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Pride, Shame, and the Original Sin - How *Lanval* Evolves and Diverges from the Christian Bible's Birth of Man:

An Analysis of 2011 *Sir Lanval*, and *The Lais of Marie de France*

Marie de France's *Lanval* is a very intricate divergence from the traditional Arthurian tales told around the same time. This can be attributed to many factors, like her gender or her status in life, but the most meaningful factor is the Christian allegories in the text. These allegories are translated in the 2011 film *Sir Lanval*, with deliberate distinctions spread throughout. While there are some narrative differences between the text and the film, both stories follow the same narrative of Lanval disobeying the Lady of Avalon's warnings and then repenting. This tale parallels the Genesis tale of Adam and Eve, although it is a version in which humanity repents for their sin against God. Lanval rejects Adam and Eve's fate; he recognizes the shame he feels after committing the sin of pride and repents and is therefore offered the greatest prize — heaven.

Before Lanval meets the Lady of Avalon (known as Tryamour in the 2011 film), he has been rejected from King Arthur's court. He is the lowest of the low and has nothing to live for until he meets the Lady, and through the Lady, he learns about Avalon (an allegory to the Christian Heaven). In Leventhal's essay "Finding Avalon: The Place and Meaning of the Otherworld in Marie de France's *Lanval*," she writes that "Avalon then becomes not a form of escape but a deeper and more fundamental reality, which Lanval achieves only through his quest

on Earth" (194). Because Lanval has nothing to live for, he is careless and lacks morals. When he meets the Lady, she shows him an entirely new world — a world of faith, loyalty, and obligations, but one that reaps satisfaction and success. Not only does Lanval become a successful knight to the members of Arthur's court after falling in love with the Lady, but he also becomes a well-rounded person because he has met the love of his life. Later in the essay, Leventhal further explains the obligations present in both the story of Lanval and the story of Adam and Eve. The Garden of Eden, also known as Paradise, is functionally the same as the Lady's "Avalon." They both are places in which humanity strives for and is something inconceivable to the human imagination. However, it only survives if specific rules are followed and if a person is entirely devoid of selfish human desires (200).

In the film, after Lanval has fallen in love with Tryamour and is gifted riches to display his prowess as a knight, Guinevere becomes infatuated with the idea of sleeping with what she considers to be the "best man." In traditional Arthurian literature, most knights would have simply caved because Guinevere is the finest woman in the whole land. Regardless, in Marie's tale, Lanval is so devoted to his love that Guinevere's advances are rejected. This completely offends her, and she does not believe his initial explanation that he is simply honoring Arthur. In fact, she believes that he is a homosexual because, in her world, no man could ever refuse her sexual advances. In the film, a snake amongst apples is pictured in the scene of her trying to seduce him - a clear metaphor for Adam and Eve being tempted in the Garden of Eden. Not only are the filmmakers trying to portray Guinevere as the ultimate temptress to mankind, Lanval continues to reject her. It is only when she claims he does not like women entirely — damaging his pride — that he is finally honest with her, going against his word to Tryamour to keep their love private. Even through this betrayal, Lanval reaffirms his love and faith for Tryamour.

Lanval acknowledges that he fell victim to his own selfish pride and, through this, has disobeyed Tryamour. It is within this shame that Lanval repents for his unfaithfulness. Marie writes,

"By my faith,' he said, 'that is my love.

Now I don't care if I'm killed,

if only she forgives me.

For I am restored, now that I see her'" (597-600).

This humility is something to be admired. It is why Tryamour ultimately forgives Lanval, speaks on behalf of him at Arthur's court, and brings him to Avalon.

Opposingly, Adam and Eve's tale is one of tragedy. While Lanval recognizes pride as his pitfall, Adam and Eve only feel outward shame through their actions and do not repent for their guilt. Lanval evolves into a man who is entirely devoted to the Lady (his God) and recognizes that disobeying her is not only disobeying her wishes but also harming himself. This shows what Adam and Eve's true sin was. It was not that they ate an apple from a tree that God ordered them not to. It was the fact that they disobeyed his will and did not feel remorseful and faithful enough to repent for their actions against him. In Graham Ward's essay, "ADAM AND EVE'S SHAME (AND OURS)," he notes that,

"In fact, God counters the effect of the shame; first, by not allowing Adam and Eve to hide or remain hiding — God brings them out into the open to talk through and make them both understand the consequences of their actions; secondly, by not exposing the transgression but leaving Adam himself to confess it; and thirdly, by re-engaging Adam and Eve in communication with Himself" (312).

The Lady does not have to force Lanval to confess to his transgression because Lanval has grown enough in his faith to understand the problems with his pride. Lanval, like Adam and Eve,

feels shame for going against the Lady (God) but acknowledges his wrongdoings and is forgiven. He is forgiven because he shows the Lady that he is still loyal to his obligations to her and Avalon.

By the end of both Marie's text and the 2011 film, Lanval is allowed to join the Lady to Avalon to be together forever. Though the evolution is the same, it is more impactful in the film in how Lanval joins the Lady. He leaps into the lake after her, presumably drowning, and is reunited with her forever. Lanval is now reborn. He has been baptized and given new life and is willing to serve his Lady for the rest of his days in Avalon. Though Marie's ending has him leaping onto the back of the Lady's horse and riding away, never to be seen again, the complete rebirth of Lanval is much more satisfying as a baptism, tying in yet another symbol of the Christian faith. Lanval is completely reborn; he is no longer a victim of his pride, he understands and repents for the shame he feels when neglecting his moral obligations, and he reveals what the original sin truly is — one of complete selfishness.

Citations

Leventhal, C. Finding Avalon: The Place and Meaning of the Otherworld in Marie de France's

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