance*, 179. Cooper comments further on the medieval view of fairies, noting that some authors claimed that fairies were angels who remained neutral in the War in Heaven. They thus did not deserve damnation, but they also did not stand clearly on heaven’s side. Consequently, they must dwell on earth alongside humans, but yet separate. Even this explanation brought fairies somewhat too close to the diabolic for comfort, so there was significant effort made to stress that fairies were distinct from devils (Cooper, *English Romance*, 179).

²⁰¹ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 15. Helen Cooper expresses a similar idea, stating: “Popular belief, and the romances with it, most commonly took fairies to be outside theological schemata, a third order alongside the angelic (fallen or not) and the human. The place occupied by the fairies was, therefore, most often defined simply as *somewhere else*: a fifth world to set beside Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and middle-earth” (Cooper, *English Romance*, 179).

²⁰² Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 15.

notes that when individuals appear who hail from the realm of the ambiguous supernatural, a popular solution arises:

In attempting to clear up such ambiguities, medieval historians and romance authors alike had two tools at their disposal: the swearing test and the Eucharist test. These are not necessarily fairy tests, but demon tests, as demons, within the imaginative networks in which these romances and chronicles participated, could never utter the name of God, nor could they withstand the presence of any Christian rituals. In nearly all instances, however, fairies have no problem encountering Christian paraphernalia or swearing in the name of God, and when such ambiguous beings are shown to pass these tests, it is a good sign they may be fairies, or something fairy-like.²⁰³

Wade, like Cooper, briefly refers to “the Eucharist test,” but this glancing mention does not concern itself with exploring why such a test would be valid. Furthermore, the line is not as neatly drawn as Wade implies. Instead, some demons, such as those described by Gerald of Wales, can actually withstand and even participate in Christian rituals such as the Eucharist.

Carl Watkins addresses the portrayal of the supernatural in the works of Walter Map and Gerald of Wales, arguing that all of the otherworldly beings in *De nugis curialium* are in fact demons, in Walter’s view. He categorizes the two tales I will closely examine, about Henno and Gerbert and their mysterious lovers, as succubi tales which are, in his opinion, governed by clear morality and which display the “deceits of devils.”²⁰⁴ He contrasts these tales with the “more ambiguous fairy stories,” such as the tales of Edric Wild and Gwestin Gwestiniog, in which their mysterious brides never come into contact with anything from the sacred realm, but still have supernatural power and vanish abruptly when their wills are crossed. Watkins argues that Walter is simply submerging the obviously demonic in order to teach his audiences to recognize devils for themselves. Such tactics were “part of Map’s rhetorical and pedagogical game. First he

²⁰³ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 31.

²⁰⁴ Carl Watkins, “Fascination and Anxiety in Medieval Wonder Stories,” *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Sophie Page, *UCL/Neale Series on British History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 45-64 at 48.

instructed his readers with examples and then he disappeared, testing their ability to recognize and escape the devil's traps on their own, for, in Map's eyes, the status of the mysterious fairy brides seems always to have been clear."²⁰⁵ Watkins argues that Walter ultimately sought to situate the ambiguous supernatural in an orthodox cosmology, where the creatures were revealed to be demons.²⁰⁶

But then Watkins turns to Gerald of Wales and portrays Gerald as an author less concerned with neatly fitting the ambiguous supernatural into orthodox hierarchies. In Gerald's writings, he includes unresolved puzzles and contradictory accounts: "He observed that there were beings in the world which were neither angelic nor demonic but which were mischievous and could not be dispelled by exposition of the sacrament or asperging with holy water."²⁰⁷ Watkins notes that Gerald scatters such stories throughout *The Journey through Wales*, *The Description of Wales*, and *The Topography of Ireland*, but he, along with the majority of scholars, overlooks the *Gemma ecclesiastica*, which contains some of Gerald's most spectacularly puzzling and seemingly contradictory stories, such as the story of the cleric and Galiena. I think Watkins's reading of Gerald as an author "fascinated by wonder stories which defied the anticipated ordering of things" is perhaps incomplete.²⁰⁸ Gerald does indeed evince an interest in tales of wonders which seem inexplicable. But he, like Walter, is a secular cleric with extensive training from the theologians of Paris. While Gerald may be comfortable leaving his

²⁰⁵ Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety," 49.

²⁰⁶ Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety," 49-50. Watkins asserts that not only fairies but also beings drawn from classical mythology are shown by Walter to be "devils in deceptive guises. A supernatural world full of apparent ambiguity was thus retrofitted into an Augustinian framework; a seemingly shaded spirit world was split cleanly into light and darkness" (50). Watkins' contentions are not held by all scholars of Walter Map. Michael Faletra, for example, argues that there is a distinct difference between demons and fairies in Walter's writing, and that the fairies are to be read as analogues for the Welsh people, not as devils of any sort. Michael Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 78-83.

²⁰⁷ Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety," 50-51.

²⁰⁸ Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety," 50.

stories unresolved and unexplained by theological or orthodox means, I do not think that meant he lacked such an explanation. He, like Walter, merely wanted his audiences to puzzle the answers out for themselves. I will undertake that worthy venture in this chapter.

Henno, the Dragon-Bride, and Her “Wary Retirement”

In the ninth chapter of the fourth *distinctio* of *De nugis curialium*, Walter Map tells the story of the nobleman Henno.²⁰⁹ At noonday, as Henno walks through the woods near the shore of Normandy, he comes upon a beautiful girl sitting beneath a tree.²¹⁰ Henno immediately offers her hospitality in his land; he is enchanted by her beauty and asks her whether her fair face “belongs to our race, or whether deity has willed to show itself to its worshippers on earth thus fair in bloom.”²¹¹ Immediately the possibility of her supernatural identity is forefronted: Henno is unsure whether to believe that a creature so radiant is human or goddess. No thought of a more threatening identity seems to cross Henno’s mind, but Walter as narrator begins to instill such a suspicion, as the lady possesses “such an innocent and dove-like voice that you might think a lady angel was speaking” but then he reverses his description darkly, adding that she could be “one who could deceive at will any angel.”²¹² Both Henno’s words and Walter’s narrative interjections emphasize the supernatural rather than human nature of the woman, but their opinions of her tend in two very different directions.²¹³

²⁰⁹ *De nugis*, 345. Henno’s full title is “Henno cum dentibus,” and Walter writes that he is “so called from the bigness of his teeth;” “sic a dencium magnitudine dictus” (344-45). “Henno cum dentibus” likely refers to the Norman baron Hamo ‘Dentatus.’ Hamo’s descendants became leading barons of the Welsh march, so though the story is set in Normandy, Walter’s tale resonates among the members of the Anglo-Norman court (*De nugis*, 344n2).

²¹⁰ *De nugis*, 346.

²¹¹ “...seu nostre sortis est hec tam desiderabilis faciei serenitas, seu se diuinitas, his redimitam flosculis” (*De nugis*, 346-47).

²¹² “Illam tam innocenter et columbine respondit, ut credas angelam locutam que possit angelum quemuis ad uota fallere” (*De nugis*, 346-47).

²¹³ Nancy Caciola observes that demons were frequently attributed female form, while angels were believed to be exclusively male, since the only scriptural names given for angels were masculine ones. Walter does not allow his audience to be taken in as is Henno. Walter implies repeatedly that the lady’s appearance belies her identity; as a female spirit, she is much more likely to be demon than angel. Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 24-27.

The lady, who remains unnamed throughout the tale, explains that she sailed with her father to be wed unwillingly to the French king, but that she and her handmaiden have been left alone on the shore, separated from her father by a storm.²¹⁴ She does not specify what land she sailed from, and while her vague origin could be cause for suspicion, Henno eagerly brings her home and marries, as Walter calls her, “that pestilence.”²¹⁵ A sharp divide stands between Henno’s attitude and Walter’s narrative tone. Walter’s ominous foreshadowing comments lead his audience to view the lady with hostility while watching Henno become enthralled by her. She is warmly welcomed into Henno’s family, where “she bore him beautiful children.”²¹⁶ If she were simply a comely foreign bride, the birth of children would be cause to celebrate, but due to Walter’s ominous interjections, the birth of such children inspires unease.

It is not Henno, but his astute mother, who begins to suspect the lady. Both women frequently perform deeds which display their devotion and magnanimity: “His mother was assiduous in attending the church, his wife yet more so; the one bountiful to orphans and widows and all who needed bread, the other surpassed her.”²¹⁷ The actions of Henno’s wife make it seem as if she is participating in a contest, seeking to outperform her mother-in-law in spiritual matters. Her zeal for devotion has two exceptions, however, for “she shunned the sprinkling of holy water, and by a wary retirement (making the crowd or some business the excuse) anticipated the moment of the consecration of the Lord’s body and blood.”²¹⁸ Henno’s mother,

²¹⁴ *De nugis*, 346. The appearance of a beautiful lady who has arrived by boat from somewhere across the sea is yet another otherworld motif, suggesting fairy origins for women who appear in such a fashion (Cooper, *English Romance*, 128-30).

²¹⁵ “illam pestilenciam” (*De nugis*, 346-47).

²¹⁶ “et ex illa pulcherrimam prolem suscitāt” (*De nugis*, 346-47).

²¹⁷ “Frequens erat in ecclesia mater, illa frequencior; orphanorum et uiduarum et omnium panis egencium (mater adiutrix), illa magis” (*De nugis*, 348-49).

²¹⁸ “excepto quod aspersionem aque benedictae uitabat, horamque corporis dominici et sanguinis conficiendi cauta preueniebat fuga, simulate multitudine uel negocio” (*De nugis*, 348-49). The translation of *fuga* as “retirement” is perhaps understated. *Fuga* could more accurately be translated as “flight” or “escape,” and a “wary escape” conveys a stronger sense of urgency and evasion.

suspicious of the woman's "wary retirement" at such crucial moments, makes a small hole to spy into the lady's chamber, and watches one Sunday morning when Henno has already left for church.

She sees the lady enter a bath and emerge a dragon, leaping onto a "new cloak" prepared by her handmaid, which she proceeds to rip into shreds, and then her maid mimics the lady's actions in every respect.²¹⁹ The Latin phrasing Walter uses for this "new cloak" is "pallium nouum."²²⁰ The term *pallium* has unmistakable relevance in ecclesiastical terms, as a sacred vestment, and this may be a deliberate reference on Walter's part. The dragon desecrates a sacred cloth, symbolic of her antagonism to all Christian practice and participants. And it is thus that her malevolent, supernatural identity is discovered. Henno's mother informs her son of what she has seen. He summons a priest, and together they surprise the wife and handmaiden, sprinkling them with holy water.

The lady had avoided holy water for good reason, for it effectively drives her and her handmaid away: "With a sudden leap they dashed through the roof, and with loud shrieks left the shelter they had haunted so long."²²¹ Walter does not clarify whether they resume dragon forms at this point, or remain in female guise, but their ability to break through the ceiling and their disappearance with outraged howls clearly indicates their supernatural origin. Even at this point of revelation, Walter does not directly name the women as demons. However, their behavior parallels that of a devil in another story Walter relates. He tells of a demon who took the guise of a woman and crept into homes to murder infants. When caught in the act by a pilgrim guest, the demon, still in the shape of a woman, flew out the window shrieking and lamenting.²²² The

²¹⁹ "pallium nouum" (*De nugis*, 348-49).

²²⁰ *De nugis*, 348-49.

²²¹ "que subito saltu tectum penetrant et ululate magno diu culta relinquunt hospicia" (*De nugis*, 348-49).

²²² *De nugis*, 160-63.

similarity in the behavior of the “women” in these two tales gives good cause to read Henno’s wife and handmaid as demons.

Immediately after describing the women’s flight, Walter states: “Marvel not that the Lord ascended to heaven with his body, since he has permitted such abominable creatures to do so, creatures which must in the end be dragged downwards against their will.”²²³ Again, Walter’s words affirm a demonic origin for Henno’s wife and maid. But one must also pause and ask why Walter turns so suddenly to the seemingly unrelated subject of Christ’s corporeal ascension. A.G. Rigg suggests that Walter is adapting and parodying the popular form of the *quaestio disputata*, the theological disputations common in the twelfth-century schools in Paris.²²⁴ This story could be told as a humorous and unconventional contribution to the question “*An Deus corporaliter in celum ascendit?*,” for “[t]opics such as these were the subjects of disputations in the schools.”²²⁵ Rigg suggests that Walter’s tale of Henno’s wife, and others like it in *De nugis*, be read as innovations which blend folklore and theology for humorous and parodic effect.²²⁶

It seems highly probable that Walter, trained in the schools of Paris, is indeed writing with the *quaestio* in mind. Yet in the twelfth century, even the more traditional *quaestiones* were under suspicion for their “proneness to irreverence.”²²⁷ Peter of Blois, for example, critiqued *quaestiones* if they were engaged in out of “philosophical arrogance or logical vanity.”²²⁸ Peter also did not feel that transubstantiation was a fitting subject for disputations, because it was a

²²³ Ne miremini si Dominus as/cendit corporaliter, cum hoc pessimis permiserit creaturis, quas eciam necesse sit deorsum inuitas trahi” (*De nugis*, 348-49).

²²⁴ A.G. Rigg, “Walter Map, the Shaggy Dog Story, and the *Quaestio Disputata*,” *Roma, Magistra Mundi: Itineraria Culturae Medievalis. Mélanges offerts a Pere L. E. Boyle a l’occasion de son 75e anniversaire. Textes et Études du Moyen Age* 10, no. 2 (1998): 723-35, at 727-28.

²²⁵ Rigg, “Walter Map,” 727. Rigg does not supply a translation for the question, but in English it can be translated as: “Can it be that God ascended corporally into heaven?”

²²⁶ Rigg, “Walter Map,” 727. Rigg feels that “[t]he literary context of the period—an age of scholastic disputation—and Map’s own devious humour certainly allow us to interpret many of his tales as parodic” (734-35).

²²⁷ Rigg, “Walter Map,” 728.

²²⁸ Rigg, “Walter Map,” 728.

matter too sacred to be brought into verbal debates that were performed to hone one's wits.²²⁹ The story of Henno does approach the subject of transubstantiation, as will be discussed shortly. And though the tale of Henno and his dragon-bride certainly does not display "philosophical arrogance," it could certainly have attracted the censure of clerics like Peter of Blois, if it is read as a parody of the *quaestio* as Rigg suggests. But I would submit that Walter may intend not only to parody the more traditional theological disputations, but to adapt them, melding a sacred genre with tales that were secular or supernatural. Many of the stories of Walter Map, and also of Gerald of Wales, end with theological statements such as the one concluding Henno's tale, and both authors could be innovating with the *quaestio disputata*, playing with academic and scholastic norms in creative new ways.

This returns us to the subject of the Eucharist and its role within the tale of Henno and his wife. Though Walter concludes by discussing Christ's ascension rather than the sacrament, the Eucharist served as a key part of indicating the demonic nature of the woman and arousing Henno's mother's suspicion. At first glance, the story might seem to suggest that the sacred rituals of the Church, such as the sprinkling of holy water and the celebration of the Eucharist, are inherently apotropaic. But I would suggest that Walter's narrative may not be simply implying that evil creatures are driven away by holy rites; instead, the story could portray the sacramental reality of transubstantiation.²³⁰ Henno's wife always leaves church before the moment of consecration of the Host, the moment when, according to the tenets of transubstantiation, the accidents of the bread and wine were converted in their substance into the

²²⁹ Rigg, "Walter Map," 728.

²³⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 1, while the Church officially recognized the equivalence of the Host and the literal body and blood of Christ in Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, it was not a new belief but rather the affirmation of a doctrine which had been much debated and discussed. See note 90 above.

body and blood of Christ. Walter's inclusion of the detail of the precise moment of her "wary retirement" implies that she is specifically seeking to avoid the actual presence of Christ.

Furthermore, Walter's is the first of several twelfth and thirteenth century accounts which tell of a mysterious, beautiful bride who perpetually evades reception of the Eucharist and then eventually is revealed to be a demon who flies away. In each episode, the woman flees precisely at or before the moment of consecration. The centrality of the Eucharist grows in each account, as holy water is omitted and the Holy Sacrament becomes the sole focus. Also, the diabolic nature of the woman is made clearer in most versions. Finally, almost every other account hereafter is associated with the Angevin court and Henry II's lineage. Robert L. Chapman speculates that even though Walter situates his story in Normandy and places the tale far back in time, he "may have intended to insult Eleanor when he told the story of Henno-with-the-Teeth...the names and places in the story are more than vaguely suggestive of contemporary matters, and it may be conjectured that here the demon-legend began."²³¹ Whether or not the legend of Henry II's demon-bride originated with Walter, the story enjoyed enduring popularity in the twelfth century and beyond, as evidenced by several similar accounts.

For example, Gerald relates a tale in *De principis instructione* (ca. 1191-1217) about a beautiful woman of unknown origin whom Geoffrey, the count of Anjou and father of Henry II, supposedly married just because of her loveliness.²³² When at worship, this countess always left the chapel before the consecration of the Host. Eventually Geoffrey, growing suspicious,

²³¹ Robert L. Chapman, "A Note on the Demon Queen Eleanor," *Modern Language Notes* 70, no. 6 (1955): 393-96, at 395.

²³² Gerald of Wales, *De Principis Instructione Liber*, ed. George F. Warner. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891), VIII. 301-2. The lengthy date of composition for *De principis instructione* reveals the many years Gerald spent crafting the work. In this specific episode, Gerald refers to Richard as the king, so the tale may have been written down during Richard's reign (1189-99). Gerald reworked and completed the entire text by ca. 1217. Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2006), 62.

signaled four soldiers to force her to remain through the celebration of the Eucharist. In order to escape, she rose up and flew out a window, carrying two of her children along with her, while leaving behind two little sons. Gerald then claims that Richard is quite familiar with the tale. He reports that Richard joked that it was no wonder his family often quarreled, seeing that they had come from the devil and would go back to the devil one day.²³³ The outright association of the woman with the devil is less ambiguous than in Walter Map's account, and the more direct association of the Angevins with the demon-woman probably reflects Gerald's dislike of the Angevins, which only increased throughout the years.²³⁴

Gervase of Tilbury relates another similar account in his *Otia Imperialia* (ca. 1214), though he, like Walter, distances the episode from the Angevins, setting the tale in Arles, in a castle called L'Éparvier.²³⁵ Here, too, the lady of the castle perpetually leaves the church in the middle of Mass, preceding the consecration of the Lord's body. Her husband, aware of this practice for years on end, finally detains his wife and forces her to remain for the consecration of the Host. As soon as the priest speaks the words of consecration, she flies away, even tearing down part of the chapel's wall in her flight.²³⁶ Interestingly, Gervase not only emphasizes the consecration of the Host as the trigger for the woman's flight, but offers up a moral injunction afterwards. He declares that those who display devotion to the sacraments such as the Eucharist

²³³ Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*, 301-02. Whether or not Richard ever actually made such a statement is uncertain, particularly when one recalls Gerald's tendency to invent episodes and revise reality. But Gerald's assignment of these words to Richard implies that the king himself had heard the tale and was unoffended, and therefore that Gerald's choice to record the origin story should not cause any others to take up offense.

²³⁴ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 54.

²³⁵ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, ed. and trans. S.E.Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), at *Distinctio* 3.57, 664-69.

²³⁶ Banks and Binns compare the lady of L'Éparvier with Mélusine, whose story is also introduced in its earliest form by Gervase in *Distinctio* 1.15. The editors also note the plot similarities between this tale, Mélusine's, Walter Map's account in *De nugis*, and Gerald's in *De principis* (see Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, 664n3). Though this is a well-known collection of tales, the significance of the Eucharist's repeated appearance merits closer investigation than has yet been undertaken.

merit trust and favor, while those who avoid or show disdain for the sacraments should be viewed with suspicion.²³⁷ Here, in contrast to Walter's comments on Christ's ascension, the moral conclusion of the tale centers on the Eucharist itself. In Gervase's text, the trustworthiness and devoutness of an individual can be indicated by their reception or avoidance of the Eucharist. It is represented as a sure proof of a person's orthodoxy or heterodoxy.

Finally, one more similar tale appears in the thirteenth-century Middle English romance *Richard Coer de Lion*.²³⁸ This account brings the associations back to the Angevin line by claiming that Henry II marries a woman named Cassodorien, who is selected as the most beautiful of all women aboard a majestic boat filled with extraordinarily attractive passengers. For fifteen years of her marriage to Henry, Cassodorien evades being present at the consecration of the Host. Finally suspicious, Henry detains her in the chapel. To escape, she flies out the window taking a daughter with her, leaving Richard below, and dropping the prince John on her way out.²³⁹ With this account, the variations of the Eucharist-evading wife tale have come full circle. Her origin story, like that of Henno's bride, evokes fairy motifs, and flying away with her daughter "seems more reminiscent of the actions of a fairy, such as Pressine [the mother of Mélusine], than of anything demonic."²⁴⁰ Both Walter and the unknown author of this romance choose to evoke fairy motifs as they introduce the women, but then they draw these ambiguous figures into the sacred space of a chapel and confront them with the presence of the Eucharist.

The women's evasion of the Eucharist is the common denominator in every variation of the tale, and their avoidance of the sacrament always leads to the revelation of their identities.

²³⁷ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, 665. "From this, happy Augustus, you should take instruction, learning to favour people who are devoted to the divine sacraments, while shunning those who commit fornication against God and despise the sacraments administered at the hands of the priests of our time..." (665).

²³⁸ *Der Mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, ed. Karl Brunner (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1913).

²³⁹ *Der Mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, lines 227-40.

²⁴⁰ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 37.

Significantly, in none of the four accounts does the wife actually receive the Eucharist. Simply being present at the consecration of the elements is enough to drive each woman away. Certainly Walter Map, Gerald of Wales, and Gervase of Tilbury, trained by the masters in Paris, were well-versed in the deliberations over the nature of the Eucharist, and their inclusion of the consecration as the specific cause of each woman's flight is significant. These authors' tales affirm the doctrinal truth of transubstantiation by portraying the demon-women as desperate to flee from the presence of the consecrated elements of the Eucharist, which manifest the real presence of Christ himself.

Annual Reception of the Eucharist and Trial by Ordeal

All of these stories reveal a network of eucharistic thought and debate carrying on in the vibrant currents of clerical culture. Not only do the aforementioned stories subtly affirm the reality of transubstantiation, they also reflect the practices and expectations surrounding the celebration of the Eucharist in the twelfth century and preceding eras. The demon-brides become objects of suspicion due to their perpetual refusal to receive the sacrament, which defied the expectation of regular communication. The response by their husbands to force an encounter with the Eucharist is reminiscent of the long-established practice of trial by ordeal, and specifically, trial by ingestion. Both the frequency of laypeople's communication and the practice of trial by ordeal were subjects of discussion and debate in the twelfth century, and were formally addressed in the Fourth Lateran Council (Lateran IV) in 1215.

The frequency of reception of the Eucharist on the part of the laity varied widely based on time and place. While clergymen would communicate daily, laity received the sacrament less regularly, and by the twelfth century it was not uncommon for laypeople to let years pass

between occasions of reception.²⁴¹ Peter Comestor deplored the decline in the laity's frequency of reception, but their reticence was likely due to their sense of unworthiness.²⁴² Moreover, the doctrine of transubstantiation had been affirmed and propagated throughout the twelfth century, and laypeople were wary of receiving the body and blood of Christ in their sinful bodies. To address the situation, Lateran IV mandated in Canon 21 that the faithful should go to confession and perform penance at least once a year.²⁴³ At the same time, yearly reception of the Eucharist was prescribed, with only a small caveat: "Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving it for a time. Otherwise they shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a Christian burial at death."²⁴⁴ While there were rare occasions when a priest would advise a layperson to abstain from communion, there was never a legitimate reason for an individual to avoid communicating for years on end, as was the habit of the demon-brides in the aforementioned accounts.

Canon 21 decrees that the consequence of avoiding communion is excommunication. An individual places his or her eternal soul at risk. But in the accounts of Henno's wife, Cassodorien, and the other women, their reactions to the Eucharist suggest that rather than saving them, the sacrament threatens them, as they assiduously flee its presence. Dyan Elliot comments that with Lateran IV, confession and the reception of the Eucharist are "established as the

²⁴¹ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 64.

²⁴² Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 64.

²⁴³ Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 12-15. Confession was also mandated as a necessary precursor to reception of the Eucharist, because confession allowed "the priest to know who is worthy of receiving the sacrament of the altar, while, on the other hand, allowing the faithful to purge themselves before approaching the Lord's body" (Elliot, *Proving Woman*, 15).

²⁴⁴ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 12. For the complete record of the canons produced by Lateran IV, see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. 1*, ed. Norman Tanner (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

essential marker or ‘proof’ of orthodoxy.”²⁴⁵ The celebration of the sacrament is certainly treated as a proof of orthodoxy—and as a means of discovering heterodoxy—in the demon-bride accounts. Gervase of Tilbury even expressed this idea directly when he urged his audience to suspect anyone who repeatedly avoided receiving the Eucharist. Peoples’ annual reception of the Host assured the priest and the entire community that those they lived with were orthodox and devout, instead of evildoers—or, even worse—devils in disguise.

Although the Fourth Lateran Council sought to regularize the celebration of the Eucharist on the part of laypeople, in another area they sought to prohibit it. The cessation of trial by ordeal was written into official Church policy by Lateran IV’s Canon 18, which barred clerical participation in any ordeal.²⁴⁶ The practice of trial by ordeal was widespread up until the thirteenth century, administered by clerics throughout Western Christendom.²⁴⁷ When an individual’s innocence or guilt could not be determined by ordinary means, he or she was given over to the judgment of God.²⁴⁸ The most common forms of trial by ordeal, and those most popularly studied in scholarship, are those of fire and water.²⁴⁹ But another ordeal, the ordeal of ingestion, speaks to the eucharistic tales under discussion in this chapter.

The ordeal of ingestion, referred to in Anglo-Saxon England as *corsnaed*, or “the ordeal of the blessed morsel,” may at first sound somewhat absurd.²⁵⁰ The accused was to swallow dry

²⁴⁵ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 14.

²⁴⁶ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 16.

²⁴⁷ Trial by ordeal was particularly popular in Germanic kingdoms. Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 15-16.

²⁴⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 160.

²⁴⁹ Bartlett’s book focuses almost exclusively on the ordeals by fire and water, rather than by ingestion. Ordeals by fire and water were varied in their implementation: the accused may be required to hold or walk on hot iron, to immerse the hand in boiling water, or to immerse him/herself completely in a pool or stream. The proof of innocence was not necessarily instantaneous; if a person held hot iron, for example, they then bandaged the hand and showed it to the priest three days later. If no infection had developed, the accused was proven innocent; if the wound was unclean, the accused was guilty. See Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 1-3.

²⁵⁰ Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 270. See also Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 160.

bread and cheese, which had been blessed by a priest, without choking or becoming ill within three days.²⁵¹ If they succeeded, they were innocent, and if they failed, they were proven guilty. Though the ordeal seems laughably simple, in practice it could have been daunting. Before eating, the accused would “sit through hours of litanies, anathemas, and invocations calling for entire legions of angels (one ritual refers to twelve thousand spirits), plus evangelists, the prophets, and so on, to dry up the saliva and seal the throat of the accused if he were guilty.”²⁵² The simple act of swallowing dry bread and cheese would become significantly less simple after hours of thirst and nervous tension.

An analogous ordeal developed, based on a passage in 1 Corinthians 11:

Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. Therefore are there many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep.²⁵³

With this passage comes the suggestion that “the energies of the sacraments could be transformed into a force for harm rather than benefit.”²⁵⁴ The Eucharist would be harmful, of course, only to those with hidden sin and guilt, not to the righteous. The practice of trial by ingestion of the eucharistic elements based upon 1 Corinthians 11 is an understandable development, although many details of the means to judge had to be extrapolated. The guilt of the recipient could be determined in a number of ways: if the person choked on the Eucharist, or exhibited immediate signs of physical ailment, or sickened within three days of receiving it, the

²⁵¹ Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 270.

²⁵² Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 270.

²⁵³ 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, ed. Richard Challoner (Charlotte: Saint Benedict Press, 2009). The Hebrew Bible also lays grounds for a sort of trial by ordeal in Numbers 5:11-31, which dictates that a woman suspected of adultery will swallow bitter water in the presence of a priest, and if her body then displays signs of illness, she will be proven guilty, and if she remains healthy, she will be proven innocent.

²⁵⁴ Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 270.

individual's guilt was revealed.²⁵⁵ While ordeals by fire, water, or bread were administered to laypeople, the trial by sacrament was more frequently reserved for ecclesiastics.²⁵⁶ Yet it was also common for the Eucharist to be included as part of another ordeal. For example, priests would often administer the Eucharist to the accused before they were subjected to a different form of judgment, as in the case of a trial by water recorded by Guibert of Nogent in 1114.²⁵⁷ Before commencing the water test, the bishop administered the Eucharist, accompanied by the phrase, "Let the body and blood of the Lord try you today."²⁵⁸ This instance also depicts the prevailing practice, which dictated that a priest preside over any trial by ordeal, and be paid for his services. Thus the trials gave authority and distinction to clerics of each city and town, as they were called upon to play an integral part in the judicial system.

God was invited by a priest to intervene in every trial by ordeal, and no one doubted his ability to work a miracle. He could cause a guilty, tied-up man to float when he would naturally sink, or could protect an innocent woman's hand from becoming infected after she burned it carrying hot iron. He could close the throat of a guilty individual receiving the Eucharist unworthily. However, the problem with every trial by ordeal was that God was required to perform a miracle on demand, "but since a miracle was surely a free act of God, this was theologically unacceptable unless the ordeal was, like the Mass, a sacrament."²⁵⁹ The Church had never instituted the ordeal as a sacrament, and did not find enough biblical grounds to do so. During the twelfth century, trial by ordeal came under close scrutiny and criticism.²⁶⁰ Influential

²⁵⁵ Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 270.

²⁵⁶ Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 95. See also Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 270.

²⁵⁷ Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 270-71.

²⁵⁸ Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 271.

²⁵⁹ Danny Danziger and John Gillingham, *1215, The Year of the Magna Carta* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 186.

²⁶⁰ Robert Bartlett explains that by 1150 "both theology and canon law had become academic disciplines. As a result, questions which had remained unresolved or disputed for centuries were subjected to intense intellectual winnowing and crystallized or polarized. New dogmatic definitions were advanced on such topics as the number and

churchmen such as Peter Comestor and Peter the Chanter disapproved of the practice which, in their view, put God to the test.²⁶¹ Clerics such as Walter Map, Gerald of Wales, and Gervase of Tilbury were undoubtedly aware of the ongoing discussion concerning the trials by fire, water, and ingestion, and it seems highly probable that they adopted the same views on the matter as did their teachers.²⁶²

Although ecclesiastical opinion in twelfth-century Paris for the most part opposed trial by ordeal, it was still exercised as normative legal procedure well into the thirteenth century.²⁶³ During the period in which Walter, Gerald, and Gervase were writing, trials by fire, water, and ingestion were commonplace. Their accounts of the demon-women suggest the clerics' interest in probing the concepts of trial by ordeal and transubstantiation side by side.²⁶⁴ While the authors affirm transubstantial truth, they neither portray nor endorse full-fledged trials by ingestion. The priests never administer the Eucharist to the suspected women, as would be the case in a trial by ordeal. Instead, it is invariably the husband, sometimes supported by guards, who forces his wife

nature of the sacraments, the rules of marriage, and the process of transubstantiation. The ordeal, too, was placed under this new and rigorous scrutiny" (Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 83).

²⁶¹ Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 86. It was thought impious for men to believe that a manufactured test like the ordeal could make God intervene at the beck and call of humans. The ordeal was seeking not just to prove the innocence of a person, but to prove the power of God. Such a test should not be undertaken. See also Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 14-17.

²⁶² There had been ongoing questioning of the validity of trial by ordeal from at least the ninth century onwards, but it escalated in the twelfth century. Churchmen questioned whether the ordeals could give a just result, and whether or not they were theologically sound (Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 70-75).

²⁶³ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 16. Trials by ordeal were still practiced for many years after 1215. The ordeals vanished more quickly where there was strong papal power or enforcement by a powerful secular ruler, but in areas where papal power was weak, the practice continued much longer. A horrific side-effect of the elimination of trial by ordeal was that in many regions torture arose as the only other "sure" means by which to confirm the guilt or innocence of the accused (Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 101).

²⁶⁴ While these tales concern succubi rather than guilty humans, the principle of trial by ingestion dictates that God will intervene to reveal those guilty of iniquity, which could operate equally effectively for mortals or devils. Moreover, the Eucharist was often forcibly administered to an individual suspected of being under demonic influence (Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 232). So the inclusion of the Eucharist in these tales is a fitting choice, since the sacrament could evoke the trial by ingestion used to test suspected people, and the exorcism of a devil in supernatural cases.

to remain present for the consecration of the elements.²⁶⁵ And, as already mentioned, the elements never pass the lips of the demon-women. It is not necessary for them to receive the Host or face trial by ingestion; the reality of transubstantiation is sufficient unto itself. No longer were people, or, more importantly, God himself, to be put to the test. These accounts all model precisely what Lateran IV aimed to establish as standard Church practice and belief: the displacement of peoples' confidence in the trial by ordeal, in favor of belief in the miraculous transubstantiated nature of the sacrament. It is highly probable that Walter, Gerald, and Gervase were all interested and invested in censuring trial by ordeal and affirming the doctrine of transubstantiation. These tales play a part in accomplishing that goal, through means of narrative example, rather than through academic or theological treatises.

Gerbert, the Pope Who Secretly Shunned the Eucharist

Walter Map and Gerald of Wales both recount another episode in which the principal figure avoided receiving the Eucharist for years on end. But in this case, the individual was not an ambiguous supernatural bride, but a learned man of the Church, Gerbert of Aurillac, who became Pope Sylvester II (999-1003). As a young man, Gerbert had traveled to Spain and lived at a monastery where he studied mathematics and astronomy. His exotic travels and knowledge quickly attracted rumors of necromancy.²⁶⁶ The legends of his league with a devil appear in the middle of the eleventh century and are retold throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ A result of Lateran IV's prohibition of clerics administering the trial by ordeal was the further division of secular and sacred justice (Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 16; Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 99). These stories maintain interaction between the two spheres by placing the priest alongside the secular rulers and nobility in the church. The secular rulers are those who initiate the testing of their wives, and they force the confrontation in the presence of the sacred Host, perhaps in spite of the priest's wishes. The sacred and secular together confront the supernatural and witness that the consecration of the Eucharist is all that is required to drive away the demon.

²⁶⁶ Ann Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas, *Magic and Medieval Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 23.

²⁶⁷ The first written reference to his unorthodox behavior appears eighty years after his death, in Hugh of Flavigny's *Chronicon Viridunense* (c. 1085), which describes Gerbert's strange habits and associates him with the term

The first detailed account appears in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* in which William writes that Gerbert learned necromancy under a Saracen master in Spain and then made a pact with a demon to bring him safely back to France and advance his church career. William also claims that Gerbert created a mechanical head animated by a spirit, which told him that he would not die until he celebrated Mass in Jerusalem.²⁶⁸ Walter adapts certain elements of the legend, such as Gerbert's affiliation with a demon and the prediction of his death, but Walter's is the first known account which introduces a supernatural lover and describes Gerbert's avoidance of the Eucharist.

Both Gerald and Walter chose to write about the life of Gerbert, but Walter recounted the story in much greater detail in *De nugis curialium*.²⁶⁹ Walter tells of a youth Gerbert, a brilliant young student at Reims who is struck with love for a maiden who does not return his affections. The agonies induced by unrequited love lead Gerbert to wander out of town, hungry and forlorn. Gerbert, like Henno, walks into the woods at noon and finds a beautiful woman sitting in the shade of the trees. But unlike the distress feigned by Henno's love, this woman is composed, and sits before a heap of money. Gerbert's first instinct is to flee, "fearing phantom or delusion."²⁷⁰ But the lady calls to him by name, introduces herself as Meridiana, and promises him wealth and success if he will be her lover and pledge allegiance to her alone. She speaks directly to his fears: "You fear, perhaps, an illusion, and are meaning to evade the subtlety of a succubus in my person. You are mistaken."²⁷¹ She assuages his doubts and uses devout language, implying that

praestigia, suggesting a connection with the forbidden arts. Lawrence-Mathers and Escobar-Vargas, *Magic and Medieval Society*, 23.

²⁶⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 279-95.

²⁶⁹ *De nugis*, 351-64; *Gemma*, 28. In known accounts of Gerbert's life, only Walter and Gerald directly address his refusal to celebrate the Eucharist. One cannot help but speculate whether the two of them discussed the story and the ramifications of his avoidance of the sacrament.

²⁷⁰ "...fantasma siue prestigium timens" (*De nugis*, 352-53).

²⁷¹ "Times forsitan illudi, et sucubi demonis in me uitare tendis argucias. Frustra" (*De nugis*, 354-55).

she is a bearer of blessings from God himself. Meridiana urges Gerbert not to hesitate but to “accept all the prosperity which the Most High is raining upon you from heaven—his creature am I as much as you.”²⁷² Her insistence on her orthodox identity does not raise Gerbert’s suspicions, or if it does, he is careless of whether she is truly a devout or demonic being. He leaps at her offer, accepting her love and her wealth with greedy zeal, careless of later consequences.²⁷³

Gerbert enjoys prosperity, popularity, and dazzling success in Reims, all due to the influence of Meridiana who not only provides him with wealth, but also exercises minute control over his deeds: “Every night she, who possessed full knowledge of the past, instructed him in what he was to do day by day.”²⁷⁴ He follows her every instruction, and it leads to an increase of his status and success. Ironically, her presence in his life yields positive results, not only for himself but for the poor and the citizens of his city: “Within a short time no one was his equal, he surpassed all and became the bread of the hungry and the raiment of the needy and the ready saviour from all oppression; nor was there a city to which Reims was not an object of envy.”²⁷⁵ It seems that Meridiana is not averse to producing positive side-effects in exchange for her control over the life and soul of Gerbert. But her power in his life, though it enables him to become the

²⁷² “...ne differas omnem suscipere felicitatem quam tibi de celo pluit Altissimus, cuius ego creatura sum ut tu” (*De nugis*, 354-55).

²⁷³ She spoke devout and reassuring words, “but there was no need of them, for Gerbert in his greed for what was offered interrupted her with his consent almost in the middle of her speech, anxious as he was to be wealthy and escape the duress of poverty, and swift to enter upon the beautiful but perilous course of love” (*De nugis*, 357). As with the tale of Henno, Walter’s narrative voice gives warning to the audience from the start, though the protagonists are ignorant of, or willfully blind to, the dangers these females represent.

²⁷⁴ “Singulis ab ipsa que preteritorum habebat scienciam docetur noctibus, quid in die sit agendum” (*De nugis*, 356-57). Though Walter never records a moment of Gerbert’s recognition of Meridiana’s devilish identity, her unnatural knowledge and her association with the darkness of night, rather than the light of day, must eventually lead Gerbert to an awareness that she is not a “creature of God,” as she had asserted.

²⁷⁵ “In modico fit impar omnibus, uniuersos excedit, fit panis esuriencium, uestis egencium, et omnis oppressionis promta redempcio; et non est ciuitas cui non sit inuidiosa Remis” (*De nugis*, 356-57).

“bread of the hungry,” prevents Gerbert from partaking for himself in the bread which sates spiritual hunger, the Eucharist.

Thanks to Meridiana’s influence, Gerbert rises in ranks of priesthood and eventually becomes pope, taking the name of Sylvester II. But his allegiance is withheld from God, as revealed by his constant, careful refusal to partake in the Eucharist: “During the whole course of his priesthood, when the sacrament of the Lord’s body and blood was celebrated he never tasted it, either in fear or respect, but by the most wary concealment feigned the act which he did not perform.”²⁷⁶ Rather than being united with Christ and the Church through reception of the Eucharist, Gerbert is united with Meridiana, which causes him to practice recurrent acts of deception by feigning reception of the Holy Sacrament. This insight offers strong proof of his consort’s demonic identity, for his association with her causes him to shun communion with Christ. Just as Henno’s wife could not bear to receive the sacrament herself, Gerbert, knowingly allied to Meridiana, cannot bear to celebrate the Eucharist either. Walter’s account suggests that the Eucharist is not only repellent to demons themselves, but also those in the service of demons.

Yet a day of reckoning must come, as Meridiana herself warns Gerbert, promising that his life will continue in safety until he celebrates Mass in Jerusalem. With these words, she offers partial truth, while withholding knowledge that would save Gerbert. Thinking he is safe as long as he never travels to Jerusalem, Gerbert celebrates Mass in a church in Rome. After celebrating, he looks up to see Meridiana exulting and anticipating his death. Gerbert then learns that the church is named Jerusalem.²⁷⁷ At that very moment, he decides to make a public confession before cardinals, clergy, and common people, and he does not keep a single

²⁷⁶ “...et toto sacerdotii sui tempore confecto sacramento corporis et sanguinis Dominici non gustabat, ob timorem uel ob reuerenciam, et cautissimo furto quod non agebatur simulabat” (*De nugis*, 360-61).

²⁷⁷ This church named “Jerusalem” is the “Basilica of S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, so called because it was built to house relics, especially a relic of the True Cross, from Jerusalem” (*De nugis*, 360n2).

transgression hidden, but confesses fully. Walter does not offer any insight into the response of those who heard his confession, but the Pope's words prove efficacious in freeing him from Meridiana's power, for he "sincerely hallowed the short remainder of his life with assiduous and severe penance, and died in a good confession."²⁷⁸ Nothing more is said of Meridiana, and Gerbert's repentance is deemed sincere.

Walter's closing comments about Gerbert acknowledge the contradictory nature of his life: "Although through covetousness Gerbert was held captive a long time by the birdlime of the devil, he ruled the Roman Church greatly and with a strong hand..."²⁷⁹ Walter's evaluation of Gerbert is surprisingly positive, when one considers that most of Gerbert's deeds were influenced by a devil. Walter never explains what Meridiana's end game may have been.²⁸⁰ She gave Gerbert wealth, success, power, and influence, and under her guidance, Reims and its citizens prospered. The single detrimental effect of Gerbert's liaison with Meridiana appears to be his inability to receive the Eucharist. But for the clerics of the twelfth century like Walter, such a consequence would have been viewed as more than sufficient punishment, for this effectively cut Gerbert off from communion with Christ and the Church. As mentioned above, the faithful were expected to receive the Eucharist once

a year, at a minimum, while priests would communicate on a weekly or even daily basis.

For many long years, Gerbert would have suffered the constant torture of feigning to participate

²⁷⁸ "Gerbertus modicum uite sue residuum assidua at acerrima penitencia sincere beavit, et in bona confessione decessit" (*De nugis*, 360-61).

²⁷⁹ "Licet autem Gerbertus auaricie causa glutino diaboli diutissime detentus fuerit, magnifice tamen in manu forti Romanam rexit ecclesiam..." (*De nugis*, 362-63).

²⁸⁰ Just as Meridiana's motives remain hidden, the intent of Henno's bride and all the other demon-women is unknown as well. The only common denominator seems to be that the succubi are attracted to men with the potential to be in positions of power and influence. Perhaps the devils hope to enjoy supreme control over offices of political and sacred power.

in the eucharistic celebration, all the while knowing that he was truly cut off from the Eucharist's sacramental efficacy.

Gerald of Wales also highlights Gerbert's failure to receive the Host, as he relates a much more condensed account of Gerbert's life:

There is also the story of Gerbert, who, as often as he should have received the body of Christ when celebrating Mass, placed it secretly in a certain little locket hanging from his neck.²⁸¹ When at length this was discovered through confession, it was established in the Roman Church that popes turn themselves toward the people at the time of communion. One reads concerning Gerbert that he did penance, and that while still alive he caused to be amputated each of the limbs through which he had vowed and given himself to the devil. It is said that his marble tomb sweats great drops of water at the exact moment of a pope's death.²⁸²

Gerald's brief account omits any clear explanation of the cause of Gerbert's avoidance of the Host. No succubus such as Meridiana appears in this version. Instead, Gerald emphasizes the Eucharist, and makes Gerbert's penance far more dramatic. Gerald includes the implication that the pope's failure came about because he had "given himself to the devil," but his central concern is with Gerbert's treatment of the Eucharist. This makes sense in the context in which Gerald includes the tale within the *Gemma ecclesiastica*. The story appears at the end of his chapter which is entirely devoted to delineating the proper reverence, protocol, and means of preserving the Eucharist. In this chapter, Gerald is interested in exploring not only the proper treatment of the Eucharist, but also its mistreatment. He closes with this tale of Gerbert's distinct

²⁸¹ Interestingly, the word Gerald uses here is *perula*, which is identical to the word he used in the *Topographia Hibernica* when describing the wallet containing the *viaticum*, which the priest carried around his neck when he met with the werewolves in the woods of Meath.

²⁸² "Item exemplum de Gereberto, qui papa creatus quotiens celebrando corpus Christi sumere debuerat, illud in perula quadam a collo dependente clam deponebat. Quo tandem per confessionem ejusdem comperto, statutum est in ecclesia Romana ut summi pontifices se hora communionis versus populum vertant. De hoc Gereberto legitur quod paenitentiam egerit, et membra singula quibus se diabolo dederat ac devoverat sibi vivens etiam amputari fecerit. Dicitur etiam quod tumba ipsius marmorea contra imminentem papae interitum guttas aquae grandes desudat" (*Gemma*, 34). For the English translation, I use Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of the Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, trans. John J. Hagen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 28 [hereafter, "H.Gem"].

lack of devotion and reverence towards the sacrament, using the tale as a fitting admonition and conclusion to his chapter.

The Succubus Who Receives the Eucharist

The tales examined thus far have affirmed transubstantiation, encouraged regular reception of the sacrament, and subtly critiqued the use of trial by ordeal. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist revealed the true identity of the succubi, who might otherwise have remained concealed. Both demons and those under demonic influence, such as Gerbert, are repelled by the Holy Sacrament. However, a lengthy tale Gerald includes in the *Gemma* defies this expected pattern, as a succubus attends church on Easter Sunday and receives the Eucharist, all in an effort to induce a young cleric to be her lover.²⁸³ Gerald includes this narrative after a series of chapters exhorting priests and monks to practice continence. He tells colorful stories of men being tempted by women and vice versa, and shows sinful lovers receiving their fair punishment.²⁸⁴ But then he relates the encounter between the cleric and succubus, which neither rewards continence nor punishes illicit love. The cleric never actually has a licentious relationship with the succubus or any other woman, and yet he dies, agonized and miserable. It is a tragic tale, and one that complicates the understanding of the expected effects of the Eucharist upon demons and those associated with them.

Gerald makes it clear that this narrative is not set in some distant age or place, but in Gerald's own time and land. The protagonist is a cleric, one whose concerns and experiences would echo those of the author himself. "It happened in our time in England that a cleric (the son

²⁸³ *Gemma*, 228-31.

²⁸⁴ *Gemma*, 169-228. Walter and Gerald both wrote various blatantly misogynistic passages. The stories I have focused on in this chapter all portray women—or succubi—in a negative light. It must be noted that of the two, Gerald is slightly more positive towards women than is Walter; he does include stories of virtuous women who maintain their chastity in the face of temptation from men (See, for example, *Gemma*, 218-20).

of a certain priest) was walking one day at noon in his father's orchard."²⁸⁵ Though he sets the story in contemporary England, simultaneously Gerald includes signals that the supernatural is likely to intrude into the predictable routine of the cleric's life, for he walks in an orchard at noon. The supernatural motifs of a wooded setting and the noonday hour indicate that this will not be any commonplace tale, so perhaps it is not such a surprise to the audience as to the cleric when a beautiful woman appears and instantly offers him her love. Yet he is suspicious due to her sudden appearance and overeager demeanor, so he hesitates to begin a relationship. He puts her off but says he will return to the same place at the same time the next day.²⁸⁶

When they meet the following day, the lovely lady again tries to entice the cleric, but sees his reluctance and asks its cause. He speaks first, saying,

“If I knew that you had come from God, this would please me as it does you.” She replied: “What can I do to assure you of this?” “If, as I watch,” he said, “you will receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ from the priest's hands on Easter Sunday...I will love you without question above all creatures.” “Then you must watch diligently for my coming to your church on Easter Sunday,” she said, “for I will without fail approach the altar to do what you ask.”²⁸⁷

The cleric proposes that the woman undergo a trial by ingestion of sorts. Though she has not been accused of a crime, the cleric's request indicates his suspicion that the woman might be of supernatural origin, perhaps a succubus. He therefore proposes a trial by ingestion for his personal benefit, evidently confident that proof of the woman's orthodoxy would be provided by her ability to receive the Eucharist. The *Gemma* is dated to ca. 1197, and trials by ordeal were

²⁸⁵ “Contigit his nostris diebus in Anglia quod clericus, filius presbyteri cujusdam, in pomarium patris meridie quadam intravit...” (*H.Gem.*, 174; *Gemma*, 228).

²⁸⁶ *Gemma*, 228.

²⁸⁷ “Si scirem te ex Dei parte venisse, non minus hoc mihi quam tibi placeret.” Cui illa: “Ed quid faciendo te potero super hoc certificare?” At ille: “Si die,” inquit, “Paschali,” quia parum ante Pascha, in quadragesima scilicet, hoc acciderat, “corpus Jesu Christi de manu presbyteri me vidente susceperis, super omnes te proculdubio diligam creaturas.” Et illa: “Adventum itaque meum eodem die in ecclesia vestra diligenter observes, quia ad altare tunc id facture indubitanter accedam” (*H.Gem.*, 175; *Gemma*, 229).

not yet prohibited.²⁸⁸ The cleric could consider such a test to be a legitimate and reliable means of determining whether or not the woman harbored hidden evil. While a well-traveled and well-trained churchman such as Gerald was familiar with the rising tide of criticism towards the trial by ordeal which was voiced in Paris, it is possible that the young cleric in England may not be aware of the growing disapproval of the tests. Whether he knowingly proposes the trial in spite of Church disapproval, or does so in ignorance, the test does not produce the cleric's desired effect.

The woman does not display any unease when hearing the cleric's proposal; her response evinces her unmitigated confidence in her ability to receive the Host. Unlike the horror which Henno's bride and the other demon-wives display at the thought of merely standing in the presence of the consecrated Host, this woman readily agrees to enter church and receive the Holy Sacrament. Her assent is not a mere façade, for she does indeed appear as promised on Easter Sunday:

When all the men and woman had received Communion, she came at the end of the line. She was by far more beautiful to look at and more noble than all the other women. She approached devoutly (as it seemed) and received the sacred host and the consecrated wine from the priest's hand. When she was leaving the altar she glanced over to the side and smiled at the cleric. He was amazed and overjoyed; yet he was still hesitant when he met her in the orchard after lunch.²⁸⁹

The woman's surpassing beauty sets her apart from the other communicants; again, this trait echoes the reputations of fairies and suggests her supernatural origin. After receiving the Eucharist, she smiles at the cleric, perhaps to prove that she has not hidden the Host in her mouth

²⁸⁸ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 32.

²⁸⁹ "Et cum omnes communicate essent, tam mares quam mulieres, demum ultima mulierum venit, et illa longe caeteris omnibus una tam speciosior visa quam praecellentior. Quae accedens ad altare devote, sicut videbatur, a manu presbyteri hostiam sacram et vinum consecratum suscepit. Et sic reversa quasi oculos in obliquum trahens, clericum illum subridendo respexit. Admirans autem et congratulans ille, et tamen adhuc haesitans post prandium ei in pomerio occurit" (*H.Gem.*, 175; *Gemma*, 229).

without swallowing it. Such deceptions were said to be practiced by the laypeople or witches on occasion, as a means of stealing Host and then using it for personal protection, profit, or, in the case of witches, desecration.²⁹⁰ The cleric is amazed at her ability to receive the Eucharist, and his joy likely comes from his hope that she is proven by this feat to be an orthodox and well-meaning fairy, rather than a succubus. Even yet, some underlying sense of caution causes the cleric to hesitate to move forward in the relationship. His vacillation stands in contrast to the eagerness with which Henno and Gerbert entered unquestioningly into relationships with the mysterious beauties they encountered.

Though the cleric still hesitates as he meets the lady in the orchard, she considers the cleric to be already committed, and even obligated to fulfill his promise, as does Gerald as narrator, who declares: “In truth, she had already conquered him for herself (consider the agreement, almost a vow, that they had made) and at once began to indulge in licentious kisses and embraces, bent upon complete satisfaction of her lust.”²⁹¹ Gerald refers back to the cleric’s agreement that if the woman successfully received communion, he would love her “without question above all creatures.”²⁹² Thus the cleric’s guilt seems to originate with his suggestion of the eucharistic test and his correlated promise to love her if she succeeded. His moral failing is not in commencing an affair, which he never does, but rather in consenting to test her in the first place. Gerald’s disapproval of the trial by ordeal is a likely subtext of this narrative. Furthermore, the woman’s ability to pass the test is shown to be unreliable as a proof of her orthodoxy or humanity, as evidenced by the events that follow. Gerald also continues his theme from previous chapters of warning clergymen to practice continence. He criticizes the cleric for thoughtlessly

²⁹⁰ For more on theft and desecration of the Host, see Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 207-40.

²⁹¹ “Ipso vero statim eo tanquam suo, puta quem sibi conventionis, et quasi stipulationis jure, jam evicerat, licentious utens et osculis atque amplexibus vacans, se totam in libidinis usus pronam applicuit” (*H.Gem.*, 175; *Gemma*, 229).

²⁹² “...super omnes te proculdubio diligam creaturas” (*H.Gem.*, 175; *Gemma*, 229).

making an agreement so serious as to be almost a vow, and for being willing to enter into an immoral relationship. Though the cleric does not fulfill his promise, the fact that he harbored the intent and tried to test her, instead of turning the woman away directly seems to be enough to condemn the young man's actions.

The cleric's downfall begins with this second meeting, as he hesitates to enter into a relationship with the mysterious woman. He suspects that the eucharistic test may not be as reliable a proof as he hoped. Because he is "not yet absolutely certain,"²⁹³ he grabs at the nearest opportunity for diversion and calls over greyhound named Galiena that had followed him into the orchard. His lack of attention deeply offends the lady, and as he turns to her again, she declares, "Away with you! For having neglected me for a dog, you will never see me again. And since you have ignored me for the sake of Galiena, be assured of this, Galiena shall revenge me on you for this insult."²⁹⁴ Speaking this ominous threat, she vanishes as suddenly as she appeared.

The cleric subsequently does meet a girl named Galiena who refuses to love him in return, even when both his parents and hers urge Galiena to marry her suitor. Years pass, and the cleric is repeatedly rejected. Eventually he joins a Cistercian monastery and becomes a monk, but continues to be afflicted by his longing for Galiena: "Asleep or awake, in choir or in bed, that is, praying and assisting at Mass, or doing anything else, he was constantly plagued by desire."²⁹⁵ His inescapable yearning for the girl prevents the cleric from contemplating God or performing his duties in the monastery; even as he does his part to assist at Mass, he may be remembering back to that fateful Easter Mass when his troubles began. His condition is made

²⁹³ "Ipse vero nondum plene certificatus..." (*H.Gem.*, 175; *Gemma*, 229).

²⁹⁴ "Vade," inquit, "quia me de caetero nunquam videbis, quam propter canem deseruisti; et quoniam propter Galienam me reliquisti, Galiena me super hac injuria de te proculdubio vindicabit" (*H.Gem.*, 175; *Gemma*, 229-30).

²⁹⁵ "...quinimmo tam dormienti quam vigilantanti, tam in choro quam etiam thoro, tam ornato scilicet et missarum celebrationibus astanti quam etiam aliud agenti, se illa continue pestis ingressit..." (*H.Gem.*, 176; *Gemma*, 230).

known to the men of his monastery and all of the Cistercian Order, who offer up special prayers on his behalf. However, the prayers have absolutely no effect, and the cleric dies shortly afterwards, in agony until his last breath.²⁹⁶

Gerald's story contains vexing and unexpected reversals; first, a lady evincing traits of both fairy and succubus seeks to seduce a man, and then is confronted with the Eucharist. Thus far the story is familiar. But what is unexpected, when considered in contrast to the preceding tales, is that the Eucharist does not appear to have any effect on the supernatural woman. Gerald may deliberately show this trial by ingestion failing to be efficacious because he desires to critique and discourage the practice of trial by ordeal. But if the woman is indeed a demon in disguise, the transubstantial nature of the Eucharist should still cause this devil to respond as did all of the others, with panicked flight. Instead, she receives the sacrament without any apparent difficulty, and then vengefully predicts the cleric's eventual ruin and death. One would expect for the prayers of the entire Cistercian order to be effective in delivering the cleric-turned-monk of his affliction, but, as Gerald blatantly writes: "the prayers, which should have obtained for the cleric some peace and respite from his trial, were of no avail whatever."²⁹⁷ Gerald was never a great admirer of the Cistercians, so perhaps this is a small jab at their order, but it also has the troubling implication of bringing into question the efficacy of prayer, and hence of God's power. The last final unexpected blow falls with the protagonist's death. No means of deliverance or protection is efficacious, not even the Holy Sacrament or the prayers of the devout. The entire episode seems to call God's power and presence into question.

²⁹⁶ *Gemma*, 230.

²⁹⁷ "...nihil ei prorsus proficere potuit quo magis a persecutione praescripta pacem obtinere aut respirare valeret" (*H.Gem.*, 176; *Gemma*, 231).

After recording the monk's death, Gerald offers one closing paragraph, which raises more questions than it answers:

There are many things in this story to be wondered at: first, that an actual apparition (which is not something real or true) was seen receiving the Lord's body and blood. [Also] amazing is the fact that [the apparition] actually foresaw at the time of her [rejection and] indignation the revenge to come in the person of Galiena and, indeed, because of Galiena. There can be no doubt that the apparition knew only as much as Divine Providence permitted it to know, and no more. Such a grave temptation and persecution, in truth, was divinely inflicted [on the cleric] either as a punishment or as a purification, that is, to punish his sins committed previously or to increase his good merits (as was the case with Job and Tobias) if he would persevere.²⁹⁸

Gerald begins by raising issues to be wondered at, rather than offering explanations for each mystery in the narrative. He remarks first over the mystery of how an apparition could receive the Lord's body and blood.²⁹⁹ Gerald seems interested in the question of the apparition's physicality, wondering if a spiritual being can receive physical food. Also, Gerald does not deny or explain away her reception of the Eucharist, instead affirming that she was indeed seen consuming the sacrament. The possibility of a deception is thus eliminated, and the audience is left to puzzle out how the spirit was able to receive the Eucharist.

Gerald's final comments assert that the apparition was under God's control, but her behavior implies that she is no angel, but is instead an evil spirit who is allowed to visit the cleric to test or punish him. The ironic reversal then becomes evident: when the cleric sought to put the spirit to the test by instructing it to receive the Eucharist, he did not perceive that he himself was being put to the test by God. There are several scriptural analogues of men being tested and tried

²⁹⁸ Plurima hic igitur admiranda concurrunt, quod enim corpus Domini et sanguinem sumere videbatur apparitio revera et non veritas fuit. Sed quod vindictam in Galiena futuram, et quasi propter Galienam praedixit, et tam immutabili veritate ipsa indignationis hora praevideit, longe vehementius admirandum. Sed proculdubio ei tantum et non amplius innotuit, quantum scire divina dispositione permissa fuit. Illa vero temptatio tam gravis et persecutio vel ad punitionem ei divinitus immisa fuerat vel purgationem hoc est vel ad punienda delicta quae praecesserant vel ad augenda, sicut in Job et Tobia, si finalem habuit patientiam, merita bona" (*H.Gem.*, 176; *Gemma*, 231).

²⁹⁹ Both Walter and Gerald repeatedly use the term *apparitio*, "apparition," to refer to evil spirits. See, for example, *Gemma*, 232-33; *De nugis*, 160.

by spirits, such as the experiences of Job and Tobias which Gerald cites. Job and Tobias are righteous men who, unlike the cleric, survive the Devil's temptations and attacks and enjoy subsequent peace and prosperity.³⁰⁰ There is also the most famous instance of temptation, when Christ faces the devil in the wilderness, but he, in contrast to the cleric, is fully aware that he is being tested, and he triumphs over every trial.³⁰¹

Conversely, there are also biblical accounts such as that of King Saul, whom God permits to be tormented by an evil spirit. Saul sins and turns from devotion to God, and the spirit comes to punish rather than to purify him.³⁰² Gerald does not write any description of the cleric's life and deeds before his extraordinary temptation, but given the fact that he died in agony, he seems more analogous to Saul than to Job or Tobias. This would also explain the reason that prayers interceding on his behalf are ineffectual. God may be exercising His divine judgment. But the question of how the succubus was able to receive the Eucharist still lingers unresolved. Gerald offers no explanation in this chapter, but this story is not the only instance in which Gerald records a demon coming in contact with the Eucharist and having no difficulty tolerating it. An investigation of another anecdote by Gerald may help shed light on the lingering question from the cleric's tale.

The Division between Body and Soul

In both the *Gemma ecclesiastica* and *Itinerarium Kambriae* (*The Journey through Wales*), Gerald tells of a woman possessed by a demon which would appear visibly in her body in the form of swelling under her skin.³⁰³ Like the story of the cleric, Gerald claims that these

³⁰⁰ See Job, chapters 1-42 and Tobit, 1-14.

³⁰¹ Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

³⁰² 1 Samuel 16:14-23.

³⁰³ The story is found in *Distinctio* 1.12 of the *Itinerarium Kambriae*. (The *Itinerarium* is first completed in 1191, but Gerald continues to edit the work through 1214.) In the *Gemma*, Gerald first introduces this demoniac in 1.17, and continues talking about her in 1.18. His emphasis in 1.17 is to encourage penance. The demon is able to list specific sins of the people it meets, until they go to confession, at which point the demon cannot list or even

events happened in his own time, but in the region of Poitiers, not in England. Reflecting common practice of the twelfth century, those attempting to exorcise the demon tried to use holy items such as the Gospels, relics, and the Eucharist.³⁰⁴

When the book of the gospels or the relics of the saints were placed, for example, upon a swelling in the throat, the demon would immediately go down into the entrails, and when the holy objects were placed there, it would descend into the privy parts of the body. But when they were placed there, the demon would retreat to the upper parts of the body. At length, when they offered the woman the body of Christ to receive, the evil spirit said: "Fools, what you are doing is of no avail because what you are giving her is not the food of the body but of the soul, and, in truth, power has been given to me not over her soul, but over her body."³⁰⁵

This final statement, though voiced through the mocking words of a demon, voices a theological concept Gerald is interested in setting forth, as evidenced by the next anecdote he offers, inserted immediately after this tale.

Gerald writes of a skeptical person who wanted to determine whether or not the Host truly nourished the soul instead of being mere food for the body. Thus the skeptic ate the consecrated hosts continuously for three days, but he remained desperately hungry in spite of the large quantity he had consumed.³⁰⁶ Gerald explains the event by asserting, "For the body of Christ is the food of the soul, not of the stomach. When we take other food, we digest it and assimilate it. When this [Eucharistic] food is taken, however, it digests and assimilates us and

remember any of their sins (*Gemma*, 53). Gerald's encouragement of confession reflects his Parisian training and predates Lateran IV's mandate of annual confession.

³⁰⁴ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 232; 255. Through the late fourteenth century, the cross, the Gospels, the Eucharist, and relics are employed in attempts to cast out demons. There are many accounts of attempts "at exorcism through the application of holy objects" (Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 232). Often these attempts are unsuccessful, and those recording the events do not hesitate to write about the failures as well as successes.

³⁰⁵ "...posito super guttur inflatum libro evangelico vel reliquiis sanctorum statim in ventrem descendebat, et inde etiam cum apponeretur ad inferiores inguinis partes. Sed cum et ibi poneretur ad partes iterum superiores resiliebat. Tandem vero cum corpus Christi mulieri offerrent ad sumendum, respondit daemonium: "Stulti, nihil est quod agitis, non enim cibus est corporis quod ei datis sed spiritus; mihi vero non in animam ejus sed in corpus est data potestas" (*H.Gem.*, 43; *Gemma*, 54).

³⁰⁶ *Gemma*, 54.

makes us part of itself.”³⁰⁷ With this insight, and the words voiced by the demoniac, Gerald asserts that the Eucharist is spiritual food, set apart from every other food people may consume. It affects the human’s soul, and unites the recipient with Christ and the Church, but it does not fill a person’s stomach, or drive away a demon that possesses the person’s body.

By the early twelfth century, consensus held that an evil spirit could not ever inhabit a human’s soul, though the Holy Spirit could.³⁰⁸ However, a devil could inhabit a human’s body. And if a demon did enter a person, they were thought to reside in the coolest and moistest part of the body, the bowels. Meanwhile, the heart, which was the seat of the soul and spirit, was reserved for the Holy Spirit.³⁰⁹ There is interesting parallelism and contrast in the ideas of possession and eucharistic reception. The Eucharist is viewed as a sort of divine possession, as recipients eat the body and blood of Christ, and are in turn assimilated into His body.³¹⁰ But if a person is possessed by a demon, the spirit controls only the physical body, as Gerald indicates in the *Gemma ecclesiastica*. What happens, then, when a succubus who does not possess a human soul but maintains the appearance of a human body, receives the Eucharist? Though the figure appears to be a human, she is actually a spirit in a fabricated body. Thus the Eucharist may enter the body of the apparition, but will find no destination. If the succubus were questioned, she may answer, like the demoniac, that the Holy Sacrament is food for the soul, and since she does not possess a human soul, the Host does not affect her. Gerald may have had such an explanation

³⁰⁷ “Corpus enim Christi cibus mentis est non ventris. Alium cibum in nos sumendo trajicimus et incorporamus. Hic vero cibus cum sumitur nos in se trajicit et incorporat, et nos sua membra facit” (*H.Gem.*, 44; *Gemma*, 54).

³⁰⁸ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 191.

³⁰⁹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 197.

³¹⁰ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 210.

in mind, and within the *Gemma* he provides his audience with the information which would allow them to reach this conclusion.³¹¹

Gerald's claim that the Eucharist affects the soul rather than the body, and therefore cannot harm a demon, seems to conflict with his account of the demon-bride who flees when confronted with the consecration of the Eucharist. But Gerald of Wales is untroubled by apparent contradictions within his writing, and even seems to relish such complications, perhaps hoping they will spark discussion among his audiences.³¹² Also, the tales could be working to affirm different aspects of the Eucharist's nature. While the demon-bride stories displace the practice of trial by ordeal through their affirmation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, this tale of the cleric proves the irrelevancy of trial by ingestion by showing that even an evil spirit can be unaffected outwardly by the Eucharist.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated several different tales in which demons—specifically, succubi—interact with the Eucharist. Walter Map relates the story of Henno, whose marriage to a succubus is discovered by his attentive mother, as she observes the lady's persistent avoidance of being present in church during the consecration of the Eucharist. Walter's account is followed by the similar versions of Gerald of Wales, Gervase of Tilbury, and the anonymous author of *Richard Coer de Leon*, in each of which a beautiful wife evades the Eucharist for years, and finally reveals her demonic identity when forced to remain present for the consecration of the Host. All of these tales effectively demonstrate that devout Christians should willingly receive

³¹¹ Peter of Blois states that a popular subject of debate in the schools of Paris was whether or not the soul was tied to specific parts of the body (Rigg, "Walter Map," 728). Gerald's story could certainly open up avenues for further debate on the subject of the soul, the body, demons, humans, and the Eucharist.

³¹² Also, the stories are included in very different works directed at varied audiences. The *Gemma ecclesiastica* is meant to be a book of instruction for priests and clerics, while *De principis instructione* has a more aristocratic audience in mind.

the Eucharist at least once a year; those who avoid the sacrament are suspect. The stories simultaneously indicate the authors' interest in displacing peoples' confidence in the trial by ordeal, while encouraging belief in transubstantiation. The real presence of Christ in the sacrament, rather than forced ingestion of the Host, is effective in driving demons away.

Walter's tale of Gerbert, the clergyman who rises to the position of pope through the influence of the succubus Meridiana, shows that not only demons, but also those who willingly place themselves under the influence of demons are repelled by the Eucharist. Like Walter's tale of Henno, this story affirms the necessity of regular communication, and shows that Gerbert's conscience is tormented by his avoidance of the sacrament. It is only through public confession and penance that Gerbert is brought back into right standing with the Church, and is able once again to receive the Eucharist.

Gerald's tale in the *Gemma*, which portrays a succubus who seems to have no problem receiving the Eucharist, complicates the assumption that demons are always repelled by the Host. However, Gerald's tale is bringing attention to a different aspect of theological truth related to the sacrament. The succubus's ability to receive the Eucharist can be explained by the fact that though she appears to inhabit a physical form, she is in fact a spirit, lacking a soul. And as the Holy Sacrament is food for the soul, not for the body, receiving the Host does not affect her as it does a human. All of these narratives, crafted by clerical authors, not only entertain, but also offer theological instruction to attentive audience members. The tales allow the authors to encourage regular reception of the Eucharist, to discourage the practice of trial by ordeal, to affirm the doctrine of transubstantiation, and to demonstrate that the eucharistic elements are food which directly affects the human soul, rather than the body. Clerical writers such as Walter Map and Gerald of Wales effectively crafted encounters between demons and the Host which

allowed them to address many of the concerns and questions surrounding the Eucharist in an engaging and thought-provoking fashion.

Chapter Three: Fairies and the Eucharist

Introduction

Chapter Two explored the way clerics such as Walter Map and Gerald of Wales deployed demonic encounters with the Host in order to encourage annual reception of the Eucharist, censure the practice of the trial by ordeal, and uphold the doctrine of transubstantiation. This chapter turns to instances when fairies receive the Eucharist, as in the anonymous *lai Desiré* and Marie de France's *lai Yonec*. I intend to read these two *lais* in conversation with one another, an endeavor which has not yet been undertaken. While Marie's well-known *lais* have received ongoing scholarly attention, *Desiré* has been perpetually overlooked, receiving only glancing mentions in scholarship. The *lai* offers many avenues for further investigation, as it is filled with vexing tensions between the fairy realm and orthodoxy.³¹³

Desiré tells of the Scottish knight Desiré's encounter with a fairy lady near the hermitage he has visited since childhood. She becomes his lover and bears him two children, but as time progresses Desiré feels guilt for his relationship outside of marriage and fears the fairy lady may be of evil origin. He confesses to the hermit, which offends his fairy love. She refuses to meet him again. Instantly remorseful, Desiré falls into deathly illness for a year, and when his lady finally reappears, she rebukes him for doubting her goodness and offers to receive the Eucharist with him in church. After doing so, they recommence their relationship until the lady finally appears in the king of Scotland's court with her two nearly adult children, asking that the king grant her the right to marry Desiré and take him back to the Otherworld with her. The king

³¹³ Among the few studies of *Desiré* are Martin Gosman, "Le Lai de *Desiré*: une lecture" *Rapports-Het Franse Boek* 52 (1982), 97-110; Paul Verhuyck, "Le Lai de *Desiré*: narrèmes hagiographiques" *Les Lettres Romanes*, 40 (1986), 3-17; Sara Sturm-Maddox, "Configuring Alterity: Rewriting the Fairy Other" *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, ed. Douglas Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 125-38 at 126-29.

agrees, and then marries Desiré's daughter himself and knights Desiré's son. The *lai* ends with Desiré joyfully departing to the Otherworld with his fairy love, now his bride.³¹⁴

Yonec narrates the appearance of a fairy knight, Muldumarec, to a noblewoman who is confined in a tower in Caerwent by her jealous old husband. Muldumarec wishes to be her lover, and she acquiesces on the condition that he can demonstrate his belief in God. He does so by reciting a statement of faith and receiving the Eucharist. Their affair carries on until the husband discovers them and mortally wounds Muldumarec, who returns to his kingdom in the Otherworld to die. Before death, he tells the lady that she will shortly bear him a son who will avenge them. She raises their son, Yonec, to be a knight. As they stand at Muldumarec's graveside, she finally reveals the truth of his birth and his father's murder, then dies of grief. Yonec immediately slays his stepfather, avenging his parents' deaths, and becomes king of his father's fairy realm.³¹⁵

Scholarship has traditionally situated fairies as independent beings who operate in a sphere apart from human rule and religion. But no marginal, non-religious space is created for the fairies in the *lais* of *Desiré* and *Yonec*. I argue that instead, the authors deliberately bring fairies from the Otherworld into the presence of orthodox practices, spaces, and of Christ himself, embodied in the Eucharist. This chapter will explore some of their motives for doing so.

It is simplest to explain the reception of the Eucharist on the part of Muldumarec and Desiré's lady as a means of proving that they are not demonic. However, as we have already seen in Chapter Two, there are other twelfth-century tales where demons or succubi receive the Eucharist without any negative affect. The ability to receive the Eucharist was not a fail-proof

³¹⁴ "Le lay du Desiré," *French Arthurian Literature, Volume IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 41-79. [hereafter, "*Desiré*"]. *Desiré* is one of four extant lays where a human man falls in love with a fairy woman, the other three being *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, and *Lanval*.

³¹⁵ Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Éditions Champion, 1983), 102-119. [hereafter, "*Lais de Marie*"].

sign of a being's orthodoxy. Moreover, testing a person through trial by ingestion was coming under increasing criticism leading up to its prohibition in 1215. Therefore, though partaking in the sacrament may have offered a reassuring indication that the recipient was not demonic, I believe the authors were undertaking a larger endeavor of *incorporation*. As fairies began to appear in the Anglo-Norman court, both in tales for entertainment and in the writings of clerics, it is natural that there would be unease and tension over what these beings represented and where they fit in the orthodox order of the universe. *Lais* such as *Desiré* and *Yonec* acknowledge that the relationship of fairies to faith must be faced, even though the interplay of the two causes tensions, fears, and dilemmas to arise in the *lais*—and likely in the listening audiences, as well. But these tensions are resolved, and the outcome in each *lai* is an accord between the realms of orthodoxy and the Otherworld, achieved by the fairies willingly incorporating themselves into the Body of Christ, and by the humans, in return, accepting the fairies as devout beings and entering into the Otherworld without fear or hesitation.

The Nature of Fairies

For over fifty years in scholarship, there has been a general agreement regarding the nature of fairies as autonomous creatures, existing outside the realm of Christian orthodoxy. They are able to slip in and out of the Otherworld, which is a realm apart from earth, heaven, hell, or purgatory. A foundational work on fairies is a chapter titled “The *Longaevi*” in C.S. Lewis’s *The Discarded Image*, in which he outlines three types of fairies represented in medieval and Renaissance literature, and summarizes prevalent theories of fairy nature and origin.³¹⁶ His

³¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 122-38. Lewis titled the chapter “The *Longaevi*,” meaning longlivers. He describes three types of fairies known throughout the medieval and Early Modern eras: 1) Fairies as ominous, dark beings classified among the outcasts and monsters like giants, witches, hags, dwarfs, and sprites. This view became most prominent in the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth century. 2) Fairies as the whimsical beings of small stature and magical ability who flee from humans and prefer their own private realms in nature. 3) The High Fairies, beings of human height and of beauty, wealth, and abilities which far surpass that of humans (Lewis, *Discarded Image*,

work offers an encompassing overview of the medieval and Early Modern understanding of the fairy-folk, and has influenced scholarship on the subject to this day. Lewis describes fairies as “marginal, fugitive creatures. They are perhaps the only creatures to whom the Model does not assign, as it were, an official status...They intrude a welcome hint of wildness and uncertainty into a universe that is in danger of being a little too self-explanatory, too luminous.”³¹⁷ Lewis’s depiction of the fairies as creatures on the margin, existing outside the ordered model of the universe defined by classical and Christian thought, does indeed describe many of the narratives in which fairies appear, but does not account for *lais* such as *Yonec* and *Desiré*, where fairies come from the margins to the center of the orthodoxy by offering to receive the Eucharist and assimilate into the Christian faith.

For several decades the nature and role of fairies in English romance went mostly untreated, until Helen Cooper addressed the subject, writing in accord with Lewis and situating fairies as entities independent of human systems. In describing the relation of fairies to Christianity, she says that “[p]opular belief, and the romances with it, most commonly took fairies to be outside theological schemata, a third order alongside the angelic (fallen or not) and the human. The place occupied by the fairies was, therefore, most often defined simply as *somewhere else*: a fifth world to set beside Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and middle-earth.”³¹⁸ While there are many romances, *lais*, and chronicles where fairies stand outside theological frameworks, there are many others in which authors bring fairies into direct contact with issues, practices, and spaces of theological significance. For instance, in *Yonec*, Muldumarec recites a

124-34). The High Fairies are those I am concerned with in this chapter; they are the fairies of twelfth-century chronicles, romances and *lais*. Lewis’s summary of theories of fairy origins will be discussed more fully below.

³¹⁷ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 122.

³¹⁸ Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 179.

credo, receives the *viaticum* administered at the hands of a priest, and is buried in an abbey where he is honored by all the inhabitants. In *Desiré*, the knight first meets his fairy love near a hermitage, and later stands at her side in church as she receives the Eucharist, and finally enters church with her yet again, in order to be married. Instead of residing perpetually in a “fifth world,” the fairies voluntarily enter the sacred spaces of Christianity, stand in the presence of priests, and celebrate the sacrament which twelfth-century authors and audiences are fully aware incorporates recipients into the Body of the Church and Christ himself. These are not fairies “outside theological schemata,” but fairies *incorporated into* the theological schemata of twelfth century orthodoxy.³¹⁹

Corinne Saunders, like Lewis and Cooper, casts fairies as anomalous beings inhabiting a space tangential to the human world, but as she describes the Otherworld, she notes that it is both “infernal, connected with violence, suffering and death, and...a brighter, more powerful reflection of the human world, a rival kingdom that threatens the human world.”³²⁰ Specifically analyzing the fairy kingdom in *Sir Orfeo*, she sees Orfeo as a king able to assert “the power of his own kingdom and its Christian, chivalric order” over the fairy “forces of magic, enchantment, and death.”³²¹ In her reading, the fairy realm stands in opposition to the Christian kingdom of humans. While this is the case in various romances that situate fairies in opposition to humans, it is also important to explore the instances, as in *Desiré* and *Yonec*, when rulers of the fairy realm align themselves with rather than against Christian mortals.

While Lewis, Cooper, and Saunders’s emphasis on fairies existing in a space separate from, or in opposition to, the human Christian world holds true in many instances, I wish to point

³¹⁹ Cooper, *English Romance*, 179.

³²⁰ Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 204.

³²¹ Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, 204.

out that there are complications and variations to the overall patterns they have described. Not all fairies are created equal. As these scholars would readily agree, medieval authors could choose to include fairies in their stories for a range of diverse purposes, evoking varied meanings and imaginative responses. To use a pop-culture parallel, the vampire has been deployed in dramatically differing ways in literature and film. The vampire is at times a heterodox threat, a blood-drinker and murderer, averse to the Host and the cross. At other times the vampire is transformed into a figure of immortality, beauty, and wealth, bearing a conscience and capable of loving humans. Like the many valences of vampires (or werewolves, or zombies, for that matter) in pop culture of the twenty-first century, fairies of the twelfth century, and indeed for the next several centuries, could be of all different sorts. Hostile or helpful, treacherous or trustworthy, loveless or lovers, fairies were portrayed in widely varying roles. The nuances of the ways in which authors chose to portray fairies and depict them in relation to humans and Christianity merits closer analysis. Such an endeavor could fill a book on its own, and a comprehensive study is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I will use the *lais* of *Yonec* and *Desiré* and their fairies' reception of the Eucharist as a case study of sorts. I hope to complicate accepted views of fairies as independent of the Christian faith, and open avenues for further research.

Theories of Fairy Origin

A basic understanding of the prevailing theories of fairy origin is valuable when considering the relationship of fairies to faith. The varying explanations which become prominent in the twelfth century were subtle, even within each author's corpus. For example, Walter Map's stance on fairy origins is so nuanced that scholars to this day disagree on his view. As mentioned in chapter two, Carl Watkins argues that Walter perceived all mythical creatures,

from satyrs to fairies, as demons cast out of heaven and wandering the earth.³²² But other scholars such as Michael Faletra see the Walter's fairy brides as benign, non-demonic beings, who are never brought into association with matters of faith and who operate independently of the Christian universe.³²³ The lack of consensus on a single clerical writer's understanding of fairies makes it clear how complex the task of describing theories of fairy origins can be when taking into consideration hundreds of separate works.

However, in a helpful summation, Lewis sets forth four theories which enjoyed prominence throughout the medieval and Early Modern periods. Fairies could be considered 1) a third type of reasoning beings, separate from the orders of angels and men; 2) demoted angels, who did not join Lucifer's rebellion but also did not side with God, and were thus banished to the earth and are destined for Hell or Heaven on Doomsday; 3) humans who have died and yet live in the Otherworld, as reflected in *Thomas the Rymer*, where a road diverges into three paths, leading to Heaven, Hell, and 'fair Elfland'; 4) fallen angels, or, in other words, demons.³²⁴ After describing the four predominant explanations of fairy origins, Lewis concludes, "Such were the efforts to find a socket into which the Fairies would fit. No agreement was achieved. As long as the Fairies remained at all they remained evasive."³²⁵ Lewis's final diagnosis of fairies as elusive beings, impossible to categorize and pin down, rings true. Yet it is significant to note that all four theories seek to situate the fairies in relation to orthodox orders of humans, angels, demons, and in relation to spaces of Heaven and Hell. As medieval authors wrote of the fairy people and

³²² Carl Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety in Medieval Wonder Stories," *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Sophie Page, *UCL/Neale Series on British History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 45-64 at 48-49.

³²³ Michael Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 78-83.

³²⁴ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 134-39. Lewis's four categories are not exhaustive, but encompass the most popular views. In Marie de France's *Yonec*, though, she hints at fairy origins which do not align with any of the four prevailing theories. For further discussion, see below.

³²⁵ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 138.

sought to explain their origins, there was a reoccurring interest in situating fairies in terms of the Christian universe.

Evidence of this interest appears in many narratives, such as the *lais* of *Yonec* and *Desiré*. Though these are the only two known twelfth-century examples of fairies receiving the Eucharist, if one looks forward to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one finds another fairy figure who regularly celebrates Mass in his castle: Bertilak, the Green Knight himself. Moreover, aside from examples of fairies receiving the sacrament, there are other instances when fairies offer assurances of their orthodoxy in order to put their human acquaintances at ease concerning their origin, such as in *Melusine*, *Huon of Burdeux*, and *Partonope of Blois*.³²⁶ Furthermore, there are *lais* like *Espine* and also *Yonec*, where humans pray, asking God to aid them in their love relationships, and they immediately receive magical responses. All of these incidents demonstrate a persistent interest in placing faith into interaction with the fantastic beings and events associated with the Otherworld.

By the sixteenth century, fairies were pushed over the margins from the Otherworld to the infernal, due to the inability to tolerate multiple explanations for their origin, joined with a heightened suspicion of witchcraft and heterodoxy.³²⁷ Lewis comments perceptively, “One might have expected the High Fairies to have been expelled by science; I think they were actually expelled by a darkening of superstition.”³²⁸ The fears of the sixteenth century were also strong in the twelfth century, however. As fairies became prominent in the literature of the Anglo-Norman court, there was considerable unease regarding their possible demonic identity,

³²⁶ For further discussion of these works, see James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 116.

³²⁷ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 137.

³²⁸ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 138.

evidenced in both chronicles and *lais*.³²⁹ But thanks in part, I believe, to tales such as *Yonec* and *Desiré* which incorporate fairies into the realm of orthodoxy—or at the very least suggest that they are something other than demonic—the fairies were not definitively identified as devils. They instead endured as figures who could evoke positive, if not always devout, affiliations in medieval narratives throughout the subsequent centuries.

Reception of the Eucharist: Merely a Demon-Screening Device, or Much More?

As Chapter Two demonstrated, incubi and succubi share many characteristics with fairies: they are physically beautiful, they possess wealth, power, and supernatural capabilities, and they often appear in nature settings and make themselves sexually available to human protagonists.³³⁰ Thus the suspicion with which characters in the tales receive these supernatural beings is well-merited, and would surely be felt by the audiences listening to the narratives, as well. The boundary between demons and fairies is a thin one in twelfth-century literature. Helen Cooper draws the dividing line between the two groups by stating that fairies, unlike demons, exist in an anomalous space without any “precise metaphysical or theological status.”³³¹ Fairies offer proof that they are not demons, Cooper says, by “passing a test of true faith such as partaking of the Eucharist, or simply by naming God.”³³² In Cooper’s view, the purpose for a fairy to receive the sacrament is simply to assure that he or she is non-demonic. James Wade, likewise, places fairies outside of orthodox and heterodox bounds, describing them as “adoxic”

³²⁹ There is particular suspicion surrounding fairy women who seduce human men. Walter Map and Gerald of Wales both address such figures, as discussed in Chapter Two. In the early thirteenth century Gervase of Tilbury definitively casts fairies as equivalent to succubi, saying how he has seen “many men who had attained the summit of worldly happiness [thanks to their fairy lovers], but then, as soon as they renounced the embraces of fays of this kind, or spoke about them in public, they lost not only their worldly prosperity, but even the solace of a wretched life.” Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, ed. and trans. S.E.Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 731.

³³⁰ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 118.

³³¹ Cooper, *English Romance*, 179.

³³² Cooper, *English Romance*, 179.

instead.³³³ He briefly mentions the Eucharist test, saying it is not a test for fairies, but rather for demons.³³⁴ If an individual successfully receives the Eucharist, then he or she must be a fairy, not a devil.³³⁵ Thus, Cooper and Wade argue that fairies exist in a sphere separate from Christian orthodoxy, but that they will occasionally receive the Eucharist or swear in God's name simply to prove that they are not malevolent or demonic.

I agree that on one level, a likely reason fairies offer to receive the Eucharist is to provide assurance that they have no infernal affiliations. Desiré's lady says as much, when she assures the knight that she has not bewitched him, and that she will go with him to church to receive the Host.³³⁶ Muldumarec offers no such specific reasoning to his lady, but says he does believe in God, and if she doubts, he will receive the *viaticum*.³³⁷ Yet, the fairies' ingestion of the Body and Blood of Christ signifies far more than a convenient proof that they are not demonic, as I will discuss shortly. Moreover, the validity of such a test is fundamentally questionable. One need only look back to the episodes included in Chapter Two to see that devout behavior and even reception of the Eucharist is not firm proof of a being's identity. In Gerald of Wales's *Gemma ecclesiastica*, the cleric watches as his prospective supernatural lover celebrates communion on Easter Sunday, but she is later proven to be a succubus.³³⁸ In several exempla, demon-possessed people receive the Host without driving away demonic presences in the least.³³⁹ In Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*, Gerbert's demon-lover gives him counsel which allows him to rise in

³³³ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 15.

³³⁴ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 31.

³³⁵ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 31.

³³⁶ *Desiré*, 429-58.

³³⁷ *Lais de Marie*, 145-64.

³³⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, ed. J.S. Brewer. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), II. 228-31. [hereafter, "*Gemma*"].

³³⁹ *Gemma*, 53. See also Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Distinctio 1.12. See also Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 198, for citations of further exempla.

Church ranks, provide benefits to the poor, and even become Pope.³⁴⁰ Orthodox appearances could be accomplished through deception, both in the human world and the supernatural world, a reality the twelfth-century audiences were fully aware of. Furthermore, Scripture depicted Satan as the father of lies, and contained warnings about devils masquerading as angels of light.³⁴¹ Thus, while the reception of the Eucharist could offer a helpful indication that the celebrant was not demonic, it could not be considered certain proof.

The Eucharist also holds far more theological significance than as demon-screening device. The doctrine of transubstantiation was being actively affirmed and propagated by clerics in the Anglo-Norman court and Church, along with the principle that by taking the Host, an individual is joined with the entire community of the Church and incorporated into Christ Himself.³⁴² As twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor writes, “Now when the body of Christ is eaten, not what is eaten but he who eats is incorporated with Him whom he eats. On this account Christ wished to be eaten by us, that He might incorporate us with Him.”³⁴³ According to this statement, the authors of the *lais* have just incorporated fairies into the body of Christ, and the body of the Church. The theological import of fairy reception of the Eucharist is immense. Both Muldumarec and Desiré’s fairy lady offer to receive this central sacrament of the Christian faith by their own free will and not at the request or insistence of their lovers. Both within and without the text-world, characters, authors, and audience members would be aware of the significance of this act. More than just indicating that the fairies are not demonic, the authors are

³⁴⁰ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium. The Courtiers’ Trifles*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 350-65.

³⁴¹ John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

³⁴² See Gary Macy, “Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages,” *A Companion to the Eucharistic in the Middle Ages*, eds. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen Van Ausdall, (Boston: Brill, 2012), 370-77.

³⁴³ Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis. On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1951), 307. See also *Gemma*, 54.

effectively incorporating the fairies into an acceptable standing in relation to the Christian social and religious system, framing them as insiders.

The authors of *Yonec* and *Desiré* not only incorporate the fairies into the Church and the Body of Christ, but they give them a corporeality, a body and soul, which the succubi lack. In Gerald's tale, though the cleric's potential lover takes the Eucharist, she is only a succubus, a spirit without a body or soul. When her attempts at seduction are rejected, she vanishes. Muldumarec not only fathers Yonec (which an incubus could accomplish), but is shown to have a physical, vulnerable body when he is pierced by the barb on the window frame, which causes him to bleed profusely, and eventually die. He is then buried in an elaborate tomb in the center of an abbey, a tangible resting place for his mortal frame. Likewise, *Desiré's* lady is shown to have physical, durable body and soul through her ability to bear him two children and to partake in the sacraments of the Eucharist and marriage. Though they are not ordinary humans, the fairies evidently have both body and soul, and their corporeality is another factor which enables their inclusion in the body of Christ and ensures that they are not spirits, whether good or bad.

These *lais* do not make fairies into humans or traditional Christians. Rather, they bring fairies within the borders of orthodoxy instead of situating them as heterodox or potentially diabolical outsiders.³⁴⁴ As I will show through a close reading of each *lai*, the incorporation of the fairies within the Christian system is only accomplished gradually throughout each text, not at the instant they ingest the Eucharist. The possibility that they could still be practicing deception would linger even after they took the sacrament, and only their devotion, corporeality,

³⁴⁴ It may be due in part to *lais* such as *Yonec* and *Desiré* that fairies are delivered from a demonic designation that potentially could have caused the development of later romances featuring the High Fairies to be tainted, or the subject of fairies as a whole to be avoided.

and behavior throughout each entire *lai* could guarantee that the fairies were not, as Desiré's love says, "de male part."³⁴⁵

In each *lai*, the protagonist faces a question: is it morally acceptable for a human, Christian mortal to love a magical fairy from the Otherworld, or could it endanger the human's soul? It seems likely that audiences struggled with a similar question: was it morally acceptable for Christians to love narratives which featured magical fairies from the Otherworld, or could it endanger their souls? Were these tales acceptable material for contemplation and imaginative engagement in a Christian, Anglo-Norman court? I would suggest that the authors first create and then relieve such tensions throughout each *lai*, as the narratives demonstrate that fairies can be fully and willingly incorporated into orthodoxy.³⁴⁶ Moreover, sometimes fairies are proven to be *more* devout and trustworthy than the humans such as the lady's powerful husband in *Yonec* or the knight Desiré himself, from whom one would expect Christian conduct. The end result in the *lais* is a sense of resolution rather than tension between the realms of fairy and faith. The human protagonists are made better due to their relationships with their fairy loves, and the fairies, in return, are fully incorporated into the Body of Christ by their reception of the Eucharist and their ongoing devotion to the Christian faith.

Desiré: The Fairy is in the Right

³⁴⁵ "Ne sui mie de male part" (*Desiré*, 432).

³⁴⁶ For an insightful exploration of other ways in which authors build "both extra- and intra-diegetic suspense" in romance narratives, see Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 117. Wade also argues that narratives like Marie's, which do not have a fully developed internal folklore, "thrive on this sort of functional irresolvability, since romance authors can use such openness to provoke wonder and encourage speculation, ultimately pushing the audience to imaginative engagement" (Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 26). I find Wade's reading strongly persuasive, and applicable to not only Marie's writings, but many of the twelfth-century narratives that seem designed to stimulate discussion, debate, and discovery of theological and societal insights.

Desiré is preserved in only two manuscripts, both copies made in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and remote from an original text.³⁴⁷ Evidence indicates that *Desiré* was composed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.³⁴⁸ Authorship was originally attributed to Marie de France, and it is alluring to consider the possibility that these two *lais* are composed by the same woman. But the *lai* is now considered anonymous, perhaps in part because it lacks the subtlety and coherency of Marie's *lais*. Whoever the author was, he or she displays familiarity with the prevailing themes of other *lais* and romances, has some knowledge of Scotland's geography, and likely composed the *lai* in Anglo-Norman.³⁴⁹ Some speculate whether the author may have been a cleric due to the religious focus in content.³⁵⁰ However, it would be an oversimplification to assume that the focus on religious themes necessitates clerical authorship. The ethical and moral questions *Desiré* struggles with would bear equal relevance to a courtly or clerical author and audience.

From the opening moments of the *lai* until its conclusion, the feudal, religious, and fairy worlds are intertwined. The *lai* is set in Scotland, in the region called Calatir, where a lord and his wife are happily married for ten years; their only sadness is their lack of children.³⁵¹ Finally, they resolve to travel to Provence to pray at the shrine of St. Giles, who is known for granting the

³⁴⁷ Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook, "Introduction," *French Arthurian Literature, Volume IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 11-39, at 12-15 [hereafter, "Burgess and Brook"]. The two manuscripts in which *Desiré* appears are Paris Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 1104, f. 10v, col.1-15v, col. 1; and Cologny-Genève, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Codex Bodmer 82 (formerly Phillipps 3713), f. 7v, col. 2-12v, col. 1., which is Anglo-Norman (Burgess and Brook, 7 and 11). The *lai* is also translated into Norse and included in the *Strengleikr* collection, which was compiled sometime between 1226 and 1263, when King Hákon Hákonarson, who had commissioned the collection, died (Burgess and Brook, 11).

³⁴⁸ Prudence M. O'H. Tobin, ed. *Les Lais anonymes des XII^e et XIII^e siècles: édition critique de quelques lays bretons*, Publications Romanes et Françaises, 143 (Geneva: Droz, 1976), 164. Tobin proposes a specific date range of 1190-1208.

³⁴⁹ Burgess and Brook, 12.

³⁵⁰ Burgess and Brook, 12.

³⁵¹ Calatir is likely Calder, a district in the county of Lothian, west of Edinburgh (Burgess and Brook, 12n5).

birth of children.³⁵² They make the journey, and their prayers are answered promptly, as the wife becomes pregnant on their trip home.³⁵³ They name their son Desiré, the Desired One, and when he is old enough, they send him to serve the king of Scotland, where he becomes a distinguished knight. He then travels to Normandy and Brittany to take part in tournaments, and is absent for seven years.³⁵⁴ Desiré finally returns home to visit his parents, and here the narrator again emphasizes the religious influences in Desiré's life, by mentioning that the knight had often visited a hermit in his youth as he traveled through his lands with his father.³⁵⁵ Desiré resolves to visit this hermit again, but at this moment the fairy world materializes in the text, in the form of a beautiful maiden carrying two golden basins to a spring under a vast tree. Both Desiré and the audience would be sensitive to the fact that she appeared "as he made his way towards the chapel."³⁵⁶ The fairies have intentionally placed themselves in the path which leads to a hermitage. From the beginning multiple interpretations are possible: either the fairies are a snare, a distraction from holy purposes, or they are able to exist in peaceful accord with Christianity, proximate to a sacred chapel.

Whether the fairies are devout or deceitful may not be yet apparent, but Desiré's own lack of consistency in conduct quickly becomes evident, as he dismounts and approaches the girl, pulling her down to the grass, "intending to make her his beloved."³⁵⁷ It is the fairy's words that forestall Desiré, as she cries out for mercy, saying "Knight, away with you! / You will not gain

³⁵² St. Giles (Aegidius) was born an aristocrat in Greece in the seventh century. He performed several miracles from boyhood onwards, and later fled from religious persecution to France. In the twelfth century, the site where he had lived, Saint-Gilles near Arles was an important town, port, and pilgrimage site (Burgess and Brook, 20n18, and 30). For more information on the life of St. Giles, see Ülle Erika Lewes, *The Life in the Forest: The Influence of the Saint Giles Legend on the Courtly Tristan Story* (Chattanooga: Tristiana Monographs, 1978).

³⁵³ *Desiré*, 1-53.

³⁵⁴ *Desiré*, 54-90.

³⁵⁵ *Desiré*, 125-30.

³⁵⁶ "Quant il erra vers la chapel" (*Desiré*, 133). The word "vers" can also be translated "at", or "near", making the proximity of the chapel to the fairy presence even stronger.

³⁵⁷ "Il en voudra fere sa drue" (*Desiré*, 146).

much / If you cause me dishonour. / Don't commit any evil act, / Let me be, for your advantage."³⁵⁸ The fairy maiden is a voice of caution and morality, pleading with Desiré to behave rightly not only for her sake but for his own. She then promises to lead him to a more beautiful lady, her mistress, who will provide him with an abundance of wealth and love.³⁵⁹ Desiré consents and releases the maiden, but his rapid vacillation from visiting a hermitage to suddenly contemplating rape reveals that the knight is willing and able to pursue widely different purposes. This scene offers the first indication that the tensions in the *lai* will arise because of Desiré's lack of an internal moral compass, rather than because of the possible temptations a fairy maid may represent.

The maiden then leads Desiré to a bower where there is an exquisitely beautiful lady, who attempts to vanish into the woods at the sight of the knight. Desiré pursues her, and catches hold of her like the first maiden. Again, the narrator emphasizes that the fairies, rather than playing the role of seductresses, are pursued by the knight. But in this instance Desiré treats her with more courtesy, offering, "I shall be your vassal and your beloved. / In order to have your love, / I shall serve you as best I can."³⁶⁰ Unlike the lady in *Yonec*, Desiré expresses no initial caution when engaging in a relationship with this otherworldly being, and he makes no effort to discover whether or not the fairy lady believes in God. His suspicion will only arise later in the *lai*, and his sense of guilt will lead to their separation. At this point, all Desiré seems to consider is his desire for her physical love, which she grants. When they part, she tells him to return home to Calatir, giving him a ring made of gold with a warning: "If you transgress in any way, / You will lose the ring at once; / And if it happens to you / That you have lost the ring, / You will have

³⁵⁸ "Chevalier, tolez vos de ci. / Ne serez gueres avanciez, / Se de mon cors me honnissiez. / Ne fetes nule mesprison, / Lessiez m'estre par guerredon" (*Desiré*, 150-54).

³⁵⁹ *Desiré*, 157-72.

³⁶⁰ "Vostre hon serai et vostre amis. / Por vostre druerie avoir / Vos servirai a mon pooir" (*Desiré*, 216-18).

lost me for good, / Without any chance of getting me back or seeing me.”³⁶¹ With this vague stipulation that the knight must always be good, they part, and Desiré returns home to distribute many gifts and accomplish many good deeds.

Desiré often meets in secret with his beloved, and she bears him a son and a daughter but never informs Desiré of the existence of the children.³⁶² When weary from winning a great battle for his king, Desiré returns home and goes into the region where he usually meets his love. In a reverse of his original encounter with the lady, he instead comes upon the hermitage where the holy man lives.³⁶³ Desiré resolves to go and confess and gain absolution from the hermit whom he has known since childhood. It is only in this moment that the author allows for a glimpse of Desiré’s conscience, and shows it to be burdened by the belief that his relationship with his supernatural lady is a sin. Confessing to the hermit, Desiré “revealed to him those of this sins / Of which he was sure and certain. / He confessed to him about his beloved, / About how she first came to him. / The hermit gave him advice / And imposed a penance on him.”³⁶⁴ The fact that Desiré views his liaison with the fairy lady as a sin in need of confession reveals an underlying tension for the protagonist, and perhaps for the listening audience as well. The fear that his relationship is transgressive plagues Desiré, although he showed no such compunction when their relationship began. Apparently over the years, his Christian convictions have plagued him with guilt. Yet his fault may not be in the relationship but in his failure to find out what his love believes. He apparently assumes that she stands outside the bounds of orthodoxy, due to her fairy nature, and perhaps because they have not been married in a church ceremony.

³⁶¹ “Se vos mesfetes de noient, / L’anel perdrez hastivement; / Et se ce vos soit avenu / Que vos l’anel aiez perdu, / A toz jors mes m’avrez [perdue], / Sanz recovrer et sanz veüe” (*Desiré*, 237-42).

³⁶² *Desiré*, 258-68.

³⁶³ *Desiré*, 269-318.

³⁶⁴ “Ses pechiez li a descovrez / Dont il estoit seürs et cerz. / De s’amie li regehi, / Comme ele vint primes a li. / Li hermits le conseilla, / Sa penitence li donna” (*Desiré*, 323-28).

As Desiré departs the hermit's chapel, he notices that the ring from his love has vanished, and he rushes to their trysting place only to find it empty. He guesses that her displeasure comes from his meeting with the holy man. In confessing his relationship with the fairy lady as a transgression to the hermit, he appears to have transgressed against the lady. This sets up a seeming opposition between the realms of faith and the Otherworld, suggesting that is impossible to serve both God and a fairy love. But once again, the problem could lie with Desiré, not with his beloved. Desiré's fundamental lack of understanding of the sacrament of confession is made apparent. It seems he wished to confess and be absolved of sin, but not to renounce the relationship which he views as a sin. Standing in their empty trysting place, Desiré begs his love to reappear, but she refuses to respond to his agonized pleas. The knight instantly reverses his commitment to fulfill the hermit's penance, begging the lady to give him a penance of her own: "Impose my penance on me. / What the hermit told me / And the fasting in which he instructed me, / At your pleasure I shall abandon them / And do your bidding."³⁶⁵ The transience and shallowness of Desiré's sense of religious conviction becomes clear as he is instantly ready to abandon the hermit's penance in favor of whatever injunction his lady might give him. If it were the fairy's intent to draw Desiré away from faith and to stand as a rival to Christianity, she could easily appear at this moment and take advantage of his desperation. Instead, she still remains absent and silent.

Desiré's rage escalates further, and his instability and lack of true religious devotion is made even more apparent. He curses the hermitage, and he prays "more than a hundred times / That the whole place should be shamed / And consumed by hell-fire, / Along with the hermit

³⁶⁵ "Ma penitence m'enchargez. / Ce que li hermits me dit, / Et les junes que il aprist, / A vostre plaisir les lairai, / Et vos commandemenz ferai" (*Desiré*, 360-64).

who lived there.”³⁶⁶ He who so recently had been sitting in the chapel confessing to the hermit he has known all his life, now commits sacrilege by praying for hell-fire to consume the holy place and man. It appears that the one thing Desiré values above all others is not God but his fairy love, as he is willing to reject his recent confession and commitment to penance, and to curse anything, regardless of how sacred it is, when he believes it has stopped him from regaining her love.

All Desiré’s pleas and curses are to no avail. He returns home and falls into grief-stricken illness for a year, and becomes so sick that he is on his deathbed. Then, finally, his lady appears to him, and her rebukes address all of his concerns and reveal a deeper understanding of the sacrament of confession than Desiré possesses. She asks, “Was I such a burden to you? / It was not such a great sin. / I have never been married, / Or affianced or promised, / And you have never had a wife; / I think you will regret this. / When you sought out confession, / I well knew that you would be losing me. / What use is it to confess a sin / If one cannot abandon it?”³⁶⁷ She first addresses the fact that their relationship is not sanctioned by marriage. The sacrament of marriage was still under formation in the twelfth century, and at the time, consent and consummation were still considered sufficient, and it was not an absolute requirement that a priest be present at the marriage, though it was preferred.³⁶⁸ Thus, though no priest had officially wed them, at least their union was not “a great sin.” They were two previously uncommitted individuals in a consensual relationship, who had exchanged expressions of love and even a ring.

³⁶⁶ “Et plus de .C. foiz a oré / Que trestot le lieu fust honniz, / Et que mau feus l’eüst bruiz, / Et l’ermite qu’il i trova” (*Desiré*, 376-79).

³⁶⁷ Estoies tu de moi chargiez? / Ce ne fu pas si granz pechiez. / Je ne fui onques espousee, / Ne fiancée, ne juree, / Ne fame espousee n’en as; / Je croi tu t’en repentiras. / Quant tu confession queroies, / Bien sai que de moi partiroides. / Que li peciez vaut au gehir, / Qui ne se puet mie partir?” (*Desiré*, 419-28).

³⁶⁸ See James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 235-36, and John Gillingham, “Love, Marriage and Politics in the Twelfth Century,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 25 (1989), 292-303, at 294-95.

(It is interesting to note, though, that when their relationship began, the lady gave Desiré a ring indicating the conditional nature of their love, rather than one representing eternal love. Her ring remains only as long as Desiré does not transgress, and her stipulation could be due to her awareness of possible weakness in his character.) The lady's second rebuke is that he would consider confessing his relationship, but without any intention to end it. Rather than assuming that Desiré's ring disappeared because he sought Christian confession, it is possible to interpret the entire situation by arguing that the fairy lady took Desiré's confession more seriously than he did. By refusing to reappear, she ensured that he would carry out his penance, however unwilling he was to do so. The fairy lady could indeed be more devout than Desiré.

Next Desiré's lady addresses a deep-seated fear which has driven his actions, though he never voiced it: "You have often feared / That I bewitched you. / Do not be concerned about this, / I am not of evil origin."³⁶⁹ She senses the root cause of her lover's unease lies in her supernatural identity, and asserts that she is not evil and has not bewitched him. She accompanies words with actions, offering, "When you go to church to hear mass and pray to God, / You will see me standing beside you / And partaking of the blessed bread. / You have wronged me greatly, / But because I loved you so much, / I want to give you another chance."³⁷⁰ She offers a demonstration of her orthodoxy which is likely to be adequate proof for a man such as Desiré, who has been shown throughout the *lai* to think simplistically about faith and actions. But she herself, along with some audience members listening to the *lai*, could be aware of the much greater theological significance in receiving the Eucharist. The fairy lady volunteers without hesitation to partake of the body and blood which will unite her with Christ Himself. Her

³⁶⁹ "Soventes foiz as tu douté / Que je t'eüsse enfantosmé. / N'aies tu ja de ce regart, / Ne sui mie de male part" (*Desiré*, 429-32).

³⁷⁰ "Quant vos irez jusqu'au mostier, / La messe oïr et Dieu proier, / Delez vos me verres ester / Et le pain beneoit user. / Molt avez vers moi meserré; / Por ce que tant vos ai amé, / Vos veil fere tant de retor" (*Desiré*, 433-39).

reception will be a physical representation of her incorporation in the faith to which she already ascribes.

The fairy woman's appearance and her words serve to revive Desiré, and he is cured. Promptly the two of them make their way to a church, where he sees "his beloved standing next to him, / Eating the blessed bread / And making the sign of the cross and blessing him."³⁷¹ What she has promised, she has fulfilled, offering visible proof by receiving the Eucharist. They recommence their relationship, happiness restored. It becomes clear at this moment that their year of separation and of Desiré's near-death illness could have been completely avoided, had Desiré thought to ask relevant questions regarding the fairy lady's relation to Christianity at the outset (as the noblewoman in *Yonéc* asked Muldumarec for evidence of his faith). Ironically, all of Desiré's problems result from his failure to value his own faith enough to ensure that his lover shares it with him from the outset. She could immediately have assured him of her orthodoxy, as she does now after he has endured so much agony. Desiré learns through trials, but he finally is able to comprehend that his love can be both a fairy and a faithful Christian. It was necessary for him to come to this realization for the couple to enjoy any peace or happiness in their relationship.

After more years pass, the king of Scotland summons his court and noblemen together at Pentecost, Desiré among them. Once again the author sets the entire encounter in a deeply religious context, when the Holy Spirit once descended upon the faithful followers of the Lord.³⁷² The supernatural of another sort descends upon the king's court, as a stunning lady, a beautiful maiden, and a handsome youth appear in court, riding white mules and carrying white hawks, signifiers of the Otherworld from which they come. The lady announces herself as

³⁷¹ "S'amie voit lez lui ester, / Et le pain benoît mengier, / Et la croiz fere, et lui saignier" (*Desiré*, 455-58).

³⁷² Acts 2:1-4.

mother of the two youths, and Desiré as the father.³⁷³ She has a request of the king: “Marry me to my beloved / Because I want to take him away with me. / We shall be together legitimately; / He will spend his whole life with me. / He will never again seek confession / Or penance or pardon.”³⁷⁴ Having already born Desiré two children from her own body, and having partaken of the Body of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist, the lady pursues another, final demonstration of her incorporation into the Christian realm.³⁷⁵ She pursues marriage in a church, in the presence of human witnesses. Instead of wishing to prevent Desiré from seeking confession, penance and pardon, she apparently wishes to put Desiré’s conscience completely at ease by removing any possible cause for lingering guilt over their relationship.

The king acquiesces to her request, and even decides to marry the fair daughter of Desiré himself. Desiré has no objection, and they immediately go to celebrate a double wedding. Finally Desiré seems at peace with his relationship with his fairy love: “He was very anxious / To be married to his lady / And for her to be given to him there. / They went together to the church / And there they were both wed.”³⁷⁶ Here an accord is reached: marriage is upheld as a sacrament to be celebrated in the church, but marriage to a fairy woman is shown to be fully acceptable, sanctioned by a priest in a holy space.

As the couple prepares to return to the Otherworld, they leave behind their daughter, now queen of Scotland, and their son, now dubbed a knight like his father. The lady assures Desiré that they will see their children again: “Know in truth, they will come back / To see us when they can.”³⁷⁷ His children, offspring of the human realm and the Otherworld, have effortlessly

³⁷³ *Desiré*, 727-74.

³⁷⁴ “Mon ami me fai espouser, / Car je l’en voil o moi mener. / Loiaument seron assemble; / O moi vivra tout son aé. / Ja n’i querra(i) confession, / Ne penitence, ne pardon” (*Desiré*, 777-82).

³⁷⁵ Her request is unique in the corpus of Old French *lais* and romances of which I am aware.

³⁷⁶ “Molt durement li estoit tart / Qu’il eüst sa fame espousee, / Et qu’el li fust ilec donnee. / Au mostier ensemble alerent, / Et ambe .II. les espouserent” (*Desiré*, 798-802).

³⁷⁷ “Sachiez de voir, il revendront / Por nos veoir, quant il porront” (*Desiré*, 813-14).

achieved a balance which Desiré failed so long to maintain. Desiré struggled to bridge a chasm of his own imagining between the realms of faith and of fairy, falsely assuming that he could not be a faithful Christian and simultaneously love a fairy woman. But his children, likely due to their mother's influence, believe in no such false opposition, and are able to exist happily with one foot in each world. They are living proof that the fairy and Christian kingdoms are not in competition or contradiction, but cooperation. And finally the conflicted Desiré attains the same comfort with the fairy realm, evidenced by the final lines of the *lai*: "Desiré mounted and left / With his beloved, who took him away. / He remained with her in such a way / That he never came back; / He no longer had any desire to return."³⁷⁸

Throughout the *lai of Desiré*, at each moment when the realms of the Otherworld and of orthodoxy interact, it is possible to read the fairies as standing in opposition to, or at least in competition with, Christianity. However, a careful reading reveals surprising reversal, as the fairy protagonist is repeatedly shown to be more devout than the human. The author cleverly acknowledges the tensions and fears that Desiré, and likely the twelfth-century audience, would feel at the interaction of the Christian and fairy worlds, but allays every fear throughout the progression of the *lai*. The fairy lady becomes the figure who leads the way in showing Desiré that the Otherworld and the Christian society do not contradict, but are in accord. The author of the *lai* likely intends for audience members to come to the same conclusion, having watched as the fairy lady willingly incorporated herself into the Body of Christ and having seen that the human and fairy union was beneficial for all parties involved, on a spiritual and earthly level.

Yonec: Freedom by Fairy Means

³⁷⁸ "Dessirez monte, si s'en va / O s'amie qui l'en mena. / O li remest en tel maniere / Que puis ne retorna ariere; / De retourner n'ot il plus cure" (*Desiré*, 815-19).

Marie de France's *lais* are dated to the second half of the twelfth century, and were likely completed before the death of Henry II in 1189.³⁷⁹ Marie's identity, still unknown, has attracted much speculation. Many think she must have been an aristocrat who became a nun. Others like Michael Faletra argue that she may have been a married noblewoman writing in the Anglo-Norman court, based the fact that Denis Piramus calls her "Dame Marie."³⁸⁰ R. Howard Bloch points out that regardless of whether she was a noblewoman or an aristocrat who became a nun, it is evident she is widely knowledgeable in subjects both sacred and secular.³⁸¹ She shows familiarity with classical, Christian, and courtly traditions in her *lais*, fables, and the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*.³⁸² Instead of trying to definitively prove and uphold one biographical approach for Marie, it is perhaps wiser to embrace the ambiguity of her identity. Whether nun or noblewoman, she was clearly interested in exploring themes of court, Church, and the Otherworld in interaction with one another.

Just as Marie's identity is contested, so is the interpretation of *Yonec*, as scholars have attempted to find a fitting frame through which to read the *lai*. In early years of scholarship the focus fell on finding Celtic analogues to the plot of *Yonec*, and on parsing out folkloric motifs Marie could have been drawing upon.³⁸³ In the past three decades there has been a turn towards exploring the Christian references and allegorical meanings which appear within the *lai*.³⁸⁴ The

³⁷⁹ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, 2nd ed., trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), 14 [hereafter, "*Lais of Marie*"].

³⁸⁰ Faletra, *Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 83.

³⁸¹ R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 313-14.

³⁸² Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, 313-14.

³⁸³ Oliver M. Johnston, "Sources of the Lay of *Yonec*," *PMLA* 20 (1905): 322-38; Tom Peete Cross, "The Celtic Origin of the Lay of *Yonec*," *Revue Celtique* 31 (1910): 413-71; M. B. Ogle, "Some Theories of Irish Literary Influence and the Lay of *Yonec*," *Romanic Review* 10 (1919): 123-48; Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World* (New York: Octagon, 1970); R.N. Illingworth, "Celtic Tradition and the *Lai* of *Yonec*," *Etudes celtiques* 9 (1960-61): 501-20; Mary H. Ferguson, "Folklore in the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Romanic Review* 57 (1966): 3-24.

³⁸⁴ J.C. Payen, "Structure et sens d'*Yonec*," *Le Moyen Age* 82 (1976): 263-87; Jacques de Caluwé "L'élément chrétien dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," *Mélanges de littérature du moyen âge au XXe siècle offerts à Mademoiselle Jeanne Lods*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ecole Normale Supérieure de Jeunes Filles, 1978), 95-114; Jacques Ribard, "Le *Lai* d'*Yonec* est-il une allégorie chrétienne?" in *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to*

third and latest trend is to apply a postcolonial lens, reading Muldumarec as a symbol for the untamable Welsh people who represent a threat to Norman lordship on the frontiers.³⁸⁵ All three approaches emphasize essential aspects of the *lai*: its otherworldly or magical resonances, its Christian evocations, and its political significance. But it is unlikely that Marie de France, or her audience, would break down their understanding of the *lai* into such compartmentalized categories or would select only one of the three views to be the most relevant. Rather, it is the *lai*'s blending of multiple levels of meaning which gives it its intricacy and enduring appeal. Like the author of *Desiré*, Marie deliberately crafts a plot which places orthodoxy and the Otherworld in interaction with one another. Instead of trying to situate fairies as adoxic creatures operating independently of faith, Marie depicts the fairy-king Muldumarec as a devout Christian who recites a credo, receives the *viaticum*, and time and time again, willingly enters into human and Christian spaces. While *Desiré* has no antagonist but the knight himself, the villain of *Yonec* is the jealous, murderous human husband of the trapped noblewoman. Marie creates a foe who is associated with institutional Church forces, and shows him to be a hypocrite, while the shape-shifting, supernatural fairy is shown to be a truly devout figure.

Ah.H. Diverres by Colleagues, Pupils and Friends, ed. P.B. Grout et al. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 160-9; Denise L. Despres, "Redeeming the Flesh: Spiritual Transformation in Marie de France's *Yonec*," *Studia Mystica* 10, no. 3 (1987): 26-39; Susan M. Johnson, "Christian Allusion and Divine Justice in *Yonec*," in *Quest of Marie de France: A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 161-74; Michelle A. Freeman, "The Changing figure of the Male: The Revenge of the Female Storyteller," in *Quest of Marie de France: A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 243-61; Suzanne M. Verderber, "Refiguring the Veil: The Transvaluation of Human History in Marie de France's *Yonec*," *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003): 79-106; Adrian Tudor, "'De Deu amer par bon fei': Marie de France's *Lais* as a Mirror of Clerical Society," *Le cygne: Bulletin of the International Marie de France Society* 2.1 (2004): 43-58.
³⁸⁵ Sharon Kinoshita, "Colonial Possessions: Wales and the Anglo-Norman Imaginary in the *Lais* of Marie de France" in *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* by Sharon Kinoshita (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 105-32; Sylvia Huot, "Others and Alterity," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 238-50; Faletra, *Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 83-95.

The *lai* opens with the description of a rich old man, the lord of Caerwent in Wales, who marries and then jealously guards a beautiful young noblewoman.³⁸⁶ As she continues to describe this man, Marie paints a darkening picture of his private life. He orders his young bride locked away in a chamber within a tower, where she is managed by the husband's old widowed sister for seven years. She is forbidden to socialize with other women, to see her family, or to attend church.³⁸⁷ At night, when the husband enters her chamber he forbids servants to light candles.³⁸⁸ He is a man who prefers darkness over light, and isolation over the fellowship of friends, family, or faith. His identity becomes even more troubling when one considers Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby's comment that the word Marie uses to identify him, *avouez*, is not only a term for a ruler of a city, but has an ecclesiastical connotation:

[I]t is more likely that Marie is referring to the official functions of the advocate (*advocatus*), the officer appointed by the Church to handle its secular affairs. The advocates seem often to have usurped the land they were supposed to protect and to have set themselves up as independent feudal lords. The distaste felt by many for the advocate would emphasize the plight of the lady, married off to him in order to produce an heir to lands which should rightfully revert on his death to the Church.³⁸⁹

By giving the old husband such a role, Marie frames her tale from the outset with religious significance. Though in the public eye he is a representative of the Church, the husband is shown to be a controlling figure who suppresses rather than supports his noble wife's religious life and growth. But it is also important to note that Marie is not necessarily intending to criticize all

³⁸⁶ "En Bretaingne maneit jadis / Uns riches hum, vielz e antis; / De Carwēnt fu avouez / E del païs sire clamez" (*Lais de Marie*, 11-14). "In Britain there once lived a rich old man who held the fief of Caerwent and was acknowledged lord of the land" (*Lais of Marie*, 86).

³⁸⁷ *Lais de Marie*, 21-50.

³⁸⁸ "Quant li sires s'alot cuchier / N'i ot chamberlenc ne huissier / Ki en la chambre osast entrer / Ne devant lui cirge alumer" (*Lais de Marie*, 41-44). "When the lord went to bed, there was neither chamberlain nor door-keeper who would have dared enter the chamber to light a candle before him" (*Lais of Marie*, 86).

³⁸⁹ *Lais of Marie*, 127n1. Michelle Freeman comments that "if this interpretation of the term is correct, then it is quite fitting that the scene of retribution should take place in a monastery" (Freeman, "Changing Figure of the Male," 260n20).

churchmen, but only those such as the *avouez* who would abuse their power and pursue marriage out of selfish motives.

During these seven years, the couple remains childless, perhaps a subtle suggestion that God is not on the side of this corrupt, hypocritical advocate of the Church. The lady grieves continually and allows her beauty to fade. One morning in early April, when the husband and his aged sister leave her alone in her tower, the lady speaks aloud to herself. This, the longest speech she makes in the entire lai, provides the first real insight into her character, and merits close analysis. As she laments her imprisonment, her first complaint concerns her soul, as she says, “I can neither go to church nor hear God’s service.”³⁹⁰ The foremost of her sorrows is her isolation from the sacraments and service of the Church, and the community of Christians. Marie demonstrates from the outset that the lady’s faith is sincere and central in her thoughts. She is not putting on a show of religion; to her knowledge, there is no one else present to hear her words or watch her weep.

The lady continues, “Cursed be my parents and all those who gave me to this jealous man and married me to this person!”³⁹¹ The conditions under which she was married now come to light, and the fact that she is in a forced marriage without her consent is significant in the twelfth century, as the Church was endeavoring to reduce the occurrence of prearranged noble marriages, and to ensure that there was mutual consent.³⁹² Since her husband and family forced her into marriage, the validity of the union is fundamentally unsound. Again, Marie is underscoring the woman’s situation under the control of a repressive social and religious system.

³⁹⁰ *Lais of Marie*, 87. “Jeo ne puis al mustier venir / Ne le service Deu oïr” (*Lais de Marie*, 75-76).

³⁹¹ *Lais of Marie*, 87. “Maleeit seient mi parent / E li autre communalment / Ki a cest gelus me donerent / E de sun cors me marierent!” (*Lais de Marie*, 81-84).

³⁹² Gillingham, “Love, Marriage, and Politics,” 294-95.

The details of her specific circumstances are unknown, but it seems that the local priest who married her to her husband may be as corrupt as the *avouez* himself, willing to perform a ceremony in spite of the fact that the noblewoman clearly did not consent to the marriage. Her family, as well, is a complicit party, as they were also involved in forcing her into the union.

The lady's next revelation casts her husband in an even more forbidding light, by portraying him as having received an infernal baptism, rather than a sacred one: "When he should have been baptized, he was plunged into the river of Hell, for his sinews are hard, and so are his veins which are full of living blood."³⁹³ Through the lady's words here, the husband is now cast not only as a repressive force but as a figure aligned with Hell itself. He may outwardly appear to be a Christian lord and advocate, but she who knows him best reverses this image to depict his nature as infernal.³⁹⁴ The lady associates her husband with Hell, death, and a pagan ethos, and her words also foreshadow future events in the *lai*. Her first mention of blood here stands in opposition to the next reference, which appears in the context of Muldumarec's reception of Christ's body and blood in the *viaticum*. Her mention of her husband's blood also contrasts with the "living blood" which will pour forth from Muldumarec's veins, after he is wounded for the love of this lady. Finally, even the *avouez's* hard sinews will not be adequate to resist the sword her son wields at the end of the *lai* as he avenges the deaths of his parents by shedding the husband's blood. The vivid imagery of blood persists throughout the *lai*, and by means of this life force, Marie sets the husband in opposition to both Muldumarec and Christ himself.

³⁹³ *Lais of Marie*, 87. "Quant il dut estre baptiziez, / Si fu el flum d'enfern plongiez: / Dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines, / Ki de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines!" (*Lais de Marie*, 87-90).

³⁹⁴ Her strange statement that he was plunged in a river in Hell and possesses hard sinews could perhaps refer to the legend of Achilles, who was dipped into the river Styx in the Underworld at infancy, making his body invincible. Like Achilles, her husband is characterized by jealousy for the women he loves, and, as will be seen, by murderous rage.

The lady's words thus far have followed a progression: Her orthodox desire for church attendance shifted to an indictment of her family for forcing her into marriage and a depiction of the husband's counter-sacramental state. She now turns her thoughts to the *aventures*, tales from *cest país*, "this country" of Wales.³⁹⁵ She says she has often heard stories in which courtly knights made ladies their lovers, appearing whenever the ladies wished it and remaining unseen to all others.³⁹⁶ The lady then steps beyond recalling narrative to desiring that the tales will become reality: "If this can be and ever was, if it ever did happen to anyone, may almighty God grant my wish!"³⁹⁷ With this final prayer, or perhaps one might call it an orthodox wish, the lady ends her lengthy soliloquy, and it is because of her words that all of the *lai*'s subsequent events unfold. Marie has deepened the audience's understanding of the husband and wife in the *lai*, casting the lady as a sincere, devout noblewoman who is confined and repressed by her husband. The *avouez*, in spite of his affiliation with the Church, has defied marriage laws and suppressed his wife's ability to practice her faith in Christian community. Into the midst of this dilemma defined by religious tensions, Marie brings the possibility of a fairy lover, and situates him in such a way that he represents an avenue of freedom and possible deliverance for the lady. For female aristocrats listening to Marie's *lais*, some might easily identify with the lady's dilemma, as they sought to function within a clerical and courtly system which could be corrupt and repressive. The *lais* about fairy lovers could deliver the listening women from their literal confinement for at least a period of imaginative freedom.

³⁹⁵ "I have often heard tell that in this country one used to encounter adventures which relieved those afflicted by care" (*Lais of Marie*, 87). "Mut ai sovent oï cunter / Que l'em suleit jadis trover / Aventures en cest país / Ki rehaitouent les pensis" (*Lais de Marie*, 91-94). Her use of the term "this country" shows that she is likely not a native noblewoman of Wales, but perhaps of Norman or English nobility.

³⁹⁶ *Lais de Marie*, 91-100.

³⁹⁷ *Lais of Marie*, 87. "Se ceo puet ester ne ceo fu, / se unc a nul est avenu, / Deus, ki de tut a poeste, / il en face ma volente!" (*Lais de Marie*, 105-8).

Within the *lai*, the lady's imaginative longings are immediately fulfilled, as a large hawk flies in through the tower window and transforms into a handsome knight. He states his desire to be her lover, assures her of his devotion to her alone, and explains that "I could not come to you, nor leave my country, unless you had wished for me; but now I can be your beloved!"³⁹⁸ He leaves his country unspecified, but his remarkable transformation implies that his origin is otherworldly. Although the lady has long been under the control of her husband, this knight, Muldumarec, indicates that his ability to act is completely dependent on the lady's wishes. Unlike Desiré, who so eagerly establishes a love affair with a fairy, this noblewoman is wisely cautious. Her genuine devotion is once again displayed as she replies, "saying that she would make him her lover, provided he believed in God, which would make their love possible."³⁹⁹ Her first concern is to establish that Muldumarec shares her faith. In *Desiré*, the thought of faith did not once cross the knight's mind as he commenced his relationship; even later when his conscience became troubled, he does not even consider the possibility that his fairy love could be devout, but confesses went to the hermit to confess his supposed sin. In contrast, the lady in *Yonec* finds it perfectly feasible to consider the possibility that Muldumarec believes in God, and with her acceptance of the idea, Marie may hope to normalize the concept of a devout Christian fairy to her listening audience as well. She draws the fairy folk into the sphere of orthodoxy by means of this subtle, simple assumption of the lady.

The noblewoman's desire to know that Muldumarec believes in God is usually explained in scholarship by an underlying fear that he may be a demon. As Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken explain, a demonic origin was plausible, "since demons were known for their ability

³⁹⁸ *Lais of Marie*, 87. "Mes ne poeie a vus venir / Ne fors de mun paleis eissir, / Si vus ne m'eüissez requis. / Or puis bien estre vostre amis!" (*Lais de Marie*, 131-34).

³⁹⁹ *Lais of Marie*, 88. "E dit qu'ele en ferat sun dru, / S'en Deu creïst e issi fust / Que lur amur estre peüst" (*Lais de Marie*, 138-40).

to change form.”⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, in bestiaries of the twelfth century, the hawk is symbolically associated with the devil, as the hawk’s habit of seizing low-flying birds is compared to Satan’s snatching of souls.⁴⁰¹ But the lady’s desire may also be related to the fact that her husband, who is supposed to be a Christian man, is instead a hypocrite with habits so dark that she imagines he was baptized in Hell. It is not surprising, therefore, that her foremost wish could be that her lover would possess genuine Christian faith.

In response to her request, Muldumarec immediately offers a detailed statement of faith: “‘Lady,’ he said, ‘you are right. I would not on any account want guilt, distrust or suspicion to attach to me. I do believe in the Creator who set us free from the sorrow in which our ancestor Adam put us by biting the bitter apple. He is, will be and always has been life and light to sinners.’”⁴⁰² Reciting a brief credo demonstrates Muldumarec’s knowledge of biblical narrative, and affirms his orthodox faith in God. Through his words, Marie also hints at an origin of fairies which does not fall within any one of the four prevailing theories which Lewis listed. She seems to ascribe to a different view, and this moment offers a tantalizing clue to those who puzzle over fairy identity. Surprisingly, the fairy claims that Adam is “our ancestor,” or literally, “nostre pere,” “our father.”⁴⁰³ While this knight clearly has superhuman capabilities such as shape-shifting, he claims common ancestry with humankind. If Adam is also father to the fairy people,

⁴⁰⁰ Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, *Marie de France: A Critical Companion* (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 146.

⁴⁰¹ Verderber, “Refiguring the Veil,” 92-93. Verderber notes that a book devoted entirely to birds, Hugh of Fouilloy’s *Aviarium*, was composed in the 1130s or 1140s and evidence even suggests that Marie could have read and adapted some of the language from the *Aviarium* in her own writing. See also Despres, “Redeeming the Flesh,” 30. She states that “the hawk had the reputation of a thief—or ‘raptor’ (30). Yet she also notes that “*ravishen*...is used throughout medieval mystical literature as a metaphor for spiritual ecstasy” (31). So the raptor could evoke both negative and positive valences, from the moment of his first appearance.

⁴⁰² *Lais of Marie*, 88. “Dame, dit il, vus dites bien. / Ne vodreie pur nule rien / Que de mei i ait acheisun, / Mescreauncë u suspesçun. / Jeo crei mut bien el Creatur, / Ki nus geta de la tristur / U Adam nus mist, nostre pere, / Par le mors de la pumme amere; / Il est e ert e fu tuz jurs / Vie e lumiere as pecheürs” (*Lais de Marie*, 145-54).

⁴⁰³ *Lais de Marie*, 151.

then they too must possess body and spirit and be made in the image of God. Marie does not hold the view that fairies are a third race apart from men and angels, or that fairies are demons. They are also clearly not demoted angels and cannot be dead, as Muldumarec is a living being who will later die. A fifth possible explanation for fairy origin, suggested by some Irish sources, is that fairies are unfallen humans, who did not partake of the fruit as Adam and Eve did. But Muldumarec's words also eliminate that possibility, as he includes fairies in the experiences of both sorrow from the Fall and redemption by God who is "life and light to sinners." To my knowledge no medieval theory of fairy origin aligns with Muldumarec's claims, and Marie does not include any further explanation in *Yonec* or her other *lais*. But the statement is sufficient to situate fairies as proximate to humans, and as orthodox beings who are knowledgeable about Christian doctrine.

After affirming his belief in God, Muldumarec then goes even further, willingly offering to verify his words through actions: "If you do not believe this of me, send for your chaplain. Tell him that an illness has come upon you and that you want to hear the service that God has established in this world for the redemption of sinners. I shall assume your appearance, receive the body of Christ, and recite all of my credo for you. Never doubt me on this count."⁴⁰⁴ Muldumarec's suggestion that he and the lady practice deception in order to receive the

⁴⁰⁴ *Lais of Marie*, 88. "Si vus de ceo ne me creez, / Vostre chapelain demandez, / Dites ke mals vus a susprise, / Si volez avoir le servise / Que Deus ad el mund establi, / Dunt li pecheür sunt gari. / La semblance de vus prendrai, / Le cors Damedeu recevrai, / Ma creance vus dirai tute: / Ja mar de ceo serez en dute!" (*Lais de Marie*, 155-64). A comparison of *Yonec* to Gerald of Wales's tale of the priest and the werewolves reveals significant parallels. In each narrative, a being of questionable identity asks to receive the sacramental ministrations of a priest. The werewolf and fairy both speak eloquent, orthodox words which display their faith. And in both cases, the outward appearance of the recipients is different than their inner identity. The wolfskin is peeled back to reveal the form of an old woman, which leads the priest to give her the *viaticum*. But in Muldumarec's case, he offers to put *on* a layer of disguise, concealing his male, knightly body under the *semblance* of the lady. If his true identity were revealed, the priest would likely forego his ministrations, while the revelation of the wolf-woman's human identity led the priest to offer them. (The priest would probably refuse Muldumarec on the grounds that he had feigned illness, not necessarily because of his fairy nature. The hypothetical response of the priest is an avenue Marie does not explore, as the priest never learns the truth.)

Eucharist may seem a troubling facet that implies that the knight is fond of deception, and thus may be closer to the demon than fairy. But when one considers that the lady's husband never allows her to leave her tower to attend church, it becomes clear that Muldumarec cannot offer, as Desiré's lady did, to attend church and there receive the sacrament by her side. It is due to the husband's practice of isolation that the lady is forced to feign illness in order to have an opportunity to receive the Eucharist. The blame for deception can fall on his corrupt shoulders, then, rather than on those of the fairy knight.

The noblewoman feels no compunction at feigning near-death illness, doing so that very morning. The priest "came as quickly as possible, bringing the *corpus domini*. The knight received it and drank the wine from the chalice, whereupon the chaplain left."⁴⁰⁵ Intriguingly, though Marie has made it clear that the knight takes on the appearance of the lady, she now specifies that it was *the knight* who received the elements. Her word choice suggests that regardless of his outward appearance, his stable inner identity is that of the fairy knight. Muldumarec has progressed from hawk to knight to semblance of his lady-love, and he is now incorporated into Christ Himself. Clearly, his reception of the Eucharist goes far beyond signifying that he is not a demon. Where the husband has been depicted, metaphorically, as receiving a counter-sacramental baptism, Muldumarec is shown partaking in this central sacrament of the faith. He is no fairy hovering on the fringes of Christianity, but is fully incorporated in orthodoxy, surpassing the human husband in true devotion.

Muldumarec, having affirmed his membership in the Christian community, becomes a frequent visitor in the tower, restoring hope and vitality to the lady with his presence. In their relationship, she has the agency that she has lacked for so long, summoning her lover whenever

⁴⁰⁵ *Lais of Marie*, 88. "E cil i vint cum plus tost pot: / *Corpus domini* aportot. / Li chevaliers l'a receü, / Le vin del chalice beü. / Le chapeleins s'en est alez" (*Lais de Marie*, 185-89).

she wishes. It may seem strange that he never seeks to carry her away to the Otherworld, and never offers to remove her from her captivity, as he presumably could. Perhaps Marie wishes to emphasize that fairies are not merely forces that separate people from the human realm. Instead, all of Muldumarec's actions are focused on entering into the lady's life, faith, and even her confinement. He is willing to incorporate himself into the human world, even though he prophesies to his love that these visits will eventually result in his death.⁴⁰⁶ And even his fate is not due to his choice to operate within the sphere of humanity, but instead is shown to be the fault of the murderous *avouez*.

Because the aged husband notices his wife's beauty has returned, and he consults with his sister, who spies and discovers that the lady has a lover. The outraged husband has razor-sharp iron spikes forged and fitted on the window. In spite of Muldumarec's prescience regarding his eventual death, his knowledge is limited, as Marie makes clear by exclaiming, "Oh God! If only he had known the treachery that the villain was preparing!"⁴⁰⁷ Muldumarec tries to enter the window and is pierced by an iron spike. At this point the imagery becomes tragically vivid, describing Muldumarec wrenches himself off the barbed point and sits on the bed beside the lady, where his scarlet blood pours out on the sheets. His corporeality and mortality is affirmed through this graphic description of his wound; he is no spirit, but is, like his human love, possessed of a physical body. One cannot help but also notice the symbolic resonances in the moment: Muldumarec, who received the eucharistic elements, has become a living incarnation of them, as his body is broken and his blood poured out for love.

The lady faints in grief, seeing Muldumarec's wounds, but he comforts her with another prophetic insight, telling her that she is with child and will have a son named Yonec who will

⁴⁰⁶ *Lais de Marie*, 199-210.

⁴⁰⁷ *Lais of Marie*, 89-90. "Deus, qu'il ne sout la traïsun / Que aparailot le felun!" (*Lais de Marie*, 295-96).

avenge them both and kill their enemy.⁴⁰⁸ With that revelation, Muldumarec returns to his own kingdom in the Otherworld, still bleeding profusely. Though up to this point Muldumarec has always been the one to enter the lady's world, now she, dressed only in her shift, leaps twenty feet from a window in the tower.⁴⁰⁹ She now possesses boldness, courage, and reckless abandon. She is beyond caring for her own safety or appearance in her concern for her fairy love. Instead of remaining helplessly in the tower where she has been confined for so long, she breaks out of her bondage. She has been transformed and liberated through her relationship with Muldumarec. No longer does the *avouez* have the power to keep her contained in his isolating sphere of influence.

The noblewoman follows the trail of blood her love has left behind until she passes through the darkness of a hill and emerges in a beautiful meadow.⁴¹⁰ For the first time the lady has crossed the threshold into her love's land, but even here signs of death and mortality persist, and beauty is marred, for she finds that the green grass is crimson with her love's blood.⁴¹¹ Full of fear for Muldumarec, she follows the scarlet trail to a silver, walled city and makes her way through the silent streets, never encountering an inhabitant.⁴¹² Finally she finds her knight in a magnificent palace, but he begs her to leave, because if his people were to find her, they would torment her, "for my people would know they had lost me because of my love for you."⁴¹³ She replies that if she returns to her husband, he will surely kill her, and she would prefer to die with Muldumarec. Once again the husband is shown to be murderous, ready to avenge himself not only on the fairy knight, but on his own wife. Muldumarec resolves this difficulty by giving her a

⁴⁰⁸ *Lais de Marie*, 323-32.

⁴⁰⁹ *Lais de Marie*, 333-41.

⁴¹⁰ *Lais de Marie*, 342-59.

⁴¹¹ *Lais de Marie*, 353-59.

⁴¹² *Lais de Marie*, 360-76.

⁴¹³ *Lais of Marie*, 91. "Bien iert entre ma gent seü / Que m'unt por vostre amur perdu" (*Lais de Marie*, 407-08).

ring which will ensure her husband's complete forgetfulness of their relationship. He also gives her his own sword to give to her son once he is of age.⁴¹⁴

The lady returns to her husband, where all proceeds according to Muldumarec's prophecies, and the very year Yonec comes of age and is made a knight, he learns the truth of his parents' past. In Wales the nobility are celebrating the feast of St. Aaron, and the lady's husband, is summoned to Caerleon to celebrate. In the years that have passed as Yonec has grown up, the incorporation of the Otherworld into the human world seems to have progressed, for Caerleon is revealed to be none other than Muldumarec's very own land. Even after his death, his genuine devotion to faith is apparent, for when the lady enters his Caerleon with their grown son, she discovers an abbey filled with holy people in the center of his fairy kingdom, and Muldumarec's tomb in the center of this holy space.⁴¹⁵ It is here, at the side of her love's tomb and in the presence of her wicked husband, that the lady relates to Yonec the true story of his birth, and gives him his father's sword. She then falls onto the tomb in a faint, and passes from a state of unconsciousness to death. Yonec, seeing his mother lying dead on his true father's tomb, immediately strikes off the jealous old husband's head "and thus with his father's sword avenged his mother's grief."⁴¹⁶ News of Yonec's deeds and his mother's death spread throughout the city, and they bury the lady in honor next to Muldumarec and make Yonec their ruler.⁴¹⁷ Though the ending of the lai is bittersweet, Marie situates both Muldumarec and his love in an unquestionably sacred space, entombed in honor at the center of a holy abbey. A fairy who is also a knight, king, and Christian, Muldumarec is the ultimate image of a fairy's ability to be fully incorporated into orthodoxy. In contrast, the controlling, hypocritical *avouez* is stricken

⁴¹⁴ *Lais de Marie*, 410-24.

⁴¹⁵ *Lais de Marie*, 477-96.

⁴¹⁶ *Lais of Marie*, 93. "De l'espeie ki fu sun pere / Ad dunc vengié lui e sa mere" (*Lais de Marie*, 545-46).

⁴¹⁷ *Lais de Marie*, 547-54.

down in this same sacred space, and Yonec is granted kingship and power by the will of his father and all the people in the Otherworld. This son who represents the joining of the human and fairy realms is likely to be the just, liberal lord that the *avouez* never was.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered two *lais* in which fairies receive the Eucharist, and are shown willingly entering into Christian spaces and practices. The anonymous *lai* of *Desiré* depicts the Scottish knight's struggle with unnecessary guilt and suspicion regarding his relationship with a fairy lady. She shows herself to be not less but more dedicated to Christianity than her human lover, and assures Desiré of her orthodoxy by going with him to church to receive the Eucharist. The fairy lady becomes the figure who leads the way in showing Desiré that the Otherworld and the Christian society do not contradict, but are in accord. The author allays the tensions and fears that Desiré, and likely the twelfth-century audience, felt at the interaction of the Christian and fairy worlds.

Like the author of *Desiré*, Marie de France deliberately crafts a plot which places orthodoxy and the Otherworld in interaction with one another, but Marie's *lai Yonec* depicts a noblewoman who is significantly more devout than Desiré. When a fairy knight appears in her chamber and offers to be her love, she first asks for assurance that he believes in God. He gladly receives the Eucharist and she, assured, enters into a relationship with him. But their happiness as a couple is short-lived, due to the plotting of the lady's jealous, murderous husband. Interestingly, Marie's antagonist is associated with institutional Church forces, and she shows him to be a hypocrite, while the shape-shifting, supernatural fairy is shown to be a truly devout figure. This may reflect an effort on the part of female authors such as Marie to push back against overcontrolling and restrictive clerical control in areas affecting women's social and

religious lives. The *avouez* faces retribution and death at the hands of Yonec, son of the noblewoman and her fairy lover, and Yonec then becomes ruler of the fairy kingdom in his father's stead, the ideal figure of a son who chooses to support his mother instead of the oppressive and corrupt churchman.

Scholars have generally situated fairies in an adoxic space, outside the bounds of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, and have explained the reception of the Eucharist on the part of the fairies as a means of proving that they are not demonic. Instead, I argue that the authors were undertaking a larger endeavor of *incorporation*, by both raising and resolving tensions over what these beings represented and where they fit in the orthodox order of the universe. The Eucharist is situated as a focal point in each *lai*, as the fairies gladly partake of this central sacrament of Christian faith. The outcome in each *lai* is an accord between the realms of orthodoxy and the Otherworld, achieved by the fairies willingly incorporating themselves into the Body of Christ, and by the humans, in return, accepting the fairies as devout beings and entering into the Otherworld without fear or hesitation.

Chapter Four: Perceval and the *Graal*: Cultivating Curiosity, Inciting Inquiry

Introduction

Chapter Three examined the *lais* of *Desiré* and *Yonec* in order to explore the relationship of fairies to faith. As the *lais* develop, the questions of where fairies stand in relation to orthodoxy are resolved, as the fairies willingly incorporate themselves into the Body of Christ, and as the humans, in return, accept the fairies as devout beings and enter into the Otherworld without fear or hesitation. Instead of allowing the fairies to exist in a marginal, non-religious space, the authors bring the fairies into the presence of orthodox practices, spaces, and Christ himself, embodied in the Eucharist.

Chapter Four shifts in focus from fairies back to humans, taking as its central protagonist the young Welsh knight Perceval from Chrétien de Troyes's incomplete romance, *Perceval, ou Le Conte del Graal* (c. 1180-1190).⁴¹⁸ In *Perceval*, Chrétien introduced perhaps the single greatest literary mystery of all time. The most famous scene in the romance depicts Perceval's encounter with a bleeding lance and a shining *graal*; these mysterious objects pass in a procession before the knight multiple times while he dines as a guest in the Fisher King's castle.⁴¹⁹ Yet neither Perceval nor the audience receives an explanation of the significance of the

⁴¹⁸ I will use Keith Busby's critical edition of the text: Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval, ou Le Conte du Graal: Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits par Keith Busby*, ed. Keith Busby (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993) [hereafter, "*Le Roman de Perceval*"]. I will use William Kibler's prose translation: Chrétien de Troyes, "The Story of the Grail (Perceval)," in *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 381-494 [hereafter, "*Perceval*"]. The dating of *Perceval* is much contested. Chrétien states that he wrote *Perceval* for Count Philip of Flanders (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 11-13). Philip became count of Flanders in 1168 and died in 1191, but within that range of years, evidence indicates that the romance was most likely composed in approximately the final decade before Philip's death. For a more detailed exploration of the dating of *Perceval*, see Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 19-22.

⁴¹⁹ *Perceval*, 420-22. The word *graal* is possibly derived from the Latin *gradale*, referring to a large serving dish which would bear food for various courses of a meal. The word appears as a common noun in Old French on a few occasions, though the usage is fairly rare until the advent of Chrétien's *Perceval, Le Conte del Graal*. Keith Busby, *Chrétien de Troyes: Perceval (Le conte du graal)*, Critical Guides to French Texts 98 (London: Grant & Cutler, 1993), 36. See also Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 95-96.

lance and *graal*, because instead of inquiring after the meaning of the procession, Perceval sits passively, a silent spectator. He is later chastised for failing to ask two questions: Why does the lance bleed, and whom does the *graal* serve? Perceval learns from his failure and begins to undergo a change, asking relevant questions and cultivating an attitude of inquiry. He resolves that he will quest until he finds an answer to the two questions of the *graal* procession, but the romance is unfinished and the questions go unanswered.

Perceval, ou Le Conte del Graal is unique among romances in its emphasis on the importance of asking questions. Richard Barber is baffled in his attempts to find a source for Chrétien's unique narrative focus: "There are many stories in folklore and literature which revolve round the finding of an answer to a question, but stories where the crux is the *asking* of the question in the first place are rare in the extreme. I have not as yet been able to find any satisfactory parallel for this daring leap of invention, for such it must be."⁴²⁰ While the focus on the asking of questions is indeed rare in the genres of folklore and romance literature, I propose that the parallel for Chrétien's question-asking emphasis can be found by looking in a different direction, towards the ecclesiastical culture of twelfth-century France. *Le Conte del Graal* is often said to be a romance about the education of Perceval as a knight, and on another level, as a Christian.⁴²¹ I propose that by looking to the twelfth century's system of clerical education, it is possible to read *Perceval* as a romance reflecting the educational methods of the theological schools of the time, and also as a work which wishes to educate its lay audience by cultivating an attitude of inquiry. Through the *quaestiones* and *disputationes* of clerical education, and through the *exempla* and miracle stories used in sermons for lay audiences, clergymen were invested in

⁴²⁰ Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 109.

⁴²¹ Ann McCullough, "Criminal Naivety: Blind Resistance and the Pain of Knowing in Chrétien' de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*," *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 1 (2006): 48-61, at 48. See also Busby, *Chrétien de Troyes*, 23.

teaching individuals to ask difficult theological questions and to find reasonable answers. It is possible, therefore, that Chrétien's "daring leap of invention," his stress on the importance of *asking* questions, is actually a reflection and endorsement of the atmosphere of energetic inquiry about spiritual matters which flourished in northern France in the twelfth century.

Chrétien's enigmatic *graal* procession was the spark that lit a fire in the imaginations of many later medieval authors, who built upon his narrative and developed the intricate and sprawling corpus of the Grail Quest.⁴²² And though there remain two unanswered questions, about the lance and the *graal*, the *graal* with its single eucharistic wafer was taken up as the central object of fascination among the medieval continuators.⁴²³ Because Chrétien's romance is unfinished, it is impossible to know if he intended to explain the Host's presence in the *graal*, or the Grail King's subsistence on the Host, in further detail. But it is significant to note that Chrétien's continuators saw the sacrament, along with the *graal*, as central to the narrative; this underscores the Eucharist's importance to contemporary authors and audiences, and also demonstrates that Chrétien's romance effectively awakened further interest and inquiry about the Eucharist.

⁴²² Chrétien's *Perceval, ou Le Conte del Graal* is followed by, *inter alia*, the four Continuations (c. 1190-1230), Robert de Boron's *L'Estoire du Graal*, *Joseph d'Armathie* and *Merlin* (all c. 1200-1210), the *Elucidation* and the *Bliocadran* (c. 1200-1210, situated as prequels to *Le Conte del Graal*), *Perlesvaus* (before 1210), the German *Parzival* (c. 1210-20), the Vulgate Cycle which contains *Lancelot*, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and *L'Estoire del Saint Graal* (c. 1210-40) and, much later, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1485). For more information on the major grail romances, see Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 373. See also *Les manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones, and Lori J. Walters, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993).

⁴²³ From the outset, Robert de Boron makes the Eucharist central to his narrative, and he devotes two lengthy sections to explaining the significance of the Eucharist. *Merlin and the Grail: The Trilogy of Prose Romances Attributed to Robert de Boron*, trans. Nigel Bryant, *Arthurian Studies* 48 (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2005) 22; Robert de Boron, *Joseph d'Armathie: A Critical Edition of the Verse and Prose Versions*, ed. Richard O'Gorman, *Studies and Texts* 120 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1995), 110-11, lines 893-928. And Gerbert de Montreuil, author of the final continuation of *Le Conte del Graal*, described Mass as "the most glorious of mysteries, and the most precious. There you can see the very body of Jesus Christ when the priest makes the sacrament and holds it in his hands...If you believe truly and hear mass willingly, I tell you on my soul that you will...learn all the secrets of the lance and the Grail." Trans. and qtd. in Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 138, from Gerbert de Montreuil, *La continuation de Perceval*, ed. Mary Williams and Marguerite Oswald, *Classiques Françaises du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Champion, 1922-75), I, 5160-77.

The argument in the first half of this chapter is based on a consideration of Chrétien de Troyes's authorial identity and the cultural context in which he wrote. Only by understanding the practices and purposes of the *quaestiones* and *disputationes* in the schools of northern France, and by examining the aims of miracle stories and eucharistic *exempla*, is it possible to demonstrate how that environment would shape the emphasis on inquiry which persists throughout *Perceval, Le Conte del Graal*. Then, the second half of the chapter will show through a close reading of the romance that Chrétien uses not only the enigmatic *graal* procession, but the entirety of *Perceval* to encourage an attitude of inquiry. From the first scene onwards, Perceval fails to ask relevant questions which would supply himself, and the audience, with insights about mysteries in the narrative. Inviting plot threads remain unresolved due to Perceval's passivity and lack of curiosity. But it could be that Chrétien seeks to awaken a keen sense of inquiry in the audience, whose understanding of the value of asking questions would grow as they repeatedly saw the protagonist failing to do so. Perceval, after his most significant failure to inquire in the Fisher King's Castle, is openly and repeatedly reproached, which leads to his transformation. He begins to ask pointed, relevant questions and to seek answers to unexplained events around him. The entire romance cultivates curiosity and encourages a spirit of active inquiry.

Chrétien de Troyes, the Fair Unknown

The identity of Chrétien de Troyes has been the subject of much scholarly speculation. Known facts about Chrétien are scant, virtually all derived from the little he reveals of himself in his writings. Over the years, scholarship has developed a general portrait of Chrétien as a religious cleric who writes for patrons in various courts, and is simultaneously "deferential and

ironic” in tone towards the aristocracy for whom he writes.⁴²⁴ Evidence of his clerical identity is also suggested through his clear knowledge of rhetoric and dialectic, and his interest in incorporating sacramental and ecclesiastical motifs in his romances.⁴²⁵ Others have questioned this depiction of Chrétien as a clerical court writer, suggesting that he may have been a Jew who converted and chose the name Chrétien to indicate his new religious affinity.⁴²⁶ Another speculation is that his name is a pseudonym cleverly linking the classical past of Troy with the Christian present.⁴²⁷ Finally, Sarah Kay argues that Chrétien de Troyes may not be one individual but rather a name assumed by a group of poets who shared a common Christian viewpoint from which to compose romances for court, and whose assumed name showed their resolve to be subject to the higher laws of faith rather than to please a particular group of courtiers, clerks, or knights.⁴²⁸

Of all these possible authorial identities, I still find the most convincing evidence indicates that Chrétien was a cleric writing for courtly patrons. Matilda Bruckner makes the argument that Chrétien’s knowledge of rhetoric, dialectics, and the canon of ancient authorities confirms his school training as a *clerc*.⁴²⁹ Chrétien also displays his proficiency in both Latin and vernacular literary genres, drawing on Ovid’s writings, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, Wace’s Anglo-Norman adaptation *Roman de Brut*, love lyrics from troubadours, oral

⁴²⁴ Kay, Sarah, “Who was Chrétien de Troyes?” *Arthurian Literature* 15 (1997): 1-35, at 3. Those who have played a large part in depicting Chrétien as a cleric with an ironic tone are Peter Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in ‘Cligès’ and ‘Perceval’* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968), and Tony Hunt, “Aristotle, Dialectic, and Courtly Literature,” *Viator* 10 (1979): 95-129.

⁴²⁵ Hunt, “Aristotle, Dialectic,” 123; Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 27; 280.

⁴²⁶ A. Putter, “Knights and Clerics at the Court of Champagne: Chrétien de Troyes’s Romances in Context,” *Ideals and Practices of Medieval Knighthood*, eds. C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1995), 243-66, at 254-55.

⁴²⁷ R. Dragonetti, *La Vie de la letter au moyen âge: Le Conte du graal* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 20-22.

⁴²⁸ Kay, “Who was Chrétien?,” 30-34.

⁴²⁹ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “Chrétien de Troyes,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, eds. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 79-94, at 81.

Breton tales, and battle scenes from the *chansons de geste*.⁴³⁰ His repertoire of sources is vast, indeed, but my focus in this chapter centers on ways Chrétien's romance of *Perceval* could be reflecting and responding to ecclesiastical writings and debates of the second half of the twelfth century, represented in *quaestiones* and *disputationes* of the schools, and in the miracle tales and eucharistic *exempla*.

Chrétien de Troyes does name two specific patrons, Marie de Champagne and Philippe d'Alsace, count of Flanders, which indicates that he was likely in northern France at the heart of political, commercial, and religious axes from sometime in the 1160s until ca. 1191.⁴³¹ In *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, Dorothea Kullmann explains that during the latter half of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth century, an abundance of clergymen trained in the schools of northern France saturated the secular and ecclesiastical courts, and that there were far fewer ecclesiastical positions available than there were clerics ready to fill them.⁴³² Therefore, many of these men were pushed to find or forge positions for themselves in the secular courts, where they were led to craft innovative writings which would please secular patrons but also allow them to give voice to their ecclesiastical training and interests.⁴³³ It seems probable that Chrétien de Troyes was one such cleric, whose talent for innovating in the romance genre while incorporating sacred motifs has been a large part of his enduring appeal.

On a larger scale, Barbara Newman asserts that vernacular genres such as the Grail romances "testify to an intense dynamic concern with bridging the divide between clerics and

⁴³⁰ Bruckner, "Chrétien de Troyes," 81-85.

⁴³¹ Bruckner, "Chrétien de Troyes," 79.

⁴³² Dorothea Kullmann, "Introduction," *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, ed. Dorothea Kullmann (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 1-11, at 9. Kullmann explains that even before the founding of the University of Paris, northern France had already established a reputation as a seat of learning. Students came from across Europe to the schools of Saint-Victor, Sainte-Geneviève, and the cathedral schools of Paris, Chartres, and Laon. Kullmann, "Introduction," 9.

⁴³³ Kullmann, "Introduction," 9.

their lay patrons and audiences.”⁴³⁴ Both Kullmann and Newman push back against traditional categories of clerical versus lay culture, and secular versus profane writing, instead demonstrating that much of the literature of the twelfth century reflects authorial investment in cultivating a crossover of sacred and secular material.⁴³⁵ Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Chrétien is using the romance genre to express the clerical values of an educational system based on active inquiry and debate, modeled in the *quaestiones, disputationes, and exempla*. *Le Conte del Graal* demonstrates a clear interest in the Eucharist, but also, on a larger scale, on the importance of asking questions about supernatural mysteries, instead of sitting silently and letting them pass by without seeking understanding. This is Perceval’s great fault in the Fisher King’s castle, and may likewise remind audiences not to sit silently as, time and time again, the divine mysteries pass before them during Mass.

An Attitude of Inquiry: *Quaestiones* and *Disputationes*

The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the rise of dialectic as a means of investigating theological questions and arriving at well-reasoned answers.⁴³⁶ Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109) advocated the use of dialectic, emphasizing that Christians could use rational arguments to demonstrate religious truths which were already known and believed.⁴³⁷ Peter Abelard (1079-1142), in *Sic et non*, firmly asserted, “By doubting, indeed, we come to enquiry, and by enquiry we arrive at the truth.”⁴³⁸ Throughout the twelfth century an increasing number of classical texts

⁴³⁴ Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 4.

⁴³⁵ Kullmann, “Introduction,” 7-8; Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 3-5.

⁴³⁶ Brian Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic Quaestio Disputata: With Special Emphasis on Its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 6-8. See also Hunt, “Aristotle, Dialectic,” 103. Hunt emphasizes how the increasing use of dialectic as a tool to interpret texts, and as a method to construct arguments, was influential in laying the groundwork for scholasticism (103-05).

⁴³⁷ Lawn, *Quaestio Disputata*, 9.

⁴³⁸ “Dubitando quippe ad inquisitionem venimus; inquirendo veritatem percipimus” (Lawn, *Quaestio Disputata*, 10).

about dialectic were circulated, and dialectical approaches were incorporated into theological study and instruction.⁴³⁹

Scholars have long been aware of the use of dialectics Chrétien's romances. For instance, Constance Bouchard emphasizes Chrétien's use of dialectical thought and particularly "the discourse of opposites," a term she uses to describe the organization of ideas into opposing categories.⁴⁴⁰ This discourse of opposites has most often been studied in scholastic writings, but she emphasizes that such discourse spread into much of twelfth-century thought, including the romances enjoyed by lay audiences.⁴⁴¹ Bouchard turns to Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, and *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charette*, to demonstrate the ways the theological schools' discourse of opposites was adapted and integrated into the romance form.⁴⁴² Bouchard does not address *Perceval, le Conte del Graal* as part of her study, perhaps because there is not a clear discourse of opposites readily apparent in that specific romance. Yet I would say that the opposing views of the Eucharist as either the real or merely symbolic presence of Christ could be considered one such discourse that would persist in the background of the audience's minds as they heard the *graal* narrative unfold.

More predominant in *Perceval* is the emphasis on the importance of exercising an attitude of inquiry, rather than debating opposing categories. I would make an argument parallel to Bouchard's by stating that that spirit of inquiry so central to *Perceval* found its origins in the dialectics used in the theological schools, where *quaestiones* and *disputationes* modeled the arrival at truth through persistent inquiry. Before examining the ways in which Chrétien could

⁴³⁹ Lawn, *Quaestio Disputata*, 10-12.

⁴⁴⁰ Constance Brittain Bouchard, "Every Valley Shall be Exalted": *The Discourse of Opposites in Twelfth-Century Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1-2.

⁴⁴¹ Bouchard, *Discourse of Opposites*, 58.

⁴⁴² Bouchard, *Discourse of Opposites*, 69-70.

have been responding to the influences of dialectical methods, it is helpful to have a general understanding of how a *quaestio* would be introduced and how a disputation would proceed.

The procedure for a disputation was as follows: the master would announce the *quaestio*, the question that would be the subject of the dispute, in advance.⁴⁴³ The set day, faculty and students from across the schools would arrive. Clergy, prelates, and other ecclesiastical figures in the region would also eagerly attend disputations, for they were “jousts which thrilled the mind. The *disputatio* was the tournament of clerks.”⁴⁴⁴ The master would give a brief lecture while the attendees filtered in, and then the dispute would begin.⁴⁴⁵ Though the master directed the dispute, it would be his bachelor who played the role of the *respondens* (respondent), in order to demonstrate his understanding of his master’s knowledge, and to establish his own intellectual reputation.⁴⁴⁶ He would be challenged by questions from the *opponens* (the opposing figure), and at times by the masters and other bachelors in attendance.⁴⁴⁷ Ideally, the respondent’s proficiency would serve to represent the excellence of his master’s instruction and also demonstrate that the bachelor had gained autonomy.⁴⁴⁸ If a bachelor performed well in disputations, in time he was able to rise to mastery, but if he could not reply adequately to the

⁴⁴³Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 90. Le Goff draws his depiction of the disputation from Père Mandonnet, citing Mandonnet’s publication in *Revue Thomiste*, 1928, 267-69. [I can find no other information on this source in the bibliography or other footnotes.] The *quaestiones* of eleventh and early twelfth century were only considered true *quaestiones* if they presented tension between two opposing solutions, where each solution held the possibility of being the right answer, and where real doubt existed (Lawn, *Quaestio Disputata*, 11). In the later twelfth century, particularly in Paris, *quaestiones* went beyond those specific bounds and were used not only to elucidate difficult theological passages, but also to detect inconsistencies in arguments based in sophistry (Lawn, *Quaestio Disputata*, 12).

⁴⁴⁴ Mandonnet qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 90.

⁴⁴⁵ Mandonnet qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 90.

⁴⁴⁶ Helen Solterer, *Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 62.

⁴⁴⁷ Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 62; Mandonnet qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 90.

⁴⁴⁸ Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 62.

opposition, his master would lend him assistance.⁴⁴⁹ Thus a bachelor's mastery was not guaranteed, and much depended on his skill in the disputations.

After the initial and most lively dispute, a second session would be held in which the master would once again hold center stage to deliver his *determinatio*, or determination, which was his resolution to the original *quaestio*.⁴⁵⁰ The master would summarize the central facts surrounding the question in logical succession, and then he would offer the proofs in favor of the doctrinal conclusions he had resolved upon.⁴⁵¹ Finally he would conclude by responding to each of the counterarguments which had been raised in contradiction to his own position.⁴⁵² Thus were the skirmishes of the disputation's verbal jousting resolved into orderly determinations, and the daunting enigmas of the *quaestio* brought to rest.

As Chrétien sought to depict Perceval receiving an education in both knightly and spiritual matters, he could have had this dialectical approach of *quaestiones* and *disputationes* in mind. Writing in northern France in the late twelfth century, Chrétien would have been familiar with the disputations, and very easily could have attended—or participated in—some of these verbal jousts. Tony Hunt argues that Chrétien's writing reveals his dialectical training in one of the schools of northern France.⁴⁵³ While that claim cannot be proved for certain, Chrétien does use the romance of *Perceval* to insist repeatedly that an attitude of active inquiry is necessary for the knight to be able to discover truth both about the *graal* procession and about the Christian faith.

⁴⁴⁹ Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 62.

⁴⁵⁰ Mandonnet qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 91.

⁴⁵¹ Mandonnet qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 91. Initially the *quaestiones* were included alongside the *lectio*, the master's exposition of a passage, but gradually the *quaestiones* were gathered into independent collections and developed into their own genre. One of the most significant collections is Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* (c. 1150) (Lawn, *Quaestio Disputata*, 10-12).

⁴⁵² Mandonnet qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 91.

⁴⁵³ Hunt, "Aristotle, Dialectic," 123.

However, Chrétien's emphasis on the value of inquiry was not shared among all twelfth-century thinkers. A tension existed among religious scholars, as many felt that using dialectics to prove tenets which should be accepted by faith was problematic.⁴⁵⁴ The twelfth century saw ongoing opposition from various clergymen against the increasing use of dialectics to address theological matters, who felt that sacred subjects should not be framed as *quaestiones* and made the subject of disputation. Jacques Le Goff describes how in the early twelfth century, Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075-1130) emerged from his cloister to denounce those in the schools who were engaging in "vain disputes between masters and students."⁴⁵⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) also challenged the dialectical methods of the theological masters, fostering widespread skepticism among the monastic clergy.⁴⁵⁶ John of Salisbury (c. 1120-1180) expressed his concern about the incursion of logic into theology.⁴⁵⁷ At the end of the twelfth century, Stephen of Tournai (1128-1203) declared that the holiness of the Trinity and the Scriptures was dishonored by being dragged into public disputations where such subject matter was "cut up and wrangled over in the trivia, so that now there are as many errors as doctors, as many scandals as classrooms, as many blasphemies as squares."⁴⁵⁸ Some subjects were considered particularly unfit for disputations. In one of his letters, Peter of Blois (c. 1130-1211) expressed his particular disapproval of disputations on the topic of transubstantiation.⁴⁵⁹ He felt that the disputations often allowed clergy to indulge their own arrogance or vanity, and said that sacramental

⁴⁵⁴ John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle, Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 96-101. Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 61.

⁴⁵⁵ Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 61-62.

⁴⁵⁶ Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants*, 97.

⁴⁵⁷ A.G. Rigg, "Walter Map, the Shaggy Dog Story, and the *Quaestio Disputata*," *Roma, Magistra Mundi: Itineraria Culturae Medievalis. Mélanges offerts à Pere L. E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire. Textes et Études du Moyen Age* 10, no. 2 (1998): 723-35, at 728.

⁴⁵⁸ Stephen of Tournai, qtd. in Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 61, from trans. Lynn Thorndike, *University Records and Life in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 23.

⁴⁵⁹ Rigg, "Walter Map," 728.

celebrations and serious matters such as the question of transubstantiation should not be made the subject of such verbal conflicts.⁴⁶⁰

Yet masters of the schools in northern France saw great value in the dialectical approach to clerical education, which taught students to exercise an attitude of inquiry and to rigorously pursue well-reasoned explanations for challenging questions. Chrétien's repeated insistence on the importance of asking questions and on the necessity of Perceval developing an attitude of inquiry holds interesting parallels to the stance of those who advocated for employing dialectical methods in the schools. Perhaps Chrétien sought to communicate in romance form the idea which Le Goff expresses in terms of the schools: "The university intellectual was born from the moment he "questioned" the text which then became only a support, when from a passive reader he became an active questioner."⁴⁶¹ Likewise, Chrétien suggests that Perceval will be worthy of achieving the *graal* quest only when he shifts from being a passive observer to being an active questioner. In the controversy over the use of dialectics in the schools, it seems highly likely that Chrétien would stand in favor of the active inquiry modeled in *quaestiones* and *disputationes*. Clerics among the audience members in the courts of Chrétien's patrons could recognize in *Perceval* a subtle affirmation of the dialectical methods employed in the schools at this time.

Furthermore, the central question around which the romance revolves is that of the *graal* containing the eucharistic wafer. Chrétien does not feel the same hesitancy as does Peter of Blois in regards to making the Eucharist a matter of inquiry and investigation. But he does so in a subtle manner which would perhaps be acceptable to Peter. In the context of *Le Conte del Graal*,

⁴⁶⁰ Rigg, "Walter Map," 728. There were other masters, such as Peter the Chanter, who acknowledged the possible abuses of sacred subjects which could arise in disputations, but who saw the positive contributions the tools of logic and dialectic could make for the study of theology. Therefore, Peter the Chanter worked to reform rather than abolish the practice, delineating appropriate material to debate via *quaestiones*. He set aside certain subjects such as the sacraments and the humanity of Christ as matters better studied through other means, but still used the disputational approach in his own teaching and writing (Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, Merchants*, 98-99).

⁴⁶¹ Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 90.

the *graal* and the wafer therein are placed at the center of Perceval's effort to ask questions and find answers, but are not presented as a formal *quaestio* that would spark debate over the sacrament. Instead, the emphasis falls on the importance of seeking to understand whom the *graal* serves, and the narrative leads the audience to wonder why the Host is borne in the *graal*. The romance raises great interest in the Eucharist without directly making it the subject of disputation. In the eight hundred years since Chrétien wrote *Le Conte del Graal*, thousands have taken up questioning and questing after the truths represented by the *graal* procession. Chrétien's choice to describe a single eucharistic wafer in the *graal* has led many to investigate the Host and its spiritual significance, who would never otherwise have done so. He successfully awakens an attitude of inquiry in both Perceval and his audience, without ever dishonoring the sanctity of the Host.

It should be clear from this section that the clerks were trained in a system which modeled and insisted upon rigorous inquiry and discussion. They were not afraid to ask difficult questions, or to search relentlessly for resolutions to those questions. In the romance of *Perceval*, Chrétien introduces a protagonist who must learn to ask difficult questions and pursue explanations. Doing so is fundamental to his development as both knight and Christian. Chrétien thus reflects and endorses the educational approach clerics were trained in, affirming the dialectical approach that some clergymen vocally criticized. On another level, though Chrétien speaks not just to clerics in the audience, but to the laypeople who would not have undergone a clerical education that encouraged active inquiry. This could have created a large divide between the clergy and the courtiers and laypeople with whom they interacted. How could clerics instill in their audiences a willingness and desire to ask difficult theological questions and pursue sound answers? I suggest that they crafted stories—*exempla*, miracle tales, and even enigmatic

romances such as *Perceval*, in order to move audiences from mute wonder or passivity and to awaken an attitude of inquiry.

Medieval Doubt and Belief in Miracle Tales and *Exempla*

Miracle tales and *exempla* served as useful sermon illustrations for the clergy who sought to engage their listeners' attention and provide them with spiritual truths, but they also could raise questions about theological mysteries and miracles.⁴⁶² Miracle stories depict divine workings and supernatural wonders which take place for the benefit of saints or laypeople. *Exempla* are brief tales illustrating moral and spiritual truths, often set in everyday contexts familiar to lay audiences.⁴⁶³ The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the appearance of collections of these tales, alongside the growth of the pastoral care movement.⁴⁶⁴ This reforming program, which flourished in the twelfth century in Paris and spread across Europe, sought to provide laypeople with sound doctrinal and moral teaching and with a correct understanding of the sacramental system.⁴⁶⁵ Clergy of the pastoral care movement were deeply invested in helping laypeople gain insight regarding the sacrament of the Eucharist, which was a difficult task, particularly in regards to the teaching of transubstantiation. An abundance of eucharistic *exempla* circulated, reflecting the clergy's concern with bringing this subject before the lay audiences. For example, a twelfth of the *Dialogus miraculorum* of Caesarius of Heisterbach was devoted to *exempla* about the Eucharist.⁴⁶⁶

Richard Barber draws attention to the Eucharist's prominence at the time Chrétien and his continuators developed the Grail quest: "The Grail romances do not conceal a secret—they

⁴⁶² R.N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 137.

⁴⁶³ Swanson, *Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, 137.

⁴⁶⁴ Swanson, *Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, 137.

⁴⁶⁵ Ronald J. Stansbury, "Preaching and Pastoral Care in the Middle Ages," *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200–1500)*, ed. Ronald J. Stansbury (Boston 2010), 23–39, at 25.

⁴⁶⁶ Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 145.

reveal the attitudes of the time. The philosophers and theologians debated the nature of the Eucharist for the same reason that these romances were written. From the tenth century onwards, there was an increasingly intense focus on the Eucharist.”⁴⁶⁷ Some specific moments in *Perceval*, *Le Conte del Graal*, resonate with eucharistic *exempla* in circulation. Jacques de Vitry (c. 1160-1240) records two tales which originate in northern France and Flanders and are contemporary with the Grail narrative.⁴⁶⁸ One woman lived for forty years sustained on the Host alone, which was delivered to her by a dove every Friday, and administered by a priest each Sunday. Another woman was reported to live for thirty years only on the Host she received from communion.⁴⁶⁹ These accounts of course bring to mind the Grail King’s ability to thrive solely on the eucharistic wafer for twelve years. While such specific parallels between eucharistic tales and Chrétien’s romance are easily recognized, I wish to bring to attention a broader influence the miracle tales and eucharistic *exempla* could have exerted on Chrétien’s romance.

As mentioned above, clergy of the pastoral care movement aimed to provide laypeople with an understanding of the sacramental system and sound doctrine. Many of these clergy, trained through partaking in the disputations of the schools, had personally experienced how the raising of theological questions fostered the avid pursuit of spiritual truth and a deeper understanding of difficult doctrines. But while the clerics benefited from their educational system that encouraged active inquiry, the majority in their audiences never had. And while clergy in the twelfth century were caught up in discussions of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation, among laypeople, “complacency (or simple bewilderment) was probably

⁴⁶⁷ Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 144.

⁴⁶⁸ Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 141.

⁴⁶⁹ For these, and many other eucharistic tales, see James of Vitry, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the ‘Sermones vulgares’ of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. T.F. Crane (London: The Folk-Lore Society, 1890). See also Jacques de Vitry, ‘De sacramentis,’ *The ‘Historia occidentalis’ of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, ed. J.F. Hinnebusch (Freibourg: The University Press, 1972), 192-246.

a *more* common response to the doctrine of transubstantiation.”⁴⁷⁰ There was a felt need among clerics to awaken their audiences to engage in active inquiry instead of passive acceptance or mute wonder.

Steven Justice argues that the miracle stories and *exempla* were crafted by clergy in order to lead audiences to engage in active questioning and consideration of sacred matter. Justice addresses these subjects in two insightful articles, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in their Miracles?” and “Eucharistic Miracle, Eucharistic Doubt.”⁴⁷¹ Justice suggests that miracle tales and eucharistic *exempla* were recounted not to silence doubters but to stir up inquisitive attitudes. Briefly summarizing Justice’s two articles will then allow me to apply similar principles to *Perceval*, for though the romance has generally been read as part of a very different genre, I argue that Chrétien’s aims and approach do in fact share many common attributes with the miracle stories and *exempla*.

In Steven Justice’s article, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in their Miracles?” he first summarizes the two different explanations scholars generally offer to explain how medieval people viewed miracle stories: miracle stories were either seen as object lessons rather than historical events, or miracle stories originated due to misperceptions of natural events as supernatural ones.⁴⁷² Justice finds both explanations insufficient, using examples from medieval writers to show that they did not view miracles with either of those interpretive lenses.⁴⁷³ Instead, he shifts the focus to the medieval understanding of belief, which required an active choice to assert that something unseen and uncertain was true.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, when asking whether or

⁴⁷⁰ Barbara Newman, e-mail message to author, February 4, 2016.

⁴⁷¹ Steven Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?” *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1-29; Steven Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, no. 2 (2012): 307-332.

⁴⁷² Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 4-5.

⁴⁷³ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 3-5.

⁴⁷⁴ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 6, 12-13.

not medieval people believed in miracle tales, Justice argues that such belief required careful thought and analysis, and points out that controversy quite often surrounded medieval miracles.⁴⁷⁵ Medieval people were not simple-minded, gullible propagators of miraculous tales.⁴⁷⁶ Justice argues that miracle stories are not simple mechanisms which affirm belief, but are instead the conveyers of ideas which demand the exercise of belief.⁴⁷⁷ These tales bring a tension to bear on listeners, who at one extreme face “the risk of conceptual complacency, at the other of conceptual audacity.”⁴⁷⁸ Miracle stories are not meant to demand passive acceptance or to incite faithless skepticism; instead, they encourage inquiry which can lead to belief in something remarkable and supernatural, and yet true.

Chrétien’s episode in the Fisher King’s castle models a strikingly similar value system. The supernatural procession of the lance and *graal* is meant to raise questions that lead Perceval to inquire further. Instead, he fails to voice a single question about the supernatural objects passing before him, and it is due to Perceval’s passivity that he fails on his quest. The episode suggests that an attitude of inquiry is not only desirable but essential, and it warns against passive acceptance of the supernatural. The text states that Perceval felt some internal curiosity regarding the wonders he saw processing before him, but he did not voice a single question, and Chrétien emphasizes that Perceval’s window of opportunity passed.⁴⁷⁹ He was meant to see and then to question virtually instantly, echoing Justice’s observation that in miracle stories, “doubting and investigating the miraculous begin almost simultaneously with believing it.”⁴⁸⁰ If Perceval had immediately begun to investigate the mysteries he saw pass before him through

⁴⁷⁵ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 6. Even the most famous and accepted miracle, St. Francis’ stigmata, underwent decades of careful scrutiny (Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 6).

⁴⁷⁶ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 6-7.

⁴⁷⁷ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 12-13.

⁴⁷⁸ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 19.

⁴⁷⁹ *Perceval*, 421.

⁴⁸⁰ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 19.

pointed questions, he would have gained personal understanding, and also released healing, liberation, and vitality in not only the Fisher King's court, but throughout the king's entire land.

It seems that the wasteland exists because of Perceval's passivity; he is content to be a spectator, rather than an inquirer. If one were to compare the *graal* procession to a church Mass, the implication would be that a vibrant spiritual life cannot exist unless those attending the service also engage mentally and spiritually.⁴⁸¹ The *graal* procession passes by Perceval repeatedly, as each course of the meal is served. Likewise, those who regularly attended Mass would see the rites repeated time and time again. If these individuals were content to be mere spectators, remaining uninquisitive and uninformed, as Perceval did, then the result would be lifelessness and desolation instead of an informed spiritual life and community. A spiritual wasteland, as it were.

It is also important to note that Perceval, the uninformed spectator, is the one who must ask questions about the *graal* procession. Those surrounding him in the Fisher King's castle are informed participants, possessing the answers to the questions Perceval is supposed to ask. So the *graal* procession does not represent an unsolvable mystery, but is instead a display which presents attainable meaning veiled in mystery. All that is required to remove the veil is for the uninformed spectator to ask for explanation of those who already have understanding. Again, the analogy to the Church is apt, for the clergy who perform sacred rites, such as consecration of the

⁴⁸¹ The question of whether or not the *graal* procession is meant to replicate or reflect a liturgical procession has been heatedly debated in scholarship. Some, such as John Carey, instead choose to highlight the elements in the narrative that cannot be explained in terms of liturgical symbolism. Carey emphasizes that the castle is a secular setting, void of religious icons or relics, and without any religious figure to properly administer the Eucharist. Carey avoids a liturgical interpretive focus and works to provide a detailed study of the Welsh and Irish background which informs the Grail legend. John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail* (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), 301-06. But the majority of scholars agree that although Chrétien has not attempted to present a traditional Mass by any means, there can be little doubt that the *graal* procession would evoke liturgical imagery in the minds of the twelfth-century audience. See L.T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 210-14; Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 135-47; Jeff Rider, "The Perpetual Enigma of Chrétien's Grail Episode," *Arthuriana* 8, no. 1 (1998): 6-21, at 9.

Eucharist, are informed about the divine mysteries, while the laypeople watching may view the proceedings without full understanding. Yet, in both the case of Perceval and those attending Mass, explanations of the supernatural proceedings that take place before them are attainable, if they will exert the effort to ask.

The emphasis on the importance of asking questions is central to the analysis of eucharistic *exempla* in Steven Justice's article, "Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt." Justice first describes these tales, in which some unusual or miraculous event occurs related to the Eucharist; for example, the infant Christ appears in place of the Host, or the wafer is visibly turned to bleeding flesh.⁴⁸² Justice challenges the scholarly consensus which holds that the eucharistic tales were created to prove the doctrine of transubstantiation.⁴⁸³ Instead, he demonstrates that these strange stories actually just draw more attention to the unprovable nature of a testimony or account.⁴⁸⁴ The stories all demand belief, belief in the difficult doctrine of transubstantiation which was constantly being discussed in clerical circles.⁴⁸⁵ But though the clergy were invested in understanding the nature of the Eucharist, this did not guarantee that transubstantiation would be an issue that laypeople were equipped to study or motivated to master. As previously mentioned, complacency or bewilderment was a more likely response from lay audiences.

Justice makes the unexpected argument that instead of trying to suppress skepticism, the eucharistic miracle stories work to raise it. He suggests that the authors of the *exempla* felt that there was a greater danger of people assenting in a lazy and unquestioning manner to difficult doctrines like that of transubstantiation, than there was in arousing people to wrestle with and

⁴⁸² Justice, "Eucharistic Miracle," 311-12.

⁴⁸³ Justice, "Eucharistic Miracle," 308.

⁴⁸⁴ Justice, "Eucharistic Miracle," 310-11.

⁴⁸⁵ Justice, "Eucharistic Miracle," 308.

inquire about the nature of the Eucharist. The tales shock people into viewing the Eucharist as Jesus Christ, physically present on the altar, in priestly hands, and in the mouths of the communicants.⁴⁸⁶ The stories vividly remind listeners of the astonishing substance which abides within the accidents of bread and wine. The tales are concerned about doubt, but “[t]he doubt they worry about is what transpires, not when the mind starts up, but when it shuts down.”⁴⁸⁷ A mind that was actively engaging and questioning and seeking for explanations was always preferable to an inert, lazy mind which passively accepted doctrines which were, in fact, spectacular when seen clearly. Like the eucharistic miracles, Chrétien’s romance models the desire to awaken individuals to inquire about the wonders before them.

Turning to *Le Conte del Graal*, the character of Perceval models a mind shut down in the face of supernatural mystery, and Chrétien is deeply invested in awakening Perceval’s attitude of inquiry. While much has been made of Perceval’s identity as an uncouth Welshman, another purpose for his unusual origin may be found through comparison to eucharistic *exempla*. Justice highlights the fact that oftentimes the protagonists of eucharistic tales are small children, ignorant peasants, Jews, or uninformed, lazy Christians. “It is sometimes thought that protagonists like these are chosen to stigmatize doubt as childish, or rustic, or Judaic. But this misses the point.”⁴⁸⁸ Justice then suggests that rather than selecting these figures to stigmatize doubt, they are chosen because they are uninformed in regards to doctrine and therefore could not have fabricated or imagined the eucharistic miracles. Chrétien could have introduced Perceval as an ignorant, uncatechized Christian Welshman for much the same reason. He encounters marvels which he would never have conceived of on his own. He, like the simple

⁴⁸⁶ Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle,” 320.

⁴⁸⁷ Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle,” 325.

⁴⁸⁸ Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle,” 311.

individuals in the *exempla*, is given a chance to see a supernatural display, and to gain deeper understanding as a result. But Perceval initially fails to recognize that the *graal* procession is a mystery which merits investigation. He misses the opportunity ask questions and become more informed. His failure serves as an effective warning to the audience, not to make the same mistakes. Instead of being passive spectator, Perceval must become an active inquirer, and Chrétien shows the knight beginning to learn because of his failure and to develop an attitude of inquiry.

Thus it is possible to make the argument that Chrétien's *Perceval* does in romance form what the miracle stories and eucharistic *exempla* do in church sermons: they seek to awaken in their audiences an insatiable spirit of inquiry, which can lead to the discovery of important truths. They teach people that it is necessary to ask questions about that which is unclear, in order to gain deeper understanding of the world around them and their part in it. And while Chrétien may not intend to make the Eucharist the central matter of inquiry at the heart of his romance, as it is in the short eucharistic *exempla*, his choice to place the Host in the *graal* does draw significant attention to the sacrament. By taking the Host and introducing it in a fictional context like the *graal* procession, Chrétien creates an alluring avenue for spiritual inquiry in a secular setting. The synthesis of chivalric and spiritual subject matter makes the Eucharist appear more, not less, intriguing.⁴⁸⁹ In summary, *Perceval* successfully stimulates interest in the Host, and, on a larger scale, demonstrates to its audience the importance of exercising an inquisitive attitude, of asking questions which can lead to the revelation of life-changing truths.

⁴⁸⁹ C.S. Lewis briefly comments on the crossover of sacred and secular material in Chrétien's *Le Conte del Graal*: "Might not the quasi-secularization of his sacred theme have been intended to produce just that liberation from reverential inhibitions, that fresh wonder, which the Christian matter elicits by catching us off our guard? Might not the cryptic quality be designed to exercise...fascination? When we are dealing with a genius we must not exclude the hypothesis that he meant to do just what he has in fact done." C.S. Lewis, "Arthuriana: *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative Study*, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959)" *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 217-22, at 218.

Awakening an Attitude of Inquiry in *Perceval, le Conte del Graal*

I turn now to the text of *Perceval* itself, to demonstrate how Chrétien uses not only the *graal* procession, but the entire romance of *Perceval* to model an attitude of inquiry. He teaches through Perceval's negative example that individuals must learn to ask pointed questions and find relevant answers to the spiritual and societal questions which surround them. Initially, Chrétien emphasizes Perceval's inability to ask relevant questions. Chrétien repeatedly places Perceval in the midst of situations where, if only he would ask the right questions, intriguing information about knightly exploits, Perceval's own family history, or the *graal* and lance would then come to light. Instead, Perceval simply remains silent, or asks irrelevant questions which derail entire conversations. I contend that Chrétien uses these moments as a deliberate narrative strategy, for the unexplained scenarios could cause the audience to feel a sense of wonder and curiosity, and then frustration and disappointment as, time and time again, Perceval refuses ask the questions that would supply the audience with explanations to the text's mysteries.⁴⁹⁰

Perceval's repeated failures to inquire gradually create a deep sense of regret, both for the knight within the text and for the audience outside the text. By introducing a protagonist who fails to question, Chrétien may be seeking to hold up a mirror to courtiers and laypeople who, like Perceval, remain passive when they should be filled with a spirit of inquiry, particularly in regards to spiritual mysteries. I can think of no method more effective in teaching individuals to ask questions and seek answers than the approach Chrétien chose. Rather than a sermon urging people to engage in spiritual and intellectual inquiry, Chrétien stirs up an attitude of inquiry through a romance overflowing with unanswered questions.

⁴⁹⁰ Keith Busby notes this technique, saying, "It is in a sense a modern reaction to a medieval text to want all of these mysteries solved, and Chrétien is often purposely mysterious, but nowhere else in his *oeuvre* does he use this technique to quite the same unsettling effect...this allusive and impressionistic technique [is] typical of *Perceval*" (Busby, *Chrétien de Troyes*, 18).

It is also essential to keep in mind that Chrétien's romances were meant to be read aloud, and the narrator who speaks in the poems continuously fosters an atmosphere of direct communication with his audience. He includes exhortations to the listeners, voices personal preference for or antipathy towards characters, addresses the audience directly, asks rhetorical questions, and makes first-person statements.⁴⁹¹ The twelfth-century audience of aristocratic listeners viewed poetry as ancillary to rhetoric, and Chrétien's use of the rhetorical mode would effectively engage the interest of his audience.⁴⁹² In *Perceval* specifically, the rapid dialogue and interrogative scenes, such as when Perceval's cousin asks him no less than fourteen questions, could have been perceived by the audience as parodies of the disputations in the schools. At the very least, the spoken performance of the romance would clearly draw attention to the moments when narrative questions are not resolved, or when *Perceval* does not give voice to the questions the audience would wish to hear answered. Were I listening to *Perceval* performed, I would have been sorely tempted to ask the questions that the protagonist fails to ask. The romance could quite effectively awaken an attitude of inquiry in its listening audience.

From the very first scene onwards, Chrétien introduces intriguing questions which are never resolved, due to Perceval's failure to ask relevant questions. As the romance begins, knights riding through the Welsh forest pause and ask the astonished Perceval—who has never encountered or heard of knights before—a question to which he does not reply: “‘Have you seen five knights and three maidens cross this clearing today?’ But the boy had his mind made up to inquire about other matters; he reached out for the knight's lance, took it, and asked: ‘Good sir,

⁴⁹¹ Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 278-79.

⁴⁹² Douglas Kelly, “Narrative Poetics: Rhetoric, Orality and Performance,” *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 52-63, at 52.

you who are called ‘Knight’, what is this you carry?’”⁴⁹³ Chrétien’s audience never learns who those five knights and three maidens are, or why these other knights were searching for them, because, as Chrétien immediately demonstrates, Perceval shows no interest in understanding the purpose of the knights’ quest, but fixates on his own interests instead. The conversation diverges down a tangential side trail that reveals Perceval’s own ignorance.

A total of five times, the knight asks whether Perceval has seen the company of men and maidens. On each occasion Perceval ignores the question and responds with inquiries of his own, asking what the lance is, then the shield, then the hauberk, and finally, whether the knights were born in this form or were made into knights by someone.⁴⁹⁴ Chrétien emphasizes Perceval’s inability to answer pointed questions and ask relevant ones, as the knight exclaims: “You are leading me on to subjects I didn’t even ask you about! I intended, so help me God, to get information from you rather than have you draw it from me—yet you want me to inform you!”⁴⁹⁵ The knight highlights a role-reversal taking place, where he who intended to question instead finds himself being questioned and serving as a source of information about the most basic attributes of his own identity as a knight. Perceval does not respond to direct questions, and his own queries are all fixated on the knight’s outward appearance, rather than trying to understand the man’s purpose or identity.

At the same time, though, the knight persists in asking his original question about the five knights and three maidens, and after his fifth inquiry, Perceval offers a seemingly irrelevant comment: “‘Sir, now observe the woods that encircle the top of that mountain. There lie the

⁴⁹³ *Perceval* 383. “«Veüs tu hui en ceste lande / .V. chevaliers et .iii. puceles?» / Li vallés a autres noveles / Enquerre et demander entent; / A sa lance sa main li tent, / Sel prent et dist: «Biax sire chiers, / Vos qui avez non chevaliers, / Que est iche que vos tenez?»” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 184-91).

⁴⁹⁴ *Perceval*, 383-84.

⁴⁹⁵ *Perceval*, 383-84. “Qu’en autres noveles me mes / Que je ne [te] quier ne demant. / Je quidoie, se Diex m’amant, / Que tu noveles me deïsses / Ainz que de moi les apreïsses, / Et tu vels que je les t’apraigne” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 216-221).

passes of the river Doon.’ ‘And what of them, good brother?’ ‘My mother’s harrowers are there, sowing and ploughing her lands. If these people passed by there, and if they saw them, they would tell you.’”⁴⁹⁶ Even when Perceval finally offers some sort of reply to the knight’s question, he does so in an incoherent and indirect manner. He also does not ask any further questions about why the knights are pursuing this group of people. But the knight, finally supplied with the directions he seeks, departs with his companions, and neither Perceval nor the audience ever learns what brought them there or who they were pursuing. This scene is the first of many moments in the narrative where Chrétien suggests that some interesting story lies near at hand, but because Perceval does not ask why the knights are riding in chase, the tale remains untold. If the audience hoped to learn the knights’ purpose, they now must surrender that hope, because Perceval has failed to find out for himself, and thus for the audience.

When Perceval returns to his mother, full of eagerness to become a knight himself, she offers her son explanation of his past. Notably, she offers this information voluntarily, in spite of the fact that Perceval did not ask her a single question concerning his ancestry or the reason his mother had never told him of the existence of knights. Yet again he displays a remarkable lack of interest in relevant issues. His mother tells Perceval that his father was a knight of great prowess, who was wounded in his thighs, and that a shift in the balance of power at the death of Utherpendragon led to their family’s impoverishment. They fled to Perceval’s home in the Welsh woods, where his two older brothers grew to be magnificent knights, who died in combat.⁴⁹⁷ She describes Perceval’s family’s tragic demise: “A strange thing happened to the elder: the crows and rooks pecked out both his eyes—this was how the people found him dead. Your father died

⁴⁹⁶ *Perceval*, 385. “«Sire, or esgardez / Le plus haut bois que vos veez, / Qui cele Montaigne avironne. / La sont li destroit de Valdone. / -Et que de che, fait il, biax frere? / -La sont li herceor ma mere, / qui ses terres sement et erent, / Et se ces gens I trespasserent, /S’il les virent, sel vos diront»” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 295-303).

⁴⁹⁷ *Perceval*, 386-87.

of grief for his sons, and I have suffered a very bitter life since he died.”⁴⁹⁸ Again, Chrétien raises alluring questions in the narrative—Who wounded Perceval’s father, and why? How did Uther’s death contribute to widespread poverty and disinheritance? Who killed Perceval’s older brothers, and what is meant by the elder’s strange and grievous demise? Any normal youth should be filled with such questions, and if Perceval had asked his mother at this moment, he could have learned valuable information about himself, the land’s history and governance, and the current political state of the knighthood he is so eager to join.

Instead, “The boy paid scarcely any attention to what his mother said. ‘Give me something to eat,’ he said. ‘I don’t understand your words, but I would gladly go to the king who makes knights; and I will go, no matter what.’”⁴⁹⁹ The callousness of Perceval’s indifference to the pains his family has suffered is obviously part of Chrétien’s efforts to demonstrate the importance of *caritas*, charity, and of his protagonist’s initial lack of it.⁵⁰⁰ But another result of the conversation is that it demonstrates Perceval’s inability to ask the right questions, foreshadowing his greater failure in the Fisher King’s castle. The mother’s explanation raised more questions than it answered, but those questions go unanswered, due to Perceval’s disinterest in even trying to listen to his mother, much less understand her words. If Perceval had made an effort to comprehend the things his mother was revealing and had asked further

⁴⁹⁸ *Perceval*, 387. “De l’ainsné avinent merveilles, / Que li corbel et les corneilles / Ambesdeus les oex li creverent; / Einsi les gens mort le troverent. / Del doel des fils morut li pere, / Et je ai vie molt amere / Sofferte puis que il fu mors” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 477-83).

⁴⁹⁹ *Perceval*, 387. “Li vallés entent molt petit / A che que sa mere li dist. / «A mengier, fait il, me donez; / Ne sai de coi m’araisonnez. / Mes molt iroie volentiers / Au roi qui fait les chevaliers, / Et je irai, cui qu’il em poist»” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 489-95).

⁵⁰⁰ As Joseph J. Duggan notes, Chrétien praises *caritas*, or charity, in the prologue, and thus it is possible to propose that Chrétien means *caritas* to be the romance’s theme. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 275. See also Busby, *Chrétien de Troyes*, 14; 19. Certainly Perceval is shown to lack charity in early scenes, and there is a correlation in learning to ask questions and in cultivating charity. It is through the vocalization of specific questions that Perceval can show concern and care for those he encounters. By learning to inquire, he also learns to demonstrate *caritas*.

questions, his understanding of his own identity and of the spiritual and political context of the society he was about to enter could have been deepened, and he could have made wiser, better-informed decisions.

The audience also is enticingly aware of a wealth of information the mother could provide, but because the protagonist does not inquire, the information is withheld and does not ever fully come to light—though, if Chrétien had finished the romance, it may have in the end. These opening scenes, in which Perceval meets knights and then speaks with his mother, serve to raise unanswered questions, and to demonstrate that the main character, Perceval, lacks the ability to ask relevant questions, and sometimes lacks the curiosity to inquire at all. From the outset of his romance, Chrétien quite effectively raises questions about characters and events, and refuses to resolve them. The *graal* procession in the Fisher King's castle just represents the most intriguing in a series of mysteries which remain unexplained because of Perceval's failure to inquire. The importance of asking questions in response to what one sees or learns is effectively portrayed from the opening scenes onwards.

Some time later, when Perceval arrives at the lodgings of Gornemant of Gohort, he receives words of advice on when a knight should speak and be silent, which Perceval then applies incorrectly. Gornemant admonishes Perceval: "And be careful not to be too talkative or prone to gossip. Anyone who is too talkative soon discovers he has said something that brings him reproach; and the wise man says and declares: 'He who talks too much commits a sin.' Therefore, young man, I warn you not to talk too much."⁵⁰¹ Gornemant includes this admonition in the midst of other brief instructions, such as the need to show mercy instead of killing a knight

⁵⁰¹ *Perceval*, 402. "Et gardez que vos ne soiez / Trop parlans ne trop noveliers: / Nus ne puet ester trop parliers / Qui sovent tel chose ne die / Qu'en li atorne a vilonie, / Car li sages dit et retrait: / <Qui trop parole, pechié fait.> / Por che, biax frere, vos chastoi / De trop parler" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 1648-56a).

outright, the importance of consoling ladies who are upset, and the value of going to church and praying.⁵⁰² Significantly, Gornemant never instructed Perceval that he should not ask questions. Perceval applies this proverbial warning against being overly talkative to every context, failing to recognize that asking questions in unfamiliar situations could *prevent* him from committing sins or failing.

Perceval's brief time of training under Gornemant is meant to serve as a significant step in his knightly education. In this context, the system of clerical education could be a subtext to the romance plot. The schools' dialectical model taught the disciple that if he is to attain autonomy, he must do so through verbal conflict.⁵⁰³ Helen Solterer comments that the debate between the respondent and his opponents "resembles the sparring between knights, for there too the clash provides a mechanism for bonding that secures both men in the same courtly, chivalric roles."⁵⁰⁴ The student attained mastery only by besting other masters with superior verbal argumentation. If Chrétien had such a model in mind, the implication would be that Perceval should not just passively and simplistically try to follow every injunction his master gives him. Just as clerks would demonstrate their increasing knowledge and ability to stand as independent masters through the asking and answering of questions, so Perceval the knight must learn to demonstrate his autonomy by asking questions of the authorities which surround him. But no verbal argumentation or even exchange of ideas occurs; Perceval makes no effort to question the purpose of Gornemant's admonition to avoid talking too much. Had he done so, he would have gained greater understanding of the intent behind the injunction. But at this early point in his

⁵⁰² *Perceval*, 402.

⁵⁰³ Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 28.

⁵⁰⁴ Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 28.

education, Perceval fails to recognize the importance of active inquiry, and thus fails to gain greater understanding or autonomy.

Perceval follows Gornemant's advice too literally at the next place he visits, the castle of Beurepaire. Perceval insists on leaving Gornemant to find out if his mother is well, and on his journey towards home he stops to request lodgings at Beurepaire. As he enters, he sees that both the castle and the churches within its walls are in disarray, with walls cracked, buildings in ruin, and mills and bakeries abandoned. The social and spiritual workings of the town have ground to a halt.⁵⁰⁵ Perceval meets the beautiful lady of the castle, Blancheflor, and she courteously welcomes him into an ornate room, where he sits, facing her and six knights, who all sit silently. At this juncture Perceval recalls Gornemant's advice and refrains from speaking. The silence drags on, creating awkward unease among Beurepaire's knights, until finally Blancheflor breaks the silence and asks Perceval to tell about himself.⁵⁰⁶ The entire scene foreshadows Perceval's upcoming visit to the Fisher King's castle. In both cases he is welcomed into a castle where there are evident problems and mysteries surrounding him, but which he does not inquire about. At Blancheflor's castle, she eventually reveals her problems to him, of her own volition and without his questioning.⁵⁰⁷ Perceval therefore takes on the besiegers and help resolve her problems, but because Blancheflor provides him with the necessary information and does not rebuke him for his lack of interest in her plight, he does not learn from his stay at Beurepaire that speaking up and inquiring over a host's situation is a valuable and necessary virtue.

Now we reach the most famous and most debated scene in Chrétien's entire romance, and indeed, perhaps in all medieval romance. After defeating Blancheflor's foes, Perceval resolves to

⁵⁰⁵ *Perceval*, 402-03.

⁵⁰⁶ *Perceval*, 404.

⁵⁰⁷ *Perceval*, 405-06.

leave and try once more to find his mother. But yet again, he finds himself welcomed into a mysterious castle. This time it is the castle of the Fisher King. He is invited to sit at the table at the Fisher King's side, and while they sit, "speaking of one thing and another,"⁵⁰⁸ Perceval sees the *graal* procession pass by for the first time. It is significant that before the procession begins, the knight and king are in conversation. Instead of remaining completely silent as he did when he met Blancheflor, here Perceval and his host have entered into dialogue. This makes Perceval's failure to inquire about the *graal* procession even more grievous, as he has already enjoyed conversation with his host, and it would not be unnatural for him to ask the meaning of the proceedings in the hall.

Three times in this fairly brief passage, Chrétien draws attention to Perceval's silence in the face of the wonders he is encountering, and with each mention of Perceval's failure to inquire, Chrétien's criticisms grow stronger and clearer. The first mention of the knight's silence occurs with Perceval's first glimpse of the *graal* procession. A squire appears, carrying a white lance whose tip releases a drop of blood, which trickles down the lance to the squire's hand.⁵⁰⁹ In the face of such a marvel, now would be the time for Perceval to ask for an explanation of the mystery before him, but instead he "refrained from asking how it came about, for he recalled the admonishment given by the gentleman who had knighted him, who taught and instructed him not to talk too much; he was afraid that if he asked they would consider him uncouth, and therefore he did not ask."⁵¹⁰ Here Chrétien attributes Perceval's silence to his fear of seeming unrefined, though later in the romance, characters tell Perceval that his sin in leaving his mother behind is

⁵⁰⁸ *Perceval*, 420. "Que qu'il parloient d'un et d'el" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3190).

⁵⁰⁹ *Perceval*, 420. "Le lance blanche et le fer blanc, / S'issoit une goutte de sanc / Del fer de la lance en somet, / Et jusqu'a la main au valet / Coloit cele goutte vermeille" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3197-3201).

⁵¹⁰ *Perceval*, 420. "Si s'est de demander tenus / Coment ceste chose avenoit, / Que del chasti li sovenoit / Celui qui chevalier le fist, / Qui li ensaigna et aprist / Que de trop parler se gardast. / Et crient, se il le demandast, / Qu'en le tenist a vilonie; / Por che sin el demanda mie" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3204-12.)

what really kept him silent.⁵¹¹ The reasons for the knight's failure to inquire are later shown to be multi-layered, but at this point, all Perceval takes into consideration is his fear of appearing uncouth and of challenging his teacher's instructions.

The next moment the golden, bejeweled *graal* itself appears, shining brilliantly. The audience may hope that now, of all times, Perceval will ask his host for an explanation of this marvel. But their hopes will be disappointed. Following the bleeding lance, two more squires enter holding candelabra, and then,

A maiden accompanying the two young men was carrying a grail with her two hands; she was beautiful, noble, and richly attired. After she had entered the hall carrying the grail the room was so brightly illumined that the candles lost their brilliance like stars and the moon when the sun rises. After her came another maiden, carrying a silver carving platter. The grail, which was introduced first, was of fine pure gold. Set in the grail were precious stones of many kinds, the best and costliest to be found in earth or sea: the grail's stones were finer than any others in the world, without any doubt. The grail passed by like the lance; they passed in front of the bed and into another chamber. The young knight watched them pass by but did not dare ask who was served from the grail, for in his heart he always held the wise gentleman's advice. Yet I fear this may be to his misfortune, for I have heard it said that at times it is just as wrong to keep too silent as to talk too much. Whether for good or for ill he did not ask or inquire anything of them.⁵¹²

Chrétien's greatest concern is in showing that Perceval's response to the procession omits question-asking. He could have described Perceval's awe at the beauty of the maiden and the *graal*, or revealed some of Perceval's mental responses to the wondrous procession. Instead, his

⁵¹¹ *Perceval*, 425; 459-60.

⁵¹² *Perceval*, 420-21.

“I. graal entre ses .ii. mains / Une damoisele tenoit, / Qui avec les vallés venoit, / Bele et gente et bien acesmee. / Quant ele fu laiens entree / Atot le graal qu'ele tint, / Une si grans clartez i vint / Qu'ausi perdirent les chandoiles / Lor claret comme les estoiles / Quant li soleus lieve ou la lune. / Après celi en revint une / Qui tint .i. tailleoir d'argent. / Li graals, qui aloit devant / De fin or esmeré estoit; / Pierres prescieuses avoit / El graal de maintes manieres, / Des plus riches et des plus chieres / Qui en mer ne en terre soient; / Totes autres pierres passoient / Celes del graal sanz dotance. / Tout ensi com passa la lance, / [Par devant le lit s'en passerent] / Et d'une chamber en autre entrerent. / Et li vallés les vit passer, / Ne n'osa mie demander / Del graal cui l'en en servoit, / Que toz jors en son cuer avoit / La parole au preudome sage. / Si criem que il n'e ait damage, / Por che que j'ai oï retraire / Qu'ausi bien se puet on trop taire / Com trop parler a la foie[e]. / Ou biens l'en praigne ou mals l'en chiee, / Ne lor en quiert, rien ne demande” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3220-53).

sole emphasis centers on Perceval's choice not to inquire. And now Chrétien implies that Perceval's silence may be a critical error. Though he avoids a sermonizing tone, Chrétien does clearly voice a strong leaning in favor of speaking up instead of staying silent. His tone is rather ominous, and rightly so.

After the procession has passed by, the table is set and Perceval and his host begin to eat. But Chrétien returns to his emphasis on Perceval's failure to inquire about the grail for the third time within a few short lines, indicating that this point is of paramount significance within the romance: "Meanwhile the grail passed again in front of them, and again the youth did not ask who was served from the grail. He held back because the gentleman had so gently admonished him not to talk too much, and he kept his warning constantly to heart. But he kept more silent than he should have, because with each course that was served he saw the grail pass by completely uncovered before him."⁵¹³ Now instead of hinting that Perceval may have erred, Chrétien openly asserts that Perceval was wrong to remain silent. With each mention of the knight's failure to inquire, Chrétien's criticism has grown stronger. The fear of appearing uncultured or uninformed, which is forefront in Perceval's mind, is not a legitimate excuse. Neither is fear of challenging the instructions of one's master a viable reason for passivity instead of curiosity. Through the protagonist's failure, Chrétien sends a clear message that active inquiry when one encounters supernatural wonders would be the wisest and best response.

Chrétien also inserts the important detail that the *graal* passes by "completely uncovered."⁵¹⁴ This raises the question of whether or not Perceval could see the eucharistic

⁵¹³ *Perceval*, 421. "Et li graals endementiers / Par devant als retrespasa, / Ne li vallés ne demanda / Del graal cui on en servoit. / Por le preudome s'en tenoit, / Qui dolcement le chastia / De trop parler, et il I a / Toz jors son cuer, si l'en sovient. / Mais plus se taist qu'il ne covient, / Qu'a chascun mes que l'on servoit, / Par devant lui trespasser voit / Le graal trestot discovert" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3290-3301).

⁵¹⁴ *Perceval*, 421. "trestot discovert" (*Le Roman de Perceval* 3301).

wafer within the grail. Chrétien only reveals what is in the *graal* to his audience at a later point in the text, when Perceval meets a hermit who offers explanations regarding many of the mysteries of the Fisher King's castle. The hermit reveals that both he and the Grail King are brothers of Perceval's mother. The hermit also states after this revelation, "And do not imagine that he is served pike or lamprey or salmon. A single host that is brought to him in that grail sustains and brings comfort to that holy man—such is the holiness of the grail!"⁵¹⁵ The hermit's words lead most scholars to assume that until this point Perceval does not know what is contained in the *graal*. But in the initial description of the procession, Chrétien clearly states that the *graal* passed by Perceval completely uncovered multiple times during his feast with the Fisher King. If this is the case, it is certainly possible that Perceval was not ignorant of the *graal's* contents. Also, the question Perceval seeks to ask is not "What does the grail contain?" but "Who is served by the grail?" Perhaps this is the question which first comes to mind because he can clearly see what the *graal* contains, and thus has no need to ask what is in the *graal*.⁵¹⁶ Chrétien could also have chosen to deliberately suspend this information from the audience, to raise their curiosity and desire to inquire even further.

Chrétien gives the audience a glimpse at Perceval's inner curiosity about who was served by the *graal*, and his unfortunate decision to keep silent instead of questioning: "But he did not learn who was served from it, though he wanted to know; he said to himself that he would be

⁵¹⁵ *Perceval*, 460. "Mais ne quidez pas que il ait / Lus ne lamproie ne salmon; / D'une sole oiste li sains hom, / Que l'en en cel graal li porte, / Sa vie sostiene en conforte, / Tant sainte chose est li graals" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 6420-25). He continues, "And he is so holy that his life is sustained by nothing more than the host that comes in the grail. He has lived for twelve years like this, without ever leaving the room into which you saw the grail enter" (*Perceval*, 460).

⁵¹⁶ Another, broader answer to the question of whom the *graal* serves may be implied. On a literal level, the *graal* bearing a single host serves the Grail King, Perceval's uncle. But on a wider scale, the Host within the *graal* serves humankind; it signifies the Body of Christ, given for salvation of the world. Could that be the ultimate answer to the question, "Whom does the *graal* serve?" A spiritual insight of that scale would indeed be effective in saving lives and restoring wastelands.

sure to ask one of the court squires before he left there, but would wait until he was taking leave of the lord and all the rest of his household in the morning. So the question was put off, and he set his mind to drinking and eating.”⁵¹⁷ Interestingly, Chrétien specifies that the meal consists of “a haunch of venison,” “clear strong wine,” and “whole loaves of flat bread.”⁵¹⁸ So Perceval sets his mind to eating bread and flesh, and drinking wine, as the *graal* with the eucharistic wafer, the body of Christ, passes by him repeatedly. Subtle irony on Chrétien’s part here seems readily apparent. Instead of pursuing explanation for the mysteries before him, Perceval “set his mind to drinking and eating.”⁵¹⁹ This phrase resonates with a similar danger laypeople faced as they received the Eucharist. They, like Perceval, may feel curiosity about what they were encountering, but then instead of pursuing clearer understanding, simply set their minds on “drinking and eating” the eucharistic elements. They, like Perceval, risked being passive spectators who encountered wonders but missed the opportunity for the revelation of deeper mysteries.

Chrétien also underscores Perceval’s failure to ask questions about the *graal* procession by showing that the knight had ample opportunity to inquire of the Fisher King after the procession had repeatedly passed by and the meal had been eaten: “After the meal the two stayed a long while in conversation.”⁵²⁰ The lord of the castle, the best source of knowledge regarding the events in his domain, sat in conversation with Perceval, fully available to answer questions. Likewise, the audience at court had no shortage of clergy surrounding them, and they could

⁵¹⁷ *Perceval*, 421. “Mais il ne set cui l’en en sert / Et si le volroit il savoir. / Mais il le demandera voir, / Ce dist et pense, ains qu’il s’en tort, / A un des vallés de la cort; / Mais jusqu’al matin atendra, / Que al seignor congié prendra / Et a toute l’autre maisnie. / Einsi la chose a respitie, / S’enten[t] a boire et a mengier” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3302-11).

⁵¹⁸ *Perceval*, 421. “une hanche / De cerf,” “Vins clers et aspre,” and “.i. gastel qui fu entiers” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3280-81, 3282, 3289, respectively).

⁵¹⁹ *Perceval*, 421. “S’enten[t] a boire et a mengier” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3311).

⁵²⁰ *Perceval*, 422. “Aprés le mengier ambedui / Parlerent ensamble et veillierent” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3320-21).

choose to inquire after further explanation of the Eucharist from these men, and would be sure to receive insightful and illuminating answers. But they, like Perceval, may be too easily contented with conversation on other topics, losing opportunities to ask about the subjects which matter most. After Perceval and the Fisher King talk together for a long while, the lord finally retires to bed. (One can only imagine the Fisher King's internal frustration as Perceval converses at length, but never asks the questions which would heal him and his land.) The morning offers an unsettling awakening for Perceval, when he discovers that he has been abandoned in the castle, and as he crosses the drawbridge to look for the castle's inhabitants, it raises up under him and he finds himself forcibly locked out. Only now does Perceval turn and cry out at the silent walls of the castle, pleading for someone to answer, because he wants to ask them about something.⁵²¹ He has spoken too little, and too late. Even at this moment Perceval does not specify what his unasked question is, though one would hope he wishes to ask about the *graal* procession.

Perceval Becomes One who Inquires

As a bemused Perceval rides through the forest away from the castle, he meets the young woman who turns out to be quite well-informed about the Fisher King's castle, and also a woman with no reticence towards question-asking. In a rapid back-and-forth dialogue, the maiden asks Perceval no fewer than fourteen questions, thirteen of which were specifically about what Perceval saw in the *graal* procession.⁵²² She wants to know if he asked why the lance bled, and where the *graal* was being carried.⁵²³ Perceval's answer summarizes the source of all his failings: "No question came from my mouth."⁵²⁴ She laments and tells him that because he failed to ask those questions, he and many others will experience great suffering. She declares that

⁵²¹ *Perceval*, 422-23.

⁵²² *Perceval*, 424-25.

⁵²³ *Perceval*, 424-25.

⁵²⁴ *Perceval*, 425. "-Ainc de ma bouche n'en issi" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3570).

Perceval kept silent because of his sin in leaving his mother, who died of grief on his account. She also reveals that if Perceval had asked those two questions, he would have healed the maimed Fisher King, and his land would have been restored. Finally, she tells him she is his first cousin.⁵²⁵ With this dramatic series of revelations, Perceval is devastated, because this is the first time he has heard that his mother has died, and the first moment that he is informed that he was meant to ask questions about the lance and *graal*.

Yet these painful revelations also bring about a change in Perceval. For the first time in the entire romance, he begins asking relevant questions applicable to the situation at hand. He first asks his cousin how she could know these things, and when she offers convincing proof, he then offers to find the knight who just struck down her love. She again displays unusual knowledge, warning Perceval that the sword he carries will shatter and fail him.⁵²⁶ Again, Perceval responds by asking a relevant question; he asks if she knows whether or not he could ever repair the sword, if it breaks. She provides a precise answer guiding him to the one smith who can repair the sword.⁵²⁷ Such a clear exchange of relevant information is striking, simply because this is the first time in the romance that such a conversation has occurred. Up until this point Perceval has either asked irrelevant and simplistic questions, as when he first encountered knights and wanted to know what their armor was, or he has not asked questions at all. But after being rebuked by his cousin, something seems to have fundamentally shifted in Perceval. His curiosity is awakened, and his reticence to speak or question has vanished. This opens new possibilities in the romance, and would also likely create a sense of relief in the audience. Finally the strange events and alluring mysteries around Perceval will not pass by unquestioned and

⁵²⁵ *Perceval*, 425.

⁵²⁶ *Perceval*, 425-26.

⁵²⁷ *Perceval*, 426.

unexplained. The protagonist has begun to ask questions that provide him, and Chrétien's audience, with insightful, relevant information.

Perceval's transformation continues to be evident when immediately afterwards he sees a maiden who has been beaten and is dressed in rags. Perceval of the not-too-distant past would likely have ignored her obvious state of distress, as he ignored the evidence of suffering in Blancheflor's castle. Instead, he approaches and declares, "I could never again be happy until I learned the truth: what adventure has reduced you to this sad and painful state."⁵²⁸ Perceval is now demonstrating an attitude of inquiry and of compassion. He takes action to discover truth when he sees strange and unexplained sights. He has learned and changed through his initial failure at the Fisher King's castle. When the maiden explains her state of woe, again the answer is unwelcome to Perceval because he finds that he has been the cause of her misery, but he does not try to evade his fault, instead working to make it right.⁵²⁹ Now instead of creating problems for others, he is beginning to solve them. Instead of remaining ignorant about the situations in which he finds himself, he becomes informed by asking relevant questions.

Later, when Perceval has returned to Arthur's court, he is confronted by the Hideous Damsel, a woman of terrifying appearance but detailed knowledge of Perceval's failure in the Fisher King's castle. Instead of asking him a series of questions as his cousin did, the damsel accuses Perceval in open reproach, for failing to ask two key questions: why the lance bled, and whom the grail served. She declares: "Wretched is the man who sees that the propitious hour has come but waits for a still better one. And you are that wretched man, for you saw that it was the time and place to speak yet kept your silence! You had plenty of time to ask! Cursed be the hour

⁵²⁸ *Perceval*, 428. "Jamais joie en mon cuer n'eüsse, / Se la verité n'en seüsse. / Quels aventure vos demaine / En tel dolor et en tel paine?" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 3803-06).

⁵²⁹ *Perceval*, 428-30.

you kept silent...”⁵³⁰ The central message voiced through the Hideous Damsel is an indictment against those who have opportunity to ask, and see situations worthy of inquiry, and yet remain silent. Once again, this criticism could be aimed not just at Perceval, but at the listening audience. Her words have an immediate effect on Perceval. Just as he took a more active role of inquiry once his cousin pointed out his error in failing to ask about the *graal* procession, the Hideous Damsel galvanizes Perceval to further action. He swears before Arthur’s court that he will not rest until he has learned who the *graal* serves and why the lance bleeds.⁵³¹ Perceval has undergone a profound change, becoming a knight in quest of answers and explanations for the wonders he has witnessed, instead of remaining a mute observer.

Through the verbal reproaches of his female cousin and the Hideous Damsel, Perceval is brought to the awareness that he has erred. While it may initially seem strange that the young knight is verbally chastised by two female figures, perhaps Chrétien’s choice again relates to the dialectic currents of the twelfth century. Helen Solterer explains, “Intellectual traditions in Europe had long typed knowledge as a woman (*scientia*), and its highest form, wisdom, as a female deity (*sapientia*).”⁵³² Abelard expressed his devotion to the goddess of wisdom, Minerva, and thus the women that speak wisdom and admonition to Perceval may be representations of *sapientia* as well, adapted to the romance genre but nonetheless representing wise principles of conduct to Perceval. They are direct and harsh in their reproaches of Perceval, much like the adversarial masters were towards bachelors who demonstrated a lack of rigor and preparation in disputations.⁵³³ However, as in the disputational system, the student’s failure and master’s

⁵³⁰ *Perceval*, 438. “Molt est maleürous qui voit / Si bel tans que plus ne coveigne, / S’atent encore que plus biax viegne. / Che iez tu, li maleüreus, / Qui vies qu’i[l] fu tans et leus / De parler et si te teüis; / Assez grant loisir en eüs. / A mal eür tant te teüsses” (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 4662-69).

⁵³¹ *Perceval*, 439.

⁵³² Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 29.

⁵³³ Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 28.

rebuke can hone the student's skills, if he is willing to learn. The central reproach from both women is that Perceval did not ask questions of the Fisher King regarding the wonders of the *graal* procession, and Perceval begins to inquire much more actively as a result of these voices of wisdom suggesting that he change his behavior and become an active inquirer.

Along with Perceval, many knights decided to take up various quests as a result of the Hideous Damsel's visit to Arthur's court, but initially no one else's quest centers around asking and finding answers to questions. Every other quest, including Gawain's, involves physical feats of prowess and bravery. As the knights begin their various adventures, Chrétien shifts his narrative focus to the exploits of Gawain, and he gradually draws Gawain, like Perceval, into the quest for an explanation for the mysteries of the Fisher King's castle, particularly the answer to why the lance bleeds.⁵³⁴ If Chrétien had completed the romance, perhaps Gawain would have uncovered the mysteries of the lance, and Perceval of the *graal*. Both knights might have undergone a full transformation into active inquirers, seeking and finding answers to the supernatural mysteries of the *graal* procession. But due to *Perceval's* unfinished state, such speculations remain ever unresolved. And though audiences past and present are filled with an attitude of inquiry—which would likely please Chrétien—we must accept that some questions will never be answered.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ *Perceval*, 456-57.

⁵³⁵ In his article, "The Perpetual Enigma of Chretien's Grail Episode," Jeff Rider argues that rather than intending to present a clear allegorical meaning, Chrétien wishes to present an intentionally obscure story which will never be explained. I agree with Rider's argument that Chrétien deliberately fashioned a story which raises questions, but my interpretation diverges from his as he claims that "the secret of the Grail...is not an answer, not an allegorical higher meaning, but a question, an indication of an unknown, but promised meaning to come, a perpetual deferral of meaning and closure" (Rider, "Perpetual Enigma," 19). I do not find any indication that Chrétien is seeking to create unending obscurity. Instead he is teaching audience, along with Perceval, to have spiritual curiosity and seek explanations. Chrétien never suggests that questions ought to remain unanswered; he insists that they should be asked, and answers pursued. From the way in which Chrétien gradually offers explanations about aspects of the Fisher King's castle and Perceval's identity as the narrative progresses, it seems highly likely that had *Le Conte del Graal* been completed, answers to the romance's central questions about the *graal* procession would have been revealed, hopefully as a result of Perceval's own active inquiring.

Perceval's Spiritual Education

After following the exploits of Gawain, Chrétien briefly offers one last brief but crucial depiction of Perceval before the romance comes to its abrupt end. It now seems that his failure to achieve the Grail Quest has damaged more than positively transformed Perceval. Chrétien places all of his narrative emphasis on Perceval's faith, or rather lack thereof. Perceval "had lost his memory so totally that he no longer remembered God."⁵³⁶ Since committing to the Grail Quest, and Perceval has never once entered church or worshipped God. While he has done great deeds of chivalry, sending sixty knights as prisoners to Arthur, he has done all of this "without ever thinking of God."⁵³⁷ Though Perceval has shown growth in the realm of his knightly education, his spiritual education is still sorely lacking. Chrétien indicates that without spiritual instruction and rehabilitation, Perceval will be unable to move forward in his quest. But this final scene depicts a turning point for Perceval.

Chrétien offers no initial explanation of the knight's spiritual failings, until Perceval finally finds his way on Good Friday to a hermit, who asks for his confession. Perceval first admits that it has been over five years since he has had faith in or love for God.⁵³⁸ The hermit asks why Perceval has acted in this manner, and his explanation is that he visited the home of the Fisher King, where he failed to ask why the lance bled or who was served from the *graal*.⁵³⁹ He laments, "Since that day I have suffered such affliction that I would rather have died; I forgot Almighty God and never implored Him for mercy, and I've not consciously done anything to merit His forgiveness."⁵⁴⁰ Perceval has become so fixated on his failure to inquire about the

⁵³⁶ *Perceval*, 457. "A si perdue la miemoire / Que de Dieu ne li sovient mais" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 6218-19).

⁵³⁷ *Perceval*, 457. "N'onques de Dieu ne li sovint" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 6237).

⁵³⁸ *Perceval*, 459.

⁵³⁹ *Perceval*, 459.

⁵⁴⁰ *Perceval*, 459. "S'en ai puis eü si grant doel / Que mors eüsse esté mon wel, / Et Damedieu en obliai, / Ne puis merchi ne li criai / Ne ne fis rien, que je seüsse, / Por coi jamais merchi eüsse" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 6381-86).

mysteries at the moment he saw them the Fisher King's castle, that his life has become defined by that mistake. He has learned that he should have exercised an attitude of inquiry, but he has yet to learn that he needs to exercise that same willingness to ask questions in his spiritual life. Before Perceval can seek another opportunity to inquire about the *graal* procession, he must ask a spiritual question of the highest authority: he needs to ask God for mercy and forgiveness. Only once he has asked God for grace can he proceed to ask questions of any earthly lord such as the Fisher King.

Perceval's confession to the hermit is the beginning of his spiritual transformation. The hermit imposes a penance on Perceval, which the knight gladly accepts, and he remains for several days with the hermit, praying and worshipping.⁵⁴¹ He has now gained the spiritual training and rehabilitation he has been so desperately in need of. In his last lines describing Perceval, Chrétien writes: "Thus Perceval acknowledged that God was crucified and died on Good Friday. On Easter Sunday Perceval very worthily received communion."⁵⁴² The final statement about Perceval centers on his reception of the Eucharist. Not only is he in a right spiritual state and thus can communicate on Easter Sunday, but also this marks the first time Chrétien has ever described Perceval receiving the Eucharist. It is eminently fitting that the knight questing for the *graal* which bears a single Host has now received a Host himself. He was able to partake in the Eucharist as a result of his recognition that before he will be fit to ask questions of the Fisher King, he must ask God for mercy. Now that Perceval has done so, the narrative direction suggests that he could possibly return to the Fisher King's castle and succeed in achieving his quest.

⁵⁴¹ *Perceval*, 460.

⁵⁴² *Perceval*, 461. "Issi Perchevax reconnut / Que Diex al vendredi rechet / Mort et si fu crucefiiez. / A le Pasque communiiez / Fu Perchevax molt dignement" (*Le Roman de Perceval*, 6509-13).

Conclusion

Chrétien's unique narrative focus in *Perceval, Le Conte del Graal* on the importance of asking questions has long baffled scholars. While many other narratives in folklore and literature portray a character who must find an answer to a certain question, it is exceedingly rare to make the crux of the narrative a character's need to *ask* certain questions. However, a parallel to Chrétien's question-asking emphasis can be found by looking to the atmosphere of energetic inquiry which flourished in the ecclesiastical schools of northern France. There a rigorous educational system posed difficult questions, framed in *quaestiones* and *disputationes*, to instruct and hone the clerics' understanding. Chrétien was very likely trained in such a system himself, and it is possible to read *Perceval* as a romance endorsing the somewhat controversial practice of public disputation to his clerical audience, and also working to awaken in the lay audience a recognition of the value of cultivating an attitude of inquiry. Chrétien teaches through Perceval's negative example that it is essential to ask relevant questions when unexplained situations, whether social or supernatural, arise. The entire romance is told in such a way that unanswered questions linger throughout, stirring both Perceval and the audience to engage in active questioning in order to gain understanding. The unanswered question which has inspired the greatest amount of inquiry centers on the *graal* which bears a single Host. Chrétien's romance of *Le Conte del Graal* has fostered an ongoing interest in the Eucharist, cultivating curiosity about the sacrament and the spiritual truths surrounding it.

“*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*” in Conclusion

“*Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature*” considers tales of Irish werewolves, beautiful succubi, devout fairies, and suffering kings, who all have one thing in common: they encounter a supreme supernatural presence, embodied in the Eucharist. This sacrament is woven into chronicles, romances, and *lais* of the twelfth century, forming an intriguing literary motif. While medieval historians and religious scholars have long recognized that the twelfth century was a critical period in which many eucharistic doctrines were debated and affirmed, literary scholars have given very little attention to the concurrent emergence of eucharistic themes in twelfth-century literature. My dissertation argues that many of the narratives reflect and reinforce the eucharistic teachings circulating in northern France at the time, with which the courtly and clerical audiences would be quite familiar. I show how the authors under consideration, many of whom were clerics, crafted engaging and simultaneously instructive tales that blended sacred and secular material to explore theological truths in fictional contexts. Many of the tales encourage annual reception of the Eucharist, discourage the practice of trial by ordeal, and demonstrate the validity of transubstantiation. Other stories use the Eucharist to affirm the humanity or orthodoxy of certain individuals, or to reveal the demonic or heterodox identity of those who should not be included within Christendom. Whether including or excluding, the Eucharist serves as a discerning tool, revealing truths which would otherwise remain hidden.

My first chapter examines Gerald of Wales’s tale of the priest who administers the *viaticum* to a dying werewolf to demonstrate the Eucharist’s role in defining and affirming an individual’s humanity and transcending boundaries of ethnicity. Through additions in subsequent recensions, Gerald further humanizes the Irish werewolves and suggests parallels between their

identity and the transubstantiated nature of the Eucharist. The second chapter addresses works by the secular clerics Walter Map, Gerald of Wales, and Gervase of Tilbury, considering what happens when demons in human guise encounter the Eucharist, showing that often the Host causes their true identities to be revealed, as they are repelled by the sacrament. Yet there are also instances when demons are able to tolerate the Eucharist, and even receive it themselves. Each story can be seen to demonstrate various theological truths which were subsequently affirmed in the canons of Fourth Lateran Council. Chapter Three examines instances when fairies from the Otherworld volunteer to receive the Eucharist, and do so without any difficulty. Far beyond indicating that they are not demons, their reception of the sacrament incorporates them within the borders of Christendom, rather than allowing them to remain as ambiguous outsiders. The fourth and final chapter examines *Perceval, Le Conte del Graal* by Chrétien de Troyes, considering reasons for the narrative insistence on the importance of asking questions about the *graal*, which contains a single Host. I argue that by looking to the twelfth century's system of clerical education, it is possible to read *Perceval* as a romance reflecting the educational methods of the theological schools of the time, and also as a work which wishes to educate its lay audience by cultivating an attitude of inquiry.

As I analyzed these tales by Gerald of Wales, Walter Map, Marie de France, and Chrétien de Troyes, and other twelfth-century authors, I found that each story includes lingering questions, unresolved tensions, or astonishing marvels which invite audience engagement. For instance, Gerald of Wales ends his werewolf narrative by insisting that he will not try to explain the miracle of transubstantiation, which only pushes the reader to ponder that subject and to consider how it is relevant to the tale of the werewolves who appear in one form but contain another identity hidden within. Walter Map, in his story of the succubus who avoids being

present at the consecration of the Eucharist, offers no explanation of why she would fear the sacrament, but leaves it to his audience to find a reasonable explanation. In the *lais* of *Desiré* and *Yonec*, the relationship between human and fairy individuals awakens tensions over the rightness of their union, which are only eased gradually through the progression of each *lai*. And Chrétien's romance of *Perceval* overflows with intriguing plot threads which are never resolved, filling the audience with an insatiable desire to ask questions and find answers, paralleling the experience of Perceval himself. While very little can be known for certain about the performance and reception of these works in twelfth-century courts and other contexts, I would like to investigate further in order to find indications of how authors of this era invited their audiences to engage with and learn from the narratives. Including sacred motifs and theological puzzles in entertaining secular literature would enable authors to cultivate lively discussion and debate about spiritual matters of import, such as the sacrament of the Eucharist.

While "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*" analyzes a number of engaging and evocative twelfth-century eucharistic narratives, many more tales concerning the Eucharist exist, both in the twelfth century and beyond, which merit further investigation. Moreover, a wide range of theoretical approaches currently prevalent in medieval scholarship are applicable to my study of the Eucharist as a literary motif. The fields of medieval identity, hybridity, object oriented ontology, and postcolonial studies all offer interesting lenses through which to examine eucharistic themes in medieval literature. The rest of my conclusion will survey recent scholarship in each of these fields and will show how these approaches could be applied to the narratives in "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*," and to other eucharistic tales which I did not have the opportunity to investigate in my dissertation.

My first chapter demonstrated how Gerald of Wales used the werewolf's reception of the *viaticum* as a means of affirming her human identity, which endured despite being enclosed within a hybrid body. The ways medieval authors define and characterize humans, animals, hybrids, and the many other diverse medieval bodies has been an ongoing subject of interest in recent scholarship, explored by scholars such as Dorothy Yamamoto, Caroline Walker Bynum, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, to name just a few.⁵⁴³ In her book *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, Yamamoto asks what it means to be human, and acknowledges that this is not a new question, but that its answer will vary based on cultural enterprises and contexts.⁵⁴⁴ The human has been variously defined as a rational animal whose ability to use logic sets it apart from others in the created order, as an ensouled being who can commune with God due to the possession of that soul, or as a creature whose facility with language is a marker of its humanity.⁵⁴⁵ "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*" shows that the question of how to determine an individual's humanity is frequently considered in tandem with an individual's devotion to God—or the devil. Orthodoxy is often accepted as evidence of humanity.

The subject of hybridity is closely related to studies of what it means to be human, and is also relevant alongside considerations of the Eucharist. A hybrid is typically a blending of two different animals, of an animal and a human, or even of a human and a demon. Caroline Walker Bynum states that "a hybrid is a double being, an entity of parts, two or more. It is an inherently visual form. We *see* what a hybrid is; it is a way of making two-ness, and the simultaneity of two-ness, visible."⁵⁴⁶ She also emphasizes that the hybrid is a dramatically paradoxical form,

⁵⁴³ Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: Of Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁵⁴⁴ Yamamoto, *Boundaries of the Human*, 12-13.

⁵⁴⁵ Yamamoto, *Boundaries of the Human*, 12-16.

⁵⁴⁶ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 30.

which “forces contradictory or incompatible categories to coexist and serve as commentary on each other.”⁵⁴⁷ Bynum’s descriptions of the hybrid resonate with aspects of the Eucharist as an entity containing multiple parts; it is not only bread and wine, but upon consecration is the body and blood of Christ, a holy hybrid. While the substance abiding within the elements is not always made visible as it is in other medieval hybrid bodies, the Eucharist could still be considered in terms of hybridity, as paradoxical elements are made to coexist in sacramental form.

In future research regarding the Eucharist, hybridity, and the sacrament’s role in defining and affirming human identity, I would like to explore accounts of wild men, humans who lose their reason but regain it and display their humanity through devout faith. One such narrative is found in the “Lailoken A” fragment, in which the proto-Merlin figure of Lailoken has been living as a wild man in the woods. Though he is not a hybrid in physical appearance, he is in terms of his actions, as his human body is given over to animal behaviors. He is devoid of reason and acts as a wild beast, because he was cursed by God, held responsible for the deaths of many men in battle.⁵⁴⁸ The saint Kentigern, who frequently withdraws into the woods alone to pray, meets Lailoken, feels great pity for his madness, and begins to pray for him. Some time later Lailoken regains his sanity and begs for reception of the Eucharist before his imminent death. Saint Kentigern refuses his requests three times, insisting that Lailoken is not worthy to receive the Eucharist due to his madness and his kinship with the wild beasts rather than humans. But Lailoken prays, speaks devoutly, and demonstrates reason and faith so consistently that Kentigern finally relents and administers the viaticum to Lailoken. Immediately thereafter, Lailoken vanishes again into the woods, and dies the very same day in the exact manner he had

⁵⁴⁷ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 29-30.

⁵⁴⁸ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini, or The Life of Merlin*, ed. and trans. Basil Clarke, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), 227-31. The Lailoken A fragment is included in Appendix 1 of Basil Clarke’s edition and translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*.

prophesied would be his death.⁵⁴⁹ Though Lailoken is human in form, his madness and his life among the wild beasts seems to be reason enough for Kentigern to consider him on par with animals rather than humans, and thus unworthy to receive the Eucharist. Yet when Lailoken can display reason and devout faith in God once again, Kentigern allows him to receive the Eucharist, reinstating and affirming his human identity. Once again, humanity is associated with, and proven by, an individual's orthodoxy.

The Eucharist not only appears in accounts of wild men who act like animals, but in many of the *exempla* from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, in which animals show reverence to the Host, though they do not possess human reason. For instance, in one *exemplum* a peasant makes a bet with his parish priest that his donkey will eat the Host if it is placed before him among other unconsecrated wafers. Instead, the donkey eats every wafer except the consecrated Host, thereby showing natural respect for divine presence.⁵⁵⁰ In Gerald's *Gemma ecclesiastica*, a man forgetfully leaves the Host in a tree, and returns later to find that bees have made perfect miniature replica of a church, within which the Eucharist is found on the altar.⁵⁵¹ Gerald emphasizes that the bees were able to accomplish this miracle guided by the aid of angels. Presumably the angels as rational beings can direct the bees in obedience. In many such *exempla* animals show reverence to the Eucharist, but their reverence is displayed by refusing to eat or desecrate the Host, rather than by being able to receive it. The division between animal and human responses to the Eucharist is a clear one, and would be an interesting subject for further exploration.

⁵⁴⁹ Clarke, *Vita Merlini*, 227-31.

⁵⁵⁰ Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100-1250* (Bury St. Edmunds: St. Edmundsbury Press, 2002), V 255-56.

⁵⁵¹ Gerald of Wales, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, ed. J.S. Brewer. Rolls Series 21, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), II. 42-43 [hereafter, "*Gemma*"].

Related to the definition of humanity and the consideration of medieval bodies is the rising interest in object-oriented ontology and posthumanism. Bruce Holsinger, Eileen Joy, Sharon Kinoshita, and Karl Steel, along with many others, have questioned the relationship between human, animal, and object, and they work to decenter the privileging of human existence over the other beings and objects which fill the environment, both within medieval texts and in modern mentalities.⁵⁵² The movement of object-oriented ontology (OOO) encourages scholars to consider the agency of objects within texts, affirming that “*things matter*” and ought to be viewed with equal importance alongside humans or other rational beings.⁵⁵³ In the introduction to the collection of OOO essays, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, readers are urged to “imagine a world that doesn’t revolve around humans, but a multiply centered expanse where we are one of many entities possessing agency, narrative power, philosophical weight, and dignity.”⁵⁵⁴ This vision of the medieval world allows one to consider humans, animals, objects in a broader sphere of interrelated cause and effect. I would like to consider the place of the Eucharist within the currents of object-oriented ontology, since the Host is simultaneously perceived as object—bread and wine—and as the body and blood of Christ. The subject of the Eucharist is an intriguing link between the questions of what it means to be human and what significance and agency objects possess.

Recent work in the postcolonial Middle Ages offers another avenue of scholarship which is relevant to “*Hoc Est Corpus Meum.*” Postcolonial studies has been introduced to the medieval context by scholars such as Sharon Kinoshita, Lisa Lampert-Weissig and Geraldine Heng, and

⁵⁵² Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed. *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects* (Washington D.C.: Oliphaunt Books, 2012.) This book is a collection of essays containing works by Sharon Kinoshita, Eileen Joy, and Karl Steel. See also Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2011).

⁵⁵³ Cohen, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, 5.

⁵⁵⁴ Cohen, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, 8.

has resulted in a fruitful analysis of colonizing forces, exploitation of the subaltern, and the marginalization of the Other.⁵⁵⁵ I believe there is still much work to be done by considering religious concerns alongside issues of colonization. I have observed that authors often introduce the Eucharist alongside matters of ethnicity. In Gerald's wolf narrative, the priest, who is journeying across the political center of Ireland in Meath, holds an involved discussion with the Irish werewolf regarding the Norman conquest. In Walter's tale of Henno's demon-bride, she comes from some unknown land over the sea and settles in Normandy with French nobility, bearing him children which Walter emphasizes are still alive to this day. In Marie's *Yonec*, a fairy from the Otherworld enters Wales and establishes an affair with a Norman noblewoman. In *Desiré*, the knight is from Scotland and his lover is a fairy from the Otherworld. In Chretien's *Perceval*, the protagonist is a rustic Welsh youth who aspires to become a knight of Arthur's court. The ethnic diversity in each tale suggests to me that medieval authors are interested in exploring how the Eucharist incorporates individuals of widely varied origins into the universal Body of Christ.

Moreover, the authors I have considered in "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*" draw some unusual figures, such as fairies, within the borders of orthodoxy, by depicting them as worthy recipients of the Eucharist. It is significant that fairies, who are often associated with rich and exotic eastern fashions and can be read as representations of Muslims or Jews, are shown to be willing and eager to take part in Christian sacramental practices.⁵⁵⁶ For example, Desiré's fairy love and the fairy king Muldumarec both offer to receive the Eucharist on their own initiative, without the

⁵⁵⁵ Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁵⁵⁶ For further consideration of how fairies can represent the medieval Other, see Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, 105-32, and Michael Faletta, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 55-98.

suggestion or demand of their human lovers. Doubts about whether or not to trust and accept this exotic Other fade away in light of their reception of the Eucharist. And in the case of *Desiré*, the fairy is actually shown to be not less, but more devout than the Christian knight, echoing tales in Marian literature which sometimes show Jewish converts to be more sincerely Christian than the other Christians around them.⁵⁵⁷ The encounters of fairies with the Eucharist could allow authors to subtly suggest that individuals who seem to be situated far outside of orthodoxy are actually quite willing and able to enter into Christian faith and practice, and may already have done so.

However, there are also many narratives linking the Eucharist and the subject of ethnicity which do not so easily encourage the incorporation of the Other into Christendom. For instance, troubling *exempla* relating encounters of Jews with the Host abound in the twelfth century. Gerald includes many such narratives in his *Gemma ecclesiastica*, relating tale after tale of Jewish abuses and encounters with the Host.⁵⁵⁸ In one instance, the Jews seek to abuse the Host, but are amazed as blood pours from the wafers they stab. As a result, they convert. In other instances, Jews enter a church and observe the consecration of the Host, after which they are horrified to see Christians eating pieces of flesh and blood. When the significance of the miracle is explained to them, once again, the Jews are led to convert.⁵⁵⁹ While Gerald's tales usually result in the mass conversion of Jews, one or two die as a result of their desecration of the Host. And in the *exempla* of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the tales involving Jews and the Eucharist become increasingly grim, ending not in the conversion but in the deaths of Jews.⁵⁶⁰ When the Eucharist comes into contact with people of diverse ethnicity, it does not always serve

⁵⁵⁷ See Adrienne Williams Boyarin, *Miracles of the Virgin in Medieval England: Law and Jewishness in Marian Legends* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010).

⁵⁵⁸ *Gemma*, 101-05.

⁵⁵⁹ *Gemma*, 39.

⁵⁶⁰ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 122.

as a means of including the Other inside the borders of orthodoxy. It can also be used to exclude individuals of certain faiths or ethnicities. These tales also merit further study as part of the eucharistic literary motif, troubling though they are.

The sacrament not only appears alongside matters of ethnicity and political boundaries, but alongside discussions of supernatural boundaries which are crossed by both God and men. For example, the Eucharist plays an important role in *L'espurgatoire seint Patriz*, a translation and adaptation, commonly attributed to Marie de France, of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* by the English Cistercian Henry de Saltrey.⁵⁶¹ In this narrative poem, the Irish knight Owein is guilty of many sins, and feels burdened by his wickedness. He finally confesses to a bishop, and asks permission to perform the heaviest penance possible, which is performed by entering St. Patrick's Purgatory and suffering for his sins in Purgatory while still being a living man. Very few are permitted to enter Purgatory in this manner; the entrance is located in Ireland, in a pit in the center of a cemetery alongside a chapel. However, Owein persists, and goes through the rigorous requirements preceding entrance to Purgatory: he must fast and pray in the church by the entrance for fifteen days, and at the end of that time he then receives the Eucharist. A central focus in the text is placed on the protection provided by the reception of Holy Sacrament; it is to be a seal and a guard for Owein as he confronts the demons and torments of Purgatory. Owein then passes through ten levels in Purgatory, afflicted but never overcome by the torments of demons, until he finally passes through yet another gate into earthly Paradise, where he yearns to stay forever. He then sees another passage, the Gate into Celestial Paradise,

⁵⁶¹ Marie de France, *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*. *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997).

but this final boundary is yet uncrossable for Owein. Instead he has to cross the boundary from earthly Paradise back to Ireland, where he lives the rest of his life in a pure and holy manner.⁵⁶²

Owein's reception of the Eucharist was what enabled him to safely step across the border from earth into Purgatory, but it could also be that the sacrament appears at this moment because Owein's journey across supernatural boundaries was meant to mirror the divine border-crossing of Christ's condescension in the elements. The view of the eucharistic celebration as a divine border-crossing is not a modern conception imposed on a medieval mindset. The imagery of spiritual boundaries being crossed and joined is referenced in poems such as that of the bishop of Le Mans, quoted by Gerald of Wales in the *Gemma ecclesiastica*:

When the suppliant priest assists at the altar
And the Son is immolated to the Father, remaining, though, unharmed,
The heavens lie open, the celestial choir is at hand,
The lowest depths are joined to heaven,
And Author and act become one.⁵⁶³

The boundaries between the lowest depths and the highest heavens are crossed at the moment of the eucharistic celebration, and not only crossed but joined. The Divine becomes incarnate as a human; Christ is manifested in the bread and wine as body and blood. In the moment of the consecration of the elements, when Christ condescends to earth, simultaneously the faithful are united across the spiritual boundaries of earth, Purgatory, and Paradise. The Church in its entirety is one in celebration. The Eucharist transcends borders of life and death and of the physical and spiritual realms, joining celebrants across boundaries.

⁵⁶² Marie de France, *Espurgatoire*, 48-161.

⁵⁶³ "Tempore quo supplex assistit presbytir aris, / Mactaturque Patri Filius, ipse manens, / Ethra patent, coelestis adest chorus, ima supernis / Junguntur, fiunt auctor et actus idem" (*Gemma*, 142). The English translation comes from Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of the Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, trans. John J. Hagen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 109.

As my conclusion has indicated, many avenues of scholarship and study invite further exploration of the Eucharist as a literary motif. The subjects of human identity, hybridity, object oriented ontology, postcolonialism, and liminality could all be applied to various aspects of the sacrament's significance in twelfth-century chronicles, romances, and *lais*. Furthermore, many other narratives concerning the Eucharist, written in the centuries preceding and following the twelfth, invite detailed investigation. However, such an undertaking goes beyond the scope of "*Hoc Est Corpus Meum: The Eucharist in Twelfth-Century Literature.*" This study represents a beginning, rather than an ending, of the work to be accomplished in investigating the Eucharist's appearance as a literary motif in medieval literature.

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