

## Clothing, Armour, and Boundaries in *Sir Perceval of Galles*

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For most, a first encounter with the Middle English romance *Sir Perceval of Galles* is the pilgrim Chaucer's last effort to get the tale of Sir Thopas under way before the Host cuts him off:<sup>1</sup>

Hymself drank water of the well,  
As dide the knyght sire Percyvell  
So worly under wede,  
    Til on a day—<sup>2</sup>

It has long been recognised that Chaucer is alluding here to the opening lines of the early fourteenth-century *Sir Perceval*:<sup>3</sup>

Lef, lythes to me  
Two wordes or thre  
Off one at was faire and fre  
    And felle in his fighte!  
His righte name was Percyvell,  
He was fosterde in the felle,  
He dranke water of e welle,  
    And gitt was he wyghte (1-8).<sup>4</sup>

This connection with Chaucer's parody of English tail-rhyme romance has doubtless influenced what I will call the current "standard reading" of *Sir Perceval of Galles*: that *Sir Perceval* is itself a parody of chivalry, and that the poem directs its humour not at the naïve hero, but at the chivalric ideal itself. I wish to suggest that this reading of

*Sir Perceval of Galles* is mistaken, and that the poem ultimately reinforces, rather than repudiates, the structures and values of chivalric romance. Understanding Perceval's situation involves recognising the function both of courtly signs, particularly those represented by clothing and armour, and of narrative structures which insistently return Perceval to the world of the court.

The idea that *Sir Perceval of Galles* represents a deliberate critique of courtly values constantly overshadows commentary on the poem. Dieter Mehl asserts the poem's merits but places it with romances that criticise the artificiality of courtliness; Perceval succeeds, he claims, not because of, but in spite of, a courtly education.<sup>5</sup> For F. Xavier Baron, *Sir Perceval* embodies a conflict between Perceval's paternal and maternal loyalties; the hero's return to the forest near the end of the poem represents both the triumph of the mother-son relationship and a rejection of knighthood.<sup>6</sup> Caroline D. Eckhardt argues that Perceval is essentially rustic, that the chivalric identity he acquires is composed of accidental qualities, and that his return to the forest shows the superficiality of those courtly attributes and the deep-rootedness of his natural ignorance.<sup>7</sup> "The story treats idealistic chivalry with considerable irony," remarks N.H.G.E. Veldhoen, arguing that in *Sir Perceval Gawain*, that exemplar of courtly values, always gives bad advice.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, Maldwyn Mills calls *Sir Perceval* "subversive," claiming that its central character "continues to resist assimilation to the court and to anything it may stand for."<sup>9</sup> C. David Fowler summarises the standard reading succinctly: "the English text is to a considerable degree a parody of conventional romance, and in that respect was probably a major source of inspiration to Chaucer in the composition of *Sir Thopas*, rather than...itself being the object of Chaucer's satire."<sup>10</sup>

The view that *Sir Perceval* is a parody of chivalric romance seems to derive from a compulsion to defend the poem itself against the charge that it is crude and unpolished, a feeble imitation of its illustrious relation, the *Conte del Graal* of Chrétien de Troyes. The only extant Middle English Perceval romance, the text differs in radical ways from Chrétien's Perceval romance: not only is all reference to the Grail obliterated in the English poem, but the structure of the narrative is more symmetrical and compact, involving a series of extraordinary coincidences through which Perceval meets various members of his family and then, by tracking the movements of an oft-exchanged ring, is reunited with his mother. The English adaptor's striking abridgement of Chrétien's story results in what Keith Busby calls "a faster moving, no-nonsense sort of romance."<sup>11</sup> Excision of many of Chrétien's place-names, for example,

makes the English poem more schematic and generalised, omission of almost all Gawain episodes focuses the story on Perceval, and the English poem's insistence on closure creates a narrative in which (in obvious contrast to Chrétien's unfinished Grail romance) no gaps or loose ends exist. If, as seems likely, the English poet worked from firsthand knowledge of Chrétien's poem,<sup>12</sup> these radical changes to the story must be regarded as deliberate and purposeful. Indeed, the neatness and care evident in the narrative structure of *Sir Perceval* point to a poet who pays attention to detail. This deliberate approach to the construction of the story is evident also in the care with which the English poet handles the physical and symbolic details of clothing and armour. In particular, clothing and armour in this romance serve as boundaries between socially constructed spaces, elements in a system of definition that, far from repudiating courtly ideals, attempts to affirm the chivalric values of medieval romance.

The action of the poem moves back and forth between two contrasting and clearly delimited spaces, the wilderness and the court. The narrative begins by introducing Perceval's father, also called Perceval, a prominent Arthurian knight who has married Arthur's sister Ache flour. After Perceval senior is killed in a tournament by a Red Knight, Ache flour moves to the woods, where she is determined to bring up her young son in complete ignorance of chivalric life. She fails: the teenaged Perceval meets three of Arthur's knights, travels to Arthur's court, and promptly embarks on a series of adventures in which he kills the Red Knight, meets a long-lost uncle, delivers the lady Lufamour from an army of Saracens, defeats a giant, and finally returns to the wood to find his mother. Throughout the poem the wilderness and the court are separated by carefully constructed boundaries: not only obvious physical barriers, such as walls, but also less obvious barriers such as clothing and armour. These last serve also as reminders of social borders, systems of signification by which courtly society defines itself. In this poem, crossing barriers—transgressing boundaries—delineates those borders more sharply, renders those boundaries more secure. *Sir Perceval of Galles* is thus an act of definition, an attempt to inscribe upon the world an ideal chivalric order, to impose on the material universe the structures of courtly society.

The history of the word "court" in English points to two related meanings: the court is both an enclosed space and the social order associated with such a space.<sup>13</sup> The court, therefore, is both a physical and a social construct, and the walls that surround such an enclosure are both physical barriers and boundaries of human space.

The distinction between the wilderness and the court in the poem is emphasised by the fact that all the examples of the court in this world are explicitly walled spaces. In Chrétien's version of this story, Perceval, on his way to Arthur's court, encounters a sleeping lady in a tent;<sup>14</sup> in the English poem, he finds her, instead, in a "hulle" (434), a permanently walled structure. Arthur's court itself is clearly surrounded by a wall, because we are told that Perceval ignores it and charges through gates and doors without stopping (489-91). Later, after fighting his way through a Saracen army to reach the besieged city of Maidenland, Perceval spends the night at the foot of the city wall (1205-08). Finally, after defeating the giant brother of the Sultan of the Saracens, Perceval rides to the giant's castle and compels the porter to surrender the keys. Into the closed space of this final castle Perceval brings his grief-stricken mother at last, and there, assisted by the porter, he restores her to sanity.

The presence of so many obvious walls in this poem underscores the absolute nature of the distinction between wilderness and court; like physical walls, the boundaries between the two types of spaces are rigid and uncompromising. Outside the walls, Perceval fights creatures outside the social order of the court: the Red Knight, the witch who is the Red Knight's mother, the Saracens, the Sultan Gollerotheram, and the giant. In the English poem we find none of the peasants, merchants, craftsmen, clerics, colliers of Chrétien's version—no intermediate human figures, people neither of the court nor opposed to it. The uncourtly figures that are Perceval's enemies are distortions rather than representatives of humanity.<sup>15</sup> Thus when Acheffour retreats with her infant son into the wood, leaving "boure and hulle" (181), she leaves human society altogether. The forest here is the *terre gaste* of Arthurian romance, a Waste Land conceived of as directly antithetical to social order.<sup>16</sup> Whereas the Perceval of Chrétien's poem lives with his mother in a manor, is surrounded by servants and labourers, and is already an accomplished horseman (cf. 74-84), the Perceval of the English poem is brought up in utter isolation, nameless and ignorant of the names of things: the goatskin clothing that he wears suggests an affinity with mere animal existence. To become a member of the court he must learn its vocabulary and definitions, recognise the boundaries it imposes on the world, and thus, the poem suggests, gain human identity.

In this paper I wish to examine in detail another kind of barrier or boundary, that represented by clothing and armour. Like the walls around a city, clothing marks a boundary between the human space of the body and the potentially threatening nonhuman world. Body armour is simply clothing that emphasises its function as

physical barrier. The poet, who seems familiar with the technical vocabulary of armour, demonstrates an acute awareness of this function. The death of Perceval's father is explicitly caused by the failure of his armour (139); so is the death of the Sultan, whom the young Perceval beheads, driving his sword "Through ventale and pesane" (1722: in other words, through the mail that protects the neck). Ordinarily, though, full armour effectively blocks access to the body within. In particular, the poet visualises his knights in closed helmets with hinged visors that completely cover the face—probably the type of helmets known as *bascinetts*.<sup>17</sup> Thus the young Perceval, dressed only in goatskins and armed only with a short spear, is confronted with a seemingly insuperable obstacle when he challenges the fully armed Red Knight: how is he to get at the body of his adversary? The poet resolves this difficulty by a striking attention to physical detail. The Red Knight raises his visor to get a better view of the goatskin-clad apparition that has challenged him, and Perceval takes advantage of this opportunity to throw his short spear under the knight's raised visor and into his eye, thus killing him. Eckhardt notes that the development of armour in the early fourteenth century, especially the impenetrability of the helmet-and-visor unit, gave the English poet a challenge that neither Chrétien nor Wolfram von Eschenbach faced: "Not every writer of romances would have perceived the difficulty which this presented to his scene, however, or could have resolved it in such a natural way" (217). There is a great deal more visor-raising in this story, though; after Perceval puts on the Red Knight's armour, he finds it repeatedly necessary to raise his visor and expose his face in order not to be mistaken for the Red Knight. The small but necessary action of consciously raising one's visor to ensure a better view both outward and inward foregrounds the ordinary impenetrability of armour; it shows, also, that the armour by which a knight is recognised can also serve as a barrier to recognition.

The most obvious example of armour as a barrier is probably the episode in which Perceval, having killed the Red Knight, wishes to appropriate his armour but does not know how to remove the armour from the dead body. He builds a fire and is about to burn the Red Knight out of his steel shell when Gawain rides up and shows him how to unlace the armour and put it on. Here the armour, by being a physical barrier, also indicates the social barrier that Perceval has not yet learned to penetrate: becoming a knight means familiarity with all aspects of chivalric life, including such practical details as unlacing armour. Although Perceval believes himself to have gained access to the world of the court, he continues to find the life of the court impenetrable.

Perceval's ignorance is his most obvious characteristic, and much of the comedy of the poem is a knowing mockery of his naïveté. Most fundamentally, Perceval's deficiency is linguistic: he has to be taught the names of things. At the beginning of the poem, much of the humour at Perceval's expense surrounds his inability to differentiate between, say, God and a knight, or a mare and a stallion. When he first meets Arthur, he identifies himself as his "awnn modirs childe" (506); later he learns the name of his father, which is also his own name. Naming, of course, depends on the recognition of difference as well as of identity; it fragments the world into categories. But Perceval betrays his ignorance also in his lack of respect for physical boundaries. His first encounter with a courtly space is with the hall of the sleeping lady: "He went in withowtten lett" (437), our poet informs us. Although he is careful to follow his mother's advice by only taking half of the food and drink he finds there, he does not realise that this brash violation of boundaries is a serious *faux pas*—later in the poem he has to rescue the lady from the wrath of her jealous lover. The second courtly space he enters is Arthur's court, and there his indiscretion is even more marked: he pays no attention to "ȝate, dore ne wykett" (490) and rides his mare into the hall and up to the king—so close that the horse's lips touch the king's forehead (493-96). Perceval's education, then, is in part an education in the significance of boundaries. He learns, eventually, to enter his other uncle's hall and the city of Maidland as an invited guest; finally, he enters the giant's stronghold as a conqueror, accepting its keys from an awe-struck porter. By the end of the poem he has not only learned the chivalric ethos, he has attained mastery in its terms.

Thus the most fundamental concept that Perceval learns is the difference between wilderness and court. His first encounter with representatives of the court emphasises this difference with a telling visual detail: while Perceval is wearing goat-skins, "Ɔe flesche-halfe tourned within" (274), Arthur's knights are dressed in rich green robes (265, 277). Impressed by the knights' clothing, Perceval recognises at once both their difference and their superiority; one of them, he suggests, must be God himself. Gawain corrects him gently: they are knights of Arthur's court, he says. An enthusiastic Perceval returns to his mother, who realises that noble blood will out in spite of her efforts to suppress it, and she gives him a crash course in etiquette to make up for the years of courtly education he has missed. The advice she gives him is sketchy indeed—"be of mesure" (398), she says, and take off your hood when you greet a knight—but it does include a small detail that I wish to dwell on at some length. We learn at this point that she has kept some of her old robes; showing Perceval the miniver trimming on them, she tells him that he can recognise a knight by

the fact that the lining of his hood will be of the same fur. This little piece of information does, in fact, become useful later in the story, when Perceval in the Red Knight's armour meets ten men (evidently unarmed) who flee when they see him. Pursuing, Perceval sees the fur in the hood of one of the men, lifts his visor, and calls out a greeting. As it happens, the man with the miniver in his hood turns out to be Perceval's uncle, his father's brother; this episode is important because the restoration of kinship relations is one process by which Perceval recovers his identity.

When she tells Perceval to look specifically for the *miniver* in a knight's hood, Acheffour alludes to an elaborate semiotics of dress that would have been familiar to an early-fourteenth-century audience. The vocabulary of this particular system of codification in dress has become obscure to most; twentieth-century editors gloss "menevaire" unspecifically as "fur" or even erroneously as "ermine." The "menevaire" at this point in the text is even, and often, said to be a kind of helmet lining—an unlikely meaning, since Perceval would hardly be expected to identify a man by a feature that he would not ordinarily be able to see.<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, the miniver in a knight's hood has no military function at all. Miniver was the belly fur of the northern grey squirrel, usually imported from the Baltic countries, and was used as a lining or trimming on various items of clothing. In the early fourteenth century it was one of the most expensive of furs, and thus the wearing of miniver served as a sign of social status.<sup>19</sup>

Our two most useful keys to the "fur vocabulary" of the late Middle Ages, to use Reginald Abbott's term,<sup>20</sup> are sumptuary laws and wardrobe accounts. Both reveal the extent to which apparel reflected and reinforced systems of social stratification, and the extent to which specific furs marked a person's place in those systems. A statute of 1337, for example, restricted the wearing of fur to members of the royal family, high church officials, earls, barons, knights, and clerks with incomes of at least £100 per year.<sup>21</sup> Another statute of 1363 shows the system shifting its terms: knights were permitted to wear hoods lined with ermine, and esquires who earned at least £200 per year, even merchants who made at least £1000 per year, were allowed to wear miniver in their hoods.<sup>22</sup> Such sumptuary laws were scarcely, if ever, enforced, and the statute of 1363 was, in fact, repealed the following year, but repeated attempts to revive it show an abiding concern that apparel should correspond to station (or, at least, to income).<sup>23</sup> As an element in the livery of noble households, furred garments served to separate the officials and courtly members of the household—knights, ladies, squires, clerks—from humbler servants.<sup>24</sup> As late as

the 1360's, the accounts of the great wardrobe of Edward III show that members of the royal family were given robes furred with ermine and trimmed miniver; trimmed miniver lined the hoods of high-ranking members of the king's household, such as the clerk of the wardrobe, the treasurer of the royal household, and the knights of the king's chamber; lesser persons—valets, squires, minstrels, archers, craftsmen—were given linings of lambskin instead.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the miniver lining of a knight's hood represents, for the poet of *Sir Perceval*, membership in courtly society. Before a brisk trade in secondhand furs devalued miniver and undermined the correspondence between types of furs and degrees of social status, the display of more prestigious furs on apparel communicated the wealth and nobility of the wearer. No longer merely utilitarian in function—for example, ermine, restricted to royalty at this time, is not a warm fur (Abbott 11)—a hood lining of fur belongs to a culture of ornament rather than of necessity. A knight's miniver exists not only as physical material but also as symbol. Perceval wears goatskins presumably because they are readily available and provide good protection against the elements, but a knight wears miniver because he is a knight. Furthermore, the courtly "fur vocabulary" inscribes its structures upon even Perceval's rustic clothing. After Perceval meets the richly dressed knights, his goatskins come to represent his ignorance, his uncouth upbringing, his uncourtliness. The court has defined his clothing, and Perceval himself, according to its own system of values; confronting Perceval with the possibility of another space, it imposes on his world an ethos of inclusion and exclusion.

Learning the language of the court means not only knowing the names of things, as Perceval discovers, but also the structures within which such language operates. Perceval's knightly identity in this poem rests on his lineage: his father was a prominent member of Arthur's court. To become a knight he must not only recognise a knight when he sees one but also be recognised as a knight by members of the court, and above all by Arthur the king. To identify a man as a knight does not necessarily imply an understanding either of knighthood or of the man; indeed, Perceval misses the important fact that the knight with the miniver in his hood is his father's brother. Thus, as the poet comments (1049-52), Perceval has met both his uncles—Arthur and the old knight—but has recognised neither. He does not realise that these two men hold the key to his knightly identity, not because they can teach him the external forms of knighthood, but because they can restore his connection with his dead father.

Perceval's lack of understanding can be illustrated by another example. After Perceval defeats the Red Knight, Gawain courteously helps Perceval to put on the Red Knight's armour. The arming of a knight is, of course, a common and deeply resonant motif in medieval romance;<sup>26</sup> to arm a man is not only to hang bits of metal onto a body but also to enclose the man within a complex of ideals, laws, identities, relationships, expectations. But the arming of Perceval here has a comic effect. In the arrogance of ignorance, he admires his new outfit and declares that the armour has made him a knight:

He loked down to his fete,  
 Saw his gere faire and mete:  
 "For a knight I may be lete  
 And myghte be calde" (801-04).

He boasts that he does not need to return to Arthur's court to be made a knight, since he is now "als grete a lorde" (814) as Arthur.

Perceval, of course, is mistaken. Clothes do not make the man; the social order that makes the clothes makes the man. For the court, physical objects are tokens of social structures and human relationships. Thus the opening stanzas of the poem describe Arthur's largesse: he gives Perceval's father a wife (Arthur's own sister, Acheffour), "brode londes" (26, 34), and "robes in folde" (32-33). Each element of Arthur's gift binds Perceval's father to Arthur through kinship and feudal obligations; the robes, in particular, imply that Perceval's father would have worn the livery of the royal household, a material and highly visible sign of identity and allegiance.<sup>27</sup> To become a knight, then, Perceval must not only assume the material tokens of his identity but also acknowledge the structures to which those tokens allude. Perceval does not learn his own story until much later, in Maidenland, when Arthur tells him. Only then does our young hero realise that he is not a knight after all, no matter how impressive his armour or his exploits, and finally he allows Arthur to make him a knight.

The standard reading of *Sir Perceval* is that Perceval tries chivalry and ultimately rejects it; the uncultured Perceval, according to this view, is an uncomplicated bumpkin whose forthright and laughable behaviour continually undercuts the pretensions of courtly society and renders them laughable in turn. But however comic Perceval himself may be, I do not think we are meant to laugh at the court itself. One implication of Perceval's movement from wild boy of the woods to knight and lord is that

chivalry is, ultimately, more than brute force or even martial skill, but involves social knowledge, the ability to recognise and read the signs of courtliness.<sup>28</sup> It is Gawain, acting as the representative of the court, who introduces him to the concept of knighthood, who shows him how to handle armour, and who recognises him and brings him back to Arthur.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the primary narrative movement of *Sir Perceval of Galles* is that of recapitulation or return. Proponents of the standard reading tend to base their arguments on the final episode, an ending for which Chrétien's *Conte del Graal* provides no precedent. In the English poem, Perceval returns to the forest to look for his neglected mother. Ache flour, thinking that her son has been killed, has gone mad with grief; she has torn her clothes off and is wandering the forest. Re-entering the wilderness, Perceval leaves behind horse and armour, the apparatus of his courtly identity, and clothes himself again in goatskins. Here, at the end of the poem, the contrast between wilderness and court is more marked than ever, and the standard reading of the poem argues that Perceval's return to the forest represents his rejection (and, ultimately, the poet's rejection) of chivalric life. But the poem does not end in the woods. Perceval brings his mother back to the nearest castle, where he clothes her and restores her to sanity; he then returns with her to the place the poet now calls his home (2276), the court of Maidenland. We are told, finally, that Perceval dies as a good knight should, fighting in the Holy Land (2281-84). The initial displacement of the narrative, in which Ache flour takes her infant son into the wilderness because she is disgusted with chivalry, is here reversed. Rather than repudiating the values of the court, Perceval restores his mother to the life she once knew. The poem begins and ends with the ideals and activities of chivalry.

*Sir Perceval of Galles*, then, presupposes the perspective of the court. It is a perspective that depends on definitions and systems, establishing boundaries and relationships, appropriating the physical world into language. The vocabulary by which this world is ordered belongs to the court for, by defining itself, the court creates the wilderness. In the wilderness, goatskins are merely goatskins. The court, however, describes itself as a space in which material is invested with meaning, in which objects and events are signs to be learned, exchanged, mastered. The wilderness is then defined as an absence of courtly values: an absence of human society, of order, of courtesy, of knowledge, of language, finally of sanity. That such a neatly divided world exists entirely as an imaginary construct, a linguistic artefact, increases rather than lessens its power. Various careful details—the fur lining on someone's clothing,

a man who lifts the visor of his helmet to get a better view, the bafflement of a Welsh country boy puzzling over the intricacies of a man's armour—stitch the imaginary close to history, describing—incribing—a vision of social order by which not only the potential but also the actual might be understood. *Sir Perceval of Galles* is, therefore, an attempt not to undermine but to secure the walls around the court; rather than a subversive narrative that undermines the legitimacy of courtly society, this poem participates in the complex project of the medieval romances to define, affirm, and protect ideals of chivalric order.

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### **Notes**

1 A version of this paper was presented at a Canadian Society of Medievalists / Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English joint session at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada, Bishop's University, on 4 June 1999.

2 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Sir Thopas*, in *The Riverside Chaucer* gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1987), p. 216 (ll 915-18).

3 See Laura Hibbard Loomis, "Sir Thopas," *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1941), pp. 486-559.

4 Quotations from *Sir Perceval* are from the German critical edition of J. Campion and F. Holthausen, *Sir Perceval of Gales* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1913). Line numbers in parentheses refer to this edition. Unfortunately, there is no English critical edition currently in print. A few critical editions exist as M.A. theses, and there are a couple of recent student editions, notably Maldwyn Mills, *Ywain and Gawain, Sir Percyvell of Gales, The Anturs of Arthur* (London: Dent, 1992), and Mary Flowers Braswell, *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo: TEAMS / Medieval Institute Publications, 1995). The sole MS of *Sir Perceval* is Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 (the Thornton manuscript), from the fifteenth century: a good facsimile, with an introduction by D.S. Brewer and A.E.B. Owen, is *The Thornton Manuscript (Lincoln Cathedral MS 91)* (London: Scholar Press, 1975).

5 Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 102.

6 F. Xavier Baron, "Mother and Son in *Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 8:1 (Winter 1972): 3-14.

7 Caroline D. Eckhardt, "Arthurian Comedy: The Simpleton-Hero in *Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Chaucer Review* 8.3 (Winter 1974): 205-220.

8 N.H.G.E. Veldhoen, "I Haffe Spedde Better dan I Wend: Some Notes on the Structure of the M.E. *Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters* 1 (1981): 279-86.

9 Maldwyn Mills in W.R.J. Barron, ed., *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 116 and 138. In the introduction to his 1992 edition of *Sir Perceval*, Mills says of Perceval's return to the forest: "what seems to be a regression from chivalry here is actually a sign of a growth in moral awareness" (xxiv).

10 C. David Fowler, "*Le Conte du Graal and Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 12.1 (March 1975): 18. See also Braswell's introduction to her edition, p. 2.

11 Keith Busby, "Chrétien de Troyes English'd," *Neophilologus* 71 (1987), p. 603. This article discusses in detail many differences between Chrétien's romance and the English *Perceval*; Busby suggests that the English romance is closer generically to Jaus's definition of "epic" than to "romance."

12 Both Fowler and Busby argue that the English poet worked from a firsthand acquaintance with Chrétien's *Conte del Graal*. Busby also argues for the English poet's knowledge of the *Continuation-Gauvain* (or First Continuation) in "*Sir Perceval of Galles, Le Conte du Graal, and La Continuation-Gauvain: The Methods of an English Adaptor*," *Etudes Anglaises* 31 (1978): 198-202.

13 David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 24. Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* trans. Thomas Dunlap (1986; Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), pp. 103-104, connects the increased interest in castle-building during the twelfth century to the development of courtly culture in the same period.

14 Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail (Li Contes del Graal), or Perceval*, ed. Rupert T. Pickens, trans. William W. Kibler (New York: Garland, 1990), ll 617ff.

15 Chrétien does not name the Sultan. Fowler (15) suggests that the English poet's name for the Sultan, Gollerotheram, is built around the word "rother," meaning "ox."

16 See R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 200-201. The whole book is a provocative discussion of the kinds of courtly codes with which this paper is concerned.

17 See Claude Blair, *European Armour c1066 to c1700* (London: Batsford, 1958), pp. 47-52, 67-70.

18 Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, *Middle English Metrical Romances* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1930), gloss “menevaire” at line 409 as “cloth or fur worn under helmet.” The *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1975) also, unnecessarily and therefore probably erroneously, attributes to “miniver” in *Perceval* (and only there) the meaning “a helmet lining of miniver.”

19 For a useful glossary of scores of technical terms related to the classification, preparation, and trade of furs in medieval Europe, see Elspeth M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

20 Reginald Abbott, “What Becomes a Legend Most?: Fur in the Medieval Romance,” *Dress* 21 (1994): 4-16.

21 *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. 1, 11 Edward III 2 (1337), pp. 280-81. This prohibition probably applied solely to expensive imported furs (such as miniver), not to domestic furs such as lamb or rabbit.

22 *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. 1, 37 Edward III 3-6 (1363), pp. 378-83.

23 For a history of English sumptuary law, see Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1926). She notes that petitions to enact (or re-enact) sumptuary legislation, particularly clothing laws, were presented in Parliament in 1378-1379, 1402, and 1406, but were unsuccessful. For additional comments on English sumptuary law see especially Claire Sponsler, “Narrating the Social Order: Medieval Clothing Laws,” *Clio* 21.3 (1992): 265-83; and Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996). For some early Continental examples of clothing laws, see Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, pp. 128-30.

24 Veale, *English Fur Trade*, p. 7, gives examples from the wardrobe accounts of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, for 1313-1314, and Elizabeth de Burgh of Clare for 1343.

25 Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1980), pp. 65-70.

26 See Derek Brewer, "The Arming of the Warrior in European Literature and Chaucer," *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives: Essays Presented to Paul E. Beichner* C.S.C., eds Edward Vasta and Zacharias P. Thundy (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1979), pp. 221-43; rep. in Brewer, *Tradition and Innovation in Chaucer* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 142-60.

27 On livery see J.M.W. Bean, *From Lord to Patron: Lordship in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 17-22. The nature and type of obligations in such relationships were, from an historian's point of view, complex and open to varying interpretations; Bean provides a detailed discussion of the subject.

28 It is at this point that my argument differs from Siân Echard's fine discussion of *Perceval*, "Of Parody and Perceval: Middle Welsh and Middle English Manipulations of the Perceval Story," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 40 (1996): 63-79. Echard suggests that the English poet sees the codes of courtly society as artificial and therefore as arbitrary; I think that the author of *Sir Perceval of Galles* would have agreed on the artificiality of courtliness, but still asserted its value.

29 This seems to be Gawain's primary function in the English poem; in Chrétien's romance, the three knights whom Perceval meets in the forest are unnamed, and it is Yonet, not Gawain, who arms Perceval in the Red Knight's armour. Veldhoen's claim that, in *Sir Perceval of Galles*, Gawain dispenses bad advice is puzzling.