6

THE KNIGHT SETS FORTH

NEAR the beginning of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, a courtly romance of the second half of the twelfth century, one of the knights of King Arthur's court relates an adventure which once befell him. His narrative begins as follows:

Il avint, pres a de set anz
Que je seus come païsanz
Aloie querant avantures,
Armez de totes armeüres
Si come chevaliers doit estre,
Et trovai un chemin a destre
Parmi une forest espesse.
Mout i ot voie felenesse,
De ronces et d'espines plainne;
A quelqu'enui, a quelque painne
Ting cele voie et cel santier.
A bien pres tot le jor antier
m'an alai chevauchant einsi
Tant que de la forest issi,
Et ce fu an Broceliande.
De la forest an une lande
Antrai et vi une bretesche
A demie liue galesche;
Si tant i ot, plus n'i ot pas.
Celle part ving plus que le pas
Et vi le baille et le fossé
Tot anviron parfont et lé,
Et sor le pont an piez estoit
Cil cui la forteresce estoit,
Sor son poing un ostor mué.
Ne l'oi mie bien salué,
Quant il me vint a l'estrier prandre,
Si me comanda a desçandre.
Je desçandi; il n'i ot el,

Que mestier avoie d'ostel;
Et il me dist tot maintenant
Plus de çant foiz an un tenant,
Que beneoite fust la voie,
Par ou leanz venuz estoie.
A tant an la cort an antrames,
Le pont et la porte passames.
Anmi la cort au vavassor,
Cui Des doint et joie et enor
Tant come il fist moi cele nuit,
Pandoit une table; je cuit
Qu'il n'i avoit ne fer ne fust
Ne rien qui de cuivre ne fust.
Sor cele table d'un martel,
Qui panduz iere a un postel,
Feri li vavassors trois cos.
Cil qui amont ierent anclos
Oïrent la voiz et le son,
S'issirent fors de la meison
Et vindrent an la cort aval.
Li un seisirent mon cheval,
Que li buens vavassors tenoit.
Et je vis que vers moi venoit
Une pucele bele et jante.
An li esgarder mis m'antante:
Ele fu longue et gresle et droite.
De moi desarmer fu adroite;
Qu'ele le fist et bien et bel.
Puis m'afubla un cort mantel,
Ver d'escarlate peonace,
Et tuit nos guerpirent la place,
Que avuec moi ne avuec li
Ne remest nus, ce m'abeli;
Que plus n'i queroie veoir.
Et ele me mena seoir
El plus bel praelet del monde
Clos de bas mur a la reonde.
La la trovai si afeitiee,
Si bien parlant et anseigniee,
De tel sanblant et de tel estre,

Que mout m'i delitoit a estre,
Ne ja mes por nul estovoir
Ne m'an queïsse removoir.
Mes tant me fist la nuit de guerre
Li vavassors, qu'il me vint querre,
Quant de soper fu tans et ore.
N'i poi plus feire de demore,
Si fis lues son comandemant.
Del soper vos dirai briemant,
Qu'il fu del tot a ma devise,
Des que devant moi fu assise
La pucele qui s'i assist.
Apres soper itant me dist
Li vavassors, qu'il ne savoit
Le terme, puis que il avoit
Herbergié chevalier errant,
Qui avanture alast querant,
S'an avoit il maint herbergié.
Apres ce me pria que gié
Par son ostel m'an revenisse
An guerredon, se je poïsse.
Et je li dis: "Volantiers, sire!"
Que honte fust de l'escondire.
Petit por mon oste feïsse,
Se cest don li escondeïsse,
Mout fu bien la nuit ostelez,
Et mes chevaus fu anselez
Lues que l'an pot le jor veoir;
Car j'an oi mout proiié le soir;
Si fu bien feite ma proiiere.
Mon buen oste et sa fille chiere
Au saint Esperit comandai,
A trestoz congié demandai,
Si m'an alai lues que je poi. . . .

(It happened seven years ago that, lonely as a countryman, I was making my way in search of adventures, fully armed as a knight should be, when I came upon a road leading off to the right into a thick forest. The road there was very bad, full of briars and thorns. In spite of the trouble and inconvenience, I followed

the road and path. Almost the entire day I went thus riding until I emerged from the forest of Broceliande. Out from the forest I passed into the open country where I saw a wooden tower at the distance of half a Welsh league: it may have been so far, but it was not any more. Proceeding faster than a walk, I drew near and saw the palisade and moat all round it, deep and wide, and standing upon the bridge, with a moulted falcon upon his wrist, I saw the master of the castle. I had no sooner saluted him than he came forward to hold my stirrup and invited me to dismount. I did so, for it was useless to deny that I was in need of a lodging-place. Then he told me more than a hundred times at once that blessed was the road by which I had come thither. Meanwhile, we crossed the bridge, and passing through the gate, found ourselves in the courtyard. In the middle of the courtyard of this vavasor, to whom may God repay such joy and honour as he bestowed upon me that night, there hung a gong not of iron or wood, I trow, but all of copper. Upon this gong the vavasor struck three times with a hammer which hung on a post close by. Those who were upstairs in the house, upon hearing his voice and the sound, came out into the yard below. Some took my horse which the good vavasor was holding; and I saw coming toward me a very fair and gentle maid. On looking at her narrowly I saw she was tall and slim and straight. Skilful she was in disarming me, which she did gently and with address; then, when she had robed me in a short mantle of scarlet stuff spotted with a peacock's plumes, all the others left us there, so that she and I remained alone. This pleased me well, for I needed naught else to look upon. Then she took me to sit down in the prettiest little field, shut in by a wall all round about. There I found her so elegant, so fair of speech and so well informed, of such pleasing manners and character, that it was a delight to be there, and I could have wished never to be compelled to move. But as ill luck would have it, when night came on, and the time for supper had arrived, the vavasor came to look for me. No more delay was possible, so I complied with his request. Of the supper I will only say that it was all after my heart, seeing that the damsel took her seat at the table just in front of me. After the supper the vavasor admitted to me that, though he had lodged many an errant knight, he knew not how long it had been since he had welcomed one in search of adventure. Then, as a favour, he begged of me to return by way of his residence, if I

could make it possible. So I said to him: "Right gladly, sire!" for a refusal would have been impolite, and that was the least I could do for such a host. That night, indeed, I was well lodged, and as soon as the morning light appeared, I found my steed ready saddled, as I had requested the night before; thus my request was carried out. My kind host and his dear daughter I commended to the Holy Spirit, and, after taking leave of all, I got away as soon as possible.) *Arthurian Romances by Chrétien de Troyes.* Translated by W. Wistar Comfort. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

Continuing his narrative, the knight, whose name is Calogrenant, tells how he encounters a herd of bulls and how the herdsman, a grotesquely ugly and gigantic *vilain*, tells him of a magic spring not far away. It flows under a beautiful tree. A golden vessel hangs nearby, and when water from the spring is poured from the vessel over an emerald tablet which lies beside it, such a terrible storm arises in the forest that no one has ever lived through it. Calogrenant attempts the adventure. He withstands the storm and then enjoys the sunny calm which follows, enlivened by the song of many birds. But then a knight appears who, reproaching him with the damage the storm has caused to his property, defeats him, so that he has to return to his host on foot and weaponless. He is again very well received and is assured that he is indeed the first to have escaped from the adventure unscathed. Calogrenant's story makes a great impression on the knights at Arthur's court. The King decides to ride to the magic spring himself, with a large following. However, one of the knights, Calogrenant's cousin Yvain, gets there before him, defeats and kills the knight of the spring, and, by means which are partly miraculous and partly very natural, wins the love of his widow.

Although only some seventy years separate this text from the preceding one, and although here too we are dealing with an epic work of the feudal age, a first glance suffices to show a complete change in stylistic movement. The narrative flows; it is light and almost easy. It is in no hurry to get on, but its progress is steady. Its parts are connected without any gaps. Here too, to be sure, there are no strictly organized periods; the advance from one part of the story to the next is loose and follows no set plan; nor are the values of the conjunctions yet clearly established—*que* especially has to fulfill far too many functions, so that many causal connections (e.g. ll. 231, 235, or 237) remain

somewhat vague. But this does not harm the narrative continuity; on the contrary, the loose connections make for a very natural narrative style, and the rhyme—handled very freely and independently of the sense structure—never breaks in obtrusively. It permits the poet an occasional line of padding or a detailed circumlocution (e.g. l. 193 or ll. 211-216), which merge smoothly into the style and actually increase the impression of naive, fresh, and easy breadth. How much more elastic and mobile this language is than that of the *chanson de geste*, how much more adroitly it prattles on, conveying narrative movements which, though still naive enough, already have far freer play in their variety, can be observed in almost every sentence. Let us take lines 241 to 246 as an example: *La la trovai si afeitiee, si bien parlant et anseigniee, de tel sanblant et de tel estre, que mout m'i delitoit a estre, ne ja mes por nul estovoir ne m'an queïsse removoir.* The sentence, linked by *la* to the preceding one, is a consecutive period. The ascending section has three steps, the third step contains an antithetically constructed summary (*sanblant-estre*) which reveals a high degree of analytical skill (already a matter of course) in the judgment of character. The descending section is bipartite, and the parts are carefully set off against each other: the first—stating the fact of delight—in the indicative mood; the second—hypothetical—in the subjunctive. Nothing so subtle in structure, and merging with the narrative as a whole so smoothly and without apparent effort, is likely to have occurred in vernacular literatures before the courtly romance. I take this opportunity to observe that in the slow growth of a hypotactically richer and more periodic syntax, a leading role seems to have been played (down to the time of Dante) by consecutive constructions (the sentence quoted on page 100 from the *Folie Tristan* also culminates in a consecutive movement). While other types of modal connection were still comparatively undeveloped, this one flourished and developed characteristic functions of expression which were later lost; the subject has recently been discussed in an interesting study by A. G. Hatcher (*Revue des Études Indo-européennes*, 2, 30).

Calogrenant tells King Arthur's Round Table that, seven years earlier, he had ridden away alone in quest of adventure, armed as befits a knight, and he had come upon a road leading to the right, straight through a dense forest. Here we stop and wonder. To the right? That is a strange indication of locality when, as in this case, it is used absolutely. In terms of terrestrial topography it makes sense only when used relatively. Hence it must here have an ethical significa-

tion. Apparently it is the "right way" which Calogrenant discovered. And that is confirmed immediately, for the road is arduous, as right ways are wont to be; all day long it leads through a dense forest full of brambles and thickets, and at night it reaches the right goal: a castle where Calogrenant is received with delight, as though he were a long-awaited guest. It is only at night, it seems, as he rides out of the forest, that he discovers where he is: on a heath in Broceliande. Broceliande in Armorica, on the continent, is a fairyland well known in Breton legend, with a magic spring and an enchanted forest. How Calogrenant —who presumably started out from King Arthur's court on the Island of Britain—managed to get to continental Brittany is not explained. We hear nothing of a crossing of the sea, as we hear nothing of it later (ll. 760ff.) in Yvain's case, who in turn undoubtedly sets out from Carduel in Wales although his journey to the "right road" in Broceliande is described in vague and legendary terms. No sooner does Calogrenant discover where he is, than he sees a hospitable castle. On the bridge stands the lord of the castle, with a hunting falcon on his fist, welcoming him with a delight which goes far beyond the expression of ready hospitality, and which once again assures us that we have been hearing about a "right way": *et il me dist tot maintenant plus de çant fois an un tenant, que beneoite fust la voie, par ou leanz venuz estoie.* The subsequent phases of his welcome follow the knightly ceremonial whose graceful forms seem to have long been established; striking three times upon a copper plate, the host summons his servants; the traveler's horse is led away; a beautiful maiden appears, who is the daughter of the lord of the castle; it is her duty to relieve the guest of his armor, to replace it by a comfortable and beautiful coat, and then, alone with him in a charming garden, to keep him pleasant company until supper is ready. After the meal the lord of the castle informs his guest that he has been receiving knights errant in pursuit of adventure for a very long time; he urges him to visit the castle again on his way back; strangely enough he tells him nothing about the adventure of the spring, although he knows about it and although he is well aware that the dangers which await his guest there will in all probability prevent his contemplated return. But that seems to be quite as it should be; at any rate it in no wise reduces the meed of praise which Calogrenant and, later, Yvain bestow upon their host's hospitality and knightly virtues. So Calogrenant rides away in the morning, and it is not until he meets the satyrlike *vilain* that he hears of the magic spring. This *vilain* of course has no idea of what *avanture*

is—how could he, not being a knight?—but he knows the magic qualities of the spring, and he makes no secret of his knowledge.

Obviously we are now deep in fairy tale and magic. The right road through the forest full of brambles, the castle which seems to have sprung out of the ground, the nature of the hero's reception, the beautiful maiden, the strange silence of the lord of the castle, the satyr, the magic spring—it is all in the atmosphere of fairy tale. And the indications of time are as reminiscent of fairy tale as the indications of place. Calogrenant has kept quiet about his adventure for seven years. Seven is a fairy-tale number, and the seven years mentioned at the beginning of the *Chanson de Roland* likewise impart a touch of the legendary: seven years—*set anz tuz pleins*—is the time the Emperor Charles had spent in Spain. However, in the *Chanson de Roland* they are really "full" years; they are *tuz pleins*, because the Emperor used them to subdue the entire land down to the sea and to take all its castles and cities except Saragossa. In the seven years between Calogrenant's adventure at the spring and the time of his narration, on the other hand, nothing seems to have happened or at least we are told nothing about it. When Yvain sets off on the same adventure he finds everything exactly as Calogrenant had described it: the lord of the castle, the maiden, the bulls with their horribly ugly giant of a herdsman, the magic spring, and the knight who defends it. Nothing has changed; the seven years have passed without leaving a trace, just as time usually does in a fairy tale. The landscape is the enchanted landscape of fairy tale; we are surrounded by mystery, by secret murmurings and whispers. All the numerous castles and palaces, the battles and adventures, of the courtly romances—especially of the Breton cycle—are things of fairyland: each time they appear before us as though sprung from the ground; their geographical relation to the known world, their sociological and economic foundations, remain unexplained. Even their ethical or symbolic significance can rarely be ascertained with anything approaching certainty. Has the adventure at the spring any hidden meaning? It is evidently one of those which the Knights of the Round Table are bound to undergo, yet an ethical justification for the combat with the knight of the magic spring is nowhere given. In other episodes of the courtly romances it is sometimes possible to make out symbolic, mythological, or religious motifs; for instance, the journey to the underworld in *Lancelot*, the motif of liberation and redemption in numerous instances, and especially the theme of Christian grace in the Grail legend—but it is rarely possible

to define the meaning precisely, at least so long as the courtly romance remains true to type. It is from Breton folklore that the courtly romance took its elements of mystery, of something sprung from the soil, concealing its roots, and inaccessible to rational explanation; it incorporated them and made use of them in its elaboration of the knightly ideal; the *matière de Bretagne* apparently proved to be the most suitable medium for the cultivation of that ideal—more suitable even than the stuff of antiquity, which was taken up at about the same time but which soon lost ground.

A self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals is the fundamental purpose of the courtly romance. Nor are its exterior forms of life neglected—they are portrayed in leisurely fashion, and on these occasions the portrayal abandons the nebulous distance of fairy tale and gives salient pictures of contemporary conditions. Other episodes in courtly romance convey much more colorful and detailed pictures of this sort than our passage does; but even our passage permits us to observe the essential features which indicate its realistic character. The lord of the castle with his falcon; the summoning of the servants by striking a copper plate; the beautiful young mistress of the castle, relieving the visitor of his armor, wrapping him in a comfortable cloak, and entertaining him most pleasantly until supper is served—all these are graceful vignettes of established custom, one might say of a ritual which shows us courtly society in its setting of highly developed conventionality. The setting is as fixed and isolating, as distinct from the mores of other strata of society, as is that of the *chanson de geste*, but it is much more refined and elegant. Women play an important part in it; the mannerly ease and comfort of the social life of a cultured class have been attained. And indeed it has assumed a nature which is long to remain one of the most distinctive characteristics of French taste: graceful amenity with almost an excess of subtlety. The scene with the young lady of the castle—her appearance, his way of looking at her, the removal of his armor, the conversation in the meadow—though it is not a particularly developed example, yet sufficiently conveys the impression of that delicately graceful, limpid and smiling, fresh and elegantly naive coquetry of which Chrétien in particular is a past master. Genre scenes of this sort are found in French literature very early—in the *chansons de toile* and once even in the *Chanson de Roland*, in the laisse which tells of Margariz of Seville (ll. 955ff.); but their full development was a contribution of courtly society, and Chrétien's great charm especially is in no small measure

due to his gift for carrying on this tone in the most varied fashion. We find the style in its greatest brilliance where the subject matter is the dalliance of true love. Between these scenes of dalliance come antithetical reasonings over the emotions involved, seemingly naive yet of accomplished artistry and grace. The most celebrated example occurs at the beginning of the *Cligès*, where the budding love between Alixandre and Soredamors—with its initial reticence and mutual hide-and-seek and the ultimate welling up of emotions—is represented in a series of enchanting scenes and analytical soliloquies.

The grace and attractiveness of this style—whose charm is freshness and whose danger is silly coquetry, trifling, and coldness—can hardly be found in such purity anywhere in the literature of antiquity. Chrétien did not learn it from Ovid; it is a creation of the French Middle Ages. It must be noted, furthermore, that this style is by no means restricted to love episodes. In Chrétien, and also in the later romance of adventure and the shorter verse narrative, the entire portrayal of life within feudal society is tuned to the same note, not only in the twelfth but also in the thirteenth century. In charmingly graceful, delicately painted, and crystalline verses, knightly society offers its own presentment; thousands of little scenes and pictures describe its habits, its views, and its social tone for us. There is a great deal of brilliance, of realistic flavor, of psychological refinement, and also a great deal of humor in these pictures. It is a much richer, more varied, and more comprehensive world than the world of the *chansons de geste*, although it too is only the world of a single class. At times indeed Chrétien seems to break through this class confinement, as in the workroom of the three hundred women in the Chastel de Pesme Avanture (*Yvain*, 5107ff.) or in the description of the wealthy town whose citizens (*quemune*) attempt to storm the castle where Gauvain is quartered (*Perceval*, 5710ff.)—but such episodes are after all only a colorful setting for the life of the knight. Courtly realism offers a very rich and pungent picture of the life of a single class, a social stratum which remains aloof from the other strata of contemporary society, allowing them to appear as accessories, sometimes colorful but more usually comic or grotesque; so that the distinction in terms of class between the important, the meaningful, and the sublime on the one hand and the low-grotesque-comic on the other, remains strictly intact in regard to subject matter. The former realm is open only to members of the feudal class. Yet a real separation of styles is not in question here, for the simple reason that the courtly romance does not know

an "elevated style," that is, a distinction between levels of expression. The easy-going, adroit, and elastic rhymed octosyllable effortlessly adapts itself to any subject and any level of emotion or thought. Did it not elsewhere serve the most varied ends, from farce to saint's legend? When it treats very serious or terrible themes, it is apt—at least to our way of feeling—to fall into a certain touching naïveté and childishness. And indeed, there is the courage of a child in the freshness of outlook which undertook—with the sole tool of a literary language so young that it had no ballast of theory, had not yet emerged from the confusion of dialectical forms—to master a life which had, after all, attained a considerable degree of differentiation. The problem of levels of style is not consciously conceived in the vernaculars until much later, that is, from the time of Dante.

But an even stronger limitation than that in terms of class results for the realism of the courtly romance from its legendary, fairy-tale atmosphere. It is this which makes all the colorful and vivid pictures of contemporary reality seem, as it were, to have sprung from the ground: the ground of legend and fairy tale, so that—as we said before—they are entirely without any basis in political reality. The geographical, economic, and social conditions on which they depend are never explained. They descend directly from fairy tale and adventure. The strikingly realistic workroom in *Yvain*, which I mentioned earlier, and in which we even find discussions of such things as working conditions and workers' compensation, was not established because of concrete economic conditions but because the young king of the Island of Maidens had fallen into the hands of two evil gnomelike brothers and ransomed himself by promising that once a year he would deliver to them thirty of his maidens to perform labor. The fairy-tale atmosphere is the true element of the courtly romance, which after all is not only interested in portraying external living conditions in the feudal society of the closing years of the twelfth century but also and especially in expressing its ideals. And with that we reach the very core of courtly romance, insofar as its particular ethos came to be important in the history of the literary treatment of reality.

Calogrenant sets out without mission or office; he seeks adventure, that is, perilous encounters by which he can prove his mettle. There is nothing like this in the *chanson de geste*. There a knight who sets off has an office and a place in a politico-historical context. It is doubtless simplified and distorted in the manner of legend, but it is maintained insofar as the characters who take part in the action have a function

in the real world—for instance, the defense of Charles's realm against the infidels, their conquest and conversion, and so forth. Such are the political and historical purposes served by the feudal ethos, the warriors' ethos which the knights profess. Calogrenant, on the other hand, has no political or historical task, nor has any other knight of Arthur's court. Here the feudal ethos serves no political function; it serves no practical reality at all; it has become absolute. It no longer has any purpose but that of self-realization. This changes its nature completely. Even the term which we find for it in the *Chanson de Roland* most frequently and in the most general acceptation—the term *vasselage*—seems gradually to drop out of fashion. Chrétien uses it three times in *Erec*, in *Cligès* and *Lancelot* it occurs in one passage each, and after that not at all. The new term which he now prefers is *corteisie*, a word whose long and significant history supplies the most complete interpretation of the ideal concept of class and man in Europe. In the *Chanson de Roland* this word does not yet occur. Only the adjective *curteis* appears three times, twice in reference to Olivier in the combination *li proz e li curteis*. It would seem that *corteisie* achieved its synthetic meaning only in the age of chivalry or courtly culture, which indeed derives the latter name from it. The values expressed in it —refinement of the laws of combat, courteous social intercourse, service of women—have undergone a striking process of change and sublimation in comparison with the *chanson de geste* and are all directed toward a personal and absolute ideal—absolute both in reference to ideal realization and in reference to the absence of any earthly and practical purpose. The personal element in the courtly virtues is not simply a gift of nature; nor is it acquired by birth; to implant them now requires, besides birth, proper training too, as preserving them requires the unforced will to renew them by constant and tireless practice and proving.

The means by which they are proved and preserved is adventure, *avanture*, a very characteristic form of activity developed by courtly culture. Of course, fanciful depiction of the miracles and dangers awaiting those whom their destiny takes beyond the confines of the familiar world into distant and unexplored regions had long been known, as well as no less imaginative ideas and narratives about the mysterious perils which also threaten man within the geographically familiar world, from the influence of gods, spirits, demons, and other magic powers; so too the fearless hero who, by strength, virtue, cunning, and the help of God, overcomes such dangers and frees others

from them was known long before the age of courtly culture. But that an entire class, in the heyday of its contemporary flowering, should regard the surmounting of such perils as its true mission—in the ideal conception of things as its exclusive mission; that the most various legendary traditions, especially but not only those of the Breton cycle, are taken over by it for the purpose of producing a chivalrous world of magic especially designed for the purpose, in which fantastic encounters and perils present themselves to the knight as if from the end of an assembly-line—this state of affairs is a new creation of the courtly romance. Although these perilous encounters called *avantures* now have no experiential basis whatever, although it is impossible to fit them into any actual or practically conceivable political system, although they commonly crop up without any rational connection, one after the other, in a long series, we must be careful not to be misled by the modern value of the term adventure, to think of them as purely "accidental." When we moderns speak of adventure, we mean something unstable, peripheral, disordered, or, as Simmel once put it, a something that stands outside the real meaning of existence. All this is precisely what the word does not mean in the courtly romance. On the contrary, trial through adventure is the real meaning of the knight's ideal existence. That the very essence of the knight's ideal of manhood is called forth by adventure, E. Eberwein undertook to show some years since with reference to the *Lais* of Marie de France (*Zur Deutung mittelalterlicher Existenz*, Bonn and Cologne, 1933, pp. 27ff.). It can also be demonstrated on the basis of the courtly romance.

Calogrenant seeks the right way and finds it, as we said before. It is the right way into adventure, and this very seeking and finding of it shows him to be one of the chosen, a true knight of King Arthur's Round Table. As a true knight worthy of adventure, he is received by his host—who is also a knight—with delight and with blessings for having found the right way. Host and guest both belong to one social group, a sort of order, admission into which is through a ceremonial election and all members of which are bound to help one another. The host's real calling, the only meaning of his living where he does, seems to be that he should offer knightly hospitality to knights in quest of adventure. But the help he gives his guest is made mysterious by his silence in regard to what lies ahead for Calogrenant. Apparently this secretiveness is one of his knightly duties, quite in contrast to the *vilain*, who withholds nothing of what he knows. What the *vilain* does know are the material circumstances of the adventure; but what

"adventure" is, he does not know, for he is without knightly culture. Calogrenant, then, is a true knight, one of the elect. But there are many degrees of election. Not he, but only Yvain, proves capable of sustaining the adventure. The degrees of election, and specific election for a specific adventure, are sometimes more clearly emphasized in the *Lancelot* and the *Perceval* than in the *Yvain*; but the motif is unmistakable wherever we have to do with courtly literature. The series of adventures is thus raised to the status of a fated and graduated test of election; it becomes the basis of a doctrine of personal perfection through a development dictated by fate, a doctrine which was later to break through the class barriers of courtly culture. We must not overlook the fact, it is true, that, contemporaneously with courtly culture, there was another movement which gave expression to this graduated proving of election, as well as to the theory of love, with much greater rigor and clarity—namely, Victorine and Cistercian mysticism. This movement was not restricted to one class, and it did not require adventure.

The world of knightly proving is a world of adventure. It not only contains a practically uninterrupted series of adventures; more specifically, it contains nothing but the requisites of adventure. Nothing is found in it which is not either accessory or preparatory to an adventure. It is a world specifically created and designed to give the knight opportunity to prove himself. The scene of Calogrenant's departure shows this most clearly. He rides on all day and encounters nothing but the castle prepared to receive him. Nothing is said about all the practical conditions and circumstances necessary to render the existence of such a castle in absolute solitude both possible and compatible with ordinary experience. Such idealization takes us very far from the imitation of reality. In the courtly romance the functional, the historically real aspects of class are passed over. Though it offers a great many culturally significant details concerning the customs of social intercourse and external social forms and conventions in general, we can get no penetrating view of contemporary reality from it, even in respect to the knightly class. Where it depicts reality, it depicts merely the colorful surface, and where it is not superficial, it has other subjects and other ends than contemporary reality. Yet it does contain a class ethics which as such claimed and indeed attained acceptance and validity in this real and earthly world. For it has a great power of attraction which, if I mistake not, is due especially to two characteristics which distinguish it: it is absolute, raised above all earthly con-

tingencies, and it gives those who submit to its dictates the feeling that they belong to a community of the elect, a circle of solidarity (the term comes from Hellmut Ritter, the Orientalist) set apart from the common herd. The ethics of feudalism, the ideal conception of the perfect knight, thus attained a very considerable and very long-lived influence. Concepts associated with it—courage, honor, loyalty, mutual respect, refined manners, service to women—continued to cast their spell on the contemporaries of completely changed cultural periods. Social strata of later urban and bourgeois provenance adopted this ideal, although it is not only class-conditioned and exclusive but also completely devoid of reality. As soon as it transcends the sphere of mere conventions of intercourse and has to do with the practical business of the world, it proves inadequate and needs to be supplemented, often in a manner most unpleasantly in contrast to it. But precisely because it is so removed from reality, it could—as an ideal—adapt itself to any and every situation, at least as long as there were ruling classes at all.

So it came to pass that the knightly ideal survived all the catastrophes which befell feudalism in the course of the centuries. It survived even Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, in which the problem was interpreted in the most thorough manner. Don Quixote's first setting forth, with his arrival at nightfall at an inn which he takes to be a castle, is a perfect parody of Calogrenant's journey—precisely because the world which Don Quixote encounters is not one especially prepared for the proving of a knight but is a random, everyday, real world. By his detailed description of the circumstances of his hero's life, Cervantes makes it perfectly clear, at the very beginning of his book, where the root of Don Quixote's confusion lies: he is the victim of a social order in which he belongs to a class that has no function. He belongs to this class; he cannot emancipate himself from it; but as a mere member of it, without wealth and without high connections, he has no role and no mission. He feels his life running meaninglessly out, as though he were paralyzed. Only upon such a man, whose life is hardly better than a peasant's but who is educated and who is neither able nor permitted to labor as a peasant does, could romances of chivalry have such an unbalancing effect. His setting forth is a flight from a situation which is unbearable and which he has borne far too long. He wants to enforce his claim to the function proper to the class to which he belongs. It goes without saying that, three and a half centuries earlier, and in France, the situation is completely different. Feudal knighthood is still

of crucial importance in military matters. The growth of an urban bourgeoisie and the growth of absolutism with its trend toward centralization are still in their earliest stages. But if Calogrenant had really set off on his quest as he describes it, he would even then have encountered things very different from those he reports. At the time of the second and third crusades, in the world of Henry II or Louis VII or Philip Augustus, things were hardly managed as they are in courtly romances. The courtly romance is not reality shaped and set forth by art, but an escape into fable and fairy tale. From the very beginning, at the height of its cultural florescence, this ruling class adopted an ethos and an ideal which concealed its real function. And it proceeded to describe its own life in extrahistorical terms, as an absolute aesthetic configuration without practical purpose. Certainly, one explanation of so strange a phenomenon lies in the surging imagination of that great century, in its spontaneous and soaring flight beyond reality into the absolute. But this explanation is too general to be adequate, especially since the courtly epic offers not only adventure and absolute idealization but also graceful manners and pompous ceremonies. One feels tempted to suggest that the long functional crisis of the feudal class had already begun to make itself felt—even at the time of the flowering of courtly literature. Chrétien de Troyes, who lived first in Champagne where, precisely during his lifetime, the great commercial fairs began to assume outstanding continental importance, then in Flanders where the burghers attained economic and political significance earlier than elsewhere north of the Alps, may well have begun to sense that the feudal class was no longer the only ruling class.

The widespread and long-enduring flowering of the courtly-chivalric romance exerted a significant and, more precisely, a restrictive influence upon literary realism, even before the antique doctrine of different levels of style began to be influential in the same restrictive direction. Finally the two were merged in the idea of an elevated style, as it gradually developed during the Renaissance. In a later chapter we shall return to this point. Here we shall discuss only the various influences which—as characteristics of the knightly ideal—were a hindrance to the full apprehension of reality as given. In this connection, as previously noted, we are not yet concerned with style in the strict sense. An elevated style of poetic expression had not yet been produced by the courtly epic. On the contrary, it did not even employ the elements of sublimity present in the paratactic form of the heroic epic. Its style is rather pleasantly narrative than sublime; it is suitable for

any kind of subject matter. The later trend toward a linguistic separation of styles goes back entirely to the influence of antiquity, and not to that of courtly chivalry. Restrictions in terms of subject matter, however, are all the stronger.

They are class-determined. Only members of the chivalric-courtly society are worthy of adventure, hence they alone can undergo serious and significant experiences. Those outside this class cannot appear except as accessories, and even then generally in merely comic, grotesque, or despicable roles. This state of affairs is less apparent in antiquity and in the older heroic epic than here, where we are dealing with a conscious exclusiveness within a group characterized by class solidarity. Now it is true that before very long there were tendencies at work which sought to base the solidarity of the group not on descent but on personal factors, on noble behavior and refined manners. The beginning of this can already be discerned in the most important examples of the courtly epic itself, for in them the picture of the knightly individual, with increasing emphasis on inner values, is based on personal election and personal formation. Later, when—in Italy especially—social strata of urban background took over the courtly ideal and refashioned it, the concept of nobility became ever more personal, and as such it was actually often contrasted polemically with the other concept of nobility based solely on lineage. But all this did not render the ideal less exclusive. It continued to apply to a class of the elect, which at times indeed seemed to constitute a secret society. In the process, social, political, educational, mystical, and class motifs were interwoven in the most varied way. But the most important point is that this emphasis on inner values by no means brought a closer approach to earthly realities. On the contrary: in part at least it was precisely the emphasis laid on the inner values of the knightly ideal which caused the connection with the real things of this earth to become ever more fictitious and devoid of practical purpose. The relation of the courtly ideal to reality is determined by the fictitiousness and lack of practical purpose which, as we hope we have sufficiently shown, characterize it from the very first. Courtly culture gives rise to the idea, which long remained a factor of considerable importance in Europe, that nobility, greatness, and intrinsic values have nothing in common with everyday reality—an attitude of much greater emotional power and of much stronger hold on the minds of men than the classical forms of a turning away from reality, as we find them for example in the ethics of Stoicism. To be sure, antiquity offers one form of turning away from

reality even more compelling in its hold on men's minds, and that is Platonism. There have been repeated attempts to show that Platonic elements were a contributing factor in the development of the courtly ideal. In later times Platonism and the courtly ideal complemented each other perfectly. The most famous illustration of this is probably Count Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Yet the specific form which turning away from reality received from courtly culture—with the characteristic establishment of an illusory world of class (or half class, half personal) tests and ordeals—is still, despite its superficial Platonic varnish, a highly autonomous and essentially a medieval phenomenon.

All this has a bearing on the particular choice of subjects which characterizes the courtly epic—it is a choice which long exercised a decisive influence upon European literature. Only two themes are considered worthy of a knight: feats of arms, and love. Ariosto, who evolved from this illusory world a world of serene illusion, expressed the point perfectly in his opening lines:

> Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
> Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto . . .

Except feats of arms and love, nothing can occur in the courtly world —and even these two are of a special sort: they are not occurrences or emotions which can be absent for a time; they are permanently connected with the person of the perfect knight, they are part of his definition, so that he cannot for one moment be without adventure in arms nor for one moment without amorous entanglement. If he could, he would lose himself and no longer be a knight. Once again it is in the serene metamorphosis or the parody, Ariosto or Cervantes, that this fictitious form of life finds its clearest interpretation. As for feats of arms, I have nothing more to add. The reader will understand why, following Ariosto, I have chosen this term rather than "war," for they are feats accomplished at random, in one place as well as another, which do not fit into any politically purposive pattern. As for courtly love, which is one of the most frequently treated themes of medieval literary history, I need also say only what is relevant to my purpose. The first thing to bear in mind is that the classical form of it, if I may use the expression, which instantly comes to mind when courtly love is mentioned—the beloved as the mistress whose favor the knight strives to deserve through valorous deeds and perfect, even slavish, devotion—is by no means the only, or even the predominant form of love to be found during the heyday of the courtly epic. We

need but remember Tristan and Iseut, Erec and Enide, Alixandre and Soredamors, Perceval and Blancheflor, Aucassin and Nicolete—none of these examples taken at random from among the most famous pairs of lovers entirely fits into the conventional schema and some of them do not fit into it at all. As a matter of fact, the courtly epic displays at first glance an abundance of quite different, extremely concrete love stories, thoroughly impregnated with reality. Sometimes they permit the reader completely to forget the fictitiousness of the world in which they take place. The Platonizing schema of the unattainable, vainly wooed mistress who inspires the hero from afar—a schema stemming from Provençal poetry and reaching its perfection in the Italian "new style"—does not predominate in the courtly epic at first. Then too, although the descriptions of the amorous state, the conversations between the lovers, the portrayal of their beauty, and whatever else forms an essential part of the setting for these episodes of love, reveal —especially in Chrétien—a great deal of gracefully sensuous art, they yet have hardly any hyperbolic *galanterie*. For that, a very different level of style is required than what the courtly epic affords. The fictitious and unreal character of the love stories is as yet hardly a matter of the stories themselves. It rather lies in their function within the total structure of the poem. Love in the courtly romances is already not infrequently the immediate occasion for deeds of valor. There is nothing surprising in this if we consider the complete absence of practical motivation through a political and historical context. Love, being an essential and obligatory ingredient of knightly perfection, functions as a substitute for other possibilities of motivation which are here lacking. This implies, in general outline, the fictitious order of events in which the most significant actions are performed primarily for the sake of a lady's favor; it also implies the superior rank assigned to love as a poetic theme which came to be so important for European literature. The literature of the ancients did not rank love very high on the whole. It is a predominant subject neither in tragedy nor in the great epic. Its central position in courtly culture moulded the slowly emerging elevated style of the European vernaculars. Love became a theme for the elevated style (as Dante confirms in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, 2, 2) and was often its most important theme. This was accomplished by a process of sublimation of love which led to mysticism or gallantry. And in both cases it led far from the concrete realities of this world. To this sublimation of love, the Provençals and the Italian "new style" contributed more decisively than did the courtly epic. But

it too played a significant part in the elevated rank ascribed to love, for it introduced it into the realm of heroism and class principles and merged it with them.

So the result of our interpretation and the considerations which have accompanied it is that courtly culture was decidedly unfavorable to the development of a literary art which should apprehend reality in its full breadth and depth. Yet there were other forces at work in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which were able to nourish and further such a development.