

Other Kinds of Hero: The Coward Knight and Intelligence Embattled¹

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The central secular image retained in our view of the Middle Ages must still be the image of the Knight. Extraordinarily, this armored and horsed carrier of the chivalric mode and code somehow survived the Renaissance, and rebounded from the rationalistic disdain of the Enlightenment to raise his Gothick lance and banneret again in the literary raptures of the Romantic era — and he is with us yet, if mainly in imagination. As historians we may *know*, or at least may have the strongest suspicion, that the European medieval warrior was on average little better than a cross-wearing savage: dirty, violent, ignorant, bigoted, and untrustworthy to a degree (nasty, brutish *and* short, if the surviving body-armor is any guide as to stature) and yet this unsavory figure still dominates the imaginal world we always project against sordid reality. Even while we smile at the gallant, antique excesses of the Knight of the Doleful Countenance we have to know that Quixote was only barely the victim of an historical dischronicity: two generations before Cervantes knights acted exactly that way, and no one laughed at them. We know that the powerful *mythos* of chivalry that addled Quixote's brain had also undoubtedly formed and modified knightly behavior in an earlier age. Rather in line with the observation that if the Christianized Saxons behaved abominably, how would they have behaved without Christianity? We can say that if a "chivalric" feudal knight might be less than a paragon, what would he have been without the statements and strictures of the code?

The following short study has, in fact, little to do with the chivalric code or with the coarse reality of knightly behavior; it has to do instead with a particular imaginal construct and character appearing in one of the Old French *chansons*. In

¹This essay was first written for a projected *Festschrift* in honor of the late Ernest MacDonnell, of Rutgers University.

order to extract the essence from and build the background of this character, I will bring in parallel evidence from other sources, from heroic narratives created in other cultures and contexts. Also, the theoretical presupposition underlying this investigation is influenced, if not dominated, by theories propounded by Georges Dumézil.

Dumézil, who ended a very long and productive life and career in 1986, is perhaps less well known to the Medievalist than to the Classicist, the Indologist, or the student of myth and mythography.² Those who need a fuller description of his theoretical *Bildung* can look at C. Scott Littleton's *The New Comparative Mythology* (Littleton 1982a) or, more recently, Wouter Belier's extensive but less friendly commentary on the Dumézilian corpus (Belier 1991).³ Very briefly, the most pertinent aspect of the general Dumézilian theory, or mesostructure, is that members of the Indo-European (I-E) family of languages seem to carry a patterning impulse or influence; that a common *idéologie* tends to surface in certain key areas and shows certain distinctive forms. The key or "deep" areas are religion, mythology, and social structure; the distinctive formulation, for our purposes, is tripartition — that is, the I-E tendency to divide the "deep" areas into three Functional aspects. The three Functions are Sovereignty, Guardianship (the warrior function) and Increase or *fécondité*: each area has its appropriate characteristics and each, as well, has its fitting or congruent reversal or "sin." The reverse of Sovereignty, as it should be devoted to order and justice, is injustice; the reversal of Third Function *richesse* and free and unstinted growth would be greed or ungenerosity. The reverse of the Second or Warrior's Function primary characteristic,

²Dumézil himself worked on the northern edges of medieval time-and-space, as witness his work on Loki (Dumézil 1948), Hadingus (1970/1973) and his analysis of the Starkaðr figure (see below). Of those closely involved in the exposition and modification of Dumézilian themes, see Strutynski (1975) and (1984); the latter is an especially important study. Edgar Polomé is deeply involved in Germanic themes: see e.g. Polomé 1970, 1989, 1990.

Most importantly for the present study, Dumézil's student Joel Grisward is probing the Old French sources: see Grisward 1981b and, most specifically, Grisward 1981a, on the Cycle des Narbonnais.

³Littleton has also examined the Arthurian material, with a view to establishing a link to Alano-Sarmatian patterns (Littleton 1982b). Belier makes rather too much of the fact that the French master sometimes changed his mind — over a career spanning almost six decades.

courage, is of course cowardice. And that brings me to the Coward Knight.

(1) The Coward Knight

An extraordinary figure appears in the midst of the great collection of Old French prose and poetic materials which deal with the *matière de Bretagne*, the Arthurian legend-cycle. In the huge company of various kinds and styles of chevaliers who populate these tales — knights innocent, tragic, proud, jealous, villainous, usually superbly brave, occasionally dreadfully inept — this is the only one who openly declares, when he is introduced to Sir Gawain in the first part of *Perlesvaus*, that he is an errant coward: *ge suis li Coarz Chavaliers*, "I am the Coward Knight" (*Perlesvaus*, v. 1, bk. IV, ll. 1359-1360).⁴

He is met as he rides backwards, his shield and lance reversed, and his hauberk and iron chausses hung useless around his neck. Though he arms himself properly after being assured that Gawain is no threat to him, he declares himself to be of absolutely no use to Gawain in any warlike encounter, and so it proves. "You wish nothing but peace" — *Vos ne volez se pes non* — says Gawain, bemused, and the Coward Knight agrees: "Nothing good comes of war" — *il ne vient de guerre se max non* (ll. 1400-1401). When they part he gives Gawain his lance, "for I have nothing to do with it" (l. 1411). Yet he seems to have at least one knightly attribute; he has a lady-love, for he identifies himself as the 'man' or knight of the mysterious *Damoisele du Char*, the Maiden of the Cart (l. 1366, see Weston 1922: 379-389, Muchnic 1928: 323-342).

After a brief appearance later in the tale — typically, Gawain sees him fleeing madly from a knight who, the Coward gasps, "has a look so fierce that I thought I was dead," *a si regart qui ge cuidai estre morz* (l. 4244) — he comes back into the 'Perceval' segment of the tale. Perceval takes *Li Couarz Chevaliers* in a firm hand, and forces him to fight a Robber Knight who is mistreating two damsels. The Robber Knight at first batters the shrinking Coward without mercy; then the sight

⁴Helen Muchnic (Muchnic 1928:327) did locate a cowardly parallel of sorts in Hugh of Rutland's *Ipomedon*, being Ipomedon himself: "Of dedes of armes when they spake/Ipomedon wolde turne his beke/And hye oute of the halle" (str. 44). The Hippomedon of Greek heroic tradition was no coward but one of the Seven who, following doomed Polyneices, son/brother of Oedipus, went up against Thebes and died there.

of his own blood affects the poltroon so powerfully that, enraged, he strikes his opponent down, lops off his miscreant head, and presents it to Perceval. The latter at once redubs him *Li Hardi Chevalier*, and the erstwhile Coward Knight says, with naive and comic wonder, "I never believed I could become heroic so fast," *Ge ne cuidoie mie que l'en devenist si tost hardi* (II. 5605-6).

The newly Hardy Knight makes a final appearance in the *Perlesvaus*, and meets his end fighting manfully against a particularly nasty specimen of villain named Aristor, who had taken Perceval's sister captive. Aristor, though stricken himself, mortally wounds the ex-Coward Knight, Perceval arrives and dispatches Aristor, and the Knight is borne off to a hermitage, is shriven, and dies.

There certainly are elements in the history of the Coward Knight which can be interpreted as a simple injection of low humor into a literary atmosphere dominated by patterns of monotonous knightly bravery. The Coward is fearful of wounds and of death, but the Coward is forced to fight, however ineptly — and everyone laughs. *Li Couarz Chevaliers* also has clear affinities with the character of the 'slow' or hidden hero, not uncommon in the narratives of the Scandinavian North, where a truly heroic individual is discovered through a particular crisis, though his previous history had been anything but distinguished (usually the hidden hero has been rather lumpish, flaccid and unreacting, not cowardly).⁵ But there are more clearly marked parallels and associations which may help us to locate this person, or type, within the continuum of heroism.

(2) Sir Kay and the Coward Knight

It may be theorized that in the lost *Urquell* of the Arthurian tales the Coward Knight, read as a 'white' magician, stood in about the same relationship to the ordinary, strong-arm, ectomorphic knight as did a figure like Cei, later Sir Kay the Seneschal. Before Cei/Kay metamorphosed into what Gwyn Jones rightly called a "boor," "fool" and "buffoon" he has a significant place in at least one of those Welsh *mabinogi* that can

⁵As Uffi or Offa of Jutland in *Saxo Grammaticus*, bk. IV, 101; Gift-Ref in *Gautrekssaga*, 6, 9-11, and, for that matter, the great Beowulf himself; see *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ll. 2183ff, with Klaeber's note on p. 196, fn. 7.

prefigure the later, more efflorescent Old French or Continental plots celebrating Arthurian chivalry (Jones 1972: 96). In the tale "Culhwch ac Olwen," for example, Cei cuts a magnificently ambiguous figure ("Culhwch ac Olwen" = CO. 1988; Ford 1977:119-157). For example, he is said to have been given two quite different sets of 'gifts' at birth: one allows him an heroic humanity (but only as "server" or "officer") but the second, contrasting, grants him a powerfully magical role and the undoubted powers of the wizard (CO 1988: 10; Ford 1977: 128-129).

These magical — and *rational* — gifts are put to use in the course of the adventurous quests and the entangled confrontations that make up the narrative of "Culhwch ac Olwen." Cei is shown to be the combiner, the *haut chef*, of magical trick and scheming intelligence. He is the Trickster who slays Wyrnach the Giant and the ferocious Dillus the Bearded, he is the percipient spy who locates the prison where Mabon ap Modron had been held captive time out of mind, and is the rescuer of this youth "while Arthur's men were attacking the fort" (CO 1988: 28-30, 33-34; Ford 1977: 145-146, 149-150). Cei plays dramatic counterpoint to a muscle-bound fighter like his partner Bedwyr, and it is quite clear that no good end could have been attained in the central quest, and the impossible puzzles and contrarities of "Culhwch ac Olwen" would never have been solved if Cei had not possessed the powers he had. This is what makes Arthur's subsequent behavior so odd, for after the successful conclusion of the episode of Dillus the Bearded the king insulted Cei so grievously that Cei refused any further part in the quest; from this point, as a Norse *sagamaðr* plainly would have put it, he is "out of the saga" (CO 1988: 35; Ford 1977: 151). Why Arthur should have insulted Cei is not at all clear; it is as though he is contemptuously preparing Cei for the sorry part the once-powerful magician-trickster will play as a transmuted, an impotent, pitiable and laughable Sir Kay, the bumbling and bad-tempered clown of the later tales of the Round Table.

(3) **Servant and Trickster**

The doubled gifts, and the doubled fate, of Cei/Kay leads us toward the bifurcation of these gifts and fates, and toward the examination of the personification of each as a separate type-figure.

No one, in the mass of heroic literature considered as a typologic collection, is more the perfect "servant" than the Norse Starkaðr, Saxo's Starcatherus. Starkaðr has been the center of much attention, attention focused by Dumézil himself and by scholars following his lead, and here he usually is characterized as a "sinning warrior" (Dumézil 1970: 82-95).⁶ For all his grim and humorless Puritanism, he would be attractive to us if all we knew of him was his violent verbal attack, as related in Saxo, on what he considered an unheroic diet — that is, on "all manner of abominable sausages..."⁷ Avoiding the problem of the old hero's origins and his awkward placement between the chancy friendship of the god Óðinn on the one side, and the certain enmity of Þórr on the other, let us look at this saturnine warrior as a peculiar refraction of the hero-type broadly speaking. The point seems to be that Starkaðr as hero precisely and obsessively *hyperdefines* the dictates and images of heroism, or herodom. His ambiguity is that, while devoting himself to 'service' to the hero or specifically to the heroic warring, he must continually present himself as the arbiter, and even the icon, of heroic behavior. As such he vehemently opposes every deviation from an impossibly perfect and puritan ideal, every *lapsus* from a behavioral code of loyalty, duty, responsibility, and death-seeking bravery — which is his own 'chivalric' (or at least warriorly) code. Within this scheme sexuality or even human affection has no place at all; Starkaðr is as opposed to lechery as he is to sausages, and yet he is no Galahad, that slightly sick-making paragon of the Round Table. Starkaðr is, paradoxically, a hero so strictly self-defined that he *cannot stand alone*; he cannot survive in isolation, and so must attach himself to another powerful figure, usually a kingly figure. But his own ideal of service makes his own lapses from that ideal all the more dramatic: the three "sins" committed during his long life — regicide, cowardice, murder-for-pay — seem to owe much less to any revenge sought by the war-god Þórr than to be an elaborate punishment of the heroic character itself, a punishment dealt out by Óðinn, the ambiguous, even treacherous high-god who is representative and master, in the Norse pantheon, of intelligence *and* of

⁶See a later reconsideration in Dumézil 1983: 9-49, and see especially Polomé 1990.

⁷*Historia Dannonum*, Elton's translation (1894: cap. 201, bk. VI). Fisher's translation (1979: 185) is less colorful, if more accurate.

magic lore.

This is the place to identify another figure from the Norse-Icelandic source-store, a character who owns his own saga and who is, in fact, the complete 'warrior of Óðinn' (Miller 1985). As I have just suggested, the god Óðinn seems less patient with certain kinds of heroic activity and, paradoxically for a sovereign god, neither is he particularly friendly to kings and kingship. His warriors — and Egil of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* surely is one of these — are prickly anarchists, opposed to kingship and somewhat derisive of those who serve kings and who often get no benefit from this service; in the instance of Egil's saga, his uncle and brother, both named Þórólfr, both of whom died because of kings and one, the uncle, who was killed by a king's treacherous order, and perhaps by the king himself.⁸ Egil is a great skald, a bit of a magician, a certain survivor, and his character bridges to a more clearly defined contrast with the 'servant hero.'

Intelligence and magical craft mark off the warrior type most immediately contrasted to Starkaðr the Old and Grim: this is a type I have elsewhere called the 'Blackened Hero,' and the most egregious example of the type known to me is Tale Ibrahim (called Tale Budalin — "the Fool" — or Tale of Orasacs) who is a central figure in a number of the Serbian Moslem heroic song-narratives collected in modern times by Milman Parry and Albert Lord (Miller 1983).⁹ Since I have used Dirty Tale as a subject in several other studies, I want to construct my analysis of him here in a slightly different way. Tale is a master of craft in every sense, and his parallel character on a different level is another 'blackened one,' the smith-god Hephaistos, who has been admirably dissected by Marie Delcourt (Delcourt 1957). Using Delcourt's recapitulation of the Hephasteian complex as a frame, how can Tale of Orasacs be fitted to her recapitulation of the *légende du magicien*? Delcourt sees four particular foci in the craft-magician's complex, four aspects that advance his special character: disfigurement, torsion, sexuality, and service. These aspects, so far as they pertain to Tale, can be parsed as follows:

- (a) like Hephaistos in at least one source, Tale, though now he "is ugly, he could not have been uglier" was once

⁸*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 1933/1976.

⁹*Serbo-Croat Heroic Songs* = *SCHS*, vol. III (1974), vol. II (1954).

physically, heroically perfect like the other Moslem *bulyukbasas*, the frontier warriors, but chose to disfigure himself, accepted the significant increase in hidden-magical powers derived from that disfigurement, and continues to wear the magician's mask of grime and dishevelment (according to the singer Demail Zogic in *SCHS* II: 242; Delcourt 1957: 115ff).

- (b) Mme. Delcourt outlines the uses and meaning of 'twisting' or torsion, the reversal of a normal human stance and appearance, emphasizing the consequent enhancement of the magical force of reversal. Tale is not himself 'twisted' but he does ride sidesaddle like a woman, and his right-hand man, Belaj or Woe-Bringer, rides backward and holds Tale's standard reversed (Delcourt 1957: 110ff.; *SCHS* III: 198, 200).
- (c) the intervention of the Hephaistos-type in the sexual realm is unmistakable; this is his Daktylic image, where the mysteries of smithing combine symbolically with male sexual force (Delcourt 1957: 154-156). Tale's world of the Moslem borderlands is profoundly prudish as compared to the Classical world's sense of sexuality's norms, and yet it must be seen that Tale gets away with more tabooed sexual references than anyone else in the songs; he makes the grossest claims to the favors of young women; he has a most ambiguous relationship with his crazy sister, Aziza. But mainly his expression of the tabooed and the ridiculous is anal and scatological, as for example in *SCHS* III: 150-155, 158.
- (d) Tale, like the smith-god Hephaistos, renders a specific technical service to his peers. Unlike Hephaistos, however, Tale provides a range of services which include tactical planning, intelligence both tactical and strategic, and in addition his mastery of the magical craft is clearly shown. His special powers are both destructive (he alone knows how to use cannon) and constructive (a touch of his mace causes chains to drop from a prisoner, a magical act). He is a weather-master. He can even count (*SCHS* II: 142, 203-4, 210-211, 262; see Delcourt 1957: 48ff.).

Tale Ibrahim, "Tale the Fool" is, in fact, the complete foil and contrast to the dashing but essentially acerebral *aghas*, exemplary fighters of unthinking and precipitate action. In this

he is much like Cei of the *mabinogi* but also — since he has a strongly comic, extravagant side — he also resembles the Coward Knight, and he, too, is perfectly capable of telling his heroic comrades that “nothing good comes of war.” But more, *he* renders no service until the promised gold is paid over; there is little of the chivalric about him, yet here, in this archaic yet modern heroic context, he seems to have a very necessary place (see *SCHS* III: 174); the Moslem “singers of tales,” long millennia after Homer, balance their peerless border heroes with a character who looks much like Thersites and acts much like Odysseus-of-many-wiles.

(4) **Beauty, ‘Face,’ and Wound**

Ugly Tale, undoubtedly to further the ingathering of extraordinary powers, mutilated himself. The gynophobic Starkaðr finally ended his long life as a battle-scarred old man-monster, showing the fearful effects of his many combats. Returning at last to the Coward Knight, how does he fit into this mysterious complex, where the face of heroism itself is examined?

The Old French *chansons*, as would be expected, describe their hero-chevaliers in terms of the typical conventions of the time. In this they are simply more literary imitators of the archaic oral-narrative phrase-makers, as most familiarly in Homer’s formulaic “long-haired” or “well-greaved” Achaians, or the repetitive descriptions provided in the Moslem Serb songs, some of them startling: “his black moustache was heroic/It looked like he held a black lamb in his teeth.” In the Old French songs the paladins are, typically, all *biaus* (handsome), *sages* (wise) and *hardis* (heroic) — a neatly trifunctional set of descriptives following the predictive Dumézilian pattern. The Coward Knight, however, is anomalous in that he combines a *biaus* appearance with an unashamedly *couarz* character. This anomaly was detected early on by scholars investigating the genre, who have puzzled over this and the transition from and contrast of the *biaus couarz* of Handsome Coward to the *lez hardi* or Ugly Hero, made ugly by disfiguring wounds (Adler 1946-47: 219ff.; Weston 1922-23: 382-3).

Here we might begin by examining the concept of heroic ‘face,’ as it seems to reflect an amalgamation of status and character in the heroic tales generally. Physical beauty, represented more or less conventionally, may be part of the

amalgam (as it is in the ancient Greek aristocratic ideal, the individual as *kaloskagathos*) but is not a separable or isolated quality: in the Greek context, again, it is conceived of as a natural result of the noble's *areté* or inborn worth. A warrior's 'face' is damaged by an assault on his pride, sense of status, honor. And it appears that in order to protect his psychic 'face,' its wholeness or integrity, the hero-warrior may or must accept some damage to his physical face and to the rest of his body. This damage, however — in the French medieval songs — still leaves the knight *biaus*, at least in the theory. We can see that in the tale of the Coward Knight the latter observes and comments on the well-scarred face of Sir Gawain, and Gawain was the greatest and most successful womanizer among those assembled around the Round Table, aptly called *li chevaliers as dames e as Demoiseles* (*Perlesvaus*, ll. 2384-5).

In this case we seem to see an intersection between fact and imagination. Given the nature of knightly warlike activity (including the violent mock-war of the tournament and the rigorous and realistic training undergone by a fledgling knight) and given the primitive state of the medical knowledge and treatment of the time, it is likely that any fighting warrior-noble who pursued his calling diligently could expect — if he survived his wounds — a truly spectacular collection of scarring and the other signs of violent trauma: the missing teeth, eye, or limb, the nonoperative joint, the limp, and so on. This reality is reflected in the imaginal figure of the *lez hardi*, the hero whom accumulated traumata have rendered 'ugly.' Gawain evidently had not yet reached this point. We should know, of course, that all of this evidence is crafted and given by men; there is no way to know what the medieval woman thought of all this conceptual invention and manipulation of images.¹⁰

¹⁰There is neither time nor space here to deal adequately with the various manifestations of dysfunction in sexual relationships as it is portrayed, or betrayed, in the aristocratic-chivalric *ethos* of the Arthurian tales, but it must be said that nowhere else is the adolescent fixation of the aristocratic libido and ego more clear than here, in terms of the view of woman and of the feminine. The Old French material gives us a range of relationships dominated, in brief, by aggressive-defensive fantasies. The dependent Damsel, target and prey of sinister lust, exists at one end of a spectrum; her femininity inheres in that helplessness which must draw the *couteouz* knight to defend her. At the other end of the spectrum are the malignantly powerful women, led by the chief mischief-maker, Morgain, with other supernaturally charged figures, enchantresses (like Niniane) or fairies malign or benign. Somewhere

In the midst of the scenario the Coward Knight moves, for a while unfought and unwounded. Where has he come from? Perhaps another figure in another *chanson* might aid in the search. In the *Chanson des Narbonnais*, thoroughly and masterfully analyzed by Joël Grisward, one of the Seven Sons of Aymeri is Hernaut, called “le personnage comique de la bande” (Grisward 1981a: 38, and fn. 24). Hernaut is identified by Grisward as a Third Function figure, since he is the distributor of nourishment and booty or riches. In other words Hernaut, like Sir Kay, is the Seneschal of this heroic family and, Grisward notes, in the medieval view riches and cowardice were inevitably combined (Grisward 1981a:66). But the *chansons* are dominated by the mentality and the imagination of the Warrior (Second) Function; Grisward aptly terms this domination an extension of the “totalitarianisme” of the Function, its suspicion and intolerance of First and even more of Third Function powers and behaviors. In his ambiguous, almost feminine physical beauty, his sensible cowardice, his relationship to the mysterious Demoiselle of the Cart, the Coward Knight strongly hints at a Third Function character — and one hauled up out of this Function into the *chanson* for a particular purpose.

Li Couarz Chevaliers' breakthrough into full, self-conscious knighthood comes at the expense of a most unchivalric type, *Li Chevaliers Roberres*, who is not especially significant and yet can be thought of as providing a preliminary bout for that final confrontation in which the renamed Hardy Knight has to deal with the sinister Aristor, who, clearly, is not just another neighborhood villain. Aristor abducts and “marries” a maiden each year, and decapitates her at the end of the year, and such behavior puts him without doubt into the dark zone of sorcery. Aristor's malefic enmity toward Perceval, the focal figure of the *Perlesvaus*, his killing of Perceval's uncle Pelles, his assault on Perceval's widowed mother, and his abduction of Perceval's sister Dendrane show not just a malignity, but a *central* and key malignity toward the eponymous hero of this tale. And it just against this dark and powerful figure that the former Coward

in the middle are the Queen-figures, with Guinevere clearly the most complex of them.

Despite the tragic or at least dramatic potentialities of certain ambiguous women — Guinevere, Yseult — the commonest psychological pattern in this imaginal construct is a bemused adolescent misogyny, in which the feminine is seen either as helpless or as malignant.

Knight is made to launch himself.¹¹

It is not unlikely that what I have been hinting at here — and what, more to the point, is hinted at in the *Perlesvaus* narrative — was at one time much more openly stated, namely, that the reversing or reversed Coward Knight is a 'white' magician, and one who is brought into the tale to oppose the 'black' powers of Aristor *as the purely knightly Perceval could not*. *Li Couarz Chevaliers* could, in fact, hold and maintain a special protective power, on the magical side, parallel to and balancing the overt, knightly-chivalric stance of other kinds of hero, especially as this stance pertained to women. The Coward Knight's powers in their original state seem to come from women, or are certainly associated with that feminine zone or, perhaps, with the anomalous zone *between sexes*.

I might suggest, then, that though the confrontation between the figures of, for example, Hero and King have attracted a major degree of attention, it might be equally or more productive to attend with an analytical eye to the complex of components *within* the supposedly monolithic heroic type, to the interrelationships, balances and imbalances, confrontations and kinds of cooperation between and among the very large collection of heroic subtypes, oddities, parts — the components of the heroic continuum as they have been imaged from the earliest, the most archaic depictions and constructions of this surprisingly ambiguous human ideal.

We have seen that the Second Function 'chivalric' imagination does not show much gratitude to this ancillary type: the Coward Knight is killed, Cei/Kay is transmogrified into an arrant fool and foil, Thersites, whatever his archaic, satiric powers may have been becomes, in Gregory Nagy's apt phrase, "the worst of the Achaians" (Nagy1981: 253-264). Yet when the full range of heroic narratives (and specifically Indo-European heroic narratives) is examined, we have to conclude that the hero-warrior type, paragon of the Second Function, is supported by the richest variety of — often ambivalent or

¹¹The etymology of the name Pelles, though not yet totally clarified, has been traced to a group of Celtic and related names generally signifying intelligence (and especially mysterious intelligence) or white-magical and interpretative knowledge: see West 1969: s.v. Pelles certainly is (as is the Hermit King) expressive of 'good' or constructive powers, and his death at the hands of the evil Aristor is an episode in a continuing series of confrontations between white and black magical forces in the *Graal* tales.

multivalent — subtypes, strange relations, and Others, that the monolithic 'Achillean' hero or the typical Arthurian paladin may be merely a self-congratulatory construct, a hero of the foreground, while behind him, in the shadows, gesture and caper the Tales, the Egils, the Ceis, and the Coward Knights.

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