

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
STUDIES IN THE GERMANIC LANGUAGES,
AND LITERATURES

The Parzival
of
Wolfram von Eschenbach

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE
WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND CONNECTING
SUMMARIES

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Against the stars' resistance,
 What time the moon should change again,
 Which was the time of greatest pain.
 But all this herb's great power
 Gave us no painless hour.

Kneeling before the Grail in prayer,
Sudden we witnessed writing there, 20
Saying: one day there'd come a knight.
If he should question us aright,
Our sorrow would be at an end,
 But if child, maid, or man intend
 To prompt the question, or hint at it—
 The question would not help one whit:
 The damage would be as before,
 And cause us grieving even more.
 Said the writing, 'Have you understood?
 Warning won't do any good.

If naught he asks on that first night, 484
 The question's power will vanish quite.
 But, if he asks in time that day,
 The kingdom shall his word obey,
 And sorrow will be ended,
 As God on high intended.

With that Anfortas will be healed,
But the scepter no more shall he wield.'
We read thus the prediction

That Anfortas' affliction 10
By a question would be mended
And thus forever ended.

Always we were smearing
 His wound with ointments cheering,
 As oil of nards, and any salve
 With theriac, and oft we have
 Smoked it with *lignum aloë*.⁸⁰
 But always in pain the king we'd see.
 Then I withdrew me hither,
 To see years joyless wither. 20

Meantime a rider came one day:
 'Twere better had he stayed away.
 I told thee how he came there

And reaped naught else but blame there.
 He saw the grief, the tears they shed,
 But not once to the host he said,
 "Sir, how does your trouble stand?"
 Since his folly was in command
 That question he omitted,
 Great happiness he quitted."

stop

Both men fell to sighing.

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Meanwhile, midday was nighing.

"Let's eat," the host decided.

"Thy horse is unprovided.

Of food I've none to offer,

Save God some help will proffer.

My kitchen's never smoking:

No meat is there for poking—

Thy loss today and some days more.

I'd gladly teach to thee the lore

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Of herbs, if but there were no snow.

God grant that soon it melt and go!

Meanwhile let's find yew-leaves and weed.

Methinks thy horse saw better feed

At Munsalvaesch' than here with me.

No host thou'lt find more fain—nor he—

For thy comfort, or the horse's;

Had I but more resources!"

They sallied forth as was agreed;

Parzival foraged for his steed.

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The host dug roots from out the ground:

No better food was to be found.

His vows the hermit ne'er forgot:

Much as he dug, he ate them not

Till the nones,⁸¹ when bells had rung them.

On bushes there he hung them,

And more he sought for storing.

To show his love adoring,

He fasted many a livelong day,—

When he missed what he had hung away.

They did not fail, these comrades twain, 486

To seek the brook across the plain.

They washed the roots and herbs the while,

What all their wealth suspended,
 Why they for joy must suffer harm,
 Often cold and seldom warm.
 At heart they both were grieving,
 In loyalty believing,
 Although their hearts were free of blame.
 From the hands of God, and in His name, 20
 Reward for sorrow they would find.
 God then and later to both was kind.⁸⁵
 They rose and went out to the stall,
 The holy man and Parzival,
 To see how fared the latter's horse.
 It sounded very like remorse,
 As the holy man the steed addressed:
 "I'm sorry thou'rt by hunger pressed,
 Since the saddle thou art wearing
 Anfortas' symbol is bearing."

When for the horse they thus had cared, 488
 Renewed laments the two men shared.

Parzival, with some design,
 Spoke, "Beloved uncle mine,
 For shame I hardly dare confess,
 But let me bare my great distress.
 Forgive it for your kindness' sake:
 In *you* my faith can refuge take.
 So grievously I've misbehaved,
 If by *your* help I can't be saved, 10
 I'll part from consolation,
 And ne'er find liberation
 In all my days from bitter rue.
 Uncle, with your counsel true
 Help me my folly to bewail.
 He who saw the Holy Grail,
 Saw that woe and still sat by,
 And never thought to question why,
 That was I, unhappy son:
 Sir, 'tis thus I have misdome." 20

The host said, "Nephew, what say'st thou?
 For both of us 'twere fitting now
 With all our hearts to make lament,

PARZIVAL
 CONFESSES

And say farewell to heart's content.
 Thou'st slain thine own felicity.
 Since God five senses gave to thee—
 They'd left thee hitherto inept—
 How was by them thy duty kept
 When thou wert all unheeding
 Anfortas' grievous bleeding?
 Yet help to seek I will not fail. 489
 Nor shouldst thou to excess bewail.
 Lament and its cessation
 Should both show moderation.
 Mankind much oddity betrays:
 Youth sometimes strives for wisdom's praise.
 If age such effort's spoiling,
 Pure youthful waters roiling,
 Then whiteness gets a dirty shade,
 And the green of virtue is bound to fade, 10
 Where, else, those forces might take root
 Which the growth of nobleness would suit.
 Could I help thee to new greening,
 Thy heart to courage leaning,
 So that, in triumph faring,
 Of God there was no despairing,
 Thou still mightst make connection
 With deed of such perfection
 As well might compensate thee.
 God would not leave or hate thee, 20
 As God-sent counselor I appear.
 Now tell me, sawest thou the spear
 At Munsalvaesch' the marvellous?
 When the planet Saturnus
 Had reached the zenith of its round,
 We knew it by the festering wound,
 And by the snow that summer brought.
 No frost had e'er such suffering wrought
 As this time to thy uncle dear.
 The wound perforce took in the spear;³⁸
 One pain the other comforted, 490
 And thus the lance turned bloody red.
 The rising light of certain stars

"Tell me where the Grail is found!
 If the grace of God in me abound,
 Of this your folk will grow aware."
 Thrice kneeling toward the Grail in prayer
 To reverence the Trinity, ANFORTAS
 He prayed that this poor man should be
 Relieved of woe that plagued him sore
 He then arose and added more:

"What afflicts thee, uncle dear?"⁸
 Who through Sylvester caused a steer,⁹
 Already dead, to turn alive;
 He who bade Lazarus revive;
 'Twas he who helped Anfortas find
 Once more his health and peace of mind.
 The bloom that Frenchmen call 'Hori'
 Suffused his skin immediately.
 Parzival's beauty was forlorn,
 And Absalon to David born,¹⁰
 And Vergulaht of Ascalun,
 All who by birth great beauty won,
 The beauty ascribed to Gahmuret
 Upon the day when forth he set
 At Kanvoleis in glamor rare—
 Not one in beauty could compare
 With Anfortas no longer ill.
 Aye, God is versed in many a skill.

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That man was now elected.
 By Grail inscription directed
 To be the ruler o'er the Grail:
 Parzival must now prevail
 As ruler and as master there.
 I ween that no one anywhere
 Could find two men as rich as they
 (If wealthiness I can assay):
 Parzival and Feirefiz.
 It seemed that no one wished to cease
 To serve the ruler and his guest.
 I know not through how many a rest¹¹
 Condwiramur was riding
 To the Grail in joy abiding.

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PARZIVAL BECOMES KING OF THE GRAIL

The truth ere this had come to her,
And such a word by messenger
As ended all her wailing mood.
Duke Kyot her uncle good
And many another noble man
Went with her, as her ride began
To Terrē de Salvaeschē, where
Segramors in jousting fair
Was felled, and where blood on the snow,¹²
Resembling her, wrought cruel woe.¹³
There Parzival should meet her:
No journey could be sweeter.

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A templar brought him the report:
"Many knights your queen escort,
In courtly cavalcade they ride."
This made Parzival decide:
Some Grail-knights taking thence, he rode
To hermit Trevrizent's abode.
His heart rejoiced, and glad he was,
That it was thus with Anfortas:
Death had now reprieved him,
The question had relieved him.

20

"To us, God's mysteries are dim:¹⁴
Who sits at a council board with Him?
Who knows if His power will e'er expire?
All the angels of the heavenly choir
The end of this will ne'er have heard.
God is man and his father's word.¹⁵
God is father, God is son,
Great help is from His spirit won."

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Said Trevrizent to Parzival,
"No greater wonder could befall:
Stirred by your wrath, God did decree
That His eternal Trinity
Your valiant will should hear and heed.
I lied, your spirit to mislead,
Of the Grail and its condition.
Grant me the sin's remission.
Obedience now I must accord
To you, my nephew and my lord.¹⁶

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