Comparison of themes in Medieval and Modern French Literature
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Abstract:

Literature around the world has changed significantly over the centuries, but people continue to be enthralled by stories that carry many of the same elements, structures, and themes as those stories told hundreds of years ago. Through a sampling of several French literary works coming from the medieval and modern periods, one can see the evolution and relative stability of the fantasy genre in its themes of courage, bravery, honor, and duty. The classic character of the Knight, a person defined by chivalry and honor, which is seen in the Legends of King Arthur circa the 12th-15th centuries, is seen time and time again in the literature of our day through the qualities and values embodied by modern protagonists. The works of literature present in this analysis are: La Légende Arthurienne by Robert Laffont (1989), Les Chroniques des Crépusculaires by Mathieu Gaborit (1995), and La Quête d’Ewilan by Pierre Bottero (2003), all read in their original French. The following analysis will explore their common themes, values, and structures of adventure, as well as offer a brief look at the history and evolution of the French fantasy genre and the inspirational role of medieval fantasy in modern fantasy works.

It is difficult to pinpoint the origin of the fantasy genre in French literature as fantasy has existed in oral traditions much longer than in written manuscripts. It is also difficult to analyze the history and evolution of an exclusively French fantasy genre, as oral and written legends pass between cultures and across national and linguistic borders. To analyze the history of French literature means, inevitably, to acknowledge the influences of other European countries and cultures. Arthurian legends, however, offer an important basis to analyze French fantasy as it is in the development of Arthurian legend that one finds the development of the French novel. It is also these stories that were among the first examples of Western European fantasy, and they continue to be an important influence on the genre in modern times.

Much of European fantasy owes its roots to classical Greek and Roman mythology as well as to local pagan legend. Arthurian legends are no different, the first traces of the legends appearing in Celtic fables, and the character of Arthur finding possible inspiration from a real Roman officer, Artorius, who lived in England in the second century. First told orally, these stories were later transcribed into written manuscripts that proceeded to evolve and become Christianized over the centuries. The first manuscript recounting the tales of King Arthur was written by Geoffroy of Monmouth in 1135 in his Historia Regum Britanniae. This account, which told the story as though it was historical record, was published in Welsh, English, and French before being translated into Anglo-Normand. It was this translation into Anglo-Normand that facilitated the mass spread of the legend. From here on, the legends of King Arthur belonged to the French as much as to the English, as the two cultures contributed significantly to the tale. The legends travelled as far as to the German courts, where further additions were made, but these will not be analyzed here.
Though the original idea of Arthur and the stories around him came from Celtic tales and a bit of Roman history, the French soon added significantly to the legend. The Round Table first appears in an account written by a Frenchman named Robert Wace, the same man who translated Geoffroy’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* into Anglo-Normand. Other important contributors were Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas, Marie de France, Layamon, and Robert de Boron. It was Robert de Boron in the thirteenth century who added a divine mission to the stories, linking Arthurian Britain to the time of the Passion of Christ through Joseph of Arimathea. Though prior Christianization appeared in previous manuscripts, it was also Robert de Boron that completed the Christianization of the Grail in making it the recipient used by Joseph of Arimathea to collect Christ’s blood and the dish used in the Last Supper. The other authors developed characters such as Perceval, and storylines and structures that became fundamental elements of the lore.

Throughout the first half of the twelfth century, the legend of King Arthur spread at an astounding rate. Stories were shared both orally and written in verse. It is impossible to say that there was one correct form of the legend as people everywhere added to it and adapted it according to their culture and their memory. It was at this time that Chrétien de Troyes emerged as an important name in both the development of Arthurian legend and in the development of French fantasy. Working with both oral and written accounts, Chrétien wrote down the various characters and gave them greater psychological depth. He also created a stable structure of adventure, and it was him that first connected Arthur, Perceval, and the Grail. It is from his work in the later part of the twelfth century that future contributors will draw. The work of Chrétien de Troyes was thus a pivotal point in establishing and stabilizing the tale in literature.

It was also Chrétien who created the French fiction novel. The idea of the novel in France is tightly connected to the language in which the text was first written. The French word for novel, “roman”, being derived from the classification of “langue romane” or vernacular language. A novel is thus a book written at a lower linguistic register than that of educational, sacred, or legal matters. Another essential aspect is that the writing is in the form of a narrative rather than as an account of past events. Until this point, the legends of King Arthur were told as historical accounts of a real past. Though they had been translated into lower linguistic registers, the original texts were in Latin.

Chrétien de Troyes drew his inspiration from Celtic legend and some previously written manuscripts which did not have established historical validity, enabling him to explore the creation of fiction within his work. His writing in vernacular French, specifically the Champenois dialect, and his mastery of narrative techniques made his book, *Erec et Enide*, the first Arthurian legend written in novel form. From here, the concept of the novel took off with the introduction of the novel in prose occurring around 1200-1210 in the work of Robert de Boron. Prose and verse continued alongside each other for many years, but by the late fifteenth and through the sixteenth century, many earlier novels written in verse were translated into prose.

Arthurian legend is thus among the first major sources of written fantasy in French literature and the source for the narrative structures that persist into modern literature. Even other novels written in the thirteenth century, such as *Le Roman de Renart*, drew inspiration from the works of Chrétien. Virtually all modern fantasy draws some inspiration from King Arthur’s tales, and it certainly owes roots to these stories. More recent works have revived interest in and redefined the fantasy genre, making them also pillars of modern fantasy and an essential source of inspiration. Among these works
are J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*. These works brought their own contributions to fantasy and paved the way for many future stories, but they also importantly perpetuated the structures and values that originated in medieval fantasy. The evolution of fantasy from the medieval period to modern day has thus experienced a relative stability in its structures, themes and characters.

*Perceval le Gallois, ou le Conte du Graal* written by Chrétien de Troyes between 1180 and 1190, is one of his most complex works and serves as a prime example of the narrative structures that he established. The story is broken into two parts: the first half recounting Perceval’s initiation into knighthood, and the second following the quests of Guavain, King Arthur’s nephew. The novel is, at its base, a tale of initiation and discovery of self. The story starts with Perceval as a young man living in his mother’s home, with no knowledge of knights, chivalry, or his past (his father and brothers were also knights but died in their quests). Upon learning of this past Perceval sets out to become a knight in King Arthur’s court and fulfill what he believes to be his destiny. Perceval is knighted by Arthur and shows great potential, but he is nevertheless young and inexperienced. Desiring to honor his king, Perceval sets out to prove himself in a quest wherein he finds an older knight who mentors him for a time. Perceval continues his journey, gaining experience and prowess, and soon rises to become the best knight in Arthur’s court. Around this time, Perceval meets the Rich Fisher King who is in possession of the grail as well as a mysterious spear with a bleeding tip. Perceval refrains from asking about the grail and in doing so unknowingly seals the secret of the grail forever.

In the face of his failure, Perceval returns to his mother only to find her dead, and then returns to Arthur’s court where he is welcomed gladly. It is not long, however, before Perceval departs again in search of the Fisher King on a quest of repentance. It is here that the story splits and begins to follow Gauvain also, who departs in order to restore his honor after being accused of murdering a king. From here on, Perceval and Gauvain are shown as foils of one another, their quests seemingly opposite in moral purpose but their experiences reflecting those of the other. Ultimately, both men are redeemed. Perceval chooses to stay at the castle of the Rich Fisher King, who he has discovered to be his uncle, and becomes the new keeper of the grail. Gauvain returns to his own uncle and resumes his place in court.

The tale starts out with our hero not knowing of his identity and then going through an introductory process to live his destiny. He is initiated into Arthur’s court and then leaves on a journey to grow and to learn. After his growing success, he is met with a crushing defeat and must take time to regather his bearings before he is able to ultimately overcome this defeat, thus fulfilling his destiny. This basic structure of initiation, growth and discovery, defeat, and redemption is a common feature in much of modern fantasy. One modern series that follows this pattern is *La Quete d’Ewilan* by Pierre Bottero.

In this series, the main character, Camille, lives in the regular world with her adoptive parents. She lives a normal life except for the fact that she is exceptionally smart and remembers nothing before the age of six despite her otherwise perfect recall. She is soon plunged into an adventure wherein she discovers her forgotten identity, her newfound powers, the existence of her biological parents, and a danger that threatens to destroy the world she comes from. Through the beginning of the series Camille must learn to control her powers and use them in order to fulfill her destiny and restore peace in her world. At the end of the first book, Camille returns home briefly only to realize danger has followed her and she must leave to respond to destiny’s call. The end of the second book brings to Camille a defeat of sorts as she and her best friend Salim, who has been by her side the whole journey, must part ways.
Though not a failure on Camille’s part, this is a moment of emotional growth and trial, similar to the emotional trials of Perceval following his failure. The series ends with Camille successfully reunited with her biological parents, the kingdom restored to peace, and her and Salim reunited as well.

Thus, *La Quete d’Ewilan* follows this same structure of initiation, growth and discovery, defeat, and redemption. The story also shares many other important structural similarities to *Perceval le Gallois, ou le Conte du Graal*. For example, the self-discovery Camille experiences is primarily discovery of her family and her past, just as it is for Perceval. Both stories show the completion of this discovery by symbolically reuniting the characters with their family and by extension their lost pasts in the end. The return home of Camille and Perceval only to again leave are also symbolic moments of the death of their past lives, or even the death of their childhoods as they fulfill their greater purposes. It is also interesting to observe the separation of best-friends Camille and Salim and the subsequent increase of growth leading to the story’s resolution, as it reflects the parting of Perceval and Gauvain and their subsequent growth. Though Perceval and Gauvain did not share the beginning of their story together, they were dear friends in Arthur’s court. Thus, the separation of the friends is a symbolic turning point in the growth and self-discovery of the main characters.

It is not shocking that *La Quete d’Ewilan* follows so closely the structures seen in Chrétien’s *Perceval le Gallois* as author Pierre Bottero cites Tolkien’s work as a major source of his inspiration. Tolkien himself was an Oxford scholar and professor specializing in Old and Middle English and later in classical literature, of which Arthurian legends would be a staple. This same structure of adventure discussed above can be seen in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo goes through his initiation and growth as he leaves the Shire with the one ring, is chosen to be the ring bearer in Rivendell, and sets out with his companions. Though he does not physically return home, he sees a vision of home while in Lorien which pushes him forward on his quest. Shortly thereafter, he experiences a defeat through Bormir’s temptation and death and the scattering of the Fellowship. It is at this time that Frodo and Sam leave on their own to complete the quest of the ring, the storylines diverging until the end where the characters experience victory and reunion. Though this is not a story of familial discovery for Frodo, Aragorn is symbolically reunited with his family when he takes his rightful place on the throne, thus overcoming his ancestor Isildur’s shame.

This structure discussed above is what is known in other terms as the Hero’s Journey, which was first identified by Joseph Campbell. The Hero’s Journey contains twelve steps, but it is an incredibly flexible framework. The pillars of this framework, however, are separation, initiation, and return. The twelve more specific steps are not all present in every fantasy narrative but are nevertheless very common. The twelve steps are as follows: the ordinary world, call to adventure, refusal of the call, meeting with the mentor, crossing the threshold, trials and enemies, approach to the inmost cave, the supreme ordeal (the climax), reward, the road back, resurrection, return with the elixir. One can see most of these steps in the three works previously discussed as well as in the work which will be discussed shortly. This Hero’s Journey, also called the Monomyth, is a primordial element to all quest-based fantasy— the concept of the quest being one of the most popular forms of fantasy writing.

*Les Chroniques des Crépusculaires* by Matthieu Gaborit is another modern French series that uses the Monomyth structure. The main character, Agone, is the son of a noble and should inherit his father’s title but does not wish to. In accordance with his father’s last wish, Agone agrees to spend six days in a school wherein he learns of magic and of a plot to overthrow the mages of the kingdom. Agone
soon finds himself manipulated by a former friend, this manipulation resulting in the destruction of the school. Agone is forced to flee with one of his school friends, who then helps him in his preparation for and ultimate confrontation with his former friend, Lershwin. Lershwin also has a plot that threatens to destroy the kingdom, and Agone must face this as well. Agone eventually succeeds in defeating Lershwin and goes on to combat an even deeper plot that is once again threatening his world. Thus, one can see in this story as well this pattern of initiation, growth, defeat, and redemption, in addition to other elements of the Hero’s Journey.

As previously mentioned, the narrative structures inspired by medieval fantasy are not the only aspects that have persisted into modernity. Many of the themes and values addressed in middle age fantasy, and more specifically in Arthurian legends, continue be popular in today’s literature. Some of these themes have been touched on briefly in the analysis of structure, such as the theme of self-discovery, the idea of fulfilling one’s destiny, and the importance of familial ties in one’s identity and purpose. There are also themes of resilience in the face of trial, coming of age, and personal acceptance in these stories. Some of the values that go along with this are those of courage, bravery, honor, and duty. One can summarize these values under the overarching concept of chivalry, which defined the Arthurian age and is lauded to this day.

Robert de Boron’s *Merlin et Arthur: Le Graal et le Royaume* is another Arthurian legend that exemplifies these themes. The first two of the novel’s seventeen chapters recount Merlin’s conception and birth, as well as his defense of his mother as a young child. The third chapter, however, is the much better-known story of Arthur’s identification and coronation as king of the Britons. Many will recognize this story as a precursor of T.H. White’s *The Sword in the Stone*. The following chapters recount many of the tales surrounding Arthur and his knights, including Perceval’s quest for the grail, Arthur’s conquest of France, and his near conquest of Rome. The book ends with Arthur’s death as well as that of many of his knights.

In the beginning of the third chapter, Merlin leaves the kingdom’s nobles with the sword in the stone, blessed by God so that only the rightful king can remove the sword from its place. The knights and the other nobles all gather to each try to remove the sword and among those who come are Auctor and his sons Keu and Arthur. After failing to remove the sword, Keu and the other knights go to joust, but Keu forgets his sword. Arthur, acting as his valet, runs to find one only to find all the doors to the houses locked. In desperation, he pulls the sword out of the stone and delivers it to his brother. Upon discovery of what Arthur did, Auctor reveals that he is not Arthur’s father and doesn’t know his true parentage. The nobles then test Arthur, making him replace the sword, attempting to remove it themselves, and watching Arthur remove it with ease. With his godly election no longer contested, the nobles insist that they wait until Easter (it is currently Christmas) for Arthur’s coronation. At Easter, they again insist the coronation be pushed back to the Pentecost. Arthur, in his first show of kingly wisdom and patience, agrees to these requests so that nobles and barons are ready to accept him unanimously when he finally is coronated.

Again, one finds in this story themes of self-discovery, the fulfillment of destiny, and the importance of familial ties. Arthur discovers his identity as the rightful King and discovers the unknown nature of his past. Though his familial ties are not revealed here, this absence of ties is just as important as their presence. Arthur knows he is to be the King, but not who he is, and this troubles the beginning of his reign. Arthur’s destiny is also clearly outlined here through an act attributed to God, and thus his
coronation is a fulfillment of this destiny. The coronation is additionally an example of initiation as Arthur transforms from valet to king. The waiting period between the discovery of Arthur’s destiny and his coronation serves a dual purpose, showing both Arthur’s wisdom in the face of his first trial and creating a period of growth as the young king prepares to accept his destiny and take this step into adulthood. Thus, one sees also the theme of coming of age. Arthur’s coronation is an acceptance of himself as much as an acceptance on the part of the barons as Arthur chooses this new identity.

The themes in just this one chapter of the story are clear, but the chivalresque values may be harder to identify as there is no clear physical conflict. Each of the values of duty, honor, courage, and bravery can, however, be seen. Arthur first shows his commitment to duty as he searches in desperation for a sword for his brother. Rather than accept the impossibility of the task, Arthur attempts to remove the sword from the stone, thinking not of his own gain but of his brother’s. This commitment to his duties as a valet is an indication of the commitment he will carry into his duties as a king.

Honor is shown through many of the characters. First, lack of honor is shown by Keu, who initially claims that it was him that pulled the sword from the stone before Auctor catches him in his lie. Arthur then demonstrates honor in telling Auctor that any good that comes to him belongs also to Auctor as he is his father. Then, even upon learning that Auctor is not his father, Arthur honors Auctor and Keu, giving them important places in his court. This difference in honor shown in Arthur and Keu illustrates Arthur’s kingly character as opposed to that of his unworthy adoptive brother. Finally, honor is again shown through the nobles who vowed to accept whoever pulled the sword from the stone as their future king in an oath to God. When the nobles first request that Arthur’s coronation be postponed, their honor is tested, and readers again question if they will act honorably as they request a second postponement. Arthur’s final coronation at the Pentecost reveals their characters, and by extension the character of the people of Britain, to be honorable like unto Arthur, as opposed to dishonorable like Keu.

Courage and bravery are required of Arthur as he accepts his identity and steps into the role of king despite is youth and lack of preparation. He never runs from this responsibility, staying in Logres and awaiting his coronation despite the daunting responsibilities ahead and the doubt of the barons. As previously discussed, Arthur also shows wisdom at this time as he acts in patience so that his coronation can take place in a united Britain, rather than entering his reign to the division that an earlier coronation would have caused. Additionally, another major value in this story is humility. Arthur is humble in his service as a valet and humble in his intentions removing the sword. He remains humble as he respects the authority of the nobles and as he respects Auctor and Keu despite Keu’s dishonorable actions.

The presence of these themes and values in what is a brief portion of this tale underlines their importance in medieval literature. These values attributed to Arthur are also essential to the narrative as they establish him as the embodiment of what a king should be. The ability to show courage and bravery in the absence of physical conflict is also important as it shows the continuation of the psychological depth originally added by Chrétien as well as the flexibility and limitless nature of the narrative structure.

Just as Robert de Boron and Chrétien de Troyes shared many of the same themes in their works, modern authors Pierre Bottero and Mathieu Gaborit also chose to focus on these same themes, as can be seen above. The characters in _La Quete d’Éwilan_ and _Les Chroniques des Crépusculaires_ also embody chivalresque values. Main Characters Camille and Agone show their courage and bravery as they accept
their respective destinies and defend their homes. For both, they are in many ways underprepared for their task, but they accept it because it is the right thing to do. They continue to show this courage and bravery throughout their many trials and the battles they encounter in their quests. Agone particularly shows a great deal of courage as his first major victory brings with it a heavy loss of life. Despite his acute knowledge of the reality of the dangers he faces, Agone chooses to pursue the next plot threatening the kingdom, even though such losses are certain to repeat.

Honor is shown in *La Quete d’Ewilan* by Salim, who as previously mentioned is forced to separate from Camille for a time. This is due to an oath of service that Salim made to another character, Ellana. Rather than break his oath, Salim chooses to honor the three years of service he promised to Ellana even though it means leaving his friend. It is in part through this honorable act that Camille and Salim’s later reunion is possible. Agone shows his honor in his own story as he redeems himself after the destruction of the school, similar to the redemption of Gauvain in *Perceval le Gallois*. Agone was blamed for the school’s destruction by many as a result of Lershwin’s manipulation. Agone’s choice to right this wrong in despite of opposition shows both his resilience and his honorable character.

Just as Camille and Agone both showed courage and bravery through their acceptance of their destinies, they also show their commitment to duty. At the end of the first book in her series Camille is sent to retrieve her long lost older brother and bring him to Gwendalavir, the world in which they were born. Many believe that it is her brother, Mathieu, who can save the world and not Camille, but when Camille finds him, Mathieu refuses this call to duty. Camille chooses to respond in the place of her brother. This scene, which shows Camille’s commitment to duty, is also reminiscent of the juxtaposition of Arthur and Keu-- the younger sibling answering the call or being worthy of it, while the older sibling shirks the call or shows themselves to be unworthy. Agone’s commitment to duty is shown through his acceptance of his identity as his father’s heir. Agone did not want this responsibility initially, but eventually chooses to accept it and once accepted he never backs down from his duty.

These values repeated throughout fantasy begin to touch on the character archetypes that are found within the genre. Naturally there is the archetype of the Hero, the one who sacrifices their needs for others and undergoes transformation. This archetype is embodied by the main character, and through the discussion above one can identify it in the characters of Camille and Agone. Two other important archetypes in fantasy literature are that of the Knight and the Mentor. The Knight is a warrior and adventurer. He rises to challenges with courage and single-mindedness to see the adventure through and is someone other characters can trust with their lives. Though the Knight may be the main character, often he is a supporting character to the Hero. The Mentor is another common archetype who teaches, protects, and prepares the Hero for their journey. Oftentimes the Mentor is present for only a portion of the journey as the Hero becomes self-sufficient and must face their tests alone.

The Knight archetype originates from the Knights of the Round Table, thus in Arthurian literature the main character is both the Knight and the Hero. Perceval, for example, is both the character who is transformed and the warrior who sees the adventure through with single-mindedness. Gauvain similarly embodies both archetypes in his portion of the story. This duality of Knight and Hero is seen often in Arthurian legends, but the two characters do occasionally appear separately as well. In the tenth chapter of *Merlin et Arthur : Le Graal et le Royaume*, which focuses on Arthur’s conquest of France, Arthur takes on the role of the Hero, while Gauvain embodies the Knight. Arthur is transformed over the
course of this story into the King of France as well as of Britain. He endangers himself to protect his knights by engaging the King Floire in single combat, sacrificing his needs for the good of others.

Though he fights skillfully and may resemble the Knight archetype in many ways, it is Gauvain who takes on this role in its entirety as Arthur cannot act single-mindedly in the interest of his quest—he must take into account his knights and the safety of Britain. Arthur is more than a mere skillful adventurer here; he is a conscientious king. Gauvain, however, acts as Arthur’s right-hand man in the conquest of France and fulfills his duties with singlemindedness. His character lacks the complex and often self-sacrificial responsibilities of the Hero, simply supporting the Hero through his unfailing loyalty and his skill and expertise. Thus, one can see in this story the development of the dynamic of the Knight and the Hero as two separate characters. *Merlin et Arthur*, takes the character of the Knight from his original place as the protagonist and places him to be a loyal, stalwart supporter of the Hero, who becomes the exclusive archetype for the protagonist.

Though this separation of the Knight and the Hero was explored as early as the twelfth century, as previously stated the Knight archetype is primarily derived from the characterization of Arthur’s knights, meaning that many Arthurian legends do not contain this separation, especially if Arthur is not present to take on the Hero archetype. The separation of the Knight and the Hero is much more common in today’s literature, the Knight not only being a courageous and skilled adventurer but also that stalwart and loyal supporter that Gauvain was in *Merlin et Arthur*. The character Edwin in *La Quete d’Ewilan* shows this.

Edwin is the first person Camille meets in Gwendaalvir and he soon becomes her loyal friend. Having grown up in Gwendaalvir, he knows of the perilous situation already and he is trained as a skilled warrior. Edwin helps Camille and Salim get oriented, and then joins them on their quest, offering support and protection. Even after Camille’s other friends, Ellana and Salim, have to leave, Edwin stays with her to help her finish the quest. Edwin might seem like he ought to take on the role of Mentor, but he quickly defers authority to Camille, making his role only supportive. The Knight archetype is essential in many narratives as the Knight offers a physical strength that the Hero may lack and opens up space for the Hero to focus on their other responsibilities. The Hero is a more psychologically complex role, and thus the character has to focus on more than battle, whereas the Knight in many ways is the muscle that creates the room for the Hero to tackle their intellectual trials. Just as Gauvain created this space for Arthur, Edwin creates this space for Camille in her narrative.

The other archetype previously mentioned is that of the Mentor, who serves as an instructor for the Hero before the Hero sets off alone. This archetype is present in *Perceval le Gallois* in the old knight who trains Perceval shortly after Perceval leaves Arthur’s court. Perceval stays with his mentor for only a short time though before he again leaves to test his newly learned skills. The Mentor is essential in many narratives to ground the Hero in the new world and give them the skills and wisdom necessary for their quest. The Mentor is also generally important in the Hero’s transformation as the Hero goes from uneducated, unskilled, and dependent on others, to skilled, educated, and independent. The death or departure of the Mentor is often a turning point in the Hero’s transformation and a symbolic new beginning to their quest.

In *Les Chroniques des Crépusculaires* the character Hurlanc embodies the Mentor archetype. Hurlanc is an instructor at the school of Souffre-Jour where Agone attends. Hurlanc takes Agone under his wing, teaching him and helping him to learn magic and to accept his destiny. At the end of the first
novel when the school is destroyed, Hurlanc is killed along with it. From here Agone must rely on the knowledge and wisdom he learned from his mentor to pursue the mastery of magic on his own. Hurlanc’s death coincides with Agone’s decision to accept his identity and save the kingdom, thus marking the Hero’s turning point through the loss of the Mentor.

Another common feature in the Mentor-Hero relationship is that of the Hero overcoming the faults of the Mentor or progressively understanding their wisdom. This dynamic is seen with Perceval and his mentor in Perceval’s initial failure to obtain the grail and his following success. Part of what caused Perceval to fail initially, was obeying his mentor’s counsel to not speak too much or pose imprudent questions. Perceval, misunderstanding his mentor’s counsel, doesn’t ask about the grail when he first encounters it, thinking that this is what he ought to do. It is only later, once he has a complete understanding of his mentor’s counsel, that Perceval asks about the grail and overcomes his failure. Similarly, Agone grows past the point of his mentor when he successfully defeats Lershwin, something Hurlanc did not do even though he could have recognized Lershwin’s threat while in the school. These moments of overcoming or coming to a complete understanding of the Mentor is generally a final turning point in the Hero’s transformation.

Evidently modern fantasy differs greatly from that of the medieval period as far as technology and cultural norms are concerned. The normal world featured at the beginning of most fantasy stories is often the world contemporary to the author and thus in modern fantasy is vastly different from the world in Arthurian legend. Another development in modern times is the inclusion of female protagonists. Though women played some major roles in medieval fantasy, narratives turning around a female protagonist were largely unheard of. Camille being the protagonist of her story is thus a more modern, albeit not particularly recent development. Though these and other changes, such as the evolution of the Knight archetype, have been made to the genre, it has been very stable in respects to its structures, themes, and values. Even the character archetypes have seen relative stability in which archetypes are used, even if there has been evolution in their presentation. Literary analysis shows that today’s works are shockingly similar to those of authors nearly ten centuries ago.

This stability of the genre attests to the timeless nature of those concepts set forth in the Middle Ages. Readers continue to want to read of people who are chivalrous, who overcome their setbacks, and respond to their life’s purposes. They continue to enjoy stories of initiation and coming of age and applaud characters who act in interest of the greater good. Perhaps this is because this responds to the fundamental ideals and longings of humanity. Everyone wants to believe their life has purpose, and everyone wants to achieve victory even after defeat. The progression into adulthood is a universal and fundamental part of life, even if it has changed over the past nine hundred years. This is why, authors continue to address these themes and audiences continue to relate to them, even if generations have passed. The French fantasy genre has spread greatly since the twelfth century and become quite prolific, but its roots remain unforgotten.

The elements of fantasy analyzed here were analyzed within the scope of only a few stories in primarily two time periods and one culture, but further exploration of the fantasy genre at a world scale would show that these same concepts hold true throughout Western literature. This is achieved through a combination of common source materials and common human desires. Fantasy is a reflection of culture and time period, but it is also a reflection of humanity.
Bibliography:


