

## The Grail Is a *Rum* Thing Robertson Davies' Cornish Trilogy

The word "rum" occurs so frequently in the Cornish novels that it calls attention to itself. Its dictionary meanings include "intoxicating drink," "odd" and "strange," with the latter two being said to derive from "Rom" (or "Rum"), a short form of "Romany," and denoting a Gypsy or something relating to Gypsies (*Webster's*). All these meanings appear to contribute to Davies' notion of the Grail which is mentioned a dozen times in *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985), only three times in *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988) and not at all in *The Rebel Angels* (1981). Its allusive overall presence among the novels' Arthurian connections, however, is strong enough for the Grail to become one of the bigger "tricky bits" (Sifton 24) of the sort Davies likes to put into his fiction. Its gleam of myth and religion serves him constructively rather than reductively to explore the complexities and uncertainties of the process of individuation. Even when Davies refers explicitly to the Grail, as in the adolescent Francis Cornish's knowledge of its common association with the Eucharistic chalice, the direction changes quickly to Francis' infatuation with the Grail in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, in the poetry of Tennyson and in his own imagination (*Bred* 191, 195); in other words, Francis' Grail promises to be quite different from its sources. In *The Lyre of Orpheus* meanwhile, the traditional notion of the Grail as a vessel is readily available in the form of "the Platter of Plenty, . . . a large silver epergne that stood in the middle of the round table" (5) in Maria and Arthur Cornish's apartment.<sup>1</sup> This platter points to the Grail-related motifs of magnanimity and marriage which complement

each other as contentious answers to the question of the Grail's significance not only in *The Lyre of Orpheus* but also in the two earlier novels.

In *The Rebel Angels*, notions of the Grail all lead to Maria Magdalena Theotoky. Her name and her effect on the other characters give her the aura of the Grail as a personified symbol whose purpose includes a reorientation of logocentric, masculine thinking toward a compensatory consciousness that can be called feminine (E. Jung and von Franz [hereafter J&F] 204, 205). Maria is aiming for "nothing less than Wisdom," following Paracelsus' maxim that "*the striving for wisdom is the second paradise of the world*" (*Rebel* 38, 39; Davies' emphasis). At least, that is what she says in her personal account of her current life as a student, appropriately entitled "Second Paradise"; its segments furnish half of the novel and alternate with the segments of Simon Darcourt's complementary personal narrative entitled "The New Aubrey" after John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*. Darcourt, Maria's professor of New Testament Greek, is infatuated with her. Maria, however, expects to "have the second paradise, and the first as well" (39), with her supervisor Clement Hollier. As a "paleo-psychologist" (15), he is a historian of people's minds in medieval times when, in Maria's words, "their thinking was a muddle of religion and folk-belief and rags of misunderstood classical learning" (29). Implicitly, her comment also refers to the medieval making of the Grail legends out of a living muddle of pre-Christian and Christian sources. A likely source for a tentative linking of Hollier to the Grail myth is Emma Jung's *The Grail Legend*, a psychological study completed by the Jungian scholar Marie-Louise von Franz. In it Davies, who had read von Franz's books (Grant 497), would have come across a reference to the Order of the Templars as a source for the Grail Knights in Wolfram's *Parzival* (J&F 17, 385); and one of the names Davies initially considered for Hollier was Templar (Grant 532). Similar to a Templar, Hollier seems to favor celibacy and rationalizes his sexual fling with Maria as "a sort of daemonic seizure" (96). Regardless of his defensive self-justification, her effect on him, as on Darcourt, may well be considered somewhat otherworldly through her latent affiliation with the Grail mystery, especially her own sense of "feminine fury" when she is "being treated mockingly as the weaker vessel" (25).

Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, in their equation of the world of the Grail with the "maternal domain of the unconscious" (113), put the notion of a "life-giving or life-maintaining" vessel at the core of the Grail

myth (114). Maria's names relate her at least nominally to that notion, if one connects both vessel and life with the figure of Jesus Christ. Indeed, other characters tend to comment on the meaning of her unusual family name of Theotoky—"the bringer of God" (6), "the divine motherhood of Mary" (191), "the Motherhood of God" (236). Although her father was Polish, the seemingly Polish suffix "-ky" in her name is really the suffix "-y" after the "k" in "tokos" (Greek for childbirth); that is to say, the name Theotoky addresses the "business of God's birth" more than the motherhood of Mary. Maria's second name, Magdalena, adds zest to that business through the allusion to Mary Magdalene, the saintly sinner of the New Testament, whose mystical role in the Gnostic Gospels links her to "the healing Goddess of Wisdom" or Sophia as symbolized by the Grail (Matthews 218-19). Darcourt, an Anglican priest steeped in Gnosticism and apocrypha, is evidently aware of this mystical connection in his infatuation with Maria as his "Sophia": "What a label to hang on [her other names]. Sophia: the feminine personification of Wisdom; . . . God's female counterpart whom the Christians and the Jews have agreed to hush up, to the great disadvantage of women for so many hundreds of years" (279). No less important here is the fact that Maria's middle name evokes the Magdalene's legendary role as the "living Grail" who, after Jesus' crucifixion, allegedly settled and gave birth to his child near Marseilles at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (Matthews 197, 218; Baigent 313).<sup>2</sup> That village, moreover, has also long been sacred to Gypsies for its shrine of their patron saint, Sara le Kali or Black Sara, who, in her alleged role as the Magdalene's servant, becomes part of the "living Grail" tradition (Fraser 312, Matthews 218). In other words, given Davies' interest in Gypsies (Grant 533), Maria's being the daughter of a Gypsy mother is one of the "rum things" accounting for her connection to the Grail.

Maria's marriage to Arthur Cornish consolidates that connection. His last name points to his family's paternal home in Cornwall, where Arthurian legend has its most popular sites. Cornish, however, also implies "hornish," as if pointing to the Cornish males' problems with cuckoldry (Köster 251). Arthur's wealth, of course, compensates for the sexual jest by turning him, as an aspiring patron of the arts, into an appropriate horn of plenty or cornucopia, a symbol complementing the platter of plenty in the Celtic version of the Grail (see Loomis, *Development* 60, 63). Thus, Arthur Cornish's ties to the Grail myth are so conspicuous that they overdetermine Maria's Grail affiliation, allowing Davies to accentuate the principle of enantiodromia:<sup>3</sup>

Maria is occasionally tipsy and bawdy; she has “a calm, transfixing face, of the kind one sees in an icon,” yet also a nose that could well “be a hook in middle age,” and her naturally black hair has “the real raven’s-wing colour, with blue lights in it” (17); moreover, she admits that the spirit of the Maenads is not dead in her (76). These earthy as well as enchanting aspects of the eye- and mind’s eye-catching figure of Maria indicate that her association with the Grail is hardly simplistic; although everyone calls her Maria, her name is Maria Magdalena.

Her own sense of self owes much to the influence of John Parlabane, a disreputable philosopher. From Darcourt’s perspective, Parlabane’s clothed appearance is “shabby and sinister”; without clothes, he resembles “Satan in a drawing by Blake” (251). To Maria, he is, similar to Darcourt and Hollier, another “Rebel Angel”; he taught her what she had merely gleaned from Paracelsus: “Be not another if thou canst be thyself” (320). This aphorism captures the importance of the individuation process which, with regard to the Grail, underlies Wolfram von Eschenbach’s notion of it as a symbol of wholeness in conjunction with marriage (J&F 399); it also provides an appropriate link between Maria’s growing self-awareness and her marriage. In addition, her reference to her teachers as rebel angels seems to touch implicitly and humorously on Wolfram’s ideas that non-partisan angels once guarded the Grail on earth and that it was not a vessel but a precious stone, his famous “*lapsit exillis*.”<sup>4</sup>

The meaning of Wolfram’s concocted Latin phrase, has resulted in “thousands of guesses” (Lefevere 247, n.18), of which *lapis exilis*, the stone of alchemists and philosophers, is the one that acknowledges Wolfram’s familiarity with alchemy (J&F 148-152; C. G. Jung 180, n.125).<sup>5</sup> Davies played with alchemical concepts during the planning stage of *The Rebel Angels* (Grant 530-37) and kept the motif of the stone. Darcourt mischievously speaks of the *lapis exilis* with regard to his colleague Ozias Froats’ investigation of faeces (*Rebel* 250), while the *lapis* in the form of Maria’s diamond ring is there for all to see. Although valuable at first glance, it is made to look trifling (*exilis*) when Parlabane compliments Maria as being the source of the stone’s “splendour” (*Rebel* 74). In a paradoxical way, his flattery reinforces her awareness of the importance of being herself and helps explain why she thinks highly of the chaotic Parlabane. Much more pertinent for Maria, though, is Wolfram’s association of the Grail stone with “paradise fulfilled, both root and branch” (*Parzival* 59-60; cf. J&F 148) and the fact that this

stone “allowed itself to be carried” by Repanse de Schoye (*Parzival* 60; see J&F 71), Queen of Monsalvaesche, the Grail castle, which can be found neither through keen searching nor busy researching but only by being worthy of the Grail (*Parzival* 64; see J&F 70-73). Repanse de Schoye (or Joie) means Dispenser of Joy, “an ancient title” with sexual connotations (Walker 352). Figuratively speaking, this name suits Maria Magdalena in her relationships with Parlabane, Darcourt, Hollier, and of course Arthur Cornish.

The name of Monsalvaesche also has latent sexual connotations: as Mount of Salvation or Mount of Joy, intimating *Mons Veneris* or, in Wolfram’s German-language context, *Venusberg*.<sup>6</sup> Given the affiliations of both Venus and Mary with the Grail (J&F 121), Maria’s names and her comparison to a Canova Venus all come into play here. Unlike A.E. Waite, for instance, whose exhaustive Grail study speaks of Wolfram’s work as “contaminated” by sexual symbolism (533), Davies belittles neither the physical nor the spiritual aspects of the feminine in his attention to the Grail. Eros is clearly at work in *The Rebel Angels*, while the Realm of the Mothers figures prominently in *What’s Bred in the Bone*.

Maria’s Grail-related qualities seem to reach their fulfillment in her marriage, were it not for her purchase-price, a Gypsy tradition, paid in the form of a necklace of Krugerrands. Davies seems to dwell on the pure gold of these large coins because, alchemically speaking, gold is interchangeable with the *lapis* (C. G. Jung 374). There is something bombastic about the necklace, something that calls into question Maria’s “splendour” and sense of self, especially so on the occasion of her wedding. It is Darcourt who notices “not a falsity, but a somewhat un-Marialike quality” in her attitude toward Arthur (314); he senses again a dark side of her that is perhaps suggestive of Kundry, the enchanted Grail servant in Wagner’s *Parsifal* who is under the spell of the wizard Klingsor. It is reasonable to think of Kundry because Maria perceives Hollier as “a sort of wizard” who reminds her of Merlin and Klingsor and their incapacity to love (309), and because she will soon have cause to question Arthur’s capacity to do so. While the name of Klingsor tacitly introduces Wagner’s opera and his literary source, Wolfram’s *Parzival*, the reference to Merlin is not the first direct allusion to Arthurian legend, if one derives Darcourt’s name from *D’Arthur’s court*. The court of Arthur Cornish and Darcourt’s at times Merlin-like presence there as a mentor provide continuity in *What’s Bred in the Bone* and *The Lyre of Orpheus*. The focus in *What’s Bred in the Bone* shifts to Arthur’s

uncle Francis who, particularly under the influence of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, is looking for his Grail in the kingdom of art.

**T**ennyson felt reluctant to write about the Grail: "It would be too much like playing with sacred things" (Hallam Tennyson I: 456-57). Yet his artistic conscience overruled his moral reservations. "The Holy Grail" came to be, he says, "one of the most imaginative of my poems. I have expressed there my strong feeling as to the Reality of the Unseen" (quoted in Ricks 1661). His vision of the Grail thereby also became his defense of the poet's truth against possible charges of heresy or fraud. The question of fraud is closely linked to Francis Cornish's rise as an artist and restorer of pictures; so is the possibility of self-deception in his search for his personal myth through painting "the world of his imagination, dominated by the Grail Legend" (*Bred* 194). His knowledge of the Grail is shaped by Tennyson, his vision of it by Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Morris (194-95).<sup>7</sup>

Francis' personal history becomes available through a quasi-biography recorded by the Lesser Zadkiel, the Angel of Biography, and supposedly being played back by him for the Daimon Maimas, Francis' guardian spirit. Davies' nominal detachment from Francis' story has parallels in "The Holy Grail" where Tennyson has Percivale record, as it were, the adventures of his quest; his sole audience is Ambrosius, a long-time monk, who, similar to Maimas, interjects the occasional comment. Because of Francis' fascination with Tennyson's Grail, Davies' conspicuous silence about Percivale encourages a closer look for latent connections between this Arthurian knight and Francis.

As if drawn by "wandering fires" like the ones King Arthur accused his knights of following (for example, "Holy Grail" line 887), Francis enters the Grail world through books, followed by a month-long visit to his paternal home and relatives in Cornwall. In the enigmatic "sea-light" that seemed to pervade "the whole peninsula of Cornwall," he sensed the unseen world of King Arthur (*Bred* 212). The way the light "puzzled and dominated him" connects it to the Grail which, only a few pages before, had "dominated" (194, 195) his mind's eye and which now asked to be seen in "a world-light" that "seemed to defy shadows, and cast itself on every side of every object" (212). This scenario is reminiscent of Tennyson's many unusual images of light by the sea that conceal more than reveal the Grail, so that Percivale only saw it veiled "in white samite or a luminous cloud" (line 513). Francis wakes up from the spell of seeing himself as the "Grail Knight" (*Bred* 318)

only after his marriage in Cornwall to his cousin Ismay Glasson.

Ismay's name is a possible Celtic variant of Esmée or Love personified (Withycombe 165).<sup>8</sup> Since her last name is Cornish for glass-man (Hanks 213), one may consider her a woman of glass and obviously lacking Maria Theotoky's diamond-like qualities. She has no romantic interest in Francis' myth-guided and misplaced anima projections and is not the soul-mate whom Francis tried to find in "the real Cornwall of his imagination" (230). Being pregnant, she marries him for his money and respectability; yet the child, as Francis learns, is not his. While Ismay has, in a sense, cuckolded him, the underlying problem is his readiness to, as it were, cuckold himself by perceiving individual lives, including his own, too naively through mirrors of myth and established art. His prosaic Cornish relatives understandably regard "his enthusiasm for King Arthur as a form of American madness," something to be expected from a Canadian member of the family whom they jokingly dub "the Last of the Mohicans" (215).

Ironically, the reference to Cooper's novel conjures up a playful link to Francis' childhood in Blairlogie, a small town at the edge of Ontario woods that had led to timber wealth for a select few like Francis' grandfather James Ignatius McRory. Davies does not, however, get side-tracked into the literal forests. Of all the characters in the Cornish novels, only Darcourt actually walks in the woods (*Lyre* 297); Davies prefers to wander into the figurative woods of myth and the arts, where Francis' childhood in the isolation of Blairlogie is somewhat analogous to young Parzival's growing up in a forest, protected from the world of knights. As an eventual knight errant, Parzival/Percivale may well be seen as a medieval variant of the North American *coureur de bois*. As a modern-day Percivale seeking the Grail of spiritual and psychic wholeness, Francis is a *coureur de bois* in the psychological sense Davies singles out in a 1977 lecture: "The Canadian is the *coureur de bois* who must understand—understand, not tame—the savage land . . . of rocks and forests [as] . . . a metaphor for that equally savage land of the spirit . . . . The Canadian voyage, I truly believe, is this perilous voyage into the dark interior. . . . It is a voyage in which many are lost forever, and some wander in circles, but it is the voyage of our time" (*One Half* 285). Percivale's is a nightmarish quest through "phantasmagoric landscape" where "everything substantial is reduced to nothing by the perceiving imagination" (Peltason 474, 478). Francis' journey through artscape toward the "inner vision" of his "personal myth" (*Bred* 272), though not nightmarish,

is certainly perilous both during his enchantment with Ismay and after his impulsive rejection of the spell of Arthurian idylls: “Bugger King Arthur—and Tristan and Iseult and the Holy sodding Grail and all that Celtic pack. I made a proper jackass of myself about that stuff” (374).

He makes this confession to Ruth Nibsmith at Schloss D $\ddot{u}$ sterstein in Bavaria, where she is the governess of Princess Amalie and he a restorer of old paintings under the supervision of Tancred Saraceni, an expert at both restoring and faking old masters. D $\ddot{u}$ sterstein is under the control of a woman, the Gr $\ddot{a}$ fin von Ingelheim, with the help of Prince Max, a wine exporter. While the name *D $\ddot{u}$ sterstein* (“Dark-Rock”) carries connotations of melancholy and gloominess appropriate to the 1930s setting, the castle is a beacon of light in the growing darkness of male-engendered totalitarian order. Its importance as a Grail castle for Francis may be seen in its challenge to totalitarianism without and to aesthetic withdrawal within. Here he paints his autobiographical masterpiece which, after the war, becomes famous as *The Marriage at Cana*, the work of an unknown Renaissance genius whom Saraceni publicly names “The Alchemical Master” (478). Privately, he tells Francis, “You have made up your soul in that picture . . . and I do not joke when I call you The Alchemical Master” (479). The ambiguity of “made up” underlines the irony of Francis’ accomplishment: the painting proves his expertise as a faker; yet, at the same time, the authenticity of Francis’ soul vision seems assured in his reply, “I don’t know anything about alchemy, and there are things in that picture I don’t pretend to explain. I just painted what demanded to be painted” (479). Analogous to Percivale and Parzival giving their horses free rein during their quests for the Grail, Francis is letting his instinct or inner vision rather than his will guide him on his psychological journey of individuation toward his Grail; and he has, according to Ruth Nibsmith, “spiritual guts, and lots of intuition” to lead him “deep into the underworld, the dream world, what Goethe called the realm of the Mothers” (369, 370).

Similar to Kundry and Repanse de Schoye’s influence on Parzival at the Grail Castle, Ruth Nibsmith’s influence on Francis at D $\ddot{u}$ sterstein comes at a crucial stage of self-discovery: it coincides with his first independent “restoration” of a non-existent old portrait of what is said to be Drollig Hansel, the Augsburg Fuggers’ dwarf jester. Like its sequel, *The Marriage at Cana*, this painting is no fake but an interpretation in Renaissance style of Fran $\c$ ois Xavier Bouchard, the dwarf tailor of Blairlogie, who had hanged himself



when he could no longer bear the town's baiting him for being different. *The Marriage at Cana* includes a variant of this dwarf as well as a veiled portrayal of Francis' severely misshapen and psychologically dwarfed older brother, who had been kept hidden in the attic of the McRory mansion.

These dwarfish figures surface at Düsterstein in conjunction with Francis' creative independence and success; in the context of the individuation process, they represent his coming to terms with the Jungian archetype of the shadow or the *düster* side of his psyche. The common human tendency to avoid unsettling encounters with the shadow is reflected fittingly here in Emerson's aphorism that "Man is the dwarf of himself" ("Nature" 53), and in Davies' complementary concept of "psychological dwarfism" (*One Half* 185). The extent of Francis' symbolic littleness, despite his introspective accomplishments inside the castle, is still evident in his naivety about the purpose of his mission for the world outside. As an observer for the British secret service, he is to count the "freight and cattle cars" that go by the castle on a railway branch line to a nearby "concentration camp" (339); and, as an assistant to Saraceni, he is to transform minor old paintings from the vast Düsterstein collection into German masterpieces to be smuggled out of the country and then sold to the Nazi government intent on repatriating national treasures. He fails to ask why he should count train cars; and, when catching on to the fraud scheme, he merely questions the risk of this, in his words, "quixotic anti-Hitler thing" (387). Knowledge of the financial reward quickly calms his worries. It is Ruth who reproaches him for his love of money, his insensitivity to "the grasp of . . . the most efficient tyranny in history" (375) and, tacitly, for his failure to ask: Whom does Francis' work at Düsterstein serve? This question, I suggest, is reminiscent of the famous one Parzival fails to raise: Whom does the Grail serve?

Initially at least, Francis' implicit answer is a largely selfish one: his work so far has meant a personal renaissance. After the war, however, his fear of being mistaken for an art faker puts an end to his old-master-style endeavors. With his expertise and inherited wealth, he now becomes a buyer and hoarder of Canadian and European works of art. His obsessive collecting stems in part, I suggest, from feelings of guilt for having found a sense of his personal Grail at, of all places, Düsterstein. Seeing his private achievement become dwarfed by his delayed consciousness of the immensity of the patriarchal wasteland under the Hitler tyranny, he has, it seems, turned his hoarding into an ambitious form of self-defense with which to guide his

adaptation to on-going demands of his shadow and renewed “entanglements engendered by the anima [archetype]” (J&F 155). Francis ends up as a miserly eccentric, spending his final years in a suite of three apartments, “a whole floor of the building . . . he owned” (*Rebel* 19), crammed full with his jungle of a collection in which he could be said to be hiding and which paradoxically both enlarges and dwarfs him as an individual.

His semi-seclusion is comparable to that of Percivale, whose withdrawal into a monastery ended a quest that had begun once his sister’s ecstatic vision of the Grail had given him “the chance to retreat into a phantasmal dream world” and thus to overcome his sense of failure as a knightly law-and-order man (Ryals 158). Similarly, Francis’ Grail quest advanced significantly under the influence of Ruth, whose role as a woman wise in matters of archetypal psychology and astrology touches on Percivale’s sister’s impact as a nun; yet, Francis remained skeptical of her wisdom: “Ruth, you can talk more unmitigated rubbish than anybody I have ever known!” (376). Of course, it was her “rubbish” that intensified his inner vision which led to his triptych of *The Marriage at Cana*, his new vision of the Grail, so-to-speak. While, at the beginning of his quest, Francis had deliberately shunned “anything that associated the [Grail] legend with the pre-Christian world” (194), he was now receptive to the legend’s anima-driven, feminine and matriarchal subtexts.

The central panel of *The Marriage at Cana* depicts a “couple who had been married” and a “smiling woman who . . . must surely be the Mother of Jesus, for she wore a halo—the only halo to be seen in the whole composition; she was offering the bridal pair a splendid cup from which a radiance mounted above the brim” (470). Francis seems to have transmuted the influence of Ruth, his real-life Grail bearer, into what appears to be the figure of the Virgin Mary as both Grail bearer and Grail. Davies, however, does not use the name Mary in the textual references that bring out in convincing detail the painting’s interpretation of the Cana wedding in the Gospel of John (2: 1-11); and the phrasing of “*must surely* be the Mother of Jesus” seems to discourage a simplistic correspondence. Saraceni’s identification of the haloed figure as both “the Holy Mother” and “Mother Nature” (476) points to the possibility of unorthodox Christian and un-Christian subtexts.<sup>9</sup> His implicit conflation of the spiritual with the physical would link the cup bearer more naturally to the figure of Mary Magdalene than to the mother of Jesus. Moreover, similar to Wolfram, Francis has the symbolic cup of the mystical marriage administered by a woman rather than a man;

he has, as it were, rescued the Magdalene from “the powerful undertow of misogyny in Christianity” (Warner 225). While the bride in the biblical Cana story has occasionally been seen as Mary Magdalene (Scheper 125), the Gospel of John mentions only the presence of Jesus with his disciples and his mother (2: 1-2). The Gnostic Gospels, however, portray Mary Magdalene not only as Jesus’ closest disciple but also as his lover (Warner 229). Francis’ seeming allusion to Mary Magdalene rather than the Virgin Mary would connect his hermetic approach to the Cana wedding to the myth of the Magdalene as the living Grail and thereby also strengthen Maria Magdalena Theotoky’s symbolic role as such in the Cornish novels.

While Maria’s actual presence is of course only marginal in *What’s Bred in the Bone*, Francis’ painting his masterpiece appears to have its own Gypsy influences in Saraceni, Ruth Nibsmith and the “click-clacks” (344) of trains going to a concentration camp. Saraceni’s “restoring” of Renaissance pictures parallels Maria’s mother’s “restoring” of violins, while his psychic insight into paintings complements her Tarot readings; above all, his name is suggestive of the Renaissance use of *Saracens* as a name for Gypsies (Fraser 95, 107). Ruth’s last name is a play on her writing about astrology which provides a link to the common view of female Gypsies as diviners; in addition, the intricate nature of her work as a “nibsmith” complements the traditional skills of Gypsies, including Maria’s uncle, as coppersmiths (Fraser 276). As for the trains, Francis did not appear to know at the time about their sinister purpose; but Davies, through Maria, has drawn direct attention to the fact that “the Gypsies too were victims of the Nazi madness” (*Rebel* 147).

Thus it is deeply ironic that *The Marriage at Cana* is said to have become part of Hermann Göring’s “personal collection” (*Bred* 468). Like Francis, Göring seems to have had an excellent eye for masterpieces and a compulsion to hoard them (*Bred* 468), yet his collecting is indicative of possessiveness rather than individuation. Nevertheless, art connects both men to fraud. For Göring, fraud was governed by traditionally patriarchal motives of conquest and acquisition, whereas Francis encountered fraud through the archetypal figure of Fraude in Bronzino’s *Allegory of Love*, “a figure from the deep world of the Mothers” (523). Fraude made him test himself against deception and self-deception in his artful quest for the Grail, the maternal realm (see J&F 113), and caused him to will his collection to the National Gallery of Canada. That is to say, he completed his quest in the role of a magnanimous guardian of the kingdom of art.

It was at the moment of his physical death that Francis entered “the Realm of the Mothers”: “How lucky he was, at the last, to taste this transporting wine!” (523) This very last thought of his followed his recollection of “Thou hast kept the best wine till the last” (523), the inscription on *The Marriage at Cana*, now modified from the original “*Thou hast kept the good wine until now*” (474; Davies’ emphasis). Francis’ laughter at this point highlights the extravagant mirth in the situational emphasis on symbolic intoxication, as if thereby putting the “transporting wine” of his experience of death under the Dionysian motto of *in vino veritas*. Indeed, that motto’s ambiguities connect this scene to his life-long exploration of the “transporting wine” of the creative process, and especially so in the faked Renaissance paintings that were shipped from Dusterstein, hidden in hogsheads of wine. This “quixotic anti-Hitler thing,” as Francis called it at the time, gradually changed Francis’ life into the “rum thing” which has Darcourt perplexed in *The Lyre of Orpheus*.

**T**he provocative conclusion to Francis’ Grail quest provides a spirited transition to the fermented and distilled liquids which flow so freely in the final Cornish novel that they become, especially through the presence of E. T. A. Hoffmann or ETAH, a significant aspect of Davies’ Grail as a “rum thing.” Hoffmann’s work had been a major influence on Davies (Grant 589), and Hoffmann’s fondness for the bottle had not gone unnoticed: he wrote his best stories, says Davies, when “more than half-drunk” (“A Classic at Christmas” 11).

One such story, “Arthur’s Hall,” provides a probable connection to the Cornish novels. It is the story of *Traugott* (“Trust-God”), a young merchant at the *Artushof* (“Arthur’s Court or Hall”), the commercial exchange of the erstwhile German port of Danzig. The Hall is decorated with Arthurian motifs, both pagan and Christian; hence its name. Hence also Traugott’s decision to leave his job and to heed his calling as a painter in search of his anima through the Grail-like attraction of art. The worlds of art, money, and King Arthur are comparably interconnected in the lives of Francis Cornish and his nephew Arthur who has established the Cornish Foundation to promote “the arts and humane scholarship” (3-4) and to entrust himself with the role of “a patron on a grand scale, for the fun and adventure” (8), a King Arthur of arts and letters. His personal adventure is already well under way through his marriage to Maria and his friendships

with Darcourt, Hollier, and the Welsh actor Geraint Powell, the directors of the Foundation, who hold their meetings at Arthur and Maria's "Round Table" with its "Platter of Plenty."

The loudness of the Arthurian context turns their first meeting into an unpleasant "joke" for Maria, as if she resented her implicit affinity with Queen Guinevere and her role as keeper of Darcourt and Hollier's wedding present, the Platter of Plenty filled with "dried fruits and nuts and sweets" (5). While the directors all enjoy their drinks, only Maria and Arthur help themselves from the epergne: she takes two nuts, he a chocolate which he can't swallow because he is coming down with mumps. In other words, that first meeting, from the liquor, nuts, chocolate, and mumps to the decision to support the completion and production of an opera called "Arthur of Britain, or the Magnanimous Cuckold," allows Davies to explore humorous and earthy possibilities of the Grail mystery. For these aspects of the Grail, Davies may well have drawn again on the work of E. Jung and von Franz who mention not only Dionysus' connection to the myth but also socio-historical precedents in Renaissance Germany when revelry was one of the meanings of the Grail (106, 120-21).

Given the all-encompassing adaptability of its earth- and life-affirming symbolism, the Grail, as Davies has it, demands true magnanimity. Etymologically, magnanimity derives from combining *magnus* and *animus*; and such a notion of magnanimity as high-spiritedness usually governs the Cornish Round Table in action. Yet, as an allusion to the Grail quest, the term also readily combines both *magnus* with *animus* and *magna* with *anima* into a state that is high-spirited and broad-minded as well as large-souled, suggesting the alchemical notion of the *chymical* wedding of the animus and anima predispositions and Davies' test of such a conjunction in the marriage of Maria Magdalena Theotoky and Arthur Cornish. Unlike Tennyson's Arthur who early on declared the vision of the Grail "[a] sign to maim the Order which I made" ("Holy Grail" l. 295) and a profound test of his magnanimity, Davies' Arthur has, in his genteel desire to be a patron of the arts, unwittingly become attracted to its gleam which has him open the door to the psychic underworld of his life farther than the Platter of Plenty of his marriage and his Foundation may comfortably accommodate. His marriage vows, his Foundation's resolutions and his as yet untested magnanimity find themselves challenged by the lyre of Orpheus.

The motif of the lyre brings to mind a second poem from Tennyson's

*Idylls*, “The Last Tournament,” in which Dagonet, King Arthur’s fool, compares Tristram to Orpheus and blames the King’s demise in part on the knight’s harp music (ll. 321-46). Tristram’s Orphic as much as Dionysian praise (and practice) of “Free love—free field—we love but while we may” (l. 281) mocks the King’s ideals of order. With regard to Arthur Cornish, such mockery alludes to his public dilemma of underwriting an opera about King Arthur as a cuckold as well as his private dilemma as a possibly impotent husband and cuckold. His marital crisis deserves further consideration in light of King Arthur’s betrayal by Sir Pelleas disguised as the Red Knight:

“The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!—  
Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King  
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world—  
The woman-worshipper? . . . .”

(“The Last Tournament” ll. 443-46)

The figure of the Red Knight usually “fulfills the role of a dangerous shadow element” (J&F 56-57). Here, he also addresses dangerous anima projections in the form of worship of woman and, by extension, of the Muses. In other words, the implicit presence of Tennyson’s Red Knight and Tristram in Davies’ novel amplifies the risky effects of the mythic lyre after it has cast its spell over the Cornish Round Table through Hoffmann’s saying: “The lyre of Orpheus opens the door to the underworld” (37).

Hoffmann’s original term for the archetypal reality of the “underworld” is “Orcus” (Review 234). Davies’ translation of the Roman concept clearly affirms the notion of the depth of the psychic unconscious that is part of Hoffmann’s reference to the lyre of Orpheus. “Music,” Hoffmann adds, “unlocks for man an unknown realm, a world which has nothing in common with the external world of the senses that surround him, a world where he may completely abandon the exact expression of thought and devote himself to the inarticulate” which, in turn, opens into “the realm of the infinite” (Review 234-35). From an archetypal perspective, it is reasonable to say that Hoffmann’s concern here is with psychic wholeness or, put symbolically, the Grail. Love of music, however, did not show Hoffmann the way in solitude; it did so in conjunction with his intemperate fondness of women and wine. Thus, ironically, the lyre of Orpheus would cut short his life’s work, *opera sua*, which evidently inspired Davies to make up Hoffmann’s reflections from the underworld in the novel’s “*ETAH IN LIMBO*” interludes. The lyre’s ambiguous potential, moreover, enchants the members of

the Cornish Foundation themselves: by supporting a conclusion to Hoffmann's *opera*, as it were, they themselves become attracted to the lyre's underlying spell of "Wine, Women, Song."

Powell, who has theatrical affinities for both the Red Knight and Tristram and whose name alludes to Pwyll, the Welsh god of the underworld, plays Orpheus' lyre well, especially in its metaphoric sense of flattery (see Erasmus 100). He is, according to Darcourt, a "bamboozl[ing]" talker capable of "soaring at need into a form of rhapsodic, bardic chant" (136) and always ready to accommodate his listeners' illusions and delusions. His verbal music opens the door to the underworld of wish fulfillment and results in burlesque pursuits of the Grail, from the Foundation's Platter of Plenty to the final opera performance, freeing the questers from received visions of Arthurian legend and forcing them to be open-eared to the lyre of Orpheus in order to discipline their ideas of the Grail. Powell causes Maria, for instance, to transmute his fermenting Round Table musings about the Grail as "a union of two opposite but complementary sensibilities" into "the wine in the gold" (139), her apparent adaptation of Hollier's reference to an alleged Welsh drinking toast, "*Gwin o eur*—Wine from the gold!" (130), which, by the sound of it, allows for a sly allusion to Guinevere and thus to Maria. While accommodating the Round Table's operatic adventure and the cuckoldry of Arthur, this elixir-like wine also points back to Francis Cornish's *The Marriage at Cana* and forward to Darcourt's need of something like a water-into-wine event to further his biographical quest for Francis Cornish.

Outright alcoholic revelry comes to test the Cornish Foundation's resilience after Gunilla Dahl-Soot arrives from Sweden to supervise the Foundation's first beneficiary, whose doctoral project is to complete the musical score of Hoffmann's, at best, very fragmentary opera. Dahl-Soot's consumption of any and all alcoholic drink earns her the respect of her Canadian peers and of Hoffmann himself in his comments from Limbo, "*She knows the lyre of Orpheus when she hears it and does not fear to follow where it may lead*" (151; Davies' italics). Her threshold of in/temperance is as wickedly high as her tolerance of Philistinism is low. "I take a serious attitude toward life," she maintains; "I am not a self-deceiver" (127). By then calling herself "a great joker" (130), she becomes for Arthur "a disturber" of his Foundation; and while Maria hopes for her to be "a good disturber," Powell senses a soulmate: "we shall get on like a house on fire" (150). Her alcoholic stamina, wit and provocativeness combined with her Mercurial presence and

her perception of herself and the Round Table members as “alchemists” (148) allow Davies, as a literary alchemist, to stir up the motif of alcohol as a “rum” way of associating the Grail with individuation, the lyre of Orpheus, and Dionysian adventures in the imaginal world of the soul.<sup>10</sup>

Since Orphic music is likely to unsettle an individual’s and society’s ideas of order, forms of *ignis-aqua*, in conjunction with the Cornish Round Table’s capacity to sponsor creative intemperance and *élan vital*, make it difficult for Davies to control the wandering fires of the imagination without dousing them. The raised levels of imagination and consciousness at the Round Table do not, for instance, change Maria Magdalena’s moderate consumption of alcohol. They lead, however, to her readiness for sexual adventure resulting in pregnancy, during which she has the occasional glass of what she calls “milk with a good slug of rum in it” (344), a sort of ardent *Liebfrauenmilch* worthy of her name and symbolic role as Grail-bearer.

The immediate task of controlling the fires fanned by Dahl-Soot, Powell, and Maria belongs to Darcourt. For his role as advisor and occasional server of wine at a Round Table function, he is well qualified as an Anglican priest with a touch of Merlin about him. Yet his pleasure in and frequent need for a glass or two of whisky point to his own anxiety in connection with his task of creating the opera’s libretto from nineteenth-century sources and with his on-going inquiry into the years still missing in his life of Francis Cornish. Leafing through an issue of *Vogue* in a wine-inspired, voyeuristic mood, he is captivated by an Old Master drawing of a girl’s head for a brand of make-up that promises to bring out “the Old Master quality in you” (60). Darcourt recognizes the drawing as possibly one of Francis Cornish’s. The owner of the cosmetics line turns out to be Princess Amalie, who is living with Prince Max, now a wine importer, in New York City. “The wine was very good” (188) when the couple opened to him in their apartment their private door to Francis’ Old-Master period, as if in honor of *The Marriage at Cana* hanging there. The painting itself provides Darcourt with something like a *tableau-vivant* of clues for “a respectable, respectful biography” (194) to complement Francis’ self-portrait in the Cana painting.

Darcourt’s renewed authorial self-confidence consolidates during his Yuletide vacation at a Muskoka resort, a likely allusion to “*esplumeor*,” Merlin’s forest refuge in the conclusion to Robert de Boron’s version of the Percivale legend (J&F 382). “It was [on his walks] in the forest that [Darcourt] fared farthest in his astonishing recognition of what he was and



how he must live" (297). Although *esplumeor*, like Wolfram's *lapsit exillis*, appears to have no clear lexical meaning, one of its etymological possibilities suggests a writer (J&F 382). This would be a fitting reference to Darcourt since he returns from his vacation in the woods, his exploration of his inner world, "with a stronger sense of who he was" (*Lyre* 301) and a firmer orientation of his always "lively but controlled imagination" (107) toward his tasks as a biographer and librettist. On another level, the fact that *esplumeor* is said to be near Percivale's home in the woods reinforces the interconnectedness of Darcourt's personal quest and the Grail quest of Francis Cornish. E. Jung and von Franz mention that not only is Merlin "behind" Percivale but, through their achievement of wholeness, each is also representative of the alchemical Mercurius (371, 109, 368). It is especially the latter's neglected feminine side that asserts itself, as it were, in both Francis' artistic alchemy and his biographer's consciousness of mythic reality: Francis connects the Grail myth to the feminine subtext of the Cana story and the "Realm of the Mothers"; Darcourt connects the foundation of Arthur and Maria's Round Table to the archetypal feminine which allows for the lyre of Orpheus to be heard.

Given Davies' attention to Orpheus, one may well wonder about Eurydice's presence in the Grail world of the Cornish novels. In her ancient function as "the underworld Goddess who received the soul of Orpheus" (Walker 287) rather than her conventional role as Orpheus' wife, Eurydice would be part of Francis Cornish's notion of "the Realm of the Mothers." In a burlesque way, she also touches Arthur Cornish through his mother-in-law, Madame Lautario; her dwelling in the basement of his apartment tower and her affiliation, by name and profession, with stringed instruments speak for themselves. Behind Eurydice is the power of the Triple Goddess or Great Mother whose many mythic versions include the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene (Walker 746, 603-05, 614). For Davies' familiarity with the Triple Goddess, one had best heed Samuel Marchbanks, his irreverent mouth-piece, whose extravagant self-perception as "the Wandering Celt" began and ended with his belief in her (*Papers* 536-37). It is thus reasonable to accept the latent presence of Eurydice in Davies' comic "farcing out"<sup>11</sup> of the Grail as one more "rum thing" and "tricky bit" on his fictional Platter of Plenty, the Cornish trilogy.

In these novels, Davies has engagingly re-harvested the power of the Grail myth by hearing, very much unlike T. S. Eliot,<sup>12</sup> thunder *with* rain in the

*Idylls of the King* and by heeding the well-tempered spirit of Hoffmann's Orphic and Dionysian lyre in conjunction with notions of the realm of the Great Mother. Davies' literary tokology, as it were, reflects "the merry heart" (Gibson x) of a novelist exploring matters of the heart, the spirit and the soul in *rum* ways.<sup>13</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 For the Grail as a platter of plenty, see Loomis, *Grail* 58.
- 2 For Davies' interest in information about Mary Magdalen's allegedly bearing Jesus Christ's child in France, see *The Merry Heart* 358. Thus, although he does not say so explicitly, he may have known about *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1982) by M. Baigent, R. Leigh and H. Lincoln, who have tried to document Jesus Christ's bloodline in France; Lincoln's early versions of their story appeared in the 1970s as part of *Chronicle*, a BBC documentary series (*Holy Blood* 24-25).
- 3 Davies defines *enantiodromia* as "the tendency of things to run into their opposites if they are exaggerated" (*One Half* 240; see also C. G. Jung 83, 86).
- 4 I do not know if Davies read *Parzival*; yet, as mentioned above, he knows the work of von Franz and E. Jung who discuss at length Wolfram's conception of the Grail.
- 5 Davies read with great interest the 1968 ed. of C. G. Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (Grant 531). His spirited use of the *lapis* motif harks back to that small piece of ordinary granite with extraordinary consequences in *Fifth Business* (1970).
- 6 For the legendary *Venusberg's* association with love, chivalry and magic, see, for example, Wagner's Grail-related opera *Tannhäuser*.
- 7 Another important contributing factor seems to have been Davies' admiration for the Grail Hall of Schloss Neuschwanstein, the idyll of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, which Davies visited when planning *What's Bred in the Bone* (Grant 562). In his infatuation with the chivalric age and Wagner's operas, Ludwig had not only the castle's Grail Hall but also its Singers' Hall and other areas richly painted with scenes from Wolfram's *Parzival* (Bertram 101, 138). Neuschwanstein, moreover, is also reminiscent of Tennyson's poem "The Palace of Art," which dramatizes the notion that introspective devotion to elixirs of beauty comes at the expense of love (see introductory poem to "The Palace of Art"). Neither Ludwig's Grail enthusiasm and his love-locked-out relationship with his mother nor "The Palace of Art" is mentioned in the novel, yet they, too, appear to be among Davies' "tricky bits."
- 8 Davies reviewed the 1961 ed. of the *Dictionary* in the *Peterborough Examiner*.
- 9 Pictures and statues of Mary interested Davies; especially those that included images of the moon (Grant 476-77). For Mary's link to the moon goddess see Warner 255-69.
- 10 For links between Dionysus and Orpheus, see Burkert 286-29; for links between Orpheus and the Grail legend, E. Jung and v. Franz 106.
- 11 Musing about "the essentials of Christianity" in conjunction with marriage, Darcourt says that for "people of strongly intellectual bent these essentials need extensive *farcing out*—I use the word as cooks do, to mean the extending and amplifying of a dish with other, complementary elements—if they are to prove enough" (*Rebel* 314; emphasis added). The implicit ambiguity of "farcing out" makes it a useful phrase to describe both

- Davies' attitude toward the essentials of the Grail and his humorous bent which ranges from the farcical to the sophisticated in the Cornish novels, turning them at times into something like literary comic opera.
- 12 I have in mind both Section V. of Eliot's *The Waste Land* and his calling Tennyson "the saddest of all English poets among the Great in Limbo" ("In Memoriam" 246); the latter is also a likely source for Davies' use of Limbo.
  - 13 For Davies' approach to religion and psychology, see his *The Merry Heart* 126 and Grant 649.

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